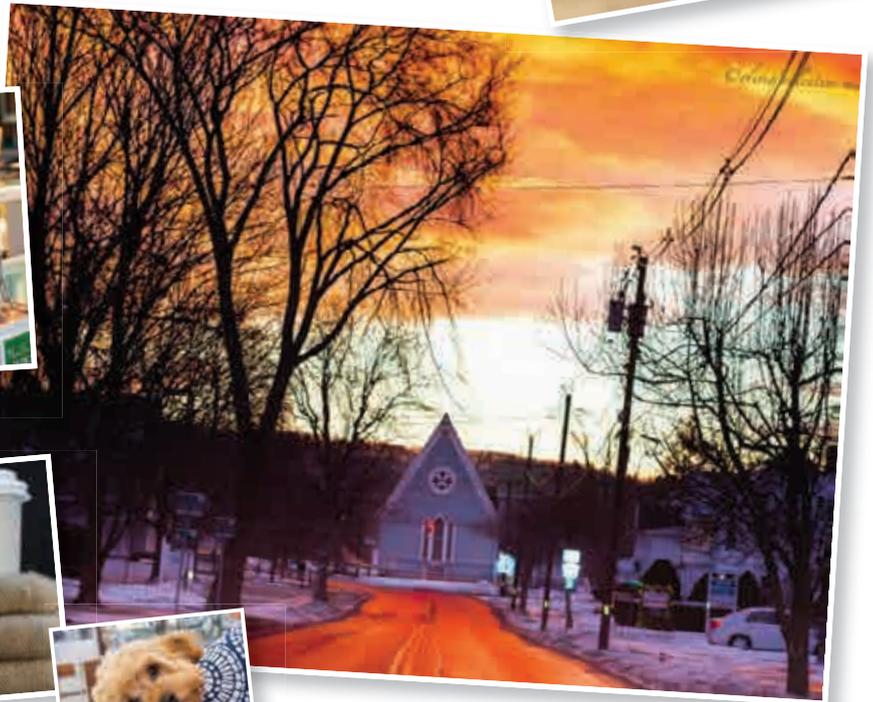


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OUR DIY ISSUE

The term “DIY” (which stands for “do it yourself”) is quite the popular term when it comes to such projects as home renovations and crafty things, and it has gained quite the momentum and notoriety in the past decade. But besides gaining recognition and clout, I feel that we find ourselves in an area where people have the ability- and like to do things themselves. In my opinion, taking charge and taking matters into your own hands shows that one is not afraid to take on a project and or a challenge. For that reason, we decided to dedicate this issue to the DIYers out there. They come in many shapes and sizes, much like the projects that people take on.

A DIY project can be just about anything. Yes, of course, many of us think of house renovations thanks to the popularity of a lot of the shows on HGTV and the DIY channel – yes, there’s even a DIY channel. But DIY is not just about redoing a kitchen or tearing out old carpeting yourself, DIY can also be about creating your own business like the not-for-profit that Louise Lindenmeyr founded, or knitting your own clothes like I have actually done myself.

I feel that there’s a common thread with a lot of the DIYers – like the married couple behind Poesis Design who decided that they could provide their clients with a quicker and nicer solution if they themselves just designed and fabricated the furniture needed for their architectural projects – and that’s the inner drive and lack of fear of failure that drives us. DIYers like to take matters into their own hands ... they grab life by the horns, or so I have witnessed by watching a few DIYers.

But regardless of the DIY project, there’s so much that you can do yourself, large or small, quick or painstakingly intricate – and once the project is done, you can proudly exclaim that “I did this!” and nothing beats that feeling of achievement: “I knit that sweater.” “I renovated that bathroom.” “I made that beaded bracelet.” “I rebuilt the motor of that car.” The feeling of achievement is purely inspirational! So to honor all of the hardworking DIYers out there, this issue is for you. Keep up the hard work. Keep creating. Keep working. Keep inspiring.

And for those who don’t consider themselves DIYers, perhaps you’ll draw inspiration from one of the stories you’ll read here.

The best of luck to you all on your various projects!

- *Thorunn Kristjansdottir*



FEBRUARY 2017

A fresh coat of color for the New Year – for our DIY issue!

Cover photo by
Olivia Valentine Markonic

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STEPHEN HART & THE dichotomy OF ART



By *CB Wismar*
arts@mainstreetmag.com

The piano chords are strong, decisive, and fully resolved. The music echoes through the beautifully designed and constructed home perched above the Housatonic River in West Cornwall, CT. When the clear baritone voice sets the melody and lyric above the chords, the entire space is filled. It may be winter outside, but inside transcends seasons and the music soars well beyond geography.

Stephen Hart is a bit of an enigma. In a world of entertainment where individuals with multiple talents are referred to as “hyphenates,” we’ve become used to the writer-producer, or the actor-director. Stephen is a musician-builder ... not a distinction often heard. True to other hyphenates, he is an expert in both.

Finding his passions

Born in San Francisco his family moved to Sharon, CT in the mid-60s. Beginning with that cross-country trek, Hart’s career has

been a peripatetic one. Growing up in the Northwest Corner of Connecticut with strong family ties to several of the local towns – among his family’s connections, a long line of executives with Stanley Tools – he came under the instructive spell of Paul Padua in the woodshop at Housatonic Valley Regional High School and fell in love with the wonders of wood.

After spending some formative years in this area, he found his way to a family home on Martha’s Vineyard and began building boats, doing cabinetry, building furniture, and working on the construction of houses.

But through it all, there was the undercurrent of a second love. Music. Stephen Hart was maturing as a musician. A drummer, he formed musical connections with a group of performers that included keyboard player and vocalist Paul Thurlow, who gravitated toward reggae, the “feel good” music that emerged from Jamaica in the mid-60s and was noted for its counter rhythms – just perfect for a budding drummer.

A life on the road

When, in the mid-80s he and his band, “Ululators!,” won a music recording contest, the hammers, saws

and chisels were set aside and the intoxicating mysteries of live musical performance took over. Recording contracts led to albums which naturally led to tours crisscrossing the country.

Stephen followed his muse into music and joined that unique fraternity of performers who move from town to town by day, playing clubs and concert halls by night, only to pack up and do it again and again. “It was a five-year tour,” recalls Stephen. “We played 270 shows a year.”

That kind of grueling schedule can take its toll on the most dedicated performers. “We got ‘road rash,’ for sure. We lost some members of the band ... replaced them and kept going.”

After five years, however, it was enough. Time to step back from the demands of constant travel and performance and return to his other love – wood. The celebrity population of Martha’s Vineyard seems to bring with it a hunger for new and better, and Stephen stepped into that world with a vengeance. He built houses, barns, cabinetry and fine furniture for a clientele that included actor Tony Shalhoub and celebrated late-night host, David Letterman.



Above top: Hart’s home in West Cornwall, CT. Above: Hart at the piano. Opposite page, top to bottom: Hart’s custom-built kitchen in his home. One of Hart’s custom-built furniture pieces.

The tug of war

Like any artist, however, there was the constant struggle between two very different forms of communication. Additionally, there was also the tug of war going on between Martha's Vineyard and the Northwest Corner. Family was here, so Hart created the bridge between Chilmark and West Tisbury on one hand and Sharon and West Cornwall on the other.

He has made the effort to shift his focus "back home," and has found success in several projects, including working on the mountain top home of John Brett and Jane Strong in Sharon. He remains somehow torn, however, by the fact that significant work seems to beckon from the island. "I want to be here," he says wistfully, "but every season there seems to be a reason to go back to the Vineyard."

House on the hill

The house he has built for himself in West Cornwall is a grand example of the craft and care that Stephen Hart brings to a project. No corner, no finishing piece, no selection of fine woods appears to be an afterthought. From the overall design to the way one moves from one space to another, the effect is to witness an intense belief in meticulous craftsmanship.

Well placed within the house is furniture Stephen has crafted. His love of woods – the contention that

fine craftsmen have that the wood "speaks to them" – is quite evident. There is respect for the grain and the contrasts between types of wood, contrasts that take a chest and turn it into an artistic statement.

Have trailer, will travel

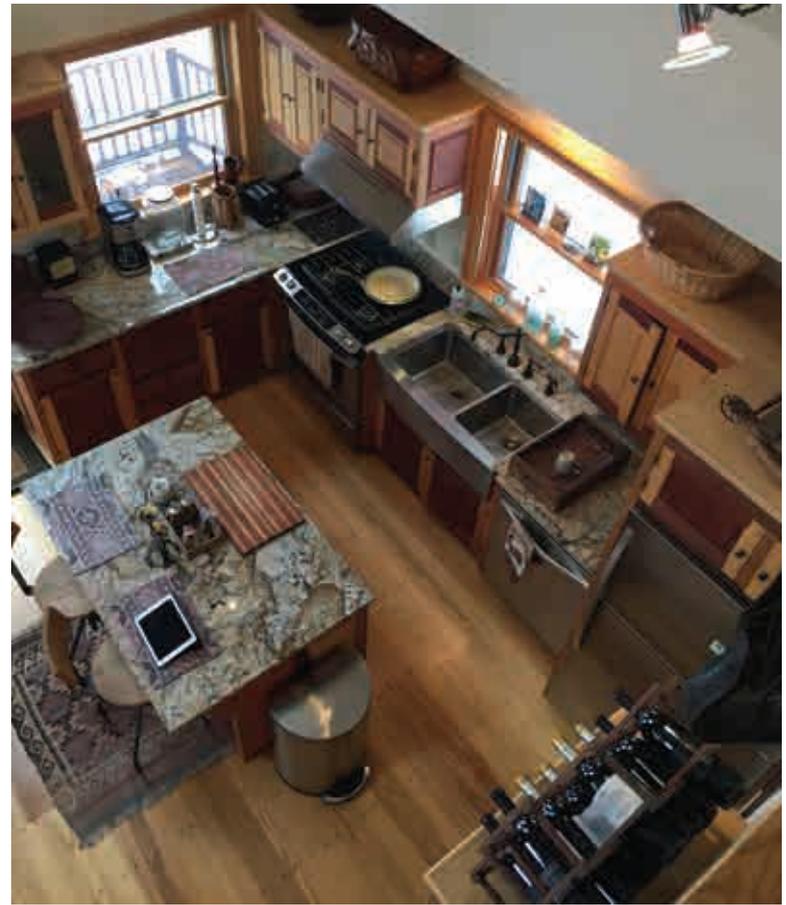
"It's not been easy" reflects Hart. "I had hoped that a reputation in one area would translate to another." Although there are several representations of his custom work in the area, the restlessness and discovery continue.

Of course, there's still been the music. When the "Ululators!" disbanded, Stephen's love of music and performance did not go with them. The first floor of his West Cornwall home is a recording studio that he designed and built himself. Balanced for optimal sound and wired to handle the control boards, microphones, and digital recording equipment needed to turn performances into presentations, he has created a work/live environment that allows him to serve that master.

Working with like-minded local Connecticut musicians, Hart pulled together a reggae/rock fusion band, "Mojo Nectar," that has performed locally and assembled a strong CD.

Rules of the road

Well aware of the demands on a burgeoning group – the time and effort it takes to build a musical



reputation – Stephen discovered the fact that a local band playing local dates is one thing, but investing the time to play wherever, whenever a promoter sets a booking is something quite different. These aren't the 80s when the band was "footloose and fancy free." There are families to consider, and "day jobs."

After playing dates on Martha's Vineyard, at the old Colonial Theater in Canaan, CT, at Club Helsinki in Hudson, NY, and Infinity Hall in Norfolk, CT, the band is "retooling" as Stephen terms it. Local guitarist Jeff Kennedy and Stephen form the core of the redone "Mojo Nectar" with additional band members being added. And while the river flows past the encroaching ice and winter takes hold, the dichotomy of being a musician-builder rages within Stephen Hart. He's added facility with several instruments to his musical repertoire. There will always be the drums as the solid foundation. Self-taught, he's also mastered the piano, the guitar, and the Native American flute.

The recording studio on the first floor calls as a new composition begins to take shape. But then, the phone rings and an inquiring voice wants to talk about a potential project. Here or there. Martha's Vineyard or Salisbury. Reggae or rock. For Stephen Hart, the tensions that are so much a part of being an artist continue. ●

Stephen Hart's construction, finish work, and furniture can be seen on his website, www.hartcustombuilders.com while the "Mojo Nectar" album can be sampled and downloaded at www.mojonectar.com.

Are you an artist and interested in being featured in Main Street Magazine? Send a brief bio, artist's statement, and a link to your work to arts@mainstreetmag.com.



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Leslie Chambers wears many hats! She was a scientist at Pfizer, where she worked in the Psychotherapeutic group. Her proudest work accomplishment was being part of the team that brought “Chantix” to the market. But Leslie’s number one hobby has always been horses, “I’ve been riding since I was 10 years old. I am now the proud owner of two Icelandics, Thokki and Vaskur (pictured above).” Leslie is very active in the local and national Icelandic horse communities, but says stained glass is her creative outlet. “I first learned it in an adult education course 25 years ago.” She and her husband first came to Columbia County a few years ago, “We love it!” It has all of their favorite things, places to appreciate nature, good food and great music, and of course Icelandic horses!



John Goudreault is a very talented craftsman. For a number of years he was doing a lot of finish work on houses, which later led him to his 14 years (and counting) of custom furniture and cabinetry making some of which can be viewed/purchased at his gallery, Place, on Main Street in Millerton, NY. “I like how every project is different and how I get to help design and create a beautiful piece of furniture for someone’s individual needs that they can show off for years to come.” Aside from wood working, John likes to snowboard and practice his archery skills in his spare time. He grew up in the area from the age of 15, “I love the landscape here – it’s spectacular. It is also filled with really nice people and I like the fact that we are close to New York City, too.”



Julianna Kreta is an artist, art teacher, and owner of Little Red Bird, Gift Shop and Gallery in Millerton. “I cannot remember a time when I was not interested in or creating art. I have been teaching adult and children’s art classes for four years.” In all that she does, Julianna likes that these are all ways for her to interact with the world in a positive way, and hopefully inspire others. She also finds enjoyment in bird watching, nature walks, astronomy, architecture, and interior design. She grew up and has lived in the northwest corner of Connecticut for all of her life, “I love the beauty of nature in this area, and the quaint New England towns. I am convinced that this is one of the most beautiful corners of the earth.”



Samantha Leonard-Tilton has been a Finance Associate at Camphill Village for a little over a year, but is a self-taught photographer and has a small business, Shots by Tilton. “Being a part of a community and working alongside those who are encouraging people with developmental differences to achieve their full potential is truly inspiring.” Sam is a life-long resident of Craryville, NY and couldn’t imagine living anywhere else. “Columbia County has amazing landscapes, but I also love photographing families and seeing their faces light up when they see pictures of their loved ones. I want to be able to share my passion with others and give them those ‘Awe’ moments.” When Sam isn’t working or photographing, she enjoys reading, hiking, crocheting, and spending time with her husband, Michael, and their hyper Jack Russell Terrier, Ellie.



