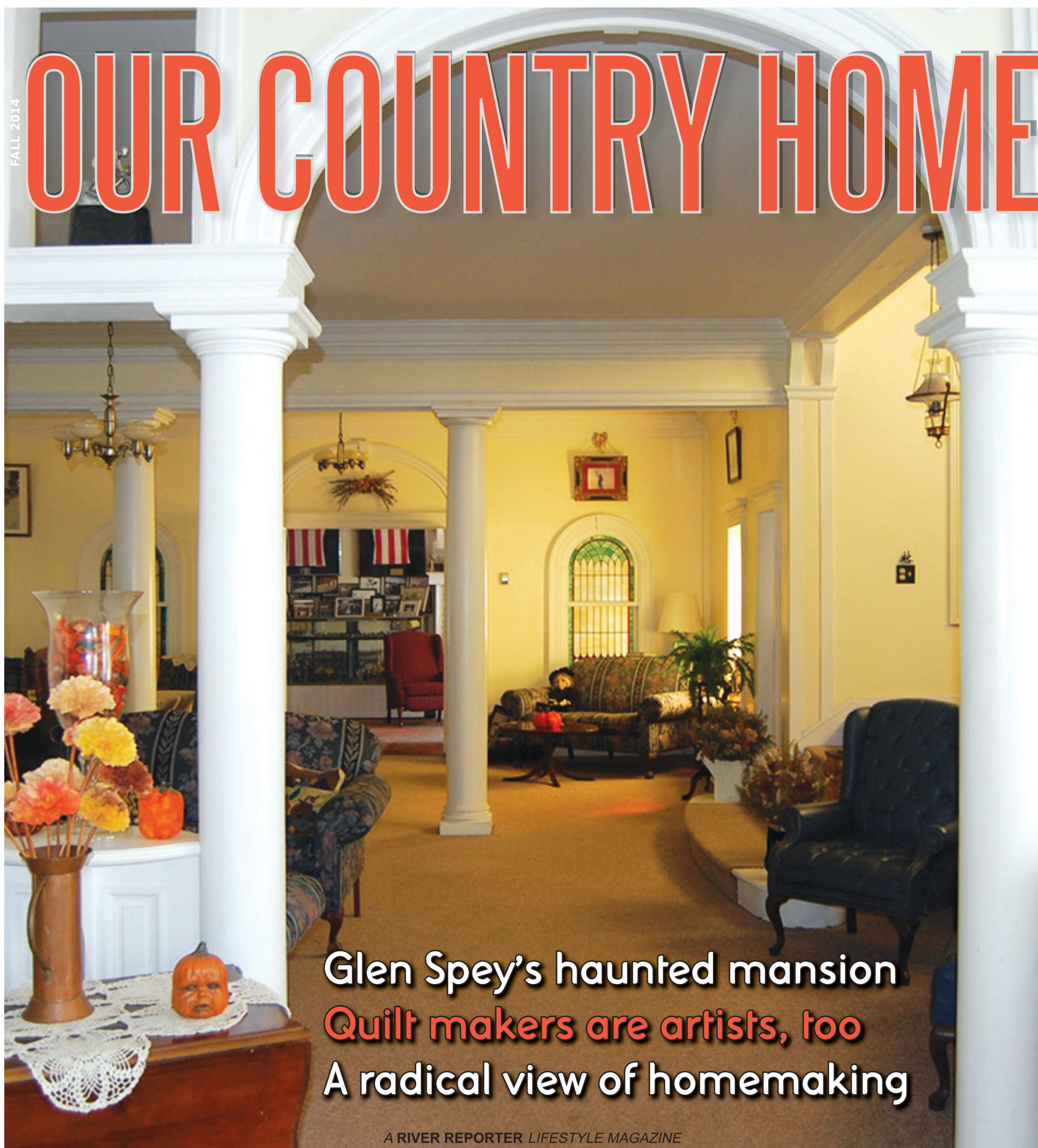


FALL 2014

OUR COUNTRY HOME



Glen Spey's haunted mansion
Quilt makers are artists, too
A radical view of homemaking

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(Or not...?)
By JOHN HIGGINS



Cover photograph by
Jonathan Charles Fox

From the editor,

Fall can be a crazy, busy time of year, scurrying around to accomplish the many chores one needs to finish to get ready for winter and the all-too-soon-to-arrive holidays that are just around the corner. So don't forget to stop, catch your breath and enjoy the moment of this all-too-short season of transition. I hope you will take a few moments, too, to sit and read this issue of **Our Country Home**. It's filled with interesting people, places and ideas for things to do to help make your house a home.

When it comes to interesting places, what could be more fun than a visit to a local haunted house around Halloween? Our Jonathan Charles Fox, always on the hunt for things extraterrestrial or paranormal, set out to hear the story and meet the owners of Burn Brea Mansion in Glen Spey, NY. He discovered a beautiful country home and B&B where strange happenings are commonplace.

Zeroing in on a trend in backyard landscaping by installing ponds and water features, writer Anya Tikka learned about pond building from a certified pond installer here in the Upper Delaware River Valley.

Winter squash is a delicious long-storing vegetable. But did you know that you have to "cure" squash before storage? Learn how from a local farmer and try out a recipe for sausage and squash stew that is sure to please in the coming cooler weather.

Writer Nancy Dymond takes us on a trip to a quilt show to meet some present-day tastemakers who prove that quilt making is a timeless art. From those making traditional quilts to modern-day art quilts, you will marvel at their talents.

If you like to sew and you are a do-it-yourselfer, Ramona Jan has a pretty project for you—making throw pillows to add just the right accent to your home. Ramona says she's even made throw pillows out of vintage men's handkerchiefs. She will walk you through the step-by-step process.

Learn about the lifestyle of radical homemakers, both men and women who are making the choice to focus their lives on home, family and community for personal fulfillment and cultural change. J.C.B. Huggard takes a look at their manifesto, the book "Radical Homemakers" by Shannon Hayes, an upstate New York farm wife.

In centuries past, only the rich could afford to build personal libraries, but today collecting books to keep and treasure is within anyone's reach. Not sure how to start a personal collection? We offer some suggestions.

Finally, the last word goes to John Higgins, who reflects on the finer points (or not!) of how to be a gracious house guest.

Jane Bollinger
Section editor



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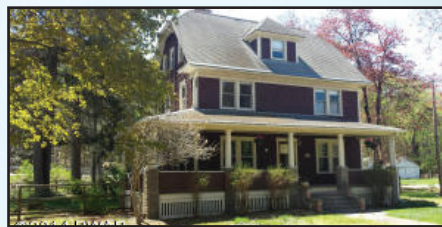
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Burn Brae Mansion

Living with ghosts of the past

By JONATHAN CHARLES FOX

My life-long fascination with mansions began in childhood. I had the good fortune to be raised in a sprawling Victorian in Binghamton, NY, and as a result, my appreciation for the architecture, structures and ornate details of a bygone era was instilled in my youth, supported by family outings organized by my mother, who loved nothing more than taking leisurely tours of the countryside in search of antiques. Those weekend drives became a tradition that I still keep and often find myself touring the Catskills, discovering architectural gems still standing throughout the region. While many of the larger homes built in the days before electricity have fallen into disrepair, there are others that have been lovingly restored and stand out, luring me to investigate. One such place is Burn Brae Mansion in Glen Spey, NY.

The sign outside declares some of the original family home's history, and a quick Internet search revealed that today it is a bed and breakfast, welcoming guests who have heard stories of the mansion's alleged haunted past. Over the years, rumors have been spread, and while there are stories that cannot be proven, some of the facts entice. I learned that the place was built in 1908 by George Ross Mackenzie as a wedding gift to his daughter Margaret Mackenzie Elkin, and that her father, the third president of the Singer Sewing Machine Company, made his fortune as advisor to the company's founder Isaac Merritt Singer. The place is huge and well situated on beautifully manicured grounds. Intrigued by the "Haunted Mansion" sign hanging from the outside knob, I knocked on the door. Present-day owner Mike Fraysse answered and waved me in, happy to answer some questions and give me a tour. "When my wife Pat and I bought the

place, it was an apartment house," he explained, "and sorely in need of renovation, and yes—we live here." Mike's enthusiasm was contagious and it was easy to get caught up as he shared their story, while the house itself beckoned, since every nook and cranny is stunning. "Do you know the difference between a mansion and a really big house?" Mike asked. "The definition of a mansion requires that the place have more than one staircase." Pointing out the hand-carved banister leading to the original servants' quarters, he began to ascend. "We have a few."

