

SPRING 2014

OUR COUNTRY HOME



Living in a 1794
country farmhouse

Making art from
flea market finds

Growing asparagus,
a perennial favorite

Target your closet
for spring cleaning

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Cover photograph by
Amanda Reed

After a challenging winter, spring will be especially welcome this year—warmer days, green grass growing, the smell of the earth, birds and animals returning, the great outdoors beckoning. And so for the 2014 spring edition of Our Country Home, we choose to welcome this sweet season by embracing the theme of rebirth and reawakening.

Our cover story is about a very special house—one with a history dating back to 1794. Just imagine how many times a 200-year-old house has been reborn, as each new owner makes it their home. Come along with us to visit the Skinner House, known today as the Hickory Lane Farmhouse on Tammany Flats in Damascus, PA and see how its present owners have brought new life into this old farmhouse.

Our journey to see how people revitalize old things continues as we pay a call on a small business that reupholsters and refinishes vintage and well-used furniture. Why take that tattered (but still your favorite comfortable overstuffed chair) or Grandma's well-worn bedside table to the thrift store or dump, when for a fraction of buying new, you can reclaim it?

Or maybe a smaller project is more up your alley. Consider creating a special retreat—a sanctuary—within your home, a space where you go just to be alone with yourself to contemplate and to leave the cares of the world behind.

We will also take a look at a couple of spring activities: planting seeds to get ready for your season in the garden and spring cleaning your closet as you swap out winter wear for the coming warmer weather.

Lastly, we will introduce you to an artist with ties to the Upper Delaware River Valley who salvages little treasures from flea markets to turn into her own unique works of found art.

Jane Bollinger
Section editor
Our Country Home



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Mailing Address:
PO Box 150, Narrowsburg, NY 12764
Phone: 845/252-7414 • Fax: 845/252-3298

Publisher: Laurie Stuart
Section Editor: Jane Bollinger
Production Manager: Amanda Reed

Advertising Sales Director:
Barbara Matos, ext. 34, barbara@riverreporter.com
Advertising Sales Associate:
Denise Yewchuck, ext. 32, denise@riverreporter.com
Advertising Sales Associate:
Eileen Hennessy, ext. 35, eileen@riverreporter.com

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Have a comment or idea for the magazine?
Jane Bollinger: 845/252-7414, ext. 29, or jbollinger@riverreporter.com

Love and lilacs

Living history revealed in the Skinner House

By SYBIL SANCHEZ

When Gina and Tom Kaufmann share how they met, they evoke a scene from the movie “When Harry Met Sally.” They grew up 20 minutes apart on Long Island, vacationed 20 minutes apart in the Upper Delaware River Valley region and even closer on Long Island, but only first met when they went horseback riding together in their mid-to-late teens. Then, there’s the house. They were dating about a year when they first entered the Skinner House, visiting family friends. Gina recalls thinking it would be romantic to live there one day. As rare as childhood sweethearts who are happily married for 34 years are, it’s equally rare for an off-the-cuff romantic notion like that to come true.

But the Kaufmanns are no common couple, and theirs is no simple house. Known today as the Hickory Lane Farmhouse, on Tammany Flats in Damascus, PA, the Skinner House dates back to 1794, although the site was first home to an earlier building that burnt down in 1788 or 1789. Like a tell, an archaeological mound created by centuries of human occupation and abandonment, the Kaufmanns’ home resembles an excavation, revealing layers of history as they discover artifacts in its walls and grounds, and create new legacies, adding their own 20th- and 21st-century layers.

Place of the Wolf, a Peaceful Chief, and Temperance

The house served as the birthplace of river rafting. Placing the Upper Delaware region on the map, the industry was founded by the Skinners in the 1750s and timber was shipped as far downstream as Philadelphia. First owned by Joseph Skinner, family patriarch and founding head of the Delaware River Company, the house was subsequently acquired by his son Daniel, who took over after Joseph’s death in 1759.

The Skinners named the site “Ack-hake,” meaning “place of the wolf” in the language of the Lenape Indians. They also called the area Tammany Flats, a name still used today, referring to Lenape Chief Tammanend, who helped establish peaceful relations among Native American tribes and settlers. The house served as St. Tammany’s Masonic Lodge No. 83 as well.