William (aka Bill) McGinn works as an interior designer for Ethan Allen, but his designing skills go way back to 1985. “My favorite part of the work is installing a project. Seeing an idea take physical form is exhilarating!” His design skills aren’t far behind him when he’s not at the office. At home he likes restoring original sash windows, scraping floors, painting, and more. “This helps me fully appreciate the fine work of craftsmen with whom I work as a designer.” Bill grew up in the deep south and came to the area as a weekendender in 1990. “I instantly fell in love with the breathtakingly beautiful natural environment.” Besides working as a designer, Bill is also an active real estate salesperson in both Connecticut and New York, and is associated with Best and Cavallaro Real Estate.



Originally from Russia, **Kamilla Najdek** moved here in 2003. “In Russia, we have many different after school activities such as art classes, dance lessons, knitting classes, floral classes, guitar lessons, sewing classes, and more.” She was primarily interested in the art, floral, and dance classes, and her education and exposure to floral design continued to grow from that first class. Kamilla has been in the floral industry for over 15 years and going on 10 years as Kamilla’s Floral Boutique in Millerton, NY. “It is a very rewarding feeling creating something using amazing fresh flowers from all over the world and local flowers.” Every spare second Kamilla has is spent with her family, and her two girls keep her very busy! She also loves skiing, yoga, reading, and traveling.

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By Christine Bates
christine@mainstreetmag.com

What is Hispanola Health Partner?

Hispanola Health Partners' mission is to strengthen healthcare structures along the Haitian/Dominican border. HHP operates a community health clinic in Marre-Joffrey, a remote corner of southeast Haiti very near the Dominican Republic about eight miles from the Caribbean Sea. It's hard to get to – six hours by bush taxi over rough roads from Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, or an overnight open boat from Jacmel, the nearest operating room and ER. There are no official estimates of the number of people who live in this area, but our guess is about 25,000. Marre-Joffrey is far from everywhere.

The community appealed for my help when I first tripped upon it by chance in 2012. In 2011 a cement shell of a clinic built by Haitian Americans was completed by Hispanola Health Partners which incorporated as a 501©3 in 2014. Just last January HHP began staffing it with medical professionals. Now the clinic operates everyday and has a full-time staff of four – a doctor and

nurse, administrator, and grounds-keeper. The clinic has provided over 5,000 patients with primary health care, and HHP has screened over 1,600 women for cervical cancer. In June of 2016 the clinic began using an ambulance to transport doctors, nurses, and supplies once a week to six distant villages where there are no health services and few resources to get to our clinic.

After Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti in October last year, HHP distributed 2,000 emergency hygiene kits and temporarily helped staff a cholera center in the region to help prevent its spread. We helped rebuild some houses and re-equip kids with backpacks and shoes for school, all lost in the storm.

This year HHP intends to expand the clinic into a “see and treat” regional training center for the diagnosis and treatment of cervical cancer. Haiti has the highest incidence of cervical cancer in the world and programs to prevent, screen, and treat women are not currently provided by the Haitian Ministry of Health. Hundreds of women die every year from a very treatable cancer.



What path that led you to found Hispanola Health Partners?

After I graduated from Georgetown University as an English major, I went on a globe-trotting road trip to figure out my purpose in life. I found myself in the Sierra Madres mountains of Mexico at a remote primary healthcare clinic set up by Dr. David Werner, author of the book *Donde No Hay Doctor* (*Where There Is No Doctor*), a village healthcare handbook, and founder of the Hesperian Foundation. I knew immediately that this was what I wanted to do with my life. I returned to the states, went back to school, became a registered nurse and started volunteering in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

I kept searching for the right project. I volunteered many places in Latin America and the Caribbean but Haiti always had a special allure for me. I was intrigued by its history and culture. Then in 2011 I worked for two months in a clinic in Anse-à-Pitres on the Haitian border during the cholera epidemic after the earthquake. While the staff

Above: HHP's co-founder on the back of a motorcycle with her cryo equipment. Below, left: HHP distributing cholera prevention kits at the local high school after hurricane Matthew. All photos courtesy of Louise Lindenmeyr and Hispanola Partners.

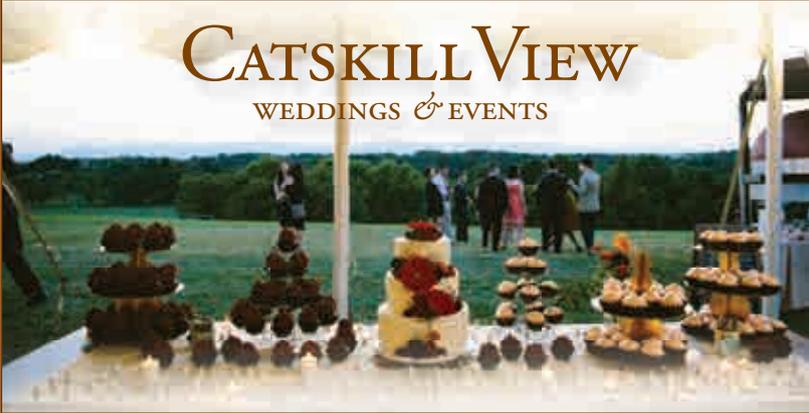


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was treating cholera in a quarantined area outside, I handled every other medical problem that came in the door. It was an extended adrenaline rush; like being on the front lines of a battle – the problems are flying at you – mothers groaning in labor, youths limping in with gashes from motorcycle accidents, babies with fevers of 104. It was astonishing and invigorating. I would return across the border to the Dominican Republic every night and drink a huge, cold beer!

Returning to Anse-à-Pitres a year later, the cholera epidemic had been quelled. My role there was nebulous. How could I be helpful? I realized the women were not being screened for cervical cancer. There was no Pap smear available like we have in this country. I became adept at a cervical screening and treatment technique called VIA/cryo and was invited to go up in the mountains on the back of a motorcycle and treat patients there. That's when I discovered the partially built clinic. The locals showed it to me and begged me to help get it up and running. I thought to myself, "no way!" A few days later I met some young Americans working in the Dominican Republic who wanted to see Haiti and I told them about Marre-Joffrey. I asked them to come back with me to check out the clinic and do an informal feasibility study. They fell in love with Marre-Joffrey, were convinced we could make it fly and Hispaniola Health Partners was born. For a year or so as we waited for nonprofit status, the local community here in NW Connecticut and New York opened up their heart and wallets, and St. John's Episcopal Church in Salisbury, CT accepted donations on our behalf.

Did you have a plan for the clinic?

We had a two-stage strategic plan in place before the clinic even opened: get the clinic up and running with daily services and build it gradually and carefully so that it can eventually be independently run without much help from HHP. We wanted this clinic to belong to the community and rejected what's called the "shake and bake" model where



Above: Patients line up to be seen at the HHP Marre-Joffrey clinic.

temporary "medical missions" fall from the sky for one week a year with a team of Americans and a pile of free goodies. The community has to buy into the clinic. Patients pay \$1 to be seen and they pay the same price for medications as they would at a Ministry of Health clinic. We don't want to destabilize the system by "giving away stuff," we want to strengthen the healthcare infrastructure. We work as part of a Haitian collaborative network. Haitians are the victims of a broken system and they are eager to be a part of positive change.

Now we want to expand care to provide surgical services in a hospital operating room 45 minutes away that only gets used twice a year when the Americans come. There are plenty of good Haitian surgeons who want to work! We are fighting the medical problems of poverty – hypertension, parasites, infectious diseases, as well as the old paradigm of hierarchical institutional thinking. We partner with other NGOs in the region to work on the core causes of disease through strategies that improve water, food, and sanitation. It's so challenging. It's rather tormenting really; it's like a fever that won't let you sleep at night, or being crazy in love, constantly asking yourself how to make things better.

What are you proudest of?

I'm proudest of our staff. They are so energetic, so proud of the clinic, so committed. They are the "dreamers" of Haiti who bash the Haitian stereotype of corruption and greed. They come up with great ideas and they have a lot of autonomy. HHP does not monitor their every move but asks for basic accountability.

What is your role today?

I'm the unpaid Executive Director, the facilitator, instructor, and administrator. That's what the clinic needs now. It's where my abilities are best used. Although I love to work as a practitioner, I don't want to take the place of Haitian nurses and doctors. Our staff is excellent and I can handle the rest – especially raising awareness of what we do and finding funds to continue our work. Every few months I go to Haiti to train staff, bring supplies, and talk to the government health officials and our other partners.

Who has inspired you?

In addition to David Werner, Paul Farmer's work in Haiti (Partners in Health) providing respectable healthcare to rural communities in the developing world has guided us. David and Paul both created models

Continued on next page ...

of building from the ground up rather than imposing US standards and policy from the top down. We harvest local resources and embellish them.

What advice do you have for anyone contemplating starting his or her own charity?

You must be really passionate about the project because it completely dominates you; it encompasses and possesses you like a siren's song. You can't resist putting more and more into the project, but it gives back because the right idea will keep feeding and inspiring you.

You also need key people, comrades, and partner organizations to help you who share the same vision. In creole they have a proverb "*Pou youn tab kanpe fòk li gen kat pye menm longèn.*" For a table to stand it must have four legs of the same length. You don't need to do everything yourself.

It's a challenge to take care not to shoot too high or too low. For example, we can help improve the general health status of the residents of our region but we cannot carry the burden of improving water and sanitation without collaborating with other agencies that specialize in that. We can treat basic primary care problems like pneumonia, amebiasis etc., but we can't handle treatment for chronic infectious diseases like TB and HIV without being part of a national treatment program.

If you're creating a not-for-profit that operates in the developing world you should have international work experience on the ground. You need to have spent time being "on location" to understand the nature of the various basic resources 24/7, or lack thereof. You can't be there only in the dry season and then be surprised because the roof leaks when it rains.

Insist on professional conduct but don't be rigid. Don't think that American protocols must be enforced because they are the only way to do things. Most important, have a sense of humor, make yourself a little vulnerable and even be goofy sometimes. Dance, sing, clown!

Once your local colleagues are laughing with you, you've got them!

How can people here help Hispanola Health Partners?

You can learn more about what we do at www.hispanolapartners.org and maybe honor us with a donation. For a more personal perspective of our work, visit the Haiti blog I have been writing for the last six years at: lindenmeyr.blogspot.com/. If you have some general questions you can email me at lindenmeyr@gmail.com.

You can support us by selecting Hispanola Health Partners as your charity of choice on Amazon smile when you shop online. Right now we're looking for laptops in good operating condition for use in our clinic and to give to our young professionals. The batteries have to be functioning so we can charge them off the generator since there is no electricity in our clinic. One of our goals this year is to install a solar energy system and get laboratory services going. As of yet the clinic, just like the rest of the community, has no electricity. Doctors and nurses use headlamps for examinations and we only operate during hours of daylight. Over 93% of the money we raise goes directly to the clinic. The other 7% pays for our insurance and accounting services.

How often do you go to Haiti? Where do you stay? What do you eat? What does your family think?

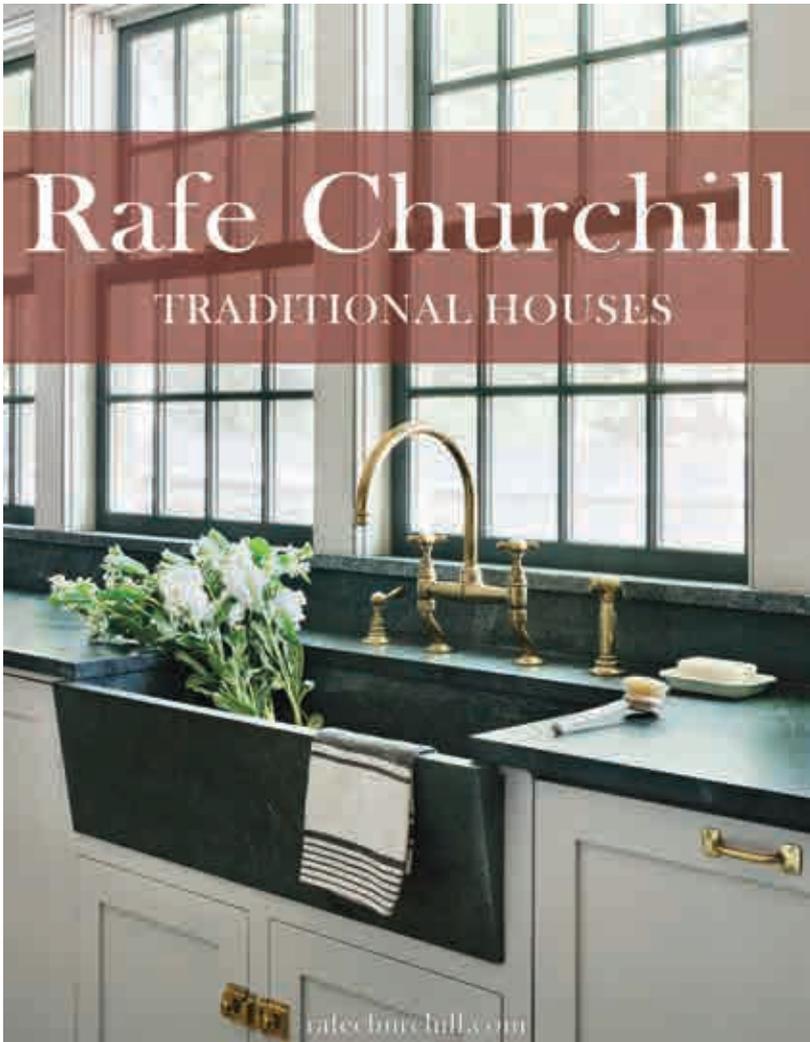
I go three times a year and stay for several weeks, traversing the country, but I always end up at the Love People Bar Resto in Marre-Joffrey, a simple guesthouse run by one of the Haitian Americans who started building the clinic after he returned to his village 12 years ago. The Bar Resto has a generator that provides light a few hours at night so we can recharge everything and all the town comes there to have a beer or a shot of rum (Barbancourt, the best rum in the world), listen to music and do a little dancing. The staff cooks simple food; Haitians eat one big meal a day at around three in the afternoon. It's mostly



fish and occasionally we are treated to chicken or goat. Everything is served with plantains and rice with special sauces. Beans are another luxury. Breakfast is a piece of hard dry white bread with a cup of super strong sweet coffee. I lose five pounds every trip! I always come home feeling great, except last year when I returned with a case of Zika.

My husband, Eliot Osborn, understands well my passion and has deep respect for what I do. God love him! When we were younger we travelled together all over the developing world with our organization Project Troubadour, playing music and doing street theater. We also traveled with our young kids to places like Central and South America, Cuba, West Africa, and we can see how much that developed their humanity. This kind of work gives so much back! •

Above, top to bottom: The hills of Marre-Joffrey, Haiti. The ribbon cutting when HHP's clinic officially opened in 2016.