Burn Brae boasts 27 rooms, including six bedrooms, a reading room, formal dining room, an industrial-sized kitchen, an enormous spooky attic and the requisite family graveyard buried deep in the woods outside,

reputed to be haunted. "Oh, it's not just the graveyard!"

Mike declared. "When we bought the place and began restoration, the previous occupants told us some pretty wild stories." Pat confirmed her husband's comments by adding that she has "seen some pretty strange

things" that are difficult to explain or ignore. "The previous tenants said there was 'always something' weird happening, but you have to take that with a grain of salt," she said, pointing out the magnificent Tiffany stained-glass windows that adorn the formal grand staircase leading to the couple's private living quarters on the second floor. Nodding in agreement, Mike continued our tour, explaining that while they both were "open to the possibility" of paranormal activity, they kept a "healthy dose of skepticism" and proceeded to call in some experts.

"Ghost hunting has become really popular with the advent of technology," Mike explained, "and interest in our place has attracted experts in the field. We've had investigators from television shows like 'Paranormal State,' 'Psychic Kids,' 'Ghost Detectives' and most recently the team from the Syfy Channel's TAPS team, which will air an episode about the mansion at the end of October." Some of the alleged hauntings documented include the story of the original owner's daughter Margaret, who is said to have hanged herself from a tree outside the house, grief-stricken over the loss of her baby during childbirth and said to be heard wailing in the halls.

The network's website (www.syfy.com) enumerates additional anecdotes, including reports that "Margaret's face has been seen staring out of windows, while others claim that 'her body can be seen hanging from the tree outside.'" Other investigators' claims include that "several of the rooms have extreme fluctuating temperatures that occur in a matter of seconds with no apparent explanation" and that "at night, guests report mysterious activity throughout the mansion." While explaining that closets were rarely



The Fear Festival that takes place each year on the grounds of Burn Brae Mansion is presented purely for entertainment purposes.



Ghouls and witches abound each Halloween in the woods surrounding the Burn Brae Mansion.

Continued on page 6



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BURN BRAE

Continued from page 4

found in homes built during the era, Mike pointed out several, one of which is filled with dozens of creepy-looking dolls. "We found scores of them," he explained, chuckling at my horror-stricken face. "I've even found some between beams in the attic. A lot of children came through this place. These days, visitors send us dolls after spending time here and today, our Attic of Curiosities has hundreds." True to his word, there are dolls everywhere, not just in the attic but in the dining room, bedrooms and various corners of the public rooms. The ghost hunters from SyFy claim that the attic, once a play area for children, is the "source of much of the mansion's intense paranormal energy."

Capitalizing on the ghostly history of the mansion, Fraysse was quick to point out that "although we market the B&B as a haunted house, nothing within the confines of the mansion itself is rigged in any way. Anything a guest might experience here is genuine, well documented and absolutely not artificially created. It's important to us to maintain the integrity of whatever might be actually occurring here. We save the 'entertainment'

Continued on page 8



Built in 1908, the Burn Brea Mansion boasts 27 rooms, including the Attic of Curiosities.



Victorian details have been brought back to their original splendor at of Burn Brea Mansion in Glen Spey, NY.



Psychic empath Art Peterson displays an archival photo of one of the ghosts he believes to be haunting the Burn Brea Mansion.

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BURN BRAE

Continued from page 6

for family fun, held yearly during our Fear Festival, which takes place each October on the grounds surrounding the mansion. None of that takes place inside the house," he added. "What happens indoors is very real."

Mike's son-in-law, Andy Russ, concurred. "The Fear Festival is strictly for fun, but there are some truly strange things that happen in the mansion," Russ said. "I'm a pretty brave soul and not easily scared, but I've seen some weird stuff happen." While Russ and his wife do not live in the house, they do have an apartment upstairs for their use when visiting, and Andy has been awakened by "slamming doors and disembodied voices," which he has personally captured in audio recordings. "After that," he said, "I decided to stay in the [converted] stable guest rooms. I never spent a night in the main house again."

During my visit, the grounds were alive with preparations for the upcoming Fear Festival, and I stopped one of the workers to inquire about his experiences in the house itself. Self-proclaimed empath and clairvoyant Art Peterson was emphatic when asked about the veracity of the variety of reports still streaming in. "I've been visiting the place for more than 20 years," he said, "and it's true, any reports about haunting within the house and the family graveyard are 100% legit. World-famous psychics have investigated, and they all agree that the place is truly haunted. I've even seen ghosts myself." Peterson went on to detail some of his experiences in the graveyard, replete with ghostly visions of a little girl. "I've done a lot of research of the original family records, and I think I know who she is. I found a photograph of one of the children buried here. Her name was Ellie." Showing me a digital image of the original picture, he continued, "A lot of guests claim to hear her crying, and paranormal investigators have captured images of a ball they place in the halls moving by itself. Stay here for a night or two," he concluded. "You'll see."

There is no formal staff in the house; it's run by the owners themselves who share their own experiences, in addition to maintaining the rooms, preparing the meals and dining with guests nightly. Pat, who along with husband Mike was originally skeptical, makes the beds and cleans the guest rooms herself. "On more than a few occasions, I've placed fresh linens on the beds and smoothed out the spreads, only to discover them rumpled and in disarray the next time I walk in," she shared. "I can't explain it. We're the only people here sometimes. I'm not scared, but it doesn't make sense. Ceiling fans turn themselves on and doors open and close when no one else is here. It's such a beautiful home and we love living here, ghosts and all."

Having attracted investigators and garnering so much attention, Burn Brae Mansion continues to entice. Open all year, guests flock to the place for a variety of reasons, including the ghosts rumored to be heard whispering in the halls, music heard in the ballroom and the eerie sound of footsteps that drift down the stairs. Every corner of the magnificently restored and beautifully appointed interior is flawlessly presented and the period antiques and décor are as beautiful as the mansion itself. The updates, including new bath fixtures and lighting, seamlessly blend with the original, and the Fraysse's impressive restoration is stunning. Even though I live nearby, I'm tempted to spend a few nights in this incredible country home myself. I'm a bit of a "fraidy cat," but curious to know if things really do go bump in the night. For reservations and information, call 845/856-3335 or visit www.burnbraemansion.com.



Overnight guests convene nightly in the formal dining room to swap ghost stories.



Toxic chemicals, including mercury, were used in the production of Victorian mantelpiece clocks like this one. So many workers died at a young age that these gilded timepieces became known as Death Clocks.



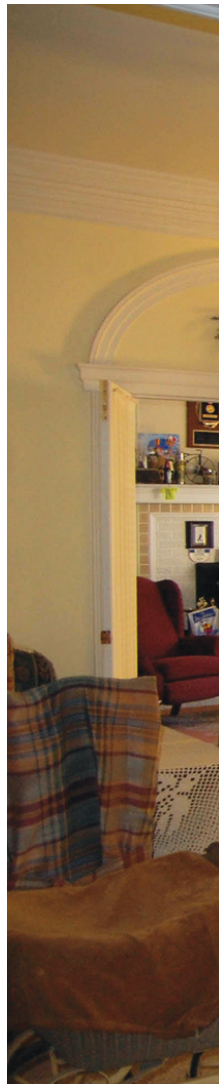
Proprietor Mike Fraysse is still discovering dolls left behind by former tenants of the Burn Brae Mansion.



Backlit by original Tiffany stained-glass windows, Mike and Pat Fraysse welcome bed and breakfast guests on the landing of the master staircase.



Having spent time at B





Turn Brea Mansion, former guests send the Fraysses items to add to their Attic of Curiosities.



Psychic investigators claim that some of these creepy dolls take on a life of their own after dark.



In addition to a ballroom and industrial kitchen, Burn Brea Mansion contains more than one reading area for guests to learn about the history of the mansion.



Psychic investigators claim that the servants' quarters tucked away in Burn Brea Mansion are active with paranormal activity.

ASK THE EXPERT

Redecorate your backyard

Install a pond

By ANYA TIKKA

Although the ponds Mark Spradling installs for clients are mostly for summertime outdoor living, fall is a good time to start planning for spring construction, because designing your pond can take time to make sure it is just what you want. But once construction starts, it is quick, usually lasting from one to two weeks, depending on the size of the project, what features the homeowner wants, and how easy it is to have access to the site, or as Spradling explained it, “If you have to haul heavy rock a long way around the house to the site, it’s a lot harder than driving right to the site to deliver.”

Spradling and wife Teresa of Pond Eddy, NY are owners of Montague Mower Service in Sussex County, NJ, and in the last several years, they have seen their pond building business blossom. These are not your grandmother’s ponds, however. Montague Mower Service’s new pond division, which they are calling S-scapes, is all about lifestyle. The trend in building ponds today is to offer all the amenities and comfort modern landscaping can offer—stone and rock patios, built-in seating, aquatic and decorative plants (both in the pond and surrounding area), fire pits, waterfalls, special lighting (some underwater), bubbling ponds and, of course, fish.