Thereafter, the house was a temperance inn. Owned by proprietor George Bush and holding “Bush’s Eddy,” the home is mentioned in Clara Gillow Clark’s historic children’s novel, “Hill Hawk Hattie,” as a place where the raftsmen tied their boats and then made off for the more jovial, and wetter, town of Callicoon. One of the

Kaufmanns’ findings is an 1853 business card from a wholesaler on Greenwich Street, with a signature stamped on it by George Bush, Esquire.

Hidden History Revealed

Their list of artifacts is long: rafters’ cleats (used horse shoes that secured raft logs together), hand-carved wooden goblets, old coins and pipes, handmade nails, and a plain, marble grave marker that bears the initials D.S. The Skinners were originally buried in a neighboring cemetery that was largely washed away by an 1880s flood, so it’s possible that the marker was for Daniel Skinner himself. They have also found a German bisque doll leg, circa 1890, and pennies that date back to 1826 and 1849. During renovation, they found that their walls were lined with old newspapers and product packaging, revealing details about prior renovations and bearing logos that could be conceptual predecessors to 20th-century icons like Campbell’s soup, Camel’s cigarettes and other brands.

Their biggest discovery remains unproven. Their house was rumored to have a secret room. When renovating their master bedroom they found a hidden entranceway (down in a scuttle hole in a closet’s back wall) that lead to an area of their attic floor that was heavily reinforced and large enough to fit 10 people. Along with being an artist, Gina has served as a substitute teacher for many years and thus taught about how Harriet Tubman led slaves from safe-house to safe-house following the river on the Underground Railroad. Numerous homes in the area have similar secret rooms, and, while they have no documentation, the Kaufmanns believe that theirs was a stop along the route.

The house breathed a sigh of relief – loved again

When they moved in, the house had been vacant for 18 years. Along with being a corrections officer, Tom has a local business doing home repairs and property management, so he brought his professional knowledge home. “Exposing the innards and then repairing it, has made us a part of the structure,” says Tom. “We have really enjoyed the process; not just of renovation but of rejuvenation.”

Once, when painting the living room, the colors pink and green came to Gina, who later learned that indeed the room previously had those very same colors. As she puts it, working on the house is, “uncovering a mystery, like Nancy Drew. As we uncovered things it would tell us more of its history and needs. Our

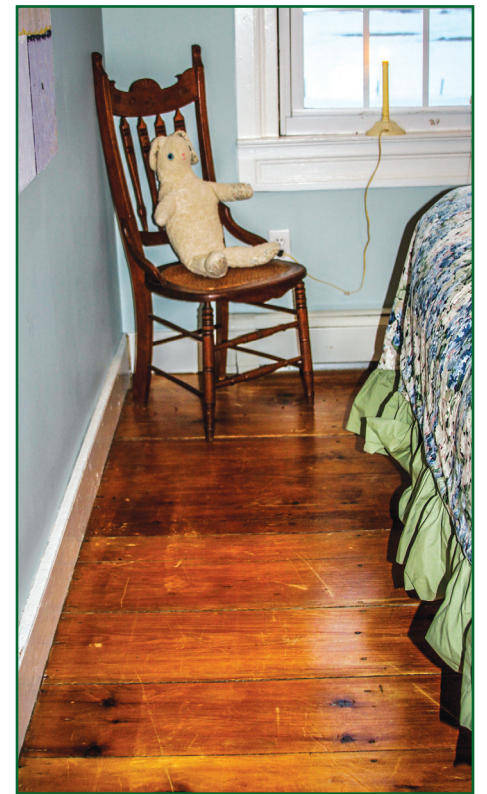


TRR photos by Amanda Reed

The Skinner House/Hickory Lane Farmhouse is an original modular unit, comprised of three buildings in one. The center, oldest structure dates back to 1794, the southernmost to the 1800s, and the northernmost structure to the early 1900s, which is now rented as an efficiency apartment.



This dramatic stairway is located in the second oldest part of the house. Under the stairs is an antique light fixture that Tom rescued during one of his renovations.



This 27-inch-wide plank floor in the bedroom, dating back to the 1800s, must have been cut from a very large tree, the kind the rafting industry was built upon.

Continued on page 4

LOVE AND LILACS

Continued from page 3

original plans might have been not to have this bathroom here, or that door open there, but we learned as we went and adjusted accordingly.”