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From the ground up

DIY CASTLE, TINY HOUSE, HOME

By Christine Bates
christine@mainstreetmag.com

I grew up in a DIY home. My mother nailed the last shingles on the roof in November, two weeks before I was born. When I came home from the hospital plastic still covered the windows of the house my father designed and built. Unusual people, who just decide to go ahead and design and build their own structure, are a special breed. For our DIY issue we discuss four very different approaches to building from the ground up and try to figure out what they have in common.

Wing Castle

Wing Castle in Millbrook, NY, a pastiche of imagination, inspiration, scavenging, and years of work (see photos on this page) is an extreme DIY example. Coming home from Vietnam, Peter Wing, with the help of his new bride Toni Ann, embarked on a 40-year project to build a stone castle. The couple was inspired by the painter Eric Sloane, who welcomed them into his studio barn and made building seem easy and inexpensive.

The Wings started by erecting a simple, twenty foot diameter stone room heated by a wood stove, which became their home during the first winter. Gradually the Wings built up and out, adding swimming pools and grottos, bathrooms, and a great room.

“The way I am, I let things evolve,” said Peter Wing in my interview with him in 2010. “Goals are for football



players.” The design was inspired by Romanesque cathedrals, Stokesay Castle, and Barcelona architect, Antonio Gaudi. Visitors to the castle often observed “You’ve ruined it,” thinking the castle was somehow a botched renovation. Sometimes they asked where Wing went to school, and became angry when he said he hadn’t. He taught himself all the trades before the advent of the Internet and YouTube videos by reading union plumb-

ing manuals, construction books, and shelter magazines. As for the intricate masonry work, Wing said simply, “Farmers know how to move stones.”

When he began his project Wing noticed an abandoned stone railway trestle in a Salt Point farmer’s field. Twenty-nine sticks of dynamite later, Wing had an abundant supply of rocks. It took him seven years to remove all the stones. He rented heavy equipment a day at a time to transport the stone to the castle and ran it for 24 hours without stopping. The castle’s beams contain recycled material from at least ten area barns. The dark, glowing foot-wide plus floorboards are the winnowing floor from a 1700s barn. Wing hauled away castle iron, stones, and 4,000 bricks for \$40 from the City of Poughkeepsie. There’s an old tavern, a Baptist church foundation, and a Masonic Temple mixed in.

Above: A pair of rescued elephants helped out one summer at Wing Castle in Millbrook. Photo courtesy of Peter Wing. Below, left: The Wing Castle in 2010. Photo by Peter Greenough.



Continued on next page ...

Until his untimely death in a motorcycle accident, Wing continued to work on his castle adding rooms to make it a B&B, including a circular room topped by the copper dome of the Pleasant Valley water tank. Design buffs might enjoy reading architect Jim Crisp's blog about his tour of the castle at crisparchitects.blogspot. "It is hard to describe the artistry, craftsmanship, and beauty everywhere you look. There is nothing, which has not been thought about carefully and detailed with loving care."

Almost finished in Boston Corners

When driving by the construction site on the east side of Boston Corners Road in New York you might have thought that Chris Regan was building a garage for his house on the other side of the road. A few years later with all of the hard work done, it's clearly a distinctive modern home with an expansive view of the wetlands. "In the spring you should hear the frogs," said Regan, the owner of Sky Farm, which supplies premium greens to local farm stands and restaurants. "Being a farmer gives me time to work on the house in the winter. I'm not a rich man and this was the only way I could afford the house I wanted."

Regan did rely on contractors to do some of the specialized work. "Con-



Above: The wetland contemporary house of Chris Regan in Boston Corners after a snowfall. Below, left: Liam O'Brien's under 200 square foot tiny house in Salisbury, CT is nearing completion. Photos by Christine Bates.

crete floors are amazingly difficult to do and if you make a mistake..." For Regan the electrical was the hardest task. Even though he did seek advice from a professional electrician, he has done all the wiring himself. The septic system was another task for professionals.

Regan started the design six years ago and developed detailed plans us-

ing a student version of Auto-Cad and actually started construction five years ago. The modern house is designed to fit on the narrow site. Regan observed, "It's stressful not knowing what you're doing, and learning while you're doing." A sentiment echoed by all of our DIYers. Regan learned from YouTube and Google, and especially www.greenbuildingadvisor.com. Building his own house allowed him to have luxuries like triple paned, energy efficient mahogany windows from Germany, and radiant heating. He hopes to be finished within a year.

Salisbury tiny house

Liam O'Brien, a 20-year-old technology, IT, engineering self-described geek, is building a contemporary tiny house next to his mother's very much-missed restaurant Chaiwalla in Salisbury, CT. The construction project began in the summer of 2015 when the 10' by 28' trailer, purchased from Tumbleweed, arrived on site. After looking at tiny house projects online and on HDTV, O'Brien developed ideas for his own tiny house. Moving the house easily was important to him – its eight-foot width is not a wide load and does not require permits to move it on public roads. The style

should be contemporary, not cutesy Victorian, with a sloping shed roof, which is better for solar panels and easier to construct than a peaked roof. It should be high enough for a tall inhabitant like O'Brien without a low ceiling sleeping loft – his bed pulls out from underneath the office floor. It should have a few big windows, not lots of little "portholes." A motorized 80" screen does double duty as a curtain and media screen when the rear view projector is activated.

To design the house, O'Brien used a free student version of Autodesk's Revit, a complex program used by architectural offices. He recommended Google SketchUp, which is a free easy-to-use program to other DIY house builders. O'Brien hopes that his tiny 190 square foot house will be mostly completed by the summer. "This is a no compromises house," according to O'Brien, "I'm not home-steading."

A typical tiny house, which is already built, costs around \$100,000 and O'Brien's luxury DIY version should be much less when completed.

Continued on next page ...



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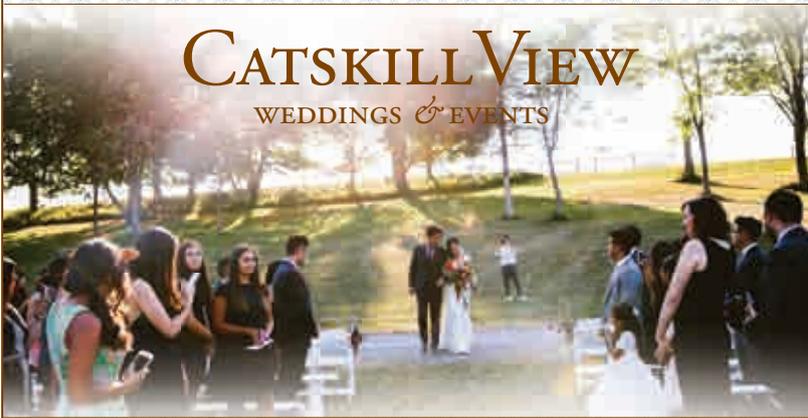


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What's the most difficult thing? "Everything is hard, especially getting the logistics right. It's physically demanding with a very steep learning curve. You are simultaneously designing and executing a project that you will live in."

The only part that O'Brien has subbed out is the foam insulation on the inside. Everything else he has done himself, framing, electrical, plumbing, although he has had the advice of a friend with 30 years of construction experience.

Retirement home in Ancram

Drafted as a teenager into the Signal Corp of the German Army during World II, Harry Holleufer worked as a telegraph operator during the Nuremberg trials and then for the US Embassy in Germany. He immigrated to America in the late 1950s and after a 25-year career working for KLM in New York decided to retire early at age 60 and build his own house. In 1984 he bought 19 acres in Ancram on a hilltop with southern exposure. An excavator, who had previously farmed the land, put a drive up the hill, cleared the land and leveled a building site. Holleufer had plans that he had drawn up himself, and took it from there.

He hired a contractor to put in his footings and was at the site everyday to supervise while living in a small rented room nearby. "That was the easiest part. Someone else was doing the work." He also hired the electrician to bury the power lines and put in a circuit box, and contracted for the septic and the well. Everything else he did himself with some assistance from his wife Hildegard. "If you have just one helper it goes four times as fast. It was really difficult to put up

4' by 8' pieces of siding on a ladder by myself. A friend came up to help put on the roof and we did it together in one week."

By the summer of 1985 the couple stayed in the garage while they worked on the rest of the two story, three bedroom, two bathroom house. By 1986 they had sold their house on Long Island and moved in while they finished the interior. Holleufer did all the tiling, plumbing, electrical, carpentry, woodworking, and heating – everything himself. "I liked it. It was fun, like playing with an erector set."

What do these DIY house builders have in common?

DIY Vietnam veteran, farmer, IT nerd, 60 year old German immigrant – what do they have in common? None of them have a background in construction. Their DIY homes are all stylistically very different from a castle to a one-room tiny house. What they share is the desire to create something that is exactly what they want and the belief that they can learn how to do whatever is required to realize their vision. They are patient and never doubt that they can complete their home, even if it does take a while.

Their houses are all very individualistic from swimming pool grottos to 80" roll down TV screens. And these DIY home builders do occasionally rely on their friends, spouses, or in the late Peter Wing's case, elephants to help them out. ●



This page: Harry Holleufer built his retirement home in Ancram at the age of 60. You can see Harry on the roof in the picture above. Photos by Harry Holleufer.

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By Sarah Ellen Rindsberg
info@mainstreetmag.com

Whenever I talk about knitting, I find myself telling one or another delightful story. Sometimes I recall how I learned to knit when I was eight from a dear elderly woman who set up treasure hunts in her home. Each clue was located at the end of a long, winding strand of yarn. The neck warmer I knit that year still keeps me cozy almost 50 years later.

Other times, I recollect my determination to learn how to knit two socks simultaneously. My neck warmer is a wonderful memory of a cherished friend and I'm currently knitting my third pair of socks.

With each subsequent creation, I have learned more stitches, become more proficient and found pleasure and accomplishment in both the process of knitting and its beautiful outcome. I have enjoyed a craft that is relaxing, inspiring, and thoroughly rewarding for many years.

When the inspiration strikes...

The desire to knit can overtake you in an instant. All that needs to happen is to notice an adorable woolen hat, sweater, or fingerless gloves. When you inquire about the garment you admire, you will almost inevitably be infected with a dose of the knitter's enthusiasm. And so you start on your own knitter's journey.

If you're looking to learn to knit, there are various methods and styles, all of which are easy to find. Type in the name of a stitch on YouTube, whether it's knit, purl, stockinette, or cable, and enjoy the show. Pause the reel and try it out. This technique is also a tremendous confidence booster since most presenters begin by assuring the viewer that the task is easy. Similarly, in the crafts section of bookstores and libraries, you'll find volumes with beautifully illustrated instructions.

A more social option is to join a group of crafters. In our neck of the woods, practitioners gather at librar-

ies in Millerton, Falls Village and Chatham, and around tables at Pine Plains Emporium, Black Sheep Yarns in Kent, The Warm Ewe in Chatham, Wonderful Things in Great Barrington and the Millerton branch of Salisbury Bank. Camaraderie accompanied by the occasional dessert and yarn swap heighten the enjoyment. You'll find more structured knitting classes online, at stores, and at many local forums.

Take the first stitch

With large needles in hand and a chunky fiber tucked into a yarn holder, cast on ("knit speak" for creating loops on the first needle) ten stitches. Pick up the second needle, insert the point into the first loop, wrap the working yarn around the two points together and scoop the stitch up and onto the second needle. Voilà, the first stitch takes shape. Continue until the sampler becomes a doll's blanket or washcloth. Acrylic is fine for the first foray – save the coveted cashmere for later.

For specific help on a project, stop by an independently owned yarn shop

– one of the great benefits of buying yarn locally. At Black Sheep Yarns in Kent, owner Nancy Hamilton's welcome is as warm as the garments on display. "I teach and help for free," she says. The trepidation of newcomers evaporates as she shares her story: "When I opened my shop, I was not a knitter." A glance at the sweater she's wearing is proof enough that she's mastered the craft.

For newbies, start with something simple, such as a scarf. Within a matter of minutes, the concept of a stitch becomes reality and the prospect of venturing out into the cold is less daunting. Your next project can be a bit more adventurous. Peruse Ravelry, a popular website for knitting patterns, where the choice of hat patterns alone is nothing short of astounding. Knitting your own sweaters and socks gives you the opportunity to customize garments, at least once you're a proficient if not an advanced knitter. Keep at it and you'll get there sooner than you think.

The yarn

There are many sources of yarn for

knitting, but none surpasses the excitement of buying it at a sheep and wool festival. These events, held annually throughout the nation and abroad, attract flocks of knitters. At the festival in Rhinebeck, NY, held every October, you'll see wool in every state of finish, from the raw materials – literally – on the various breeds of sheep, to yarn-makers at their spinning wheels. Finished skeins in all colors and weights are available for purchase at exhibitors' booths.

When you stroll through town, there's nothing better than to be stopped by a stranger and asked, "Where did you get that bag?" I love to respond, "I made it!" and engage my dimples in a smile. I feel a swell of pride as I describe the simple – yes, entirely simple – way to knit and then "felt" my project. In this case, I knitted the bag using superlative Icelandic wool, then popped it into the washing machine and watched as the stitches meshed into sturdy yet soft felted fabric. •



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Columbia County Habitat for Humanity

ANCRAM RURAL BUILD PROJECT

By Mary B. O'Neill, Ph.D.
info@mainstreetmag.com

It's no mystery that people are attracted to this area for its simplicity and beauty. The desire to live here on a full or part-time basis is driven by the quality of life we believe we can achieve.

An unfortunate side effect of this – particularly if you're a first-time buyer – is increased home prices. When demand increases and supply decreases, prices go up. This basic economic relationship is being played out all over Columbia County, NY. And bearing the brunt of it are local workers and full-time residents trying to make a living.

These same full-time residents are also the ones charged with maintaining and preserving the beloved rural character of our communities. When they can't find affordable quality housing for themselves and their families, they need to go elsewhere. This depletes the area of critical human capital.

While Columbia County is long on natural beauty and diversity it's becoming increasingly short on the diversity of the people who live and work here. As any environmentalist will tell you, diversity is key to a healthy and thriving ecosystem. Without it, a system can't flourish and survive adversity.

A partner in community

For over 23 years Columbia County Habitat for Humanity has been working to maintain a healthy and diverse



Above: Volunteers raise a second exterior wall, which provides the cavity for 12 inches of insulation, a key element of a passive construction. Below: Renee, a future homeowner on the left, begins her sweat equity, working with volunteers and family members who come to support her in her new journey of becoming a homeowner. Photos courtesy of Habitat for Humanity.

economic ecosystem by providing affordable housing to those residents needing a leg up on the property ladder. The stability that home ownership can bring allows them to build thriving lives in the communities where they work.