“Water is always moving, and that’s why it’s interesting,” Mark said. “It’s not static, like a lot of landscaping is. We want people to find the relaxing and calming effect of flowing water,” Mark said. “That’s what it’s all about. If you install a [swimming] pool, how often do you use it? With a pond, you can take short mini breaks here and there, even if it’s just for five minutes; just to step outside, sit by the pond, feed the fish, and you start to relax... I love to come home and sit outside with my wife Teresa with a glass of wine, a cup of tea, and discuss our day just for a few moments or longer. It’s very relaxing, very stress relieving.”

Although it’s all about relaxing, when it comes to constructing the pond, Mark is all business. In the last five years, he estimates he’s installed around 20 ponds. He has also become a certified pond installer. This certification is awarded by Aquascape Inc. of Chicago, IL, which has become North America’s leading supplier of water gardening supplies to the amateur and professional. The firm has gained recognition recently for being the featured hosts of National Geographic Wild’s TV show “Pond Stars.” Mark not only learned Aquascape’s 20-step installation process for building a pond, but also all about pond ecosystems—including potential pond diseases. By doing everything right, he maintains, you can achieve a nearly maintenance-free pond.

Each pond is designed and constructed to be an extension of nature, mimicking it as closely as possible. “The pond is its own totally self-sufficient eco-system. The fish produce waste in the water, which breaks into ammonia and nitrate that feed the plants, which produce oxygen for everyone,” Mark explained.

“The only thing we add is beneficial bacteria,” he continued. “It helps to break down the fish waste.” The bacteria are available at the Spradling’s store in Montague. In 2015, new Aquascape feeders will be available that release bacteria automatically. The fish need to be fed daily, espe-

Continued on page 12



Contributed photo

Over time, these koi learned to know their owners, and now come to feed from their hands.



Photo by Anya Tikka

Mark Spradling of Montague Mower Services has seen his pond-building business grow in recent years, as the trend to add water features to landscaping has become popular.

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INSTALL A POND

Continued from page 10

cially the few weeks leading up to closing the pond at the end of the fall season. The fish learn to know their owners, and, in time, come to feed from their hands.

The water also needs to be aerated, and the plants kept in check, so pumps are necessary for the operation of these ponds. "The pumps for waterfalls and other water features run on electricity. New magnetic-drive pumps are very efficient, costing between \$18 and \$45 a month to operate. The old ones were four to five times the amount," Mark explained.

Ponds are all about the calming effect of water that's never static. From a simple bubbling pond all the way to major waterfalls, Mark believes, the benefits are the same.

Step-by-step pond construction and maintenance:

Construction

- How long the installation takes depends on the project's scope and the site. Assuming everything is ready, it's usually between one to two weeks from the word "go."
- Accessibility. "Much depends on accessibility, and where the pond is built," Mark explained. Every scenario is different, requiring one-on-one consulting.
- Another factor is the kind of rock and other pond additions the homeowner wants to use. Pond constructions can range from a simple pond with bubbling water to a major pond designed with waterfalls, lights and large-scale landscaping. Animal options include koi and goldfish, turtles, frogs, dragonflies and birds. Other wildlife will naturally gravitate to the water feature.
- Aquatic plants include irises, water lilies, horsetail and water hyacinths.
- "We can do things for every budget," Mark said.
- Mark uses a four- to five-man crew, and "I'm one of them. I'm with the crew on every pond installation job," Mark said.

Opening

- In spring, you generally have to follow the weather, but usually pond construction and opening starts by the end of March or beginning of April when the winter is over, but not too soon. The weather temperature has to be right for the water to stay open.
- Hook up the pumps and filters, for a jump start.

Winterizing

- Winterize the existing aquatic plants. Take a pair of scissors and trim back the aquatic plants. Move the lilies that are planted in pots around the pond for landscaping in the very deepest part of the pond, so if it freezes, they're OK.
- Remove the pump, turn off the waterfall. Put them inside for the season so they won't freeze.
- Add special weatherizing bacteria to help stabilize the pond through the winter.
- Put a net over the pond. Leaves are falling, and you don't want them to fall into the bottom of the pond to decompose.
- Add an aeration unit and de-icer, a heating element that keeps ice melted in one small hole. The reason for this is to let the gases escape. If the gas stays in, it becomes toxic for the fish.
- Feed the fish a special diet in fall that's easier for them to digest. Its main ingredient is wheat germ.
- Stop feeding the fish once temperature drops below 40 degrees. Fish swim to the bottom of the pond for the winter, going into dormancy.

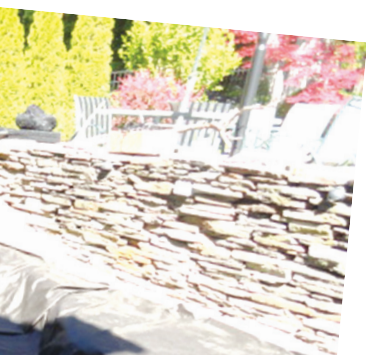
[Montague Mower Service is located at 2 Clove Rd. in Montague, NJ. Visit www.montaguemowerservice.com or on Facebook at Montague Mower Service. For information, call 973/293-3333.]



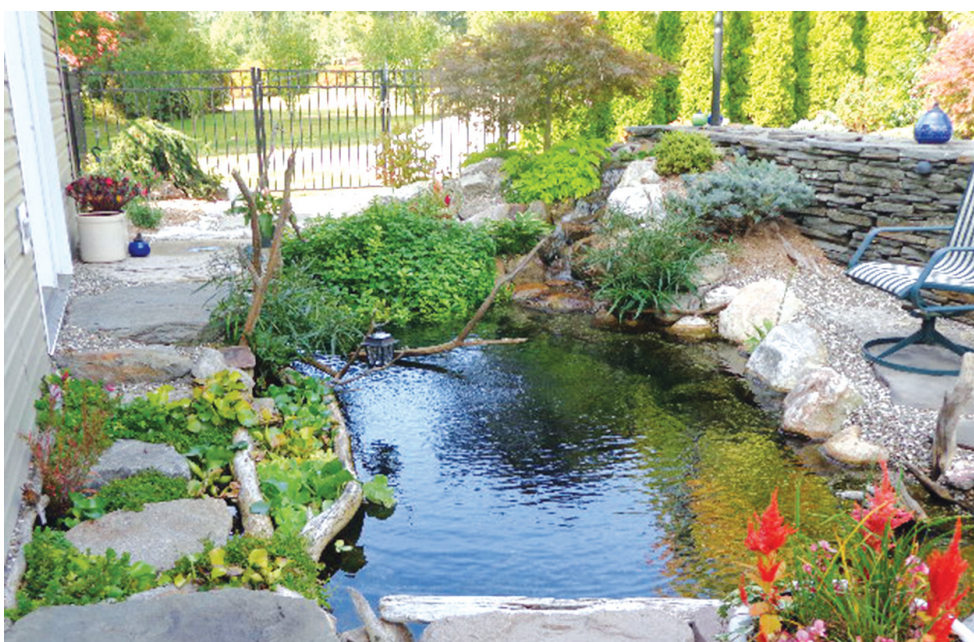
In the country, wildlife from nearby naturally gravitates to backyard ponds and water features



With rocks surrounding it and appropriate planting, this same man-made pond (see series of construction photos above) creates a backyard retreat.



Contributed photos
 Over a period of little more than a week, the homeowners watched a small backyard pond unfold before their eyes. Step 1, far left photo, dig and shape a hole in the ground. Step 2, left, make it leak-proof. Step 3, below, add stone to mimic the look of nature. Later, the pond was planted with appropriate vegetation, as can be seen in the photos at the bottom or the page.



Creating backyard ponds and water features is a popular trend in landscaping.

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Curing winter squash

By JANE BOLLINGER

The first time I heard a farmer talking about curing winter squash, I was mystified. I quickly figured out that curing refers to preserving the squash for storage during the long, cold winter months. An Internet search told me that curing is simply storing unwashed winter squash at a warm temperature—70 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit—with good air circulation for a period of time, usually 10 days to two weeks before putting them in winter storage.

Curious to learn more, I sought out the advice of Roger Hill, the farmer/owner of Treeline Farms near Honesdale, PA. “Basically curing is a ripening process,” he explained, “like you’d do with a European pear; when you pick it, it’s not ripe. Like some long-keeping apples of the past that start off in a green state—like Northern Spy—it ripens during storage. It’s the same thing with pumpkins and squash. They develop a natural, waxy coating on the outside that seals them and keeps them from drying out, provided you keep them at the right temperature,” he added. Proper storage is not too damp, not too cold, according to Hill, 50 degrees or above, and room temperature is OK.