In the Jack Finney story, “Where the Cluetts Are,” a couple builds an authentic Victorian house and becomes so in tune to it that they turn into Victorians themselves. When the Kaufmanns talk about their relationship with their house, they sound similarly enmeshed, except rather than going back in time, they have brought their home’s past to life and its future into the 21st century.

For example, when they gut renovated, birds flew to the upper sills at the windows and started nesting, as they had not done in years. Once rid of acorns, corn cobs, rodents, bats, and debris, the house was rejuvenated. The lilacs, seemingly dead from being hacked down, returned. It was, as Gina puts it, “As if the house itself sighed a breath of fresh air.... Someone’s going to love me again.”

Better than Plumb, Level or Square

The house had a reputation for hosting festive parties in the ’50s and ’60s, only to fall into disrepair in the ’70s and ’80s. By the time the Kaufmanns acquired it, it was either going to be razed or renovated. Tom says, “It was doomed, if it wasn’t viewed for its real historic worth and character. Some people said there was too much to be done than worth doing; that it was better to simply put up a new structure because this one would never be plumb, level or square (meaning that all the angles are straight.) We saved the structure because we love it so and because we saw the diamond in the rough.”

The house has loved them back. In 1997, when Gina’s infirm mother moved in with the Kaufmanns, they told their five children to prepare for her imminent death. Yet, as her doctor put it, moving into that house gave Kathleen Carlstrom another lifecycle, seven more years of family celebrations and good times. “At a certain point, we were giving cakes away,” Tom said, describing his mother-in-law, “She baked them for us every day.”

Although the Kaufmanns’ children are now all grown and moved out, the house continues to serve as a site for socializing as their extended families use the grounds frequently. In 2008, their daughter Kelly Kaufmann-McKenzie got married on the grounds with 140 guests. Plus, they turned the back apartment into a rentable efficiency.

“I don’t know who we would be if we lived in the other [previous] house,” is how Gina sums it up. “I feel humbled by it because you find things, treasures. It makes you wonder about history and who was here before—how many other mothers sat on the porch nursing their children or grandmothers holding their babies? Newer homes just don’t have that ancestral connection. In ours, every window has something to offer. Now that value certainly trumps being plumb, level or square.”

[For more information, go to www.hickorylanefarmhouse.com]



The kitchen at Hickory Lane Farmhouse is the heart of the home.



Tom and Gina Kaufmann



This bathroom, above, is lined primarily with original tin from the early 1900s.

The bathtub, right, stamped with the date 1919, was luxurious for those times.

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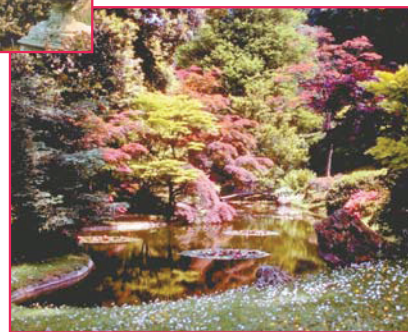
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Spring clean your closet

By ISABEL BRAVERMAN

Spring is the season of renewal and birth. It is a time when we get a fresh start in our lives, and the ever-popular phrase “spring cleaning” enters our vernacular (and hopefully our activity). If you’re anything like me, you often throw things into your closet without really paying any attention; it’s the ideal throw-stuff-in-and-shut-the-door kind of space. You might find yourself looking at your closet and shaking your head or averting your eyes from the horror. If you can’t find what you’re looking for, it’s time to tackle that project and spring clean your closet. If I can do it, you can do it too! Below are tips and tricks that I gathered from my research and also from doing it myself. I hope this serves as inspiration.

Set aside time

This is possibly the most important step, and definitely the one that should be done first. While you might find yourself getting a burst of motivation one day and begin to dig into the mess, you never know what obstacle you might encounter: you have to run to the grocery store, or go to that appointment. Look at your calendar and allot a time when you know you won’t have anything else going on for about two hours, and give yourself time to go through your entire wardrobe. Also, while this might seem like an arduous task, and certainly one that you may have been avoiding, I dare you to try and make it fun. Play some music and get inspired.