Executive Director Brenda Adams has guided the organization through the last seven years and witnesses the challenges that residents of rural communities often face in finding housing that is reasonably priced, safe, and predictable. This lack of housing is “harder to see in a rural area but

the need is definitely there,” Adams asserts.

During her tenure, the number of individuals applying for Habitat housing has quadrupled. It has increased from roughly 10 applicants per application cycle to over 55 applicants for two homes in the most recent cycle. The most basic requirement is an income level that is 20 to 60 percent of the Annual Median Income. Last year in Columbia County that equated to a maximum income level of \$42,000 for a family of four. The family must also contribute a minimum of 300 labor hours toward the construction of their own home, take a HUD-certified first-time homebuyers course, and currently live in substandard rental housing.

Community health through housing

“We need to attract young people and families to our communities, and make it possible for them to live here. When they do, their children go to the local school, they can work closer to their homes, and they can volun-

teer in the communities they live in,” explains Adams.

Adams credits the growth of Habitat to its energetic and devoted board and team of volunteers. Because of their work, Habitat has been successful in building partnerships on all levels. This reinforces an increased understanding that Habitat forges a relationship between the partner family, the organization, and the wider community.

That spirit of partnership carries on after the last nail is hammered and the keys are handed over. Adams describes that “new Habitat homeowners become knit into the community and develop skills and relationships from helping build their own home with local volunteers. While volunteering in the communities that Habitat families live in isn't a requirement, I've noticed that many of our families give back, either through volunteering for Habitat themselves on projects or

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Yet even with the hand up provided by Habitat over the years, Adams and the board are aware that new homeowners are still in a tenuous situation regarding housing expenses such as heating. With very modest salaries that often don't rise in proportion to the increase in fuel costs incurred during harsh winter months, Habitat homeowners can find themselves having to make difficult choices between heat and other necessities.

A match made in Hudson

Seeking a solution, in 2011 Adams contacted Manhattan- and Hudson-based architect Dennis Wedlick of BarlisWedlick Architects to speak at a fundraising event. The topic: his work with sustainable Passive Houses that are fiercely energy efficient. (See related article on Passive House design on page 30).

Wedlick studied under post-modern architect Philip Johnson (who designed the Museum of Modern Art) and cut his chops designing skyscrapers. In Wedlick's early career in the 1980s he found his way to designing high-end sustainable residential housing, yet moonlighted designing affordable housing developments in Columbia County.

In 2010, he spearheaded the Hudson Passive Project. Designed and built in partnership with builder Bill Stratton and Company, it was a watershed moment for him. That soaring, yet deeply energy efficient dwelling, won the project many accolades.

Not only was it architecturally stunning, it was a test case for how a house could be built to reduce its energy footprint. Wedlick worked with New York State Energy Research and Development Authority as part of its High Performance Challenge to document and prove the energy savings. It has now become a standard bearer for what is possible in sustainable, low-energy housing.

This was the work Habitat wanted to hear about, and at that presentation a beautiful partnership was born. Wedlick describes on the dynamic energy created by a room full of

“building enthusiasts who completely understood the technical aspects of my presentation. I couldn't go fast enough. I'd present a theory, and they'd say, 'We get that, what's next?'" Then Wedlick got Passive aggressive. Adams remembers, “Dennis presented us with a challenge – use his know-how in Passive House design and apply it to Habitat housing.” Wedlick convinced Habitat that he could adapt his Passive House design principles to their budget, which included vinyl siding and materials from Home Depot.

“With the enthusiasm of Dennis and Habitat volunteers,” recalls Adams, “we began our first set of Passive Houses 10 months later. We monitored the savings, which were real and substantial. These houses cost 90 percent less to heat, leaving families with more money for a financial safety net. We're now building our third set of houses with Dennis and BarlisWedlick in Valatie, New York.”

For BarlisWedlick, their Passive House work with Habitat has been “the single largest volunteer effort my firm has made over six years and with a staff of four architects,” recounts Wedlick. “My partner Alan Barlis and I are dedicated to improving the quality of life of our rural neighbors. Our working relationship has allowed me to focus on developing strategies that make Passive House technologies available for the rural workforce.”

Ancram Rural Build project

As part of their 15-month strategic plan, the Habitat board is expanding the organization's capacity and fully embracing its vision of partnering with communities in all parts of the



county. Habitat's goal is to build 12 more homes over the next five years, all of which will be Passive House design. An important pillar of that plan is the Ancram Rural Build, which is the product of a “convergence” as Wedlick calls it.

Wedlick is a rare combination of data junkie, empath, and lofty idealist. He brings number-crunching support, his ability to identify with the plight of others, and a vision of providing opportunities for homeownership, to a critical cross section of Columbia County – the agricultural community.

For Wedlick, Habitat is uniquely positioned as a lead partner in this endeavor. “Habitat taught me about building community by building *for* community – building for our neighbors. It reflects the notion of a traditional barn build – everyone pitching in, doing what they do best. I know how to design, but Habitat volunteers know how to build.”

Above top: These Columbia County Habitat for Humanity Passive Town Houses use the same Passive House technology as custom-built green homes, which far exceed code-minimum requirements for comfort, efficiency, and resiliency. Photo courtesy of Dennis Wedlick. Above: Every helping hand makes a difference. Volunteers are the backbone of Habitat's organization, and make it possible to provide the community with affordable housing. Photo courtesy of Habitat for Humanity.

Continued on next page ...



Habitat was ready to swing the hammer, and Wedlick had created the design – they just needed the site. In line with Wedlick’s idea of convergence came the involvement of Frank and Katherine Martucci, longtime Columbia County residents, philanthropists, and landowners.

In conversation one day about how best to conserve the area’s rural character, while bolstering the community that works and tends to the land, Wedlick and Frank Martucci shared concerns about who would steward



Above top: In 2010, Stratton Building Company raised the frame of the Hudson Passive Project, the first certified Passive House in the state of New York. Photo credit: Michael Fredericks. Rights owned by BarlisWedlick. Above: Volunteers construct the first wall of the Valatie Passive Townhouse homes. Photo courtesy of Habitat for Humanity.

the land and keep the fabric of community intact. They both recognize the economic constraints of the area in terms of rising costs of living and stagnant wages. Both believe in the strength of a vibrant and diverse community. Having a situation where young artisans, farmers, and tradespeople can’t afford to live is not a path to a sustainable economic and environmental future for Columbia County.

Wedlick kindly gave the Martuccis a vehicle to address their concerns.

They could donate land in central Ancramdale and be partners with Habitat and himself in the Ancram Rural Build. The Martuccis, along with Dan Slott with whom they co-owned the land, were impressed with Habitat’s model and rigorous selection process. They have since donated the land, and the third piece of the puzzle is now in place.

Adams describes the Martuccis as “visionary individuals who are concerned with a healthy, sustainable, and diverse community in the long term.” This perspective dovetails so well with Habitat’s own. For Adams, “Effective community planning, the kind Habitat is dedicated to, requires a long view and a commitment to a vision of inclusive community life. We’re so fortunate that Frank and Katherine share that philosophy.”

Documenting the need

One of the key aspects of the Habitat model is assessing the demand for its housing before a shovel strikes dirt. It doesn’t build spec houses and hope to find an owner. Habitat must document the need before the project will move ahead. Wedlick, ever one for a firm foundation, took to building the case for the project.

He accessed information from the New York State Department of Labor that details occupations, requisite education and skill levels, and pay scales based upon experience divided into tertiles. Using his vast experience building residences in rural Columbia County, he personally highlighted every occupation that is remotely related

to the agricultural sector, from food worker to farm bookkeeper to farmer.

He then determined that the median salary across all occupations in the first tertile, where a first-time homeowner might be, was \$27,000 per year. Based upon this and Habitat’s own research on the issue, he saw that one-third of Columbia County earns about 50 percent of the state average. His conclusion: the housing need is there for the agricultural worker in demographic that Habitat serves.

Putting faces to numbers

These statistics must now become real faces. Habitat needs to know that there are actual families who meet its criteria and are willing to become partners in home building and ownership. Habitat is holding a community meeting to share information about the Habitat Ancram Rural Build so that prospective applicants can understand requirements for qualification, the application process, and what happens after one is selected.

Wedlick and Adams emphasize that the Ancram Rural Build targets those occupations that are required to sustain our agricultural economy, such as farm workers, and those careers that sustain the agricultural infrastructure, such as barn builders, tractor drivers, carpenters, surveyors, landscapers, and food science technicians – their definition of rural workforce is quite expansive. Finding potential partner families that meet the criteria is the critical next step in making this project a reality. From their research, they know these families are out there – the more families to come forward, the more they will build. •

The Ancram Rural Build community meeting will be on February 12th at 1pm at the Ancram Volunteer Firehouse. It is open to any resident of Columbia County who is interested in becoming a partner family in the Ancram Rural Build. The firehouse is located at 1306 County Route 7 in Ancram. Questions? Not sure if what you do for a living meets Rural Build requirements? Contact Brenda Adams at badams@columbiacounty-habitat.org – she’ll help you figure it out.

For more information about Columbia County Habitat, go to www.columbiacounty-habitat.org. The office and ReStore shop are located at 829 Route 66, Hudson, NY. Phone number: (518) 828-0892.

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Above: The Ancram Build Passive House Prototype. This 3bd/2bth Passive House by BarlisWedlick Architects of Hudson, NY is specifically designed for the first-time homebuyer from the agrarian workforce. Photo courtesy of Dennis Wedlick.

*By Mary B. O'Neill, Ph.D.
info@mainstreetmag.com*

Passive House design signifies reaching and maintaining a comfortable ambient temperature in a house. This is accomplished through passive measures such as insulation, solar, and heat recovery, rather than actively heating and cooling the structure by external means, such as heating and cooling systems.

In recent years, the discipline has taken a huge leap thanks to the Passive House Institute, which has developed a thermal modelling software, available to architects, building scientists, and builders, to help promote this standard. The Institute is a global organization seeking to make passive technologies mainstream and be considered as best practice in the building industry.

Dennis Wedlick of BarlisWedlick Architects explains that building a Passive House is accomplished through a combination of design approaches and careful study of the specific building site.

Data and design

With thermal modelling, builders and architects bring data to bear on the construction. Using CAD design and specifications of the building materials, it scientifically proves the energy efficiency of the building design and methods. While modelling provides a formula for optimal calculations, it doesn't help with the design.

This is the challenge Wedlick relishes most – how to combine data, cost and materials constraints, and the needs of the client to create a livable, affordable, and efficient, living space that is also attractive and aspirational.

For the past six years, this is the volunteer work that he, along with his partner Alan Barlis and others from BarlisWedlick, have been doing with the nonprofit Columbia County Habitat for Humanity. (See related article on page 25).

Sealing the envelope

Passive House design starts with the building envelope. Wedlick explains that this is the walls, foundation, and roof of a house – surfaces that interact with the outside. The goal is to create a “type of thermos ideal, where the house in neither gaining nor losing energy and stays at a

given temperature over an extended period.”

To create this equilibrium in Habitat houses Wedlick and his team, along with the volunteer help of building science experts from the Levy Partnership, develop a “site specific understanding of the climate where the house is located,” explains Wedlick. “Each location has its own microclimate that influences how the envelope will be constructed. A north-facing wall with an open field will have different insulation requirements than a west-facing wall with a tree barrier. To create equilibrium requires calibrating insulation to the external conditions. This even includes the ground, where energy will also be exchanged.”

Thermal bridges

The second step is to eliminate thermal bridging to the extent possible. This phenomenon occurs when the desired temperature on the interior of the house is altered due to an exchange with the heat

or cold from the exterior building materials.

A simple and common solution for this is creating an air buffer between the inside and outside of the house. The air interrupts the transfer of heat or cold and prevents a thermal bridge from forming, thus preserving the equilibrium.

Mind the gaps

A third measure is to eliminate all unintentional air exchanges. The house should be as “tight” as possible – 99.5 percent airtight is the ideal. The home must not leak more than 0.6 times the building volume per hour at 50 Pascal [the metric measurement of pressure]. Achieving this level of tightness can be accomplished through wrapping the exterior of the house with a vapor control wrap, along with caulking and gaskets.

The blower door test measures how airtight a structure is by a fan that sucks the air out of the house through one door with all other doors and windows closed. During the test, as the fan pulls air out of the house, the more difficulty it should have turning its blades (since there’s no air to circulate). The



speed of the fan blades will help determine how airtight the house is considered.

Out with the bad, in with the good

Finally, an energy recovering ventilator allows for the heat from stale kitchen or bathroom air to be continuously transferred to fresh air coming into living spaces and bedrooms. This air exchange is necessary only when mechanical heating or cooling is required via a

single split heat pump. When the weather is fine and a spring breeze is blowing, open the windows to allow for natural air exchange.

Wedlick assures that these Passive House measures don’t result in “a stuffy bunker, but create a balance in the house’s equilibrium and the highest indoor air-quality possible, which clients have told me is palpable.”

Passive + Habitat = Sustainable Living

BarlisWedlick has proved Passive House technology can be achieved within Habitat for Humanity’s building budget, using Habitat’s own volunteers. This allows members of Columbia County’s rural workforce to live in state-of-the-art, aspirational homes that will be comfortably heated and cooled without incurring bank-breaking costs.

The goal for Habitat is to allow families to own a home, with reliably low carrying costs, and thereby improve their lives. Passive House’s low-energy, low carbon footprint technologies economically sustain Habitat’s client families and Columbia County, while ecologically sustaining the environment. ●

Above: The An-cram Build Passive House (story on page 25) will feature over-sized windows, an open floor plan, and state-of-the-art mechanical systems, to make for a spacious and bright interior overflowing with fresh air. Photo courtesy of Dennis Wedlick.



Above: The Hudson Passive Project proved that a Passive House would use 99% less energy for heating and 78% less total energy when compared to conventionally built New York State home. Photo: © Peter Aaron/OTTO. Rights secured by BarlisWedlick.

For more information about Passive House Institute visit www.phius.org. To see the Passive House design work of BarlisWedlick go to www.barliswedlick.com. Their Hudson River Studio office is located at 17 North 4th Street, Suite 1N, Hudson, NY. Phone: (518) 822-8881. Email: info@barliswedlick.com.