“The most important thing in our region’s climate, if you’re growing winter squash, is to pick it before a hard frost, because a hard frost can really diminish the longevity of its storage... If you can’t pick it just then and it’s still on the vine, something I’ve done in the past is to take a generous mound of dry hay to make a tent over each fruit. That will help keep them until you can harvest them.”

When picking winter squashes, use scissors or pruners, and be sure to retain two to three inches of the stems. Squash with loose or broken-off stems don’t keep as long, so use these first. Curing also helps form a protective corky layer on the cut surface of the stem.

For best long-term storage, pick the ones that are mature, Hill indicated, rather than the ones showing green veins. “And don’t worry if you have immature squash when a hard frost comes. Just because humans don’t consume them, doesn’t mean they go to waste; the others can go to the chickens, or the pigs, or to compost.”

How long will cured squash keep?

“Certain squash varieties like those in the Hubbard family and the butternut family will make it all the way through the winter in proper storage,” Hill said. “As they dry out slowly and get rid of excess moisture, their texture changes and their flavors become more concentrated. The way I like to describe it is that

Continued on page 15



TRR photo by Amanda Reed

Never rush to harvest winter squash, because immature fruits won’t store well. Unless pests or freezing weather threaten them, allow fruits to ripen until the vines begin to die back.



Photos courtesy Wikimedia commons

After picking winter squash, clean away dirt with a soft, damp cloth. Allow fruits to cure for 10 days to two weeks in a warm place. Store cured squash in a cool, dry place, such as your basement, a cool closet or even under your bed. Check every two weeks for signs of spoilage.

CURING SQUASH

Continued from page 14

they ‘raisin up.’” Hill reported that he has kept Hubbard squash in storage into the following July “without a lot of loss,” although he admitted that this is pushing the envelope.

“Some other squash varieties, like acorn, delicata, or spaghetti squash, are tastier earlier. They also are not known for keeping a long time, but the truth is, if you have really good, balanced, mineral-rich soil to grow them, these squashes also will last longer in storage.” Still, these may be the winter squash you want to eat first.

Hill confessed that some of his favorites for storage are from the buttercup family, like Marina di Chioggia squash. “If you cook it when it’s first picked, it will have a granular texture, but as it matures, it becomes softer and less brittle. The flavor also definitely changes. It’s almost like candy; when you bake it, you get a kind of caramelization going on.”

“You can’t beat butternuts; they’ll keep forever,” he said, “and in our area, you can get a good crop most years.”

His favorite? “I really like the buttercup variety,” he said, singling out Uncle

David’s Dakota Dessert Squash. “It’s really waxy, you’ll love them, if you try them.”

The squash family is native to the New World, taken to Europe by Spanish explorers in the 16th century.

There are as many as 30 varieties of winter squash and pumpkins. If you’re into the Latin names of vegetables, *Cucurbitapepo* includes acorn and spaghetti squash and pumpkins; *Cucurbitamaxima* includes Hubbard, banana, buttercup, golden nugget and Marblehead; and *Cucurbitamoschate* includes butternut, Ponca and Waltham.

Low in fat, winter squash is high in dietary fiber. It provides significant amounts of potassium, vitamin B6 and folate (another B vitamin), beta-carotene (which converts to vitamin A) and is rich in the antioxidant vitamin C.

Winter squashes make delicious savory soups, sweet desserts and tasty side dishes.

For the following recipe, choose your favorite sausage, from Italian sweet to German bratwurst to Polish kielbasa.

Sausage and squash stew

Serves 4 to 6

- 1 (1-pound) butternut squash
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 12 ounces fresh sausage (about 3 sausages)
- 1 medium yellow onion, medium dice
- 2 medium garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 10 ounces red potatoes, large dice
- A generous pinch of dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes and their juices
- 3 cups water
- 6 ounces baby spinach

Peel the skin off the squash with a vegetable peeler. Cut open and discard the seeds. Cut squash into one-inch pieces.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium heat. When it shimmers, add sausage and cook, turning occasionally until well browned, about 15 to 20 minutes. Remove and set aside.

Over medium heat, cook onion and garlic (seasoned with salt and pepper to taste) until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Add the squash and potatoes, and cook until the potatoes are just starting to brown, about 5 minutes. Stir in the thyme and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Add tomatoes with their juice, water, bay leaf and then bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, and simmer until the vegetables are tender, about 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Slice the reserved sausage into 1/2-inch rounds and add it to the pan along with the spinach. Cook until the sausage is heated through and the spinach is wilted.



This squash, which looks like a wheel of cheese, is called Long Island Cheese squash.



Once cured, Blue Hubbard squash has a very hard skin, making it one of the longest lasting squashes for winter storage.



Marina di Choggia is an Italian squash, called *suca baruca* in Venice, meaning “warty pumpkin.”



Photos courtesy Wikimedia commons

Curing squash heals cuts and scratches, hardens the skin for storage and also forms a protective corky layer on the cut surfaces of the stem. This is a delicata squash. When just picked, it has such tender skin that the skin can be eaten. It can be stored after curing, but will not keep as long as many other winter squashes.



Photo by Barbara Lewis

Amy Dunn of Mountain Quilt Works donated this quilt for a raffle to benefit The Wayne-Pike Shiners' hospitals for children.



Photo by Barbara Lewis

Demonstrating a technique called "big-stitch quilting," Jackie Murphy was one of several owners of quilting-related businesses at the Pleasant Mount Quilters Guild's biennial quilt show.



Photo by Barbara Lewis

"At my niece's baby shower, everyone wrote a message for her baby. I created this quilt for her and Anthony."—Linda Williams

TASTEMAKERS

The timeless art of quilt making

By NANCY DYMOND

There's a place near here where folks meet to share their discoveries about combining light with dark, layering shape and design, arranging color palettes to excite or soothe. And if that sounds more poetic than pragmatic, well, maybe there is more to this art of quilting than either you or I know.

The place these mysteries occasionally unfold to public view is an unremarkable building in the center of Pleasant Mount, PA, called, appropriately enough, the Pleasant Mount Community Center. As the day of the Pleasant Mount Quilters Guild's biennial Quilt Show drew near, quilters of the region were readying the 187 quilts to be displayed. By Saturday the display would completely fill to overflowing every room in the community center.

Carefully weaving my way through the bubbling energy to a back room, I found Lorraine Fenstermacher, founder of the Pleasant Mount Quilters Guild, registering quilts for the show. Fenstermacher started quilting by accident, quite literally. "I was in a motorcycle accident," she said. The long recovery time was responsible for the start of her interest in quilting. "Before my husband and I moved to this area from New Jersey, I took a class in quilting and did workshop retreats with the South Shore Stitchers Guild in Tuckahoe. We'd go down to Wildwood for a weekend and we'd all quilt."

"My husband wanted to live in the mountains when he retired. I was familiar with this area because I spent time as a kid on my grandfather's farm in Susquehanna County." After their move, she offered to teach a class in quilting at the Pleasant Mount Library. In 2004, after Fenstermacher had taught two classes at the library, the librarian suggested having a quilt show at the community center. With this encouragement, Fenstermacher, along with Felicia Poterjoy, one of her first quilting students, worked together to establish the Pleasant Mount Quilters Guild, a non-profit organization that would donate its proceeds to benefit the local community.

From those small beginnings emerged a core of enthusiastic quilters, who are devoted to encouraging the art and craft of quilting in whatever form it takes.

Art quilt maker, Linda Krause, described a quilt to me this way. "Basically, a quilt is three layers: a top layer and a bottom layer with batting in between, all connected by stitching or tying." Krause's quilts are all that and more. Each of her art quilts has a definite theme inspired by emotion-tinged colors and shapes. Many are built from experiences in Australia's bush country, where she became acquainted with Aboriginal art. Others, such as her bright yellow and black "Swallowtail," arose from unconscious associations or dreams.

Krause says she is less a quilt maker than an artist who makes quilts. "I always sewed. Later I went off to art school. I was doing scientific illustration for the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology in western Canada and later worked in New York in production art. For art quilts there are not many rules. When I design a quilt, I make a large thumbnail of what I'll piece together. Then I'll make a big pattern and it will be exact.

"Each quilt is like a journey. You never know what's going to happen. There's an element of surprise in the journey. Purists want quilts exactly the way they've always been made, but even so, things will happen. There's always some little glitch that demands a certain amount of improvisation. It calls on your creativity."