Make piles

As you go through your closet, take each item off the hanger and divide clothes into “yes,” “giveaway,” and “throwaway” piles. I cannot tell you how helpful making piles will be.

Make a shopping list as you go along

Plan ahead and make a spring shopping list as you go through your closet (then pat yourself on the back for thinking ahead). Ask yourself these questions: What do I have too much of and not enough of? Do I have a color palette for spring? Or a particular style in mind? Are there any spring trends that I want to try out? Do I find I have too many work clothes and not enough dress clothes (or vice versa)? Be specific when you write your list, for example: mid-length black dress, or lavender button-down shirt.

Follow the “two year rule”

If you haven’t worn it in two years, into the giveaway pile it goes. If it has sentimental value, like a wedding dress or college sweatshirt, but you never wear it, don’t keep it in your closet. Make sure it’s clean and store it properly in a box.

Be honest, ask the tough questions

Ask these questions about the clothes you’re on the fence about: Will I really wear this? What would I wear it with? Is it flattering and does it fit properly? Is it the image I want to project? If you answer “no” to these questions, put it in the giveaway pile.

Say goodbye to your stuff

Once you have a giveaway pile, sort the clothes, deciding how you will pass them on. If you don’t think you can make any money by re-selling an item, give it to local thrift stores or give it to a friend. One of my favorite ways to get rid of clothing is to organize a clothing swap. Gather some friends and ask them to bring their giveaways. Throw the clothes into a giant pile and “shop” till you drop. If you have designer or luxury items, consider selling online; check out the websites eBay, Bib and Tuck, Copious, Klury, Poshmark, Threadflip, Tradesy, Shop Hers and The Real Real. If an item is too stained or worn out, then throw it out, turn it into cleaning rags, or donate to fabric drives. It may be hard to get rid of something that was a gift or still has the price tag on it, but if you’ve never worn something it’s time to toss it. If you feel guilty about having splurged on something you’ve never worn, consider that you can make some money back on it, or give it to a friend who loves it. For example, many times when I do a closet haul, I give the castoffs to the girls at my dance studio. When I think of something I feel bad about parting with, I just think of their excited and happy faces when they see I’ve brought in a bag of hand-me-downs.

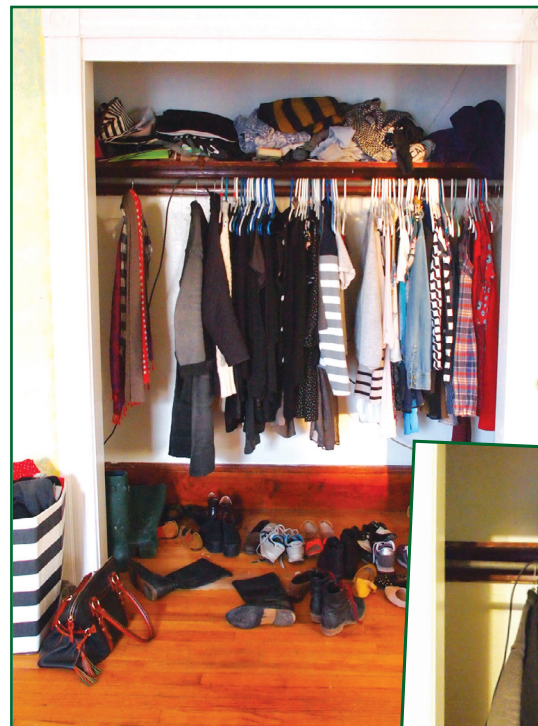
Organize

Now it’s time to put the stuff you’re keeping back in the closet. The best way to keep an organized closet, where you can easily find what you’re looking for, is to organize by color or type (for example, sweaters, dresses, professional, casual, etc.) Also, think about adding closet accessories and invest in shoe racks, boxes, and nice hangers. These will give your closet a put-together look and keep your shoes and clothing in good condition.

Photos by Isabel Braverman

As you can see, my shoes are in disarray (mostly due to my cat Iggy playing with them), there are piles of clothes and other things mounded on the top shelf, and nice things that should be hung up or stored are lying on the floor.

I cleaned up my shoe act and bought a shoe rack (but due to my vast collection of shoes, it looks like I’ll need to get one or two more). I took everything off the top shelf and organized it, and hung up my bag on the wall, which you can do with adhesive wall hooks.