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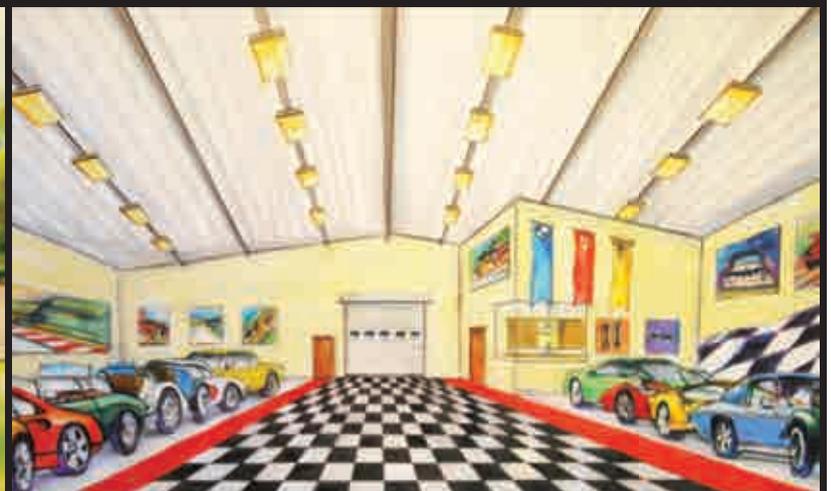
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winter project: reconsider composting

By Claire Copley
info@mainstreetmag.com

Winter is a good time to take stock and see what your garden needs to be at its best next season. One thing I am constantly in need of is organic material to tune up the soil in my garden beds. I do compost at home, but the store-bought tumbler I have is small and the compost it produces just doesn't cover my garden area. I end up purchasing compost in bulk which is expensive! This winter I am spending my time carefully considering how and where to set up a more productive composting operation.



Soil tilth

Most of us have garden soil that is less than ideal. Whether your soil is rocky, sandy or dense clay, adding organic matter can improve it substantially. Organic matter alters the tilth of the soil and helps with water and nutrient retention as well as promoting better drainage.

What is soil tilth? Tilth is the condition of your soil as it relates to its ability to support plant life. It is measured by the soil's ability to absorb and retain water, oxygen, and nutrients. Sandy soils cannot hold on to water, clay soils cannot drain. Practically speaking it is quite difficult to alter the nature of your soil as there are a range of factors that add up to soil tilth, but adding organic matter to any type of soil goes a long way to fixing its structural problems.

Amending the soil in a garden is probably the single most important job we can do as gardeners. We always think of amending the soil before we begin to plant but, for perennial gardeners, it is important to remember that top-dressing with a layer of compost twice a year is the best way to ensure that your soil

is nourishing your plants. Compost, as a top-dressing, suppresses weed growth as any mulch will. But using compost as mulch actually improves the tilth of the soil, making it more difficult for weeds to anchor roots. Using compost as mulch protects plant roots from sun and wind damage and aides in water retention. Either top-dressing or lightly digging in two to four inches of fresh compost at the beginning and the end of the growing season will markedly improve your soil over time.

Using compost

Fertilizing with organic matter provides a healthy habitat for microbes and fungi that will stimulate root growth and help your plants thrive. Compost returns the nutrients of the composted material to the soil. Phosphorus, potassium, nitrogen, and many trace minerals, are released slowly over one or two years and contribute to optimal plant health. Nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus (that fancy N-P-K formula you see on bags of fertilizer) will be produced naturally by the feeding of microorganisms.

Compost is one of nature's best

soil amendments and it is the cheapest by far. Adding compost to your garden will help fight disease, insects, and low yields by giving your plants the nutrients they need to grow strong, healthy, resistant, resilient, and productive.

The process of composting helps the environment as much as the finished compost helps our gardens. Composting our food and garden waste prevents these materials from ending up in landfills, or incinerators. Landfills prevent waste from decaying by depriving the material of oxygen. They give off destructive greenhouse gases instead. Incinerators pollute the atmosphere with a vast amount of carbon dioxide. By recycling and using our own waste, we protect the environment, decrease our carbon footprint, and improve our land.

What's involved

Composting is easy, if you have the right set-up. There are, however, a few things to remember. The pile needs the correct conditions for decomposition to occur. Compost is made by gathering together yard cuttings, kitchen waste (no meat), leaves and other organic materials

and allowing them to decompose with the help of millions of microbes that grow, eat and generate waste. The process produces heat which is important to the decomposition. What is left behind is what some gardeners call Black Gold. It is sweet smelling, soft and crumbly, decomposed organic matter. All you need to do is create your pile, check it every so often to make sure it is getting adequate oxygen and moisture, and wait.

Village gardeners may have to abide by municipal rules governing waste disposal. Always check with your municipality to see if there are rules or guidelines for composting in town. More and more municipalities are offering recycling programs and selling compost bins at cost so it's worth checking.

There are hundreds of effective ways to compost and only a few simple rules to follow. Keeping compost contained is important for a variety of reasons; it generates the required heat, keeps out rodents and other marauders, and makes turning

Continued on next page ...

and aeration easier. Catalogs and websites are full of composters that make it easy to contain, protect, and aerate your compost. But, if you have more space and time you can build a variety of structures which will do the same thing at a considerably lower cost.

I do recommend buying a compost tumbler for smaller gardens. They are ideal in that they hold the waste in a pod-like container and can be turned easily every few days to remix the contents and therefore speed the process of decay. They also keep out animals, which is important. Cheaper methods, like a simple eighteen-gallon garbage can with holes drilled in the sides, work too. This type of container can be shaken or stirred every day and is small enough to keep (covered) outside the kitchen door.

But if you are like me and need a larger quantity of compost, you will likely need to construct an outdoor area where your pile is in an out of the way location with easy access to your garden. If I put the compost too far from the house I will be forced to brave the elements every day in the winter to deliver kitchen waste. If I put it too close I could have unsightly messes. Maybe both the kitchen door garbage can and the remote compost pile is a solution worth considering. Then the smaller can could be transferred out as little as once a week.

Before constructing your own composting set up, think about what you want it to do, and how you can make it easiest on yourself. How much compost do you need to produce? Do you have a space

on your property that could be set up as a composting area? Or do you need to purchase a smaller ready-made composter? Consider that you might have to devise a way to keep rodents and other animals out of the compost and you will also need an easy way to remove the compost when the process is complete.

Constructing your composting operation

Constructing your own compost area requires some thought and a little work. Find a partially sunny, sheltered site to begin and decide what size your bins will be. Turning compost is a necessary chore so a double bin which allows you to transfer compost from one bin to another is a handy design. The compost will need a constant supply of oxygen and access to the hose in dryer months so building this into your design will make your life easier later. Think about materials and ease of use.

Covering the compost pile keeps it from getting too wet and helps keep critters out, but can be done simply by throwing a tarp over the pile. Since my carpentry skills are limited, I think that will be my solution. But don't forget to think about ease of use and access. You will need space for wheelbarrow turn-around and tools.

The first decision is materials. You can use almost anything to construct the bins. I have seen cinder block piles, wooden bins, wire cages, and enclosures made of wooden pallets (these can be found for free or at nominal cost – a big advantage!). Wood will rot over time, and treated wood should not be used for compost bins. Field fencing, rabbit wire, or manufactured plastic with holes work well too.

Creating a type of portable

compost pile is smart as they are easy to construct and disassemble. Wire fencing makes this type of pile easy to make: simply cut a length of fencing or wire caging and form it into a circle enclosure. These can be set up throughout the garden. When they are full you can simply move on to the next while the first one “cooks.” To aerate these piles the enclosure can be removed and reassembled next to the old pile, then the old pile is shoveled into the new enclosure. This needs to be done somewhat frequently since the piles settle and reduce oxygen flow. When the compost is finally ready you can just remove the cage and spread it. The empty enclosure can be set up elsewhere and the process continued.

If you decide to construct a more permanent structure, having a double bin makes aeration easy as you can simply transfer the contents of the pile from one side to the other, aerating the mix in the process. A third bin can be added as a holding pen for materials you are not yet ready to add. All of this can be made lovely by a talented builder. The advantages and disadvantages of different types of constructions depends on your needs.

Many people construct enclosures that are too large to handle easily, so keep your realistic needs in mind. In the beginning, the kitchen scraps, garden cuttings, veggie garden waste, grass clippings, and leaves that will be the basis for compost can take up a lot of space, but it shrinks as it decomposes.

You can lay cardboard or several layers of newspaper down where you will be placing your pile and this will help eliminate weeds and volunteer plants. The moisture that drains from the pile is a highly beneficial tonic for the soil underneath. Professionals call this “compost tea.” Compost tea is a valuable plant food in itself, and many gardeners use it for specific feeding. It can also

be made from finished compost by steeping a shovel full of compost in a 5-gallon bucket for a few days. You can pour it on plants (dilute for seedlings), but use it all within a week.

Don't be surprised if you get volunteer plants growing from within your compost pile. One year I had a pumpkin vine emerge from my pile. I had to think back and remember the previous Halloween when I had scraped out pumpkins and included the scrapings and seeds in my kitchen waste that went into my compost. Seeds in such fertile rooting medium will tend to sprout and grow, so you might want to omit such seeds from your composting material.

There are many ways to produce Black Gold for your garden, and many set-ups that will allow the process to function easily. I recommend using websites to look at possible designs and methods. As with everything these days, the internet is an invaluable resource for would-be composters. The set-up can be accomplished in a day and will yield enormous benefits to your garden and to the environment we all share. •

Websites for further information:
www.epa.gov/recipes/composting-home
www.planetnatural.com/composting-101/
www.howtocompost.org
www.bbg.org/gardening/composting
<http://compostguide.com>

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PILAR PROFFITT & ROBERT BRISTOW:

Intentional elegance

By CB Wismar
info@mainstreetmag.com

It's unlikely that Pilar Proffitt and Robert Bristow spent a great deal of time in school studying the works of Charles-Guillaume Etienne. After all, their pursuits were architecture and design, not 19th Century French drama.

His enjoiner, however – “If you want something done right, do it yourself,” – could well be the banner under which this couple has operated over the years of their relationship and successful joint career. They are, after all, both husband and wife, the parents of three children, and equal partners in their own firm.

Poesis Design

Poesis Design, the decades-old partnership that is the professional presence of Pilar and Robert has evolved into a successful creative venture known locally for the re-design of the Scoville Library interior spaces, the original transformation of the former Number 9 restaurant in Millerton, NY, and their starkly beautiful home on the Lakeville-Lime Rock Road, CT.

On a broader scale, the two completed a total hotel conversion in 15 months in Richmond, Virginia, a

project that necessitated the design and construction of furniture and fittings. And they recently threw themselves into a major home design and construction project on Harbour Island, Bahamas, a project that earned Pilar the respected title of “Boss Madam” bestowed on her by the local construction crew.

As projects have been undertaken and have been challenged by the need to find the “right” piece, the correct solution, or the extra component that takes an architectural and design project from good to exceptional, they have relied on their skills, instinct, and capacity to do it themselves. Often the difference has been the custom furniture that they have designed, prototyped, and had manufactured.

Robert describes the difference their approaches to furniture design as “Pilar does the thin and elegant pieces. I do the ‘chunks.’” The blended results, however, are visually stunning and quite distinctive.

Ring, ring - who's there?

Pilar is from Long Island, the child of an architect and designer, while Robert grew up near Richmond, Virginia, the son of a businessman.



Above: Robert Bristow and Pilar Proffitt. Photo by John Gruen. Below, left: A bedroom designed by Bristow and Proffitt on Harbour Island in the Bahamas. Photo courtesy of Proffitt and Bristow.

They met on the phone. It was a simple enough conversation. Pilar was interested in attending Virginia Tech in the architectural program and Robert, working a summer job for a family friend between years at Tech had been asked to do his boss a favor and take Pilar's call. “She might have some questions about Tech, so maybe you can help her out.”

The call happened, and both of them nearly forgot about the conversation. It was only when Robert returned to campus in the fall and asked if a young woman named Pilar had showed up to register that they met face-to-face.

Armed with degrees in architecture, they ventured out into the working world and ended up at an architectural firm in Boston. Long hours. Operating at the lower end of the design chain. Counting the days until they could venture out on their own.

On weekends, they would

explore the New England countryside and almost on a whim made an offer on a piece of property in Norfolk, Connecticut that had on it a barn. That barn would later play an important part in their journey. First, however, there was a diversionary year that would help crystallize their conviction that doing things for themselves was far superior to relying on the whims of others. Truth be told, the year wasn't completely without its challenges.

Robert had decided that not only was it time to go out on their own, he was going to design and build a house ... back in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he had been an undergraduate at the University of Virginia.

As for Pilar, the family had grown with the birth of their first

Continued on next page ...



child, and there were family needs on Long Island. Back home she went, with Robert commuting on weekends while the project moved forward. The fact that the project was not the financial success they had imagined led them to expand their horizons ... and their prospects.

Why not us?

While in New York, Pilar managed to get an assignment to re-do some corporate offices, complete with bringing in new furniture. "As a kid, we used to go into New York in October for Designer Saturday," recalls Pilar. All the showrooms would be open and we'd wander from place to place looking at some incredible work." The studio furniture movement was taking hold in New York when Robert and Pilar were trying to keep their young business afloat.

"We looked at the designer work and saw what was being offered in new stores like Troy and Room and asked 'why not us?'" Robert recalls the time when their horizons expanded and the notion of designing furniture as well as interior spaces became real.

"We had the barn in Norfolk,"

Pilar adds with a laugh. "We thought it was perfect, halfway between Boston and New York." And, so they began. Soon, it became obvious that distances could be deceiving and living closer to where they worked would be a much better idea. First they moved to Norfolk, then to Lakeville where they have raised their family and firmly built their business.

The Quirk Hotel

"The Quirk Hotel project in Richmond really brought it all together," affirms Robert. "It was crazy how it happened. Pure serendipity."

It seems that on the strength of the design they had done for the Number 9 Restaurant in Millerton, Pilar and Robert were invited to address a 2014 convention in Las Vegas on "Authenticity and Design." After checking in at the speakers' desk, Robert excused himself to freshen up when in the hallway he came face to face with an individual he hadn't seen since he was in eighth grade and the other gentleman in fifth grade in Richmond. They recognized each other and struck up a conversation.

It seemed that his old acquaintance and his wife had just purchased a building in downtown Richmond and were intent on converting it to a boutique art hotel. They were having a challenging time with their architect and designer and were in Las Vegas trying to get some ideas and answers. Pilar and Robert made their presentation. Dinner followed, and by 4 am the following morning, a deal had been struck. The only caveat was that the hotel had to be open in 15 months. There was to be a major bicycle race in Richmond on September 17th, 2015 – and the Quirk Hotel had to be open.

The teamwork between Pilar and Robert is inspiring. She is the orchestrator, he brings the sculptor's point of view. Both work under the umbrella of the well conceived architectural concept.

As the project moved forward, it became obvious that buying all of the furniture for the hotel would take longer and be more costly than



having them design all the pieces and fixtures and having them built from prototypes constructed in their Lakeville studio/office. "So that's what we did," says Pilar with the touch of whimsy that transcends the pressure and the deadlines that were met. 1,000 beds, dressers, desks, banquettes, tables, and a front desk later, the Quirk Hotel opened on time.