Krause's fellow quilter, Linda Williams, credits the Pleasant Mount Quilters Guild with providing a place where she could share things and learn things from other quilt makers. When Williams and her husband made their permanent move to this area five years ago, she visited the quilt show at Pleasant Mount. She liked what she saw and heard, so she became a member.

"About 12 years ago, I took an adult education class in New Jersey and made a traditional Log Cabin quilt. Then I was hooked. I started out very traditional. I made blocks and put them together. Williams said that since she invested in a higher-end machine, she's gone into

doing more art-type things like machine appliqué and embroidery with her quilts.

What about the future of quilting, I wanted to know. Is it a dying art? Will it continue to involve mostly women?

"I don't think so," Williams mused. "Quilt making before was a sewing thing. Now it's becoming more of an art thing. In the magazines and on TV you see a lot more men involved in quilting and writing articles. And I don't think it's dying. I think it's evolving. I see a lot of new processes, like painting on fabric, that young people are getting engaged in."

Back at the community center Felicia Poterjoy guided me "down to the hanging" in the gymnasium. "Everything is new, but it's old," she said, gesturing at the dozens of hanging quilts that created a high corridor before us of traditional patterns made new by startling color combinations and fascinating embellishments.

"Janine is our overachiever," Poterjoy remarked with respect, as Janine Lamberton joined us to gaze at one of her expertly crafted, amazingly beautiful quilts.

"You have to trust the fabric," said Lamberton. In order to make her "scrappy" quilt (an awkward name meaning "made from scraps"), Lamberton, with a wink, revealed her technique. "You cut the light and dark fabric into strips, you put two lights and two darks together and then you do what quilters do best. You sew them together, cut them apart, sew them together again, and then cut them apart so you can sew them together again!"

As you might expect, a handmade quilt takes many, many hours to complete. Linda Williams, who works full time, said that a full-size quilt will take her many months from start to finish. She estimated she had made 10 or 12 large quilts that she'd given away to family.

"My husband's family is very into having treasures that were made especially for them. I make quilts for all

"You learn all about shape and color and it throws you into a different dimension; quilting isn't just that little word anymore."
—Felicia Poterjoy



Photo by Nancy Dymond

Linda Williams shows her memory quilt to welcome a new baby.



Photo by Nancy Dymond

Claire Servilla and Lorraine Fenstermacher register the quilts as they arrive at the quilt show.



Photo by Barbara Lewis

"Anticipating a move, I gathered fabrics from quilting friends to piece this quilt. It's like sharing a cup of tea with them."—Rachel Wagner.



Photo by Nancy Dymond

Linda Krause displays the highly decorated quilt back of one of her art quilts.



Photo by Barbara Lewis

"One of several quilts that I did after going to Australia, [where] I spent a month in Alice Springs. There is an actual small piece of Aboriginal art in this quilt."—Linda Kraus



Photo by Barbara Lewis

"I made this quilt around the time of Duke Ellington's 100th birthday. It is named after ['Mood Indigo'] one of his most famous tunes."—Linda Kraus



Photo by Barbara Lewis

"This quilt was inspired by a documentary I saw about birds of paradise. The birds are hand-painted on broad cloth. The background is tea-dyed silk."—Linda Kraus

DIY: Ramona's pillow talk

By RAMONA JAN

Not too long ago, I came across a stack of unused vintage men's handkerchiefs in a thrift store. Fondling (yes, fondling) them between my fingertips (I'm fond of anything silk), I debated buying them. The whole bunch was only 10 bucks, but unless I have a plan, I don't throw away money. Hmmm, throw away money? Throw pillows?

The throw pillow, also known as the 'accent pillow,' can really cozy up a place. And even though they're not necessarily designed for comfort (or to support the body for that matter), I'm finding these DIY silk pillows to be extremely comfortable and supportive as well as decorative. Besides, pillows smack of money, and the more you have the wealthier you are—at least that was the view of the Mesopotamians around 7,000 BC. It's also my view. The ancient Chinese, however, had another perspective altogether.

Throughout many dynasties, the Chinese made pillows from jade, wood, bamboo, porcelain and bronze for resting your head upon—ouch! The porcelain ones (mass produced during the Tang Dynasty between 618 and 907) were the most popular. However, even they passed out of favor during the Ming and Qing dynasties (between 1368 and 1911) with the emergence of better pillow-making materials—silks, feathers, and thrush—just about anything softer (duh!).

Besides being comfy, pillows under the head while sleeping are said to keep bugs out of the hair, mouth, nose and ears. (I hate to confess this, but I do not use a pillow to sleep—oh, well). I've also long given up collecting "toss" pillows for the bed—too much trouble tossing them on and off. But the couch, window seat and random chairs are another story. My accent pillows thrive in those places, and make me feel rich!

So I bought the men's handkerchiefs, and here's what I did with them. You can do it, too!



Photos by Ramona Jan

Never choose matching throw pillows. Think of each one as an individual work of art.



1. Using a light setting on your iron, press one handkerchief (or small woman's silk scarf) giving particular detail to the edges—making sure they are pressed flat.

2. Choose a backing fabric: The backing fabric should be non-stretchy and of a similar weight to the handkerchief/scarf. (Light-weight cottons or raw silks are your best bets). As for color, pick any one of them from the print. (I usually select the darker color, thus the navy blue from the print in this particular handkerchief.)



3. Iron the backing fabric and then lay your handkerchief on top of it as flat and square as possible. Carefully cut around the handkerchief being mindful not to cut into it. (The backing fabric should be cut to the same size square as the handkerchief.) **Tip:** If there's a straight edge on my backing fabric, I line it up with one edge of the handkerchief—leaving only three edges to cut. And I like to use the selvage edge for just that purpose. The selvage is the factory finished edge of the fabric. And for a really straight cut, simply snip the fabric where you want and then tear! Good materials will rip well and straight.

Continued on page 20

The River Reporter's 19th Annual 2014 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

THE BEST BALLOT IS BACK!

We have revamped our ballot and it's better than ever! We ask that you simply vote for the people, places or businesses that you think are the BEST. Thank you for your participation and we look forward to receiving your votes. If there is a category that we are missing, let us know!

We will publish our 2014 WINNERS in our annual Readers' Choice Awards "BEST" supplement in January 2015.

Good Luck to all!

BEST PLACES FOR FOOD & DRINK

Appetizers _____	Ice Cream Parlor _____
Authentic Meal _____	Italian Restaurant _____
Bagels _____	Locally-Sourced Menu _____
Bakery _____	Local Watering Hole _____
Barbeque _____	Lunch _____
Beer Selection _____	Martinis _____
Breakfast _____	Menu _____
Brunch _____	New Restaurant _____
Budget-friendly _____	Pasta Dish _____
Buffet _____	Pizza _____
Candy Shop _____	Off The Beaten Path _____
Cheesesteak Sandwich _____	Outdoor Dining _____
Chinese Restaurant _____	Overall Restaurant _____
Coffeehouse _____	- Delaware County _____
Deli _____	- Orange County _____
Desserts _____	- Pike County _____
Diner _____	- Sullivan County _____
Dinner _____	-Wayne County _____
Dinner Specials _____	-Region _____
Early Bird Specials _____	Ribs _____
Family Restaurant _____	Romantic Restaurant _____
French Fries _____	Salad _____
Gourmet Restaurant _____	Sandwiches _____
Grocery Store /Supermarket _____	Seafood _____
Hamburgers _____	Soups _____
Happy Hour _____	Steakhouse _____
Health Food Store _____	Vegetarian Food Restaurant _____
Home Cooking Restaurant _____	Wine Selection _____
Hot Dogs _____	Wings _____

BEST PLACES TO SHOP

Antique Store _____	Jewelry Store _____
Auto Parts Store _____	Knit Shop _____
Baby/Kids Store _____	Liquor Store _____
Boat Dealer/Rental _____	Locally-made products _____
Bookstore _____	Lumberyard _____
Car Dealership _____	Medical Equipment _____
Clothing Store _____	Motorcycle Shop _____
Collectibles Store _____	Music Store _____
Consignment Shop _____	Novelty Shop _____
Electronics _____	Outdoor Recreational Vehicles _____
Farm Equipment Retailer _____	Pet Store _____
Flooring Store _____	Place to Buy Art _____
Florist _____	Pottery Studio _____
Furniture Store _____	Specialty Store _____
General Store _____	Sporting Goods Shop _____
Gift Shop _____	Tattoo/Ear Piercing Shop _____
Hardware Store _____	Vintage Shop _____
Home Décor _____	