When going through your closet, make “yes” and “no” piles.



Success! Organization complete and it feels good. Now it’s time to reward yourself; perhaps a shopping spree?

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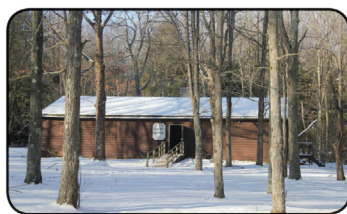
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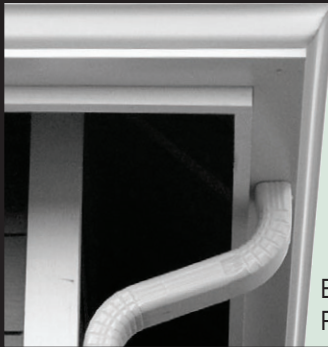
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Photos by Tammy Compton
Mark Weller, co-owner of Sterling Upholstery Co., Inc., is restoring a Victorian gentleman's chair, circa 1880-1890.

A 1920s coffee table has intricately carved swan table legs. Mark Weller is restoring the piece for a client.



Judy Shaffer, a longtime employee at Sterling Upholstery Co. Inc., says the biggest payback in reupholstering is an elated client.

By TAMMY COMPTON

“Is it Monday yet? Can I please go back to work?” asks Judy Shaffer, emphasizing the word “please.” For the past 18 years, Judy has worked side by side with Mark and Andee Weller, owners of Sterling Upholstery Co., Inc., located at 50 Neville Rd. in Moscow, PA. “We love what we do, and it’s very easy. We found what we’re good at,” says Mark.

What they do is restore and refinish furniture, from a favorite rest-your-weary-bones recliner to family heirlooms that have been passed down from generation to generation.

Now in its 22nd year, the business offers full restoration, refinishing and sales. And nestled within its walls is wife Andee’s specialty: Sterling Custom Picture Framing, specializing in needle points, shadow boxes and special requests.

Mark, who’s been working in the trades since the age of 15, left home for a time to serve in the U.S. Navy. Reaching the rank of E-5, he was a Russian linguist, a cryptology specialist during the Cold War, trained to listen in on Russian communications and interpret the level of threat. For four years, he proudly served his country before returning home to Northeast, PA and resuming his life’s work.

Walking around his well organized work room, it’s easy to see Mark’s love for his craft, for intricate carvings, and history. It’s as if he sees things that others might not. When he looks at an original piece, his fingers tend to follow the path of his eyes as he examines and admires someone else’s work.

Picking up an acanthus leaf carving in his shop, he explains it’s from an old buffet dating back to the turn of the last century or early 1900s. Though moisture and water damage have taken their toll on the original piece, Mark sees potential in its parts. “Somebody carved that and I can’t throw that out,” he says. The beautiful carvings will be repurposed to create an aesthetically pleasing, artistic piece by Mark. Along with a delicate, wooden heart, centered at its top, the acanthus leaf carvings will form the frame of an antique mirror.

He has a knack for creating something out of nothing. Take the one-of-a-kind wooden cabinet, holding a large fish tank in their showroom. Fashioned from six or seven different antiques, Mark used pieces from a chestnut church pew, a herter sofa, and even a piece from an old pump organ. The eye-catching piece can’t help but be admired. Mark humbly says it was completed within a month—“playtime” between customer projects—not that he has a lot of free time.

“We’re a seven-day shop,” explains Mark. “I wake up every morning with way too much to do.” A smile finishes his sentence. He truly loves what he does.

With clientele stretching from Connecticut to New York, from New Jersey to Pennsylvania, his company is kept quite busy. Projects keep flooding in as their workmanship spreads by word of mouth and industry awards. He’s worked on carriages and surreys, a buckboard dating back to the 1830s, and a rollercoaster car from the original amusement park in nearby Lake Ariel.

Each new customer brings a new piece of history and heritage. “Sentimental value trumps most of the pieces I do here,” Mark says.

His favorite pieces to work on are from the Victorian era, like the antique gentleman’s chair he’s currently restoring for a customer. “Solid poplar finished in cherry, circa 1880 to 1890,” he says, smoothing a hand over the wood.

“I have a reverence for pieces,” he says. There’s no need to explain.