As their reputation grows and their work is roundly praised, each new proposal, each new intense project keeps them energized, even refreshed. The house on Wells Hill. The Arts Wing redesign at Hotchkiss School. Proposing a new concept to a national hotel chain. Pilar Proffitt and Robert Bristow do it right. They do it themselves. ●

Above, top to bottom: The front desk at the Quirk Hotel. A living room design on Harbour Island in the Bahamas. Left: The Scoville Memorial Library arch. Photos courtesy of Proffitt and Bristow.

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OUR MOUNTAIN

The Indian Mountain School
Outdoor Adventure and Education Program

By Ian Strever
info@mainstreetmag.com

Driving a four-wheeler up the slope of Indian Mountain in Lakeville, it's easy to forget that this is a school campus. Ethan Harris, the Director of Outdoor Education at Indian Mountain School (IMS), swapped his blazer for a sporty shell back in the office, and on a crisp November morning, he chauffeured me over fallen limbs and muddy ruts on the faintest suggestion of a trail. Here, just behind the school, lies 600-acres of rugged forest, and although it may look like so many trees and rocks, Harris sees a blank canvas. He points to a potential mountain bike trail, explains his work to revive the ropes course, and ushers me to the *pièce de résistance*: the abandoned ski trail that he hopes to revive with some help from nostalgic alumni. Right now, the upper slopes are overgrown with decades-old saplings, but he sees potential.

Above: Students graduate to the high ropes obstacles and tackle their fears directly with the skills they have learned. Photo courtesy of Indian Mountain School.

Educating in the outdoors

Outdoor education has been around since Jean Jacques Rousseau advocated for a more “natural” education in *Émile*, but the term can be elusive, encompassing everything from summer camps to “forest schools” where students spend every day outdoors – rain or shine. IMS lies somewhere in the middle, with team-building trips for all grades and a range of offerings throughout the terms. The experiences grow with the students, evolving from overnights on the campus to multi-night backpacking excursions into wilderness areas. This is not *Lord of the Flies*, though, explains their website: “We de-emphasize competition and encourage problem solving in ways that build and enhance confidence, leadership, teamwork, and goal setting.”

IMS officially calls its program “Outdoor Adventure and Education,” capturing the thrill of the outdoors experience with the additional word, but also emphasizing its importance by specifically adding it to their mission statement. Students are involved with the Adventure Education

program at the Lower School climbing wall, where they learn some of the basic skills that they will develop later on the 40-foot, multi-faced Upper School wall. These technical sessions lay the groundwork for more extensive work on the ropes courses during seventh and ninth grade. At that point, they transcend the physical challenges of the obstacles and develop the interpersonal and social qualities that were the aim of the program all along.

More than just ropes

Harris shows me the ropes course with the pride of a new car owner. There is a low ropes course that presents individual challenges that require cooperation and trust among partners, and a high ropes course consisting primarily of obstacles for groups to negotiate. Although a former teacher, Steven Wertz, installed the courses in the early '90s, Harris has rejuvenated the obstacles to bring them up to current industry certification standards, and there is an energy about the place that stems from the involvement of young people in the enterprise. Harris is a sort of evangelist for the outdoors, encouraging students to explore the area and involving them in some improvement projects such as the new tent platforms they had constructed just before my visit.

The recruits come easily after students get to know Harris through the class trips in fifth, sixth, and eighth grades. He introduces the youngest students to camping on an overnight excursion on the campus, teaching them how to pitch a tent and cook their own food, as well as involving them in some of the low ropes obstacles. For most students, it is their first foray into self-reliance, when they are responsible for their own shelter and sustenance.

Continued on next page ...

Lessons that are learned

Scientists are beginning to understand the role of context in promoting long-term retention of learning, and lessons such as these that take place outdoors, in a novel setting, at such a formative age, become touchstones for young people. They will not easily forget their first camping trip, nor their subsequent adventures and the lessons they teach. In sixth grade, students spend three days and two nights outdoors, this time on the Appalachian Trail, away from the safety net of the campus and now responsible for all of their needs. Students carry all of their food, shelter, and necessities, and spend the better part of three days learning about their local environment, including how to steward these resources.

The goal of all educators is to develop young people who are resourceful, prepared, and knowledgeable, and the culminating eighth grade trip into New Hampshire's White Mountains moves students one step closer to that goal. Instructors demonstrate backcountry skills such as orienteering and waste disposal, and then take a step back to allow students to practice these skills in their wilderness surroundings. The rugged, unpredictable setting challenges students to think on their feet and improvise solutions for

those conveniences they left at home. The three-day trip is demanding and exhausting, but an unforgettable capstone to middle school.

Memories that last a lifetime

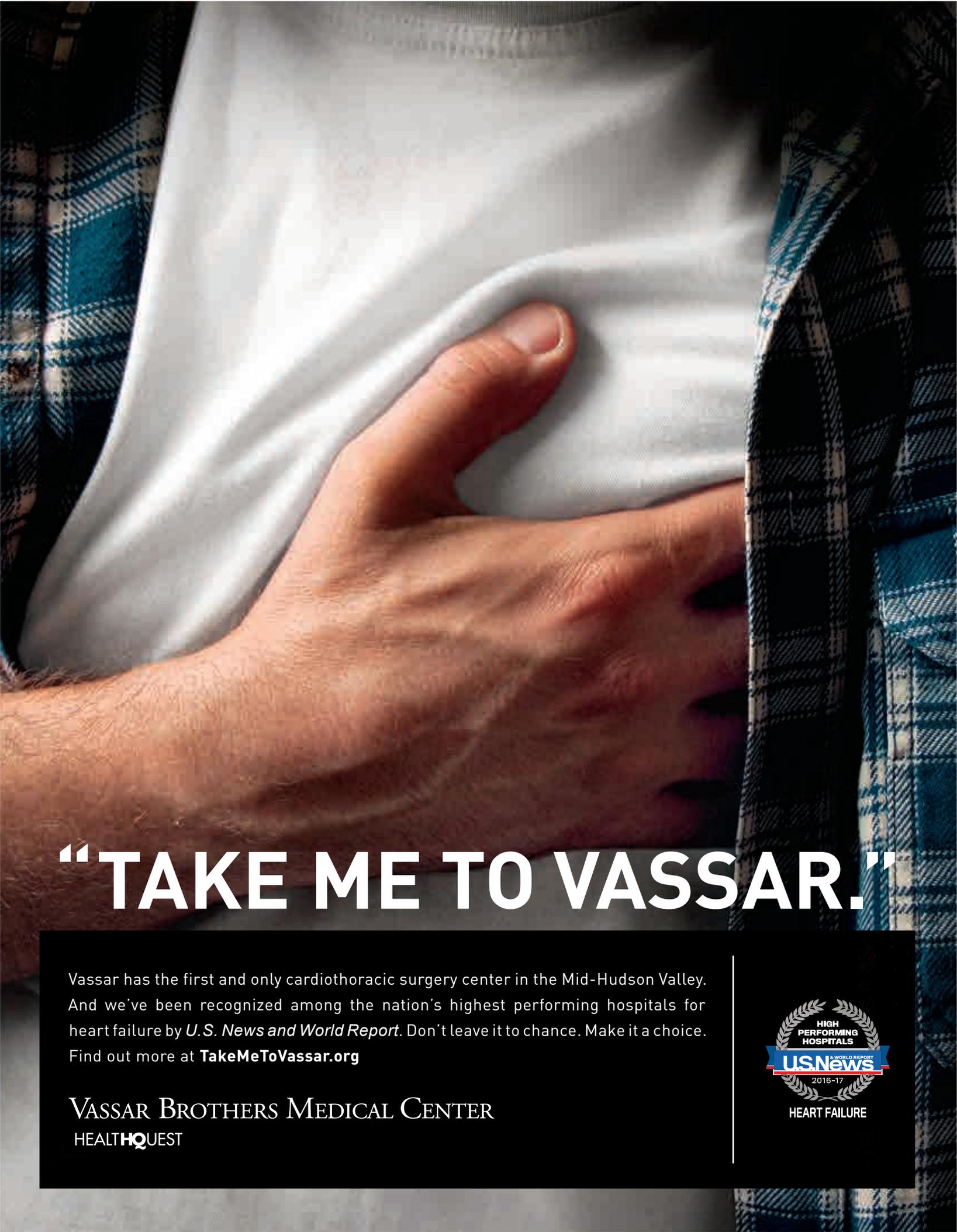
Outdoors education is an integral part of the IMS experience, both in a formal sense and in the opportunities it affords students to just be outside. Harris plans to extend the experience to fourth grade next year, and to include a camping trip for every grade.



In the words of John Avildsen '51 (director of *Rocky*), "One of my most cherished memories is of being up on Indian Mountain one winter afternoon in 1951. I was the last person in my group to head down the ski trail and found myself mesmerized and enchanted by the quiet that filled the air. I'd never heard such blissful quiet."

Harris and I end our tour of Indian Mountain with a stop on that old ski run. The lower slopes are still open, and some prominent dips and mounds suggest it was a fun descent. It is a bit short to be worthwhile, though, and the upper slopes will need to be cleared to create a longer run. We step out of the Gator and Harris points uphill to a pair of chutes that are covered in saplings of about three inches in diameter. A student noticed that all of the trees here were undersized in comparison to the rest of the forest. "That's where the old run used to be," explains Harris, pointing out some of the old ski lift machinery that is set back in the woods. Alumni wax poetic when describing the old ski area, and a few of them went on to work in the ski industry, perhaps as a result of their time here. With their help and some hard work of his own, Harris hopes to recreate that magic for the next generation of students, too. ●

Above: The "Spider's Web" is a classic element of low ropes courses that requires teamwork and cooperation. Left: Partners must depend on each other to navigate the "Wild Woozy" obstacle. Photos courtesy of Indian Mountain School.



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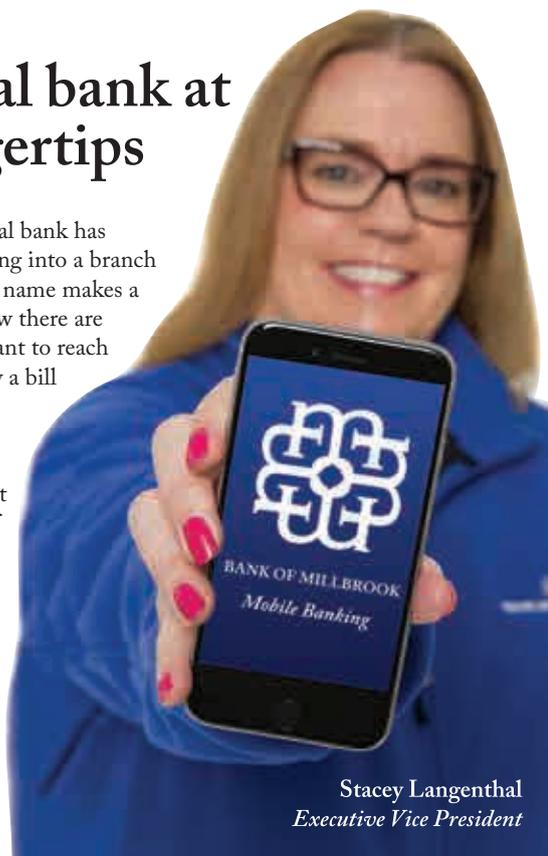
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BACKYARD TRAVEL IN THE HUDSON VALLEY:

Hudson's new Rivertown Lodge

FITS RIGHT IN

By Paige Darrah
info@mainstreetmag.com

Hudson, NY needed another hotel. Well, less so since Wm. Farmer & Sons opened down by the Amtrak Station in September of 2015. But the town's two new hotels are quite different aesthetically, and since weekenders can't get enough of Rivertown (as Hudson is known to historians and bloggers), there seems to be room for both.

Hudson history Cliff Notes

Hudson is decidedly edgier than Millerton, NY and most of the other bucolic Dutchess and Columbia county towns. "I came here in '98 when Hudson was still a little Bronx," said Max, the Italian restaurateur behind Ca'mea (which has the best caprese salad ever, by the way).

This colonial whaling port was indeed chock-full of brothels and gambling dens during the first half of the 20th century; cocaine in the 80s and 90s. But with high-profile chefs, quirky artists named Earl, artisanal sauerkraut merchants, and indie booksellers setting up shop – Hudson's been on a manic upswing for the bulk of the 2010s. Oh, and its Amtrak Station is the third busiest in New York State – beating out both Yonkers and Rhinecliff.



Hudson's latest lodge

When you stroll up to 731 Warren Street's current iteration, you're greeted by an endearingly rusty blue station wagon parked in Rivertown Lodge's (RTL) single carport at the lobby entrance. Is it the owner's vehicle, or product placement? Either way, it's conspicuously and adorably on brand. (I later learned that the truck's name is Scout and belongs to Ray, one of Rivertown's two proprietors).

This two-story building spent 1928 through 1958 as a movie theater; and the second half of the 20th century as the Warren Inn. Then spent 2013 through 2015 under construction to become what looks like a fancy Scandinavian summer camp from the 1950s – rustic, folding-style wooden chairs; simple fire places; pendant lamps; and a focus on functionality rather than heavy decorative accents.

Going analog

It seems that the ladies who work here are required to wear overalls. Cool, navy "Utility"-brand overalls bought from Hudson Clothier a few doors down on Warren Street, but overalls nonetheless. While standing behind a blonde-wood reception desk with a built-in turntable, Bea – an overall-clad front desk lady from California – assigned me to Room 17. Bea described my room as a "single double reading nook." "I'd totally live in that room if I could," she said. Is it her favorite in the motel? "Hmm, I'd say 27 is my favorite; but #14 has a great view of the Catskills."

Bea handed me a set of real keys (not a credit card-looking one) with a monogrammed leather Rivertown Lodge triangle attached. Each of the hotel's 27 room keys are arranged on heavy brass key rings with a gold charm engraved with its corresponding outdoorsy symbol. Room



17's symbol is a tent; Room 21's is a hunting knife; Room 24's is a picnic table ... you get the idea.

And may I just say, dimmers. RTL knows all about dimmers. Burnt-red stairwells separate two floors of screened-in hallways and sitting nooks – all expertly lit to a simple, soft glow. There's a fine line between crazy hoarder caves and ambient hideaways – and RTL has achieved the latter.

Incidentals

RTL does things a bit differently. Case in point: instead of dorm room-style refrigerators stocked with Sprite, Pringles, and B-list Chardonnay, RTL's got communal mini bar closets labeled "Pantry" on each floor. The Pantry isn't associated with any one room, nor is it behind a locked door. It's little

Continued on next page ...

Above: The front entrance to the Rivertown Lodge. Below, left: The lodge has a lot of cozy little sitting nooks and places to relax. Photos courtesy of the Rivertown Lodge.



Above, top and bottom: One of the lodge's seating areas and bedrooms. Middle: The real keys that you get at the lodge. Photos courtesy of the Rivertown Lodge.

commerce is run on the honor system. Grab the sushi menu-looking checklist from your room and tally the items you consume. But do people ever help themselves to organic salt water taffy or Tate's cookies from Southampton and then conveniently forget to mark it down? "That's what I thought too! But The Pantry has actually really worked out ... barely any theft. I mean, sure, there is the occasional drunk guy who doesn't pay for his ginger beer," said Michael who's been working the front desk since Rivertown opened in October 2015. "But that's extremely rare."