BEST BUSINESSES & SERVICES

Auto Service Station _____	New Business of the Year _____
Bank _____	Pet Boarding/Pampering _____
Child Care Provider _____	Pet Grooming /Groomer _____
Christmas Tree Farm _____	Pharmacy _____
Eye Care Center _____	Photography Studio _____
Elder Care Facility _____	Plumbing & Heating Supply _____
Emergency Room _____	Rehabilitation Services _____
Engaging Facebook Page _____	Recycle & Transfer Station _____
Fitness Center _____	Rental Center _____
Funeral Home _____	Real Estate Office _____
Green Business _____	Salvage Company _____
Hair & Nail Salon _____	Septic Service _____
Heating Fuel Company _____	Spa or Personal Pampering _____
Home & Garden Store _____	Storage Center _____
Hospital/ Medical Facility _____	Towing Service _____
Insurance Agency _____	Truck Center _____
Kid's Camp _____	Tuxedo Rentals _____
Kitchen & Bath Store _____	Veterinarian Clinic _____
Maternity Unit _____	Well Driller _____
Modular Homes _____	Women's Health Center _____
Mortgage Company _____	

BEST OF OUR COMMUNITY

Ambulance Squad _____	- Golf Pro _____
Amusement/ Fun Park _____	- Musician/Band _____
Animal Shelter _____	- Photographer _____
Art Gallery _____	- Potter _____
Atmosphere _____	Local Products:
Bed & Breakfast _____	- Beer / Spirits _____
Bowling Lanes _____	- Cheese _____
Canoe Livery _____	- Eggs _____
Campground _____	- Meats _____
Chamber of Commerce _____	- Maple Syrup _____
Chicken BBQ (Volunteer) _____	- Wine _____
Cider Mill _____	Meditation Center _____
Civic Club or Organization _____	Movie Theatre _____
College _____	Museum _____
Community Festival or Street Fair _____	Neighborhood _____
Conference Center _____	Pancake Breakfast _____
Dance Studio _____	Parade _____
Day Trip _____	Penny Social _____
Fair _____	Place to Hold a Prom _____
Family Night Out _____	Places to Play Bingo _____
Farm Market _____	Place to Take out of town guests _____
Fire Department _____	Place to Take the kids _____
Golf Course _____	Playhouse Theatre _____
Historic Site _____	Post Office _____
Horseback Riding _____	Private School _____
Hotel _____	Radio Station _____
Law Office _____	Resort _____
Library _____	Shopping Area _____
Live Music Venue _____	Ski Lodge _____
Local _____	Special Area Attraction _____
- Artist _____	Sullivan Renaissance Project _____
- Author _____	Wedding Reception Location _____
- Celebrity _____	Winery _____
- Farm _____	Youth Center _____
- Getaway _____	Youth Program _____

BEST PEOPLE

Accountant _____	Green Developer _____
Architect _____	High School Athlete _____
Auto Mechanic _____	Holistic Practitioner _____
Baker/ Specialty Cakes _____	Interior Decorator _____
Bank Teller _____	Landscaper _____
Barber _____	Lawyer _____
Bartender _____	Law Enforcement Officer _____
Builder _____	Local Hero _____
Butcher _____	Massage Therapist _____
Caterer _____	Medical Specialist _____
Carpenter _____	Painter _____
Car Salesman _____	Pediatrician _____
Chef _____	Plumber _____
Chiropractor _____	Politician _____
Clergy _____	Postmaster _____
Coach _____	Radio Personality _____
Custom Cabinetry _____	Real Estate Agent _____
Dentist _____	Roofer _____
Doctor _____	Teacher _____
Electrician _____	Veterinarian _____
Event Planner _____	Waiter/Waitress _____
Excavator _____	Web Designer _____
Friendly Staff _____	Yoga Teacher _____

HOW TO VOTE: Please print clearly your choices for "THE BEST" from the categories listed. Best choices are limited to Delaware, Orange, Pike, Sullivan and Wayne counties. You may also VOTE ONLINE: www.RiverReporter.com/BEST

HOW TO ENTER: NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Additional ballots are available at **The River Reporter** office at 93 Erie Ave, Narrowsburg, NY. Ballots MUST be complete and include full name, address and phone number of voter. All ballots must be received by December 18, 2014. Employees of **The River Reporter** and **Stuart Communications** are permitted to vote but not eligible to win prizes. Entries that are late, damaged, illegible or missing voter's name will not be eligible. One entry per person. Mechanically reproduced or Photocopied entries are not eligible. A business, organization or person may win no more than three (3) categories. Winners will be chosen based on the number of votes received by December 18th, 2014.

HOW TO WIN PRIZES: All ballots will be included in a random drawing for prizes. Drawing will be held in January 2015. No duplicate winners. BEST Winners will be notified in January 2015.

OFFICIAL "BEST" BALLOT ENTRY FORM

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Name _____

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PLEASE MAIL COMPLETED FORMS TO:

The River Reporter "BEST"
 PO Box 150, Narrowsburg, NY 12764

or DROP OFF AT:
 93 Erie Avenue, Narrowsburg, NY 12764



4. With right sides of the fabric together (the 'right' side is the side you want to eventually show), pin the backing fabric to the handkerchief around three edges of the square.



5. Sew the three pinned sides together either by hand with a running stitch or by machine. When using a machine, line up the edge of the pressure foot even with the edge of the fabric as shown. This will produce about a quarter-inch seam. Anything less will be trouble! **Tip:** If your backing material has a selvage end, leave that end open. It's so much easier to deal with a non-fraying edge.



6. Turn the whole thing right sides out and press all the sewn edges flat (as shown). Then press the open seams of both the handkerchief and backing fabric a quarter inch under (as shown).



7. Using a purchased pillow insert (or poly-fill), crumpled plastic bags (pictured) for a stiffer feel and a crunchy sound, an old (but not too nasty) pillow, or anything else you think will make your pillow look and feel good; stuff it to your heart's desire. Some like it puffy!



8. Pin and then top-sew the open end. (You can do this by hand or machine). Obviously, you can insert a zipper if you wish, in order to remove the cover and launder it, but at this price (I made 10 accent pillows for approximately \$10), I decided to forgo the zipper and merely re-cover them someday—a future DIY (How to Freshen-Up an Old Throw Pillow?).

People often ask me: Should I try to tie my accent pillow into something else in the home like a color? Don't even think of it! Allow each accent pillow to stand alone as a work of art. When I assisted Citicorp's art curator as well as its interior world-wide office designer, one rule of thumb was never to match your art work (or rugs) to the rest of your décor. Naturally, this rule extends to throw pillows. Think of them as individual works of art. And please, unless you have a very, very good reason, are a bit insane, or are still in college, try to avoid the novelty pillow—anything shaped like a banana, tweety bird, human leg, chainsaw, dill pickle or President Nixon. Thank you!



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Radical homemakers

Rekindling the home fires

By J.C.B. HUGGARD

[Editor's note: From time to time in previous issues of Our Country Home, we have turned our attention to the topic of housekeeping, and so we do today, but with a difference, as we take a closer look at a new philosophy of homemaking that has been gaining a lot of attention in recent years. "Radical homemaking" espouses a way of life that is quite different from the nearly universally accepted way Americans currently live, earn their livings and make their homes. The leading voice of these new homemakers is Shannon Hayes, who asks the fundamental question: what do we want home to be?]

Shannon Hayes is a farmer in upstate New York where three generations of her family work Sap Bush Hollow Farm in the Town of West Fulton. Hayes is also a talented writer and blogger, author of several books including two cookbooks—"The Grassfed Gourmet" and "The Farmer and the Grill"—and one of the most thought-provoking books I have read in a long time, "Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture."