An unusual piece on a nearby table catches one’s eye. An obvious carving of sorts, it demands a closer look. It’s the leg of a mar-

ble-topped coffee table waiting to be lovingly restored. On closer inspection, it reveals itself to be an intricately carved swan; all four legs will match once Mark is able to place them back together.

“A family piece pulled out of an attic,” Mark shares. To an onlooker, it may seem just a jigsaw of pieces, but Mark has already envisioned it fully restored. His excitement is contagious.

The payback for all of their hard work? “Seeing [the piece] when it’s done,” says Judy. “Seeing people appreciate it when they get it back.”

No matter how challenging a piece may be, Andee says, “You can’t give up hope.” After 15 years of marriage, she knows her husband’s capabilities and just how hard he’ll work to restore someone’s treasure.

“We do full restoration on pieces. We try to follow the original intent and the original design,” he says.

Highly skilled in vintage furniture, the talented trio can also refurbish late-model furniture. Perhaps you have a favorite recliner or sofa that you just don’t wish to part with. If it’s got a good frame, then it’s worth re-upholstering.

“This is the most economical way to go,” says Mark. Depending on fabric selection and re-upholstery costs, most furniture can be restored for less than half of its original cost. “It’ll be rebuilt solid as a rock for less than half price, quality for quality,” Mark explained. “An upholsterer has an option of choosing better materials [to restore the piece].”

When choosing fabric, Mark says the most important thing to consider is abrasion count. Abrasion count is determined by how the fabric rates in the double-rub test, a standard used to check the fabric’s durability. The fabric is passed through a machine and rubbed back and forth, counting as one double rub. “You definitely want the highest count of the double rub,” Mark explains. An abrasion count of 9,000 to 12,000 would be for very light duty, where you’re going more for the beauty of the fabric chosen and not necessarily durability. The higher the abrasion count means the more you can sit on that fabric before it will start to fray or disintegrate.

A medium-duty fabric would be one with an abrasion count above 15,000, whereas anything over 30,000 double rubs would be considered heavy-duty. For a customer looking for extreme durability, Mark recommends a commercial grade fabric. According to sources, a heavy-duty commercial grade fabric would be 100,000 double rubs or more.

An equally important aspect is fabric protection, such as Scotch-guard™. It’s important to know the stain-resistant properties put into the fabric to help resist dirt buildup, Mark explained.

As far as advice on re-upholstery estimates? Mark says, “Just because someone is a re-upholsterer doesn’t mean they do the same quality of work. There’s a difference between applying fabric and methods of application.” It’s important to check springs, glue joints, interior burlaps or materials, and the quality and density of the foam used. “An upholsterer has choice and control and can step into much better materials,” he said.