Goin' local

I lived here in Hudson for a year in 2014/15. And, as a relative outsider, I've long been enchanted by Hudson's tight-knit community – everything and everyone seems to fit together like a puzzle.

"The owners aren't into franchises, and that's what I love about them. It's like they want to support everybody in the neighborhood. They want to use the farms; all our liquor's local; things like that. I think that's what a lot of towns should be doing – using local products and supporting their local businesses – instead of going to Walmart or whatever," Michael told me as we were discussing Hudson's perfumery, 2 Note, which is well on its way to becoming the Jo Malone of the Hudson Valley. 2 Note makes Rivertown's shampoo, and they created a custom scent for Wm. Farmer & Sons, who diffuse it into the air via some unknown medium.

"I totally agree. And that 2 Note shampoo is some of the best I've ever used in a hotel, a far cry from the habitual. Beyond wanting to support the local community (which is a lovely, romantic notion), a lot of the products coming out of Hudson these days are worth buying in their own right."

The weekend restaurant

As I remembered, Hudson sleeps Monday through Thursday (Wednesday if you're lucky, or if it's summer). So RTL's in-house bar/restaurant is open Friday through Sunday and has a memorable "drink program" involving Taconic rum and bourbon (I hate it when bars refer to their cocktail list as a drink program, but to each her own). It's a hot brunch spot from 10am to 2pm on weekends, and Rivertown recently gained approval from Hudson's fastidious Planning Board to build an outdoor "eating and drinking" venue of sorts behind the property. Stay tuned!

Scandinavia on the Hudson

"You know, when I moved here 15 years ago, there was no such thing as hotel in Hudson except for the Warren Inn. Which, you didn't necessarily want to stay at. Then there was The St. Charles, which you might stay at for a night or two, just as a place to lay your head down," said Rudy Huston, a Tribeca transplant and owner of Try Hudson Realty. "Rivertown makes you feel like you're staying in a place that's true to it's original calling. They bought this beautiful, historic building on Warren Street and really brought it back to life in a way that fits now."

Indeed, the room signs above each door are illuminated milars – a nod to the building's movie theater past. Sure, the rooms are a bit small considering we're not in Europe. But they're artful and cosy, and somehow ... perfect. •

For more information, visit them online at www.rivertownlodge.com. Rooms starting at \$199/night. The suite's \$450/night.



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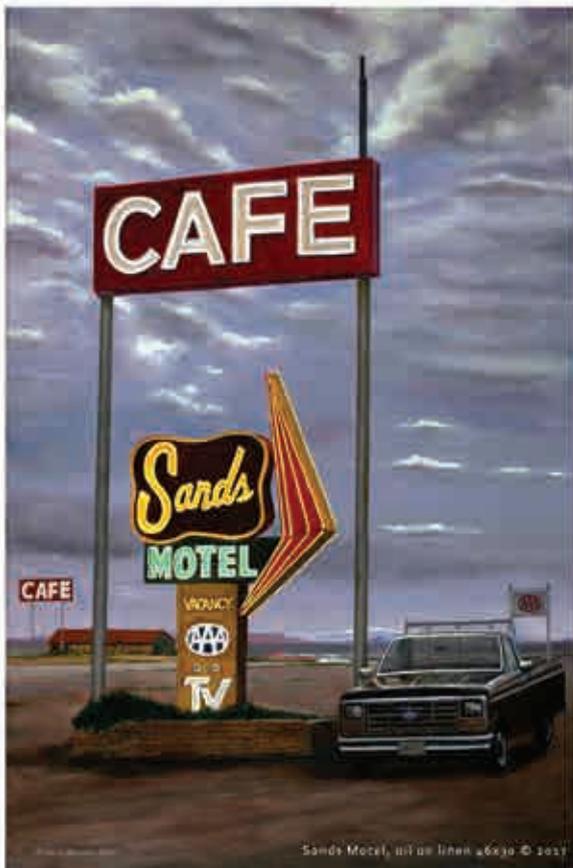


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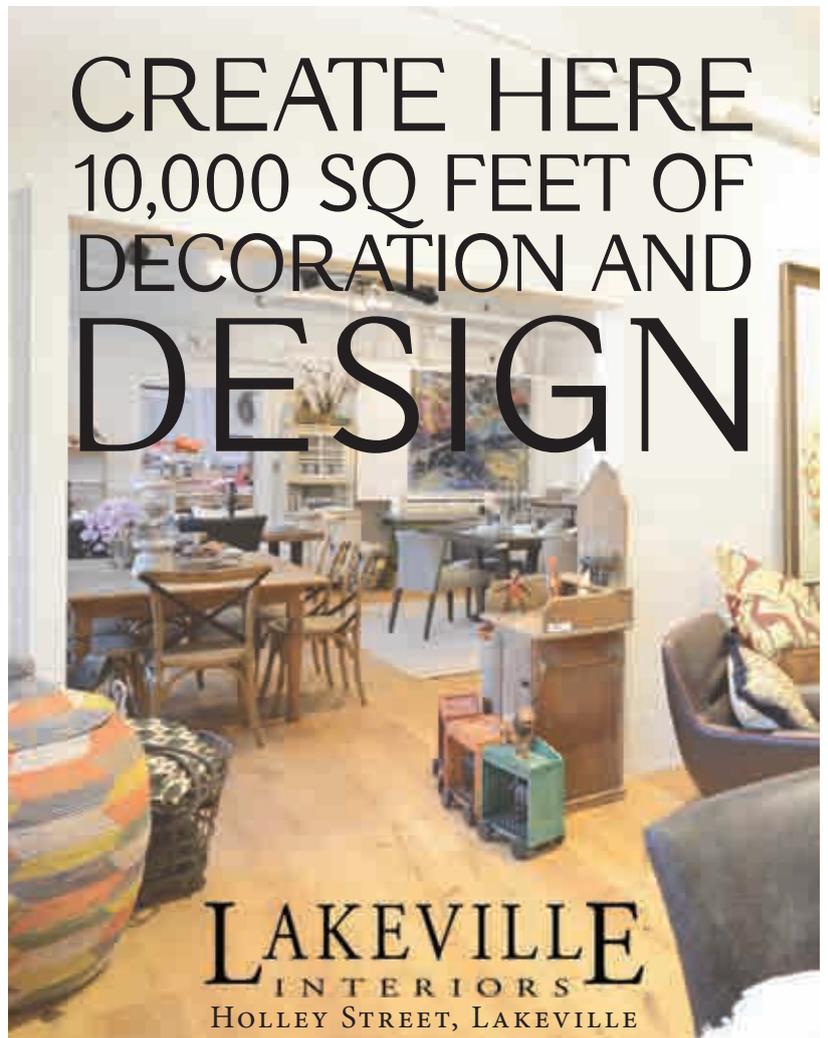


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youth ski programs

By John Torsiello
info@mainstreetmag.com

Tri-State ski and snowboarding facilities – knowing that the young are always the future of any sport – have been reaching out to children of all ages during the last several years with quite noticeable results. Industry statistics show that children six to 17 make up about a quarter of all alpine and freestyle skiers. For snowboarding, the number jumps to 28 percent. Whether it is a program designed for the very young to enjoy along with their parents as an introduction to skiing, or highly competitive racing teams, ski areas such as Catamount Ski in Hillsdale, NY, Mohawk Ski Area in Cornwall, CT, and Ski Butternut in Great Barrington, MA, are helping grow winter's favorite sport by, well, leaps and bounds among the young.

Catamount Ski

“Youth ski race programs at Catamount have grown every year for ten years,” says Richard Edwards, Vice President/Marketing Director, “We are basically at our maximum capacity with 200 racers. The success of the racing at Catamount can be attributed to the program's overall reputation, coaching, the mountain's racing terrain, and proximity to the ski areas in Berkshire County.”

The intent of the program is to provide a ski racing experience that will develop skills for competitions, and strong skiing skills in order to remain a life-long skiing enthusiast. The Interclub racers (ages seven to 12) compete in Western Massachusetts, while the Tri-State racers (ages ten to 19) primarily have events throughout Massachusetts.

Says Edwards, “Parents tell us that their kids absolutely love Catamount and that the biggest reason is the Mountain Cats program at the Catamount Snow Sports School.” Edwards continues, “Catamount has more than 35 ski and snowboard professionals who specialize in coaching kids. We make sure that your child has the best possible experience on snow, while learning the skills they need to excel.”

The Mountain Cats program at Catamount emphasizes three things: safety, fun, and learning. Children ages four to six can participate in skiing only, while children ages seven to 12 can participate in either skiing or snowboarding. The Mountain Cats program is available on weekends and holidays, as well as in Thursday and Friday morning sessions during non-holiday periods. Sessions are half-day (9:30am to 12pm, or 1pm to 3:30pm) or full day (9:30am to 3:30pm). Full day lift tickets are included in the price of the sessions, but rental equipment must be purchased separately. Private instruction for children is available midweek and for children younger than four years of age with reservations.

Catamount's Group Advant-Edge is a twilight/evening program that gives school groups savings on ski lessons and rental equipment. The program is for groups of ten or more that plan to ski at least six consecutive weeks.

For a number of years, Catamount has supported the scout movement by offering specially priced ski and snowboard packages for Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. The program is available to any registered scout troop, with Catamount customizing packages to meet individual needs. The program is for groups of 15 or more. Catamount also holds special “Scout Weekends” that have no minimum group size requirement (although a free ticket will be provided for every 15 purchased, excluding children's tickets).

Mohawk Mountain Ski Area

Mohawk Mountain Ski Area in Cornwall, CT, has four different multi-week programs for youngsters. The Yeti Club is for beginners to intermediate skiers and snowboarders age five to 13 years. The Mountain Division is for intermediate to advanced skiers and snowboarders age six to 13. DSQUAD is a race development program for six to 13 year olds designed to hone the skills of advanced skiers. And the Mohawk Mountain Alpine Race Team (MMART) consists of five age groups, under-ten, under-12, under-14, under-16, and under-19,



Photo courtesy of Ski Butternut

with approximately 70 athletes on the teams. The race team was founded all the way back in 1962.

The Snowhawks is Mohawk Ski area's 1.5-hour lesson program for children aged five to 13 for beginners to advanced skiers and snowboarders. “Our multi-week programs have become so popular we sell out in August when they go on sale,” says Andy Raybould, Snowsports Director at Mohawk Mountain Ski area. “We have started using a lottery system to allocate places in the programs. If we had more instructors available the programs would continue to grow. If there is anyone in the community who skis or snowboards and is interested in teaching they should reach out to us.”

Ski Butternut

Matt Sawyer, Director of Marketing at Ski Butternut, reports that both of the facility's ski racing team programs, Interclub and Tri-State, have grown each of the last few years. “Interclub is designed to introduce young skiers to both the mental and physical elements of alpine racing, preparing them for slalom and giant slalom races. The kids have the opportunity to compete in races against other ski teams in the Berkshires, allowing them to experience and refine their newly developed skills in a competitive environment. After a year or two in Interclub, kids with lots of drive and motivation can move onto our more competitive Tri-State racing program.”

Sawyer says Butternut's Tri-State program is designed to coach racers in

all aspects of alpine ski racing, including mental, physical, and skiing skills. “These athletes participate in drills and race situations preparing them for United States Ski and Snowboard Association slalom and giant slalom races. Tri-State is a program for young athletes with ambitious goals who wish to compete at higher levels.”

Racers compete in USSA sanctioned events at locations across Massachusetts and Connecticut. Stronger racers that excel earn the opportunity to race in USSA events in New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, or Maine. “This year our Interclub program will travel to races at Blandford, Bousquet, Catamount, Otis, Wachusett and Gunstock,” says Sawyer, “while Tri-State racers compete in age groups ranging from under-12 to under-19 at Berkshire East, Blandford, Bousquet, Eaglebrook, Jiminy Peak, Mount Southington, Mohawk, Ski Butternut, Sundown, and Wachusett.”

Post-season events take place at some of the biggest ski areas in the Northeast and Canada, including Sunday River in Maine, Tremblant in Quebec, Stowe in Vermont, Okemo in Vermont, Attitash in New Hampshire, and Sugarloaf in Maine.

In addition to these programs, ski areas also offer discounted lift ticket passes, both daily and seasonal, for youngsters, leaving them no excuses to not leave their video games and iPhones behind and head to the slopes for exercise and fun. ●



Martin Van Buren & his Lindenwald

By Allison Guertin Marchese
info@mainstreetmag.com



Above: The eighth President of the United States, Martin Van Buren, photo taken between 1840 and 1862. Photo courtesy of The Library of Congress.

Lindenwald sits back off the busy Route 9H in Kinderhook, NY, an early Dutch settlement meaning “children’s corner.” The story is told that Jesse Merwin was the Kinderhook schoolmaster who served as the model for Ichabod Crane in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, which Irving published in 1820. It was about that time that Washington Irving stayed for nearly seven months as a guest in the mansion of William P. Van Ness, invited by his friend “Billy” after the death of Irving’s fiancée. Later, while a guest of Martin Van Buren at Lindenwald, Irving allegedly composed portions of his famous story, *Rip Van Winkle*.

Washington Irving wasn’t the only notable at Lindenwald. Famous people including Speaker of the House, Henry Clay, anti-slavery activist, Charles Sumner, American Statesman, John Bigelow, and others have been guests at the sprawling estate.

The Kinderhook connection

Martin Van Buren, (1782-1862) whose life spanned the Revolutionary War to the Civil war, was the eighth President of the United States and the first American-born President. He and

his wife, Hannah Hoes, were both of Dutch decent and born in Kinderhook.

There are a few reports that point out that Martin and Hannah were actually first cousins, once removed. The story goes that Hannah and Martin were childhood sweethearts, but Martin finished his training as a lawyer before the two were married, very much a Dutch tradition.

In the first year of their marriage they lived in Hudson where Martin became involved in politics. There, the Van Buren family grew. Hannah and Martin had five sons of whom only four survived and a daughter who was stillborn.

While her husband was building his career, Hannah became a practiced host and devoted mother. It wasn’t unusual for the Van Burens to entertain nightly, with Martin’s law partners occasionally moving in to live with the couple from time to time. Like many women of Hudson, Hannah threw herself into charity work and joined the Presbyterian Church.

It was also in Hudson that Hannah contracted tuberculosis. Though the disease made her so weak that she

could hardly get out of bed, she somehow became pregnant in that time period. Hannah struggled through a difficult pregnancy, and gave birth to a healthy son. While she and her child survived the birth, the episode weakened her tremendously and she died soon after. Hannah was just 36 years old when she succumb to “consumption,” and she was buried first in Albany and then later relocated to the Van Buren family plot in Kinderhook.