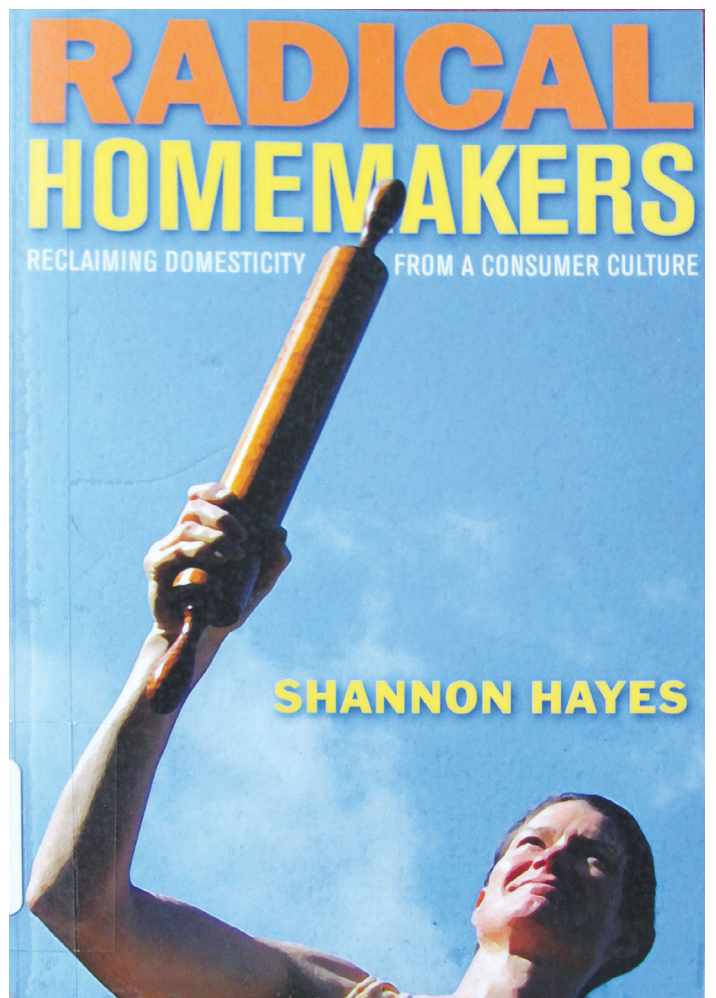
This book is about far more than simply reclaiming the domestic skills that so many in our current culture have forgotten or rejected. It is about reestablishing the supremacy of home and community, and in

so doing, Hayes argues, radical homemakers will help transform society in a way that addresses many of its problems and can lead to more happiness in the process.

Hayes questions the very foundation that supports today's typical American family—two adults working outside the home. As she sees it, they need (and need to pay for) two cars; they commonly need to pay for child care, elder care, household repairs and/or other domestic assistance. By contrast, radical homemakers create a home-based life, commonly eschewing the need to work outside the home, doing more for themselves, using life skills and relationships as a replacement for earning money to pay others to do this work.

"Traditional knowledge to care for the sick, nourish our families, produce our own food and entertain ourselves has nearly disappeared from our culture," she says, "with all of it being transferred to 'experts'—factory farms, corporate health care, chain restaurants, media conglomerates—who are more interested in maximizing a profit than in conserving or replenishing our living systems... In order to revive our culture and create a vibrant society that does not depend on a consumer-driven and ecologically rapacious economy," she writes, "more of us need to look homeward to create a life-nurturing alternative."

Continued on page 24



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RADICAL HOMEMAKERS

Continued from page 22

In short, “Radical Homemakers” is an economic, ecological and social justice manifesto. Hayes postulates that by transforming one’s own household into a unit of production—producing more of one’s own goods and services—rather than a unit of consumption—buying everything we need (and don’t need) in a corporate-dominated global economy—then one’s family, one’s community, society at large and the planet benefit. She refers frequently to what she calls the existing “extractive economy” that relies on consumption and depletes not only the earth’s resources but also the “life energy” of those who participate in that economy. Participating in an extractive economy costs us our time. We are overworked, overscheduled, stressed, depressed and unhealthy, she maintains. Compare this to the wealth radical homemakers are creating at home in their relationships and the time they spent with family and community.

Radical homemakers generally earn less, but also learn to live with less. This does not bother Hayes, who asserts that we have lost the skills to live on a low income. These skills, however, can be regained through what the author calls a “life-serving economy” that “practices thrift, frugality and debt avoidance... capitalizing on available resources, minimizing waste... bartering, spending money where it matters most and understanding the concepts of ‘enough.’”

Feminists will read this book with interest. Hayes has constructed a different brand of feminism. She is not advocating a throwback to the 1950s, when mothers stayed at home and fathers went to work, and she rejects what followed in the 1960s and ‘70s when the worth of full-time, stay-at-home homemakers was widely diminished. Hayes admits that radical homemakers “are

not the brand of feminists seeking security through economic independence.” She believes that both husband and wife are vulnerable to the vagaries of the corporate-dominated economy and the whim of an employer. “They are both vulnerable if their life skills are limited to whatever they are able to do for a paycheck....”

“These homemakers have evolved a more sophisticated view of what constitutes an economy and they have surrendered a false sense of [financial] independence to embrace genuine interdependence. In place of conventional employment, these men and women build security through frugal living, domestic skills and reduced material needs. They have opted to trust and actively nurture their personal partnerships and to cultivate a web of family and community that supports them.”

The book “Radical Homemakers” is divided into two parts. In part one, Hayes lays out her thesis in greater detail than I have been able to describe here. In the second part she shares excerpts from personal interviews she conducted with 20 radical homemakers. Though their stories are different the same common themes emerge: consume less, increase self reliance, shop and eat locally, reclaim domestic skills, rebuild local communities, create a home-based life.

Hayes asks big questions: What is progress? What is wealth? How do we measure success or failure? What is really essential in life?

In rejecting the idea that corporate wealth is the foundation of society’s economic health, her book indeed proposes radical change. In the end, the goal of the radical homemaker’s way of life is to achieve family and community well-being, social justice and ecological sustainability. Are these not radical ideas worth discussing?

Continued on page 26



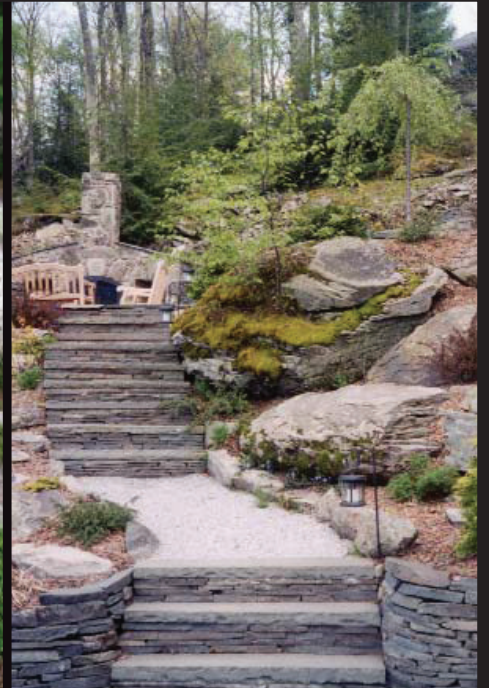
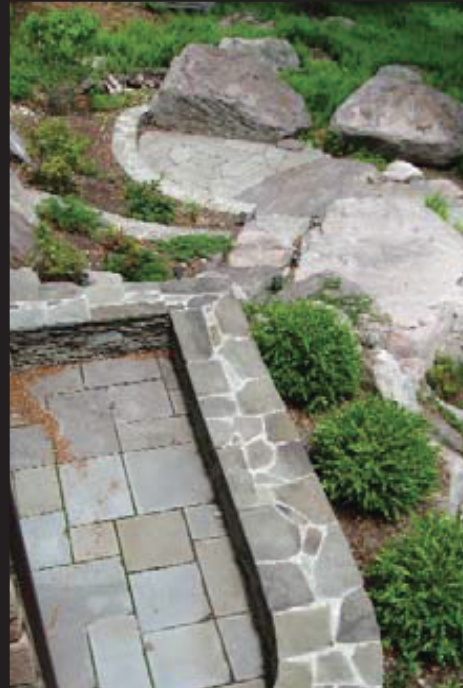
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10 easy steps for becoming a radical homemaker

Commit to hanging your laundry out to dry.



Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons

Many radical homemakers commit to hanging their laundry out to dry. It is a statement about the lifestyle they strive for and it conserves electricity by letting the sun do the work instead of the dryer.

Get to know your neighbors. Cooperate to save money and resources.

Go to your local farmers' market each week before you head to the grocery store.



Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons

"Go to your local farmers' market each week before you head to the grocery store," is one of 10 easy tips to becoming a radical homemaker according to author/blogger Shannon Hayes.

Get your family to spend more evenings at home, preferably with the TV off.

Choose one local food item to learn how to preserve for yourself for the winter.

Dedicate a portion of your lawn to a vegetable garden.



TRR photo by Amanda Reed

Growing a vegetable garden is one example of how radical homemakers do more for themselves by employing life skills to become producers rather than consumers of the things they need.

Donate to help others save money and resources.

Cook for your family.

Do some spring cleaning to identify everything in your home that you absolutely don't need.

Make a commitment to start carrying your own reusable bags and use them on all your shopping trips.

Focus on enjoying what you have and who are with. Stop fixating on what you think you may need, or how things could be better "if only."