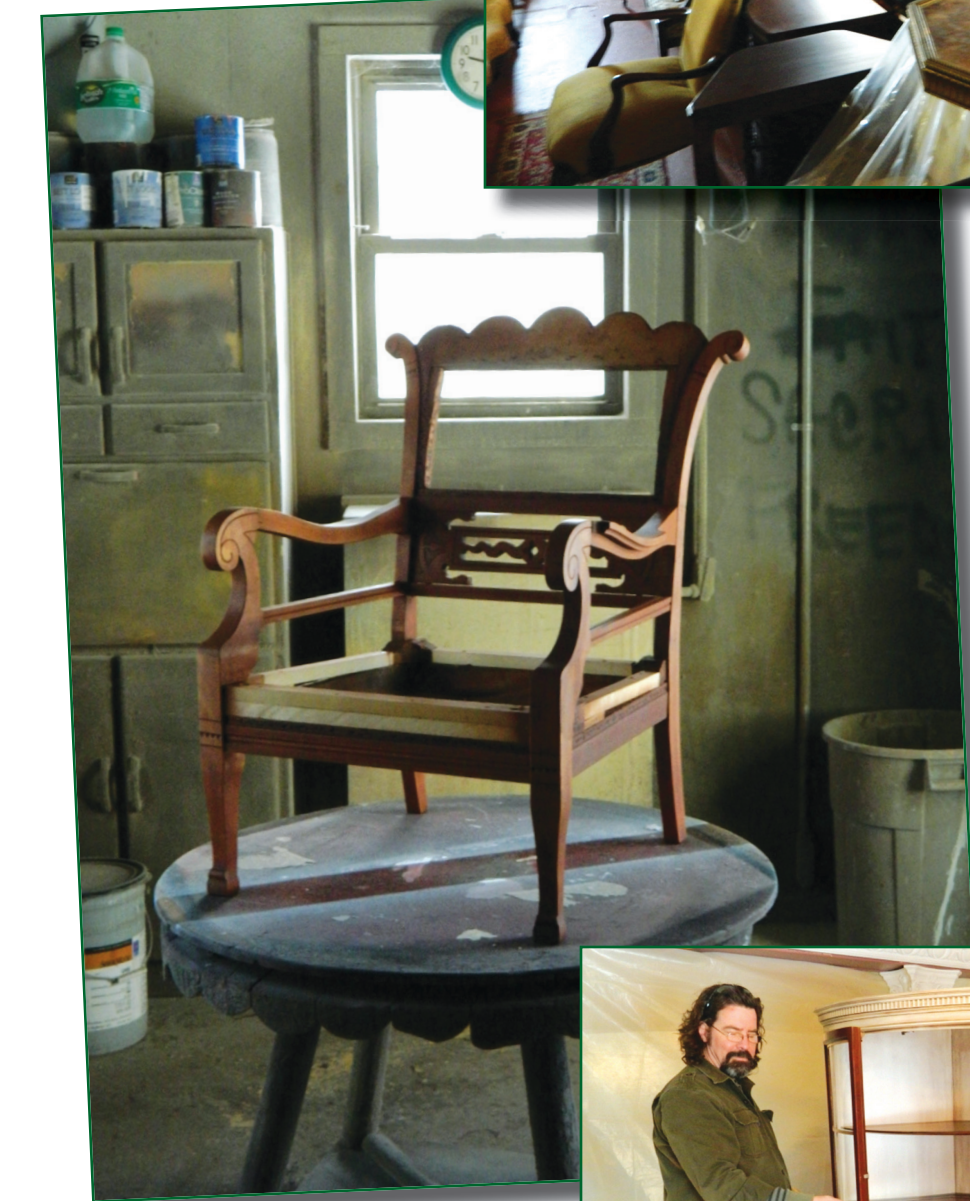
“My business is to build that piece of furniture better and make it last longer than industry standards,” Mark said. “We’re still doing that old-fashioned workmanship with old fashioned quality materials.”

When choosing an upholsterer, Mark recommends visiting their shop. “Take a look at work that’s being done at the time. How do they approach their work?” he said. Ask for testimonials or recommendations of past customers.

“You have to be wary of someone who gives you too high of a price or too low of a price. That’s done by research. Take a ride to their shop and see what they do,” Mark encourages.

To learn more about Sterling Upholstery Co. Inc., visit www.sterlingupholsteryco.com.

The Weller’s workshop on Neville Road in Moscow, PA features refinishing, restoration and antique sales.



A Victorian gentleman’s chair, circa 1880-1890, is being lovingly restored.

Mark and Andee Weller display a corner cupboard, circa 1940, for sale in their showroom. The Hepplewhite cupboard is a third or fourth reproduction of an original style from the late 1700s.



Diggin' the seeds

By FRITZ MAYER

In some years, the weather is warm enough in March that the fence around my garden can be inspected and repaired in anticipation of the upcoming gardening season. But this year, with snow still piled high, the garden gate has not even been opened yet, so garden activities thus far have been limited to starting seeds indoors.

The biggest challenge with starting seeds indoors is getting enough light to the seedlings once they emerge. A bright sunny window will sometimes do, but most windows aren't sunny enough for a long enough time, and space in front of them is limited.

I met the challenge of light by building incubation shelves out of two-by-fours and other wood to make a series of four shelves, with two, four-foot fluorescent light fixtures that hold a total of four 40-watt tubes suspended over each shelf.

The height of the lights is adjustable, so the distance from the plants can be varied as the seedlings grow, and the lights can be maintained at about three or four inches above the tops of the plants. Plants grown under these conditions will still need to be hardened before going outside indefinitely, which means they will have to be introduced to the full strength of the sun somewhat gradually. But plants grown in this manner will be much healthier, bigger and more mature than plants grown with insufficient light.