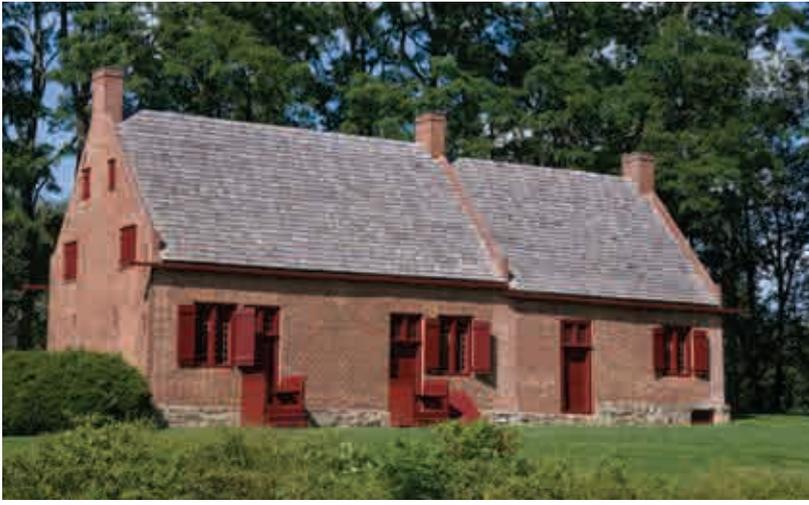
Martin Van Buren claimed that Hannah was the driving force in his early life, yet her name never appears in his hefty eight-hundred-page autobiography. What’s even more disturbing is that some reports say he never even mentioned his wife to their children as they grew older, to the point that his second son was unsure of his mother’s first name. Curiously, Martin Van Buren never married again and remained a widower.

Lindenwald

Though Lindenwald is currently a National Historic site rescued by the US Parks Department in 1974, Martin Van Buren acquired the house and 137 acres of land in 1839 for \$14,000 while he was still President. He was intent on retiring in the town where was born and is now buried.

He gave the estate the name Lindenwald, which is German for “linden forest” after the American Linden (American Basswood) trees which once lined the Albany to New York Post Road, which still runs along the front of the home.

The house was originally a three-story, 36-room, Federal house and was remodeled by Van Buren as a Victorian mansion with Italianate changes. The original structure was built in 1797 by Judge Peter Van Ness in a Georgian style. His son, The Honorable William P. Van Ness, a lawyer and a Federal Judge in New York City, inherited the property in 1804. It was in William Van Ness’ offices in 1802 that Martin Van Buren completed his legal training. In 1824, experiencing financial trouble, William lost the house to creditors. It was then purchased at auction by William Paulding. Though William Van Ness was Martin’s childhood friend, Van Buren ended up buying the home from



Above: The Luycas Van Alen home and the Ichabod Crane School House, located a few miles south of Lindenwald. Opposite page: Van Ness' family home went on to be the famous home of President Martin Van Buren called Lindenwald. Photos courtesy of the Columbia County Historical Society.

Paulding. Having expanded his holdings to include a total of 225 acres, Van Buren took up the occupation of “gentleman farmer” while also plotting unsuccessful attempts to regain the presidency in 1844 and 1848.

Van Buren began converting Lindenwald first by removing the original staircase, expanding rooms, and hanging the scenic French wallpaper that still greets visitors today. Most of the mixing of features happened when he expanded the house in 1841 to accommodate his growing extended family, as well as his many servants.

Richard Upjohn, a well-known architect, included a four-and-a-half story Italianate tower that is uncharacteristic of the period. From his tower, Van Buren could look down the Old Post Road – the road from Albany to Manhattan – to see if anyone was coming to visit him.

Spirits call

The Van Buren household was a busy one. The servants of Lindenwald worked long days, sometimes up to ten and twelve hours. And if that wasn't enough, they were literally on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Hence the need for a sophisticated call bell system installed throughout the Lindenwald mansion. The bells were actually hooked up to the servants' bedrooms, which spanned from the basement to the attic, as well as the basement kitchen where servants took their meals and took their breaks. The call bells were indeed an invasion of privacy and drew a definitive line between the social rankings of servant and master.

As reports of odd happenings have surfaced over the years, one such story is told of the smell of pancakes wafting up the stairs of the grand old house. Many have said that the pancakes are the breakfast preparations of the spirit of a woman known as Aunt Sally who was a cook in the Van Buren household.

Lindenwald's spirits

The history of Lindenwald's original owners, the Van Ness Family, offers some curious legends. Van Buren's childhood friend, “Billy” Van Ness as he was known, is seared in history for acting as the second to Thomas Jefferson's former Vice President, Aaron Burr, in the fatal duel with Alexander

Hamilton in the summer of 1804.

Hamilton and Burr were prominent American politicians. Hamilton was the former Secretary of the Treasury and Burr was the sitting Vice President at the time. Burr was also the bitter political enemy of the popular patriot Alexander Hamilton who thwarted Burr's efforts to gain the presidency. The terrible feud came to a head when Burr shot and mortally wounded Hamilton in their famous duel that is rumored to have taken place a few miles from Lindenwald in Claverack, NY.

According to legend, dueling was illegal and Burr hid out at the Van Ness family mansion for three years in a secret windowless room. Though few can say for certain where in the famous house that room is located, one story claims that the room was discovered when the roof was being replaced. Reportedly inside the dark space was Burr's calling card in tact on the floor.

As the stories of spirits circulated over the years, Lindenwald has a reputation for frequently reported visitations. Many believe that Burr's spirit roams the upper levels of the house with strange noises emanating from the walls.

The noises, similar to footsteps, have been repetitive, as if someone were pacing, deep in thought. Later, in the 1950s, caretakers reported large sturdy wooden doors opening and closing on their own, as did dresser drawers. Servants said that Burr's ghost materialized near the house wearing a handsome burgundy coat with lace cuffs. The “white apparition,” is often attributed to Burr and sometimes believed to be the spirit of Van Buren himself.

Reportedly, Martin Van Buren loved living at Lindenwald and a number of Lindenwald's original pieces remain in the historic estate. Lindenwald boasted one of the earliest forms of central heating in the area, indoor running water, a “flush toilet,” and a 19th-century version of a coffee maker. Upstairs includes a number of bedrooms where his sons and their wives would stay, including Angelica Singleton Van Buren who, as Van Buren's daughter-in-law, had served as the President's White House hostess.

Angelica, who was Dolly Madison's cousin, also served as Van Buren's first lady.

The upstairs also includes the bedroom of the former president. In the very bed that is in the home today, Martin Van Buren, suffering from bronchial asthma, died of heart failure on July 24, 1862. Before his death, he wrote in a letter to an old friend: “The evening of my life is passing far more quietly and agreeably than I could have hoped.”

After he died, Van Buren's body lay in state at Lindenwald for three days. Following his funeral, he was laid to rest a short distance from his treasured estate in the Kinderhook Reformed Church Cemetery. There he rests next to Hannah.

More Kinderhook historic sites

In addition to Lindenwald, Kinderhook's main thoroughfare, Broad Street, is one of the most beautiful places in Columbia County, lined with ancient trees and a few other incredibly stately historic homes.

Decedents who lived in the Luycas Van Alen home around the year 1808, just a few miles south of Lindenwald, claim that Catharina Van Alen was the young girl who inspired Washington Irving's character in the *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

The Ichabod Crane School House was built in 1850 and ran as an active one-room schoolhouse into the 1940s. It is now located at the Van Alen House property, it was moved there (about 1974) from just across the road at a point in time when it was to be demolished ... it had been vacant and unused for many years. This building was the second school house built on the school house lot where Merwin taught and it dates from the late 1840s. While Franklin D. Roosevelt was still Governor of New York, his wife Eleanor came to dedicate this building as the Ichabod Crane School House. It was used as a community center for a number of years. ●

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This is the best time of year to focus on your own business' needs and gear up for the coming year. That may include a multitude of things, but don't forget about the importance of your graphic and visual needs. They may include revisiting your website for updates or a face-lift, new ad and or marketing campaigns for the coming quarter or season, new brochures to give to your customers, or perhaps it is finally time to give your business a complete makeover in the form of an entirely new identity system – there's no change like that which is apparent after all!

When running our own business, we are all guilty of focusing on running the day-to-day functions of our business and keeping our clients and employees happy, but don't forget the importance of keeping your business current with the times, technology, and appearance. Successful informational materials (like brochures, websites, business cards, etc.) help to instill confidence in your customers and clients. Those materials provide

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But don't feel overwhelmed at the thought of yet another thing that you have to do. I am here to help with all of your design and marketing needs. Have a happy and prosperous 2017!

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To design is to create, execute, or construct according to a plan. I design by creating according to your specific needs. There are many design solutions, but by getting to know you and your needs, the solutions become fewer and clearer. My design bias and passion is always to strive to create the "wow" factor.

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When are you going to find time to repaint the house, take down that ugly wallpaper in the bathroom, or tend to the other projects you had in mind? We have just found the answer to your questions. Tavish and Conor Gallagher have worked in the home improvement field for years, recently forming Gallagher Brothers Contracting Solutions, LLC. They specialize in painting, plaster, and related services, while also working extensively with their robust network of contractors and craftsmen to meet their clients' specific needs. While the majority of their clients' residences are in New York City and the Berkshires, they also serve the greater Northeast. Tavish and Conor feel their client relations set them apart from similar businesses: they communicate clearly and promptly, have never exceeded their bid, and always deliver the highest quality work within the scheduled time frame. Every client they have ever worked for is a reference. They are honored to see the look of satisfaction on their clients' faces once they have helped them transform their homes. Tavish and Conor love working together as brothers to creatively problem-solve. Although the future remains nebulous, they see sustainable building and development on the horizon. Everyone's home needs some TLC, and that's where their skills and knowledge come in handy. "We're excited to get to know and work for you in the years to come!"



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They say two of the most popular rooms in the house to remodel are the kitchen and bathroom. It's always refreshing to have updated surroundings, but it can be overwhelming to take on project-planning by yourself, especially when you thought you only had to worry about paint colors, light fixtures, and countertops, but then realize you have to pick out hardware for your cabinets, too. Robyn Keeler of Keeler Concepts By Design started offering her services to the public in 2005. She and her daughter Brittany have over 25 years of combined design experience. Their services are offered in Berkshire, Dutchess, Columbia, Westchester, and Albany Counties and include start-to-finish kitchen and bath design, space planning, supplier of cabinetry, countertops and tile, and project management. Keeler Concepts is a small business that focuses on every detail to see the project through to completion. They have the skills to supply and spec building needs and materials for kitchens and bathrooms that reflect the client's personal taste. Above all, they love what they do! "Seeing the finished project of a place that brings families together in a beautiful, new environment is what it's all about." Going forward they are hoping to challenge themselves with new projects and expand the business, too. Robyn and Brittany hope to get the opportunity to work with you on your next project!



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Brad Peck, Inc.

When DIY is best left to the lawyers

The satisfaction from a do-it-yourself project done well can be rewarding. But when it comes to DIY "lawyering," the best advice is, don't. Even the online DIY build-a-basic-legal document sites contain disclaimers that their services do not constitute legal advice, and users are encouraged to consult a lawyer. No matter how "simple" a deal appears, without that seasoned input, there can be no assurance that the downloaded contract (or worse, one cobbled together from Internet surfing), actually protects the DIY'er, or even applies to the deal for which it was created. Unfortunately, the DIY'er likely won't know whether the contract was right until something goes wrong, thereby creating a false sense of security that can leave a well-intentioned DIY'er exposed.

As tempting as it may be to go the seemingly cheaper DIY route, there are ways DIY'ers can manage legal costs and the risk of going it alone. Retain counsel to provide a consultation or contract review for a fixed fee commensurate with the contract value. Where the economic (and payment) terms are straight-forward, ask for a limited-scope review that focuses on specific rights to be protected and known risks that need to be managed, such as insurance, intellectual property ownership, indemnification, risk of loss, and the passage of title. As there is no such thing as standard contract terms, the review should include all "boilerplate" provisions, as they are sometimes used to bury one-sided clauses or so-called "standard" terms that don't adequately protect the DIY'er when something goes awry. Finally, while the usual rule is that each side pays their own legal costs, it is worth exploring whether there are strategies for recouping those costs from the other side.



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Things to know about lightning:

Ansel Adams has shown us in his photographs that lightning can be a thing of beauty. But it can also be quite destructive. In the Northeast these storms are very common between the months of April and September. Homes in higher elevations with exposure are particularly vulnerable. The effects of lightning in relation to your home can be as minimal as an electrical surge damaging some electronic equipment to a catastrophic fire that can completely destroy a home. A Lightning Protection System can prevent these types of problems from occurring by creating a more desirable path for the lightning to follow to the earth without actually damaging the structure. According to State Farm Insurance, the average lightning related insurance claim in 2015 was \$7,947. Typically the cost of installing a system on an average single family home is lower than this amount. Not only that, you typically qualify for discounts on your homeowners' insurance premiums when a system is installed by a certified professional. A skilled installer can carefully install a system that is compliant with the National Fire Protection Association and Lightning Protection Institute's codes and is also inconspicuous and blends in with the architectural features. If there is attic space inside, much of the system can be hidden inside these spaces and pose no threat to the wood framing if the house is struck. Even better, when lightning protection is installed during a new construction project, virtually all of the components can be hidden inside the walls of the home with only the rods visible on the peaks. Having a Lightning Protection System installed on your home gives you peace of mind, which we all know is invaluable.



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PERCEPTION: THE LOCK OR THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY MARKETING A PROPERTY

Listing your home for sale changes the lens through which you see it. Sellers often seek guidance in how to best showcase their most prized possession, their home. In short, create a multitude of reasons for buyers to consider your home, not eliminate it.

Improvements such as fresh paint and polished floors, paired with clutter-free décor, are key to empowering buyers to see themselves in a space. Neutral paint, classic furnishings, and clean spaces allow creative liberty for buyers to embellish upon their visions rather than struggling to "see past" that which does not fit their plan. Kitchens and baths, however, are off the punch list. Buyers have their own personal flair that they'll want to infuse into these spaces and there is no way to appeal to the masses.

Momentum is key – Newton's theory that objects in motion will stay in motion proves true in real estate. The most informed sellers are often the most successful. Although it's most common for buyers to get home inspections, we strongly recommend that sellers also do so prior to listing. A home inspection prior to listing gives sellers a chance to resolve issues or to budget accordingly when setting a price. Knowing your home eliminates alarming surprises when a buyer begins the inspection process. Assuring that all permits are recorded and properly closed out is also crucial. Questions will arise, a seller's timely and knowledgeable response is most apt to maintaining the momentum of a transaction.

Purchasing a home is a process that requires the cooperation of buyers and sellers, anything that can slow the process risks stopping the process. When you choose to list your home, prior planning prevails.

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