SOURCE: www.yesmagazine.org/blogs/shannon-hayes/live-dangerously-10-easy-steps



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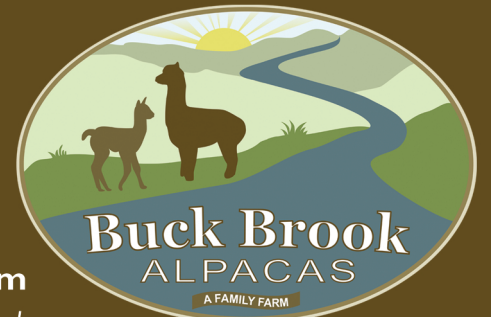
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MAKING CHANGES

Building a personal library

By JANE BOLLINGER

The mess in our living room on my mother's library table—a lovely piece of furniture I inherited from her, but which I now can hardly see for the piles of books growing on it (not to mention similar piles growing all around the house)—has finally prompted me to action. At one time, I thought we had ample shelving for books in our modest house, but today the bookcases are full to overflowing. The time has come to make a better plan—(LOL) something short of putting an addition on the house.

There is plenty to read on the Internet about how to plan and build a personal library, including some articles with provocative questions, starting with two very fundamental ones: Am I a book collector or just a book hoarder? Do I really want to build my own library or am I merely a book buyer? Opting for building a personal library and becoming a book collector (these ideas certainly sound nobler than being an indiscriminate book buyer and hoarder); I still have plenty of decisions to make. Hardback or paperback? Fiction or non-fiction? New or second-hand? What are my favorite reading topics? Do I dare buy any more cookbooks?

I decided to examine the collection of books I already own, knowing that when it comes to cookbooks, I already have the foundation for a personal library. But, in recent years, I also have taken to reading books about the environment, sustainability and how to build strong, local communities to achieve the kind of mid-21st century world one might actually want to live in.

Perusing my book shelves, I find I also have a small section of childhood books, including a lifetime favorite I would never part with—a battered copy of Robert Service verse from which my father read such ghoulish poems to us children as “The Cremation of Sam McGee” and the “Shooting of Dan McGrew.” I also find a complete collection of Winnie the Pooh books, and from my youth, Douglas Adams' series “The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.” Keepers all.



TRR photo by Jane Bollinger

Piles of books “grow” on this table in the writer's living room, awaiting decisions about how to make room for them on the home's several book shelves. For book lovers, it's hard to get rid of old “friends.”

I have a modest collection of novels (at one time in my adult life I read only fiction), and over the years I've kept quite a few. These include a selection of novels that have won Pulitzers, National Book Awards, Man-Booker prizes and a fair number of first novels. (I love reading authors' first novels, finding that these are often their most original, most passionate works. Yes, some go on to write wonderful successive novels, but it turns out that others had only one story inside them to tell—their best story.) I do have one rule about the novels I keep: I hold on only to those that I want to go back and read a second time. (In fact one article I read about building a library suggested, “If you don't read a book more than once, you don't need a library.”)

With no more space even for the books I currently have, the first job will be letting go of some, winnowing out dross. This, of course, is difficult for anyone who believes that “my books are my friends.” The most helpful tip I found on the Internet was to look at each book one at a time, and to consider if you are keeping it just as a prop—something to look at—or if the book actually spoke to you in some meaningful way when you read it. If this method proves to be of too little help, one blogger's advice was to “write down how you feel about each book.” This, in theory, is to help one decide whether to keep or give it away. Still, this chore will be challenging.

Another bit of helpful advice I found was about being more intentional regarding what books I want to own in my library—both in regard to what to get rid of now and what to buy and collect for keeps in the future.

Here are other thoughts that may be helpful for building a personal library:

Define and prepare the physical space to hold your books

Create a quiet, comfortable space for reading—a comfortable chair, good lighting and surroundings that please you or have special meaning, such as some favorite photos or art.

Identify your interests and passions, and as you buy books on these topics collect judiciously.

Examine what you would love to learn or know more about, and start by collecting three books on this topic. (Don't go crazy all at once.)

Create some simple rules to guide your collecting so you are not just “buying books,” but are acquiring books to build your library.

Be selective by sticking to your plan.

Have a book budget.

Keep the books you love and give the others away (library sales, garage sales, book swaps, thrift stores, etc. or try out www.paperbackswap.com)

Share your library

Let your library evolve

Read what you collect!

Finally there is the matter of buying a Kindle or a Nook. Having an e-reader would probably make it easier to empty my bookcases to make room for only the books I want to keep in my personal library—the books that really speak to me. On the other hand (call me old fashioned?), I can't even imagine a home without bookshelves holding traditional books.



Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

At one time, only the rich could afford to build a personal library. Today visitors to the Chateau de Breteuil in Chevreuse, France (built 1604-1610), a designated historic monument since the 1970s, will find the library of the original Marquis de Breteuil.



Photo courtesy of U.S. Forestry Service

Closer to home, this is the library of Gifford Pinchot, America's first chief of its forestry service and governor of Pennsylvania. The public can browse through Pinchot's book collection at Grey Towers National Historic Site on regularly scheduled tours.

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Be our guest!

By JOHN HIGGINS

For the last 22 years my partner Pip and I have happily entertained family and close friends at our home here, at the beach, and in NYC. The key to hosting is pre-production. Before we moved to PA full-time, Pip and I would have a mid-week meeting at home, usually with a martini or two, and talk about the coming weekend and make the overall plan for how the weekend should run. Guests arrive at X time on X date. The menu of meals was planned out and a shopping list was made, which Pip would expertly handle and I would happily retain my post as his amanuensis. We would arrive in the country in time to make sure everything was ready down to the details, which included glassware, lighting and music, depending on where we had our first cocktail (main house, guest house, pool, stable, etc.)

Our houseguests are comprised of our family and long-time close friends, so everyone knows how things run, the expectation of behavior (usually funny and madcap if it's one of my brothers), favorite bedrooms yielded to whoever had the more winning argument as to why they deserved to stay there, etc.

That said, some houseguests are a challenge, and herein lies my cautionary tale about someone new who was brought into the fold, and by that I mean a certain friend's newest—some might even say “latest,” but that would be unkind (although far more accurate)—par amour. This person (and I use the term loosely) is the houseguest we now refer to as “Voldemort.” In fact, every transgression you could read in an Emily Post column on what makes for a “bad” houseguest was more than ably demonstrated.

Within the first two hours of our houseguest's arrival, he had consumed several scotch-and-sodas (note: we didn't have soda in the house, so it poses the question, “Did he CONJURE the soda into that scotch?”), got rather loud and opinionated with our friend who had invited him for the weekend and then stormed off toward the guesthouse, as I watched him play an imaginary game of pinball, he careening from side to side on the road leading across the meadow. Oh, my, my. This is the houseguest from hell, I thought. Our friend was contrite and followed after Drunkee Magee.

Cut to the next morning. Cue the perfect morning music, Edvard Grieg's “*Morgenstimmung*.” Now cue the sound of the needle being pulled across and off that same melody. Voldemort is up, hungry, needs coffee (Now!) and not making eye contact with anyone. I approach him, albeit cautiously, and ask him to join me for a morning walk and PLEASE bring your coffee. We start across the same meadow toward the guesthouse where I had lately seen Voldemort bounce from side to side only hours ago. I ask him if he's anxious about things, e.g. meeting new people, the ever-present hush of quiet in the country can be scary, and if there's anything I can do to make the weekend fun and brighter. To his credit, he apologized profusely (he was anxious, he said) and even got weepy (there, there...). I told him, “New day, new vibe! Let's have fun!” The next two days were as if the first night had never happened. After a lap at the Callicoon Farmers' Market and late lunch on Sunday, our friend stayed

behind to thank us for a weekend in the country, while V went back to the guesthouse to pack. An hour later, we bid our friend and the erstwhile Voldemort a fond farewell with the promise we'll email to find another date on the calendar for the next visit. Pip even found time to bake cupcakes with Almond Joy frosting (Is he the son of Jor-El, or what?!), boxed a few for them and sent them on their way back to NYC. A while after their departure I popped down to the guesthouse to check on things.

WHAT THE H-E-DOUBLE-HOCKEY-STICKS?!?! The bedroom and bathroom of the guesthouse looked as if

crime scene tape should be pulled out and strung around the offending mess. Oh, Emily Post, where art thou now? “The best guest and the guest always invited back leaves things the way they were. Or better!”

Well, Voldemort missed that chapter, Emily. House + Guest = Better vetting.

Endnote: Almost a year to the date of that weekend Pip and I saw Voldemort in Narrowsburg with someone we know peripherally. All I could think was, “Got Swiffer?” That, and “I hope they have soda.”



“No guest should be admitted without the date of their departure settled.”

—Lady Violet Crawley, Dowager Countess of Grantham, on houseguests.

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