The next major challenge with starting seeds indoors is heat. With heating and energy costs soaring over the past years, many people no longer heat their homes as warmly as in the past, and for some seeds that's not a problem. Lettuce seeds, for instance, will easily germinate in temperatures as low as 50°F. But many seeds are not so accommodating.

Tomato and pepper seeds, for instance, prefer soil temperatures in the range of 75°F or higher to germinate. Seedling mats were created to raise the temperature of soil anywhere from 15°F to 20°F above the ambient temperature. Seedling mats are generally designed to accommodate two or four flats, which are the plastic trays that hold pots that hold the seedlings. A seedling mat placed under one flat will also provide heat to any flats that are located above the first flat, and so multiple flats can be heated with a single mat.

Another condition that needs to be controlled in seed starting is the amount of moisture in the potting soil or growing medium. Most seeds require moist soil to germinate but don't like soil that is soggy. I use flats that have no holes in the bottom and can be filled with about half an inch of water. The water will be drawn up by the growing medium in the pots, which do have holes in the bottom.

This method of watering the seeds and

seedlings from the bottom ensures that tender seedlings will not be jarred by pouring water from the top. Additionally, when seeds are first planted and seedlings are young, the flats may be covered with a clear plastic cap, which allows light to get to the seedlings, but keeps moisture from evaporating quickly; this reduces the amount of watering that is needed. These caps also hold warmth inside the flat.

Another element that needs attention in starting seeds is the potting soil or growing medium. There was a time when I bought the various ingredients myself and mixed them together in a wheelbarrow. I used a mix of about two parts peat moss, one part vermiculate and one part perlite, plus one part of compost from our compost pile.

I ultimately switched to pre-mixed starting medium for convenience sake; these products are quite good at ensuring germination. However, there are not a lot of nutrients in the mix, so a couple of weeks after most seeds have sprouted, they are transplanted into large pots, into a mixture of the prepared starting medium and compost.

Ultimately all of the seedlings will be planted in the garden. While my seedlings have been grown under fluorescent lights, most will still not be able to immediately withstand the strength of direct sunlight. The plants, therefore, must be gradually introduced to the sun—perhaps an hour on the first day, for instance, with increased exposure over the next four days or so, until they can be left out in the weather permanently.

In the case of my garden, the plants go from indoors, then into a greenhouse. After a few days inside, they can be planted directly out into the sun.

It's important to read seed packets so as not to start the seeds too early. If you plant them too early, the plants will become too large and they will be stressed and won't perform well. It's also important to know when to put plants out in the garden. **Some plants, like lettuce and snap dragons, can tolerate a frost and suffer no damage from a cold night. Other plants like tomatoes and sunflowers can be killed by a frost. It's also helpful to know which plants are tolerant of transplanting, and which are not.** Melons, squash, pumpkins and cucumbers do not like to have their roots disturbed, and often die after transplanting.

While seed starting may seem like a complicated process, it's quite easy if you remember that seedlings and plants have certain requirements to thrive: they need the right amount of light, water, nutrients and space, and those variables can be rather easily controlled.

Once you've mastered seed starting, the variety of plants that can be grown is seemingly unlimited.



TRR photo by Anne Hart

Our seedling nursery was formerly set up in our dining room, as this picture from a previous year shows. However, giving that the set-up is in place from March through early June, we moved the seed-starting operation to a more convenient place. The seed-starting shelves are made from two-by-fours and fluorescent lights. The incubation arrays are reused every year to start many varieties of flowers and vegetables.



The tray on the left is full of tiny ageratum flower seedlings that were started in the pots in which they're growing. The rudbeckia, or black-eyed susans, in the tray on the right, are very difficult to start; these seedlings were bought as tiny "plugs" from growers who specialize in difficult flowers. We then transplant them into these larger pots. As the season moves on they will be moved to the greenhouse and finally into the garden.



TRR photo by Fritz Mayer

Artichoke seeds are the earliest seeds I put into a starting medium. They were started in early January, because they need to grow as much as possible before being placed outside, where they can be exposed to temperatures below 50° for at least 500 hours. However, they need to be brought indoors when nighttime temperatures drop too low. This cold treatment "tricks" the plant into acting as if it is in its second year of life, and leads to the production of buds in the first year of growth rather than in the second year, which is the plant's normal behavior. Winters here are too cold for artichoke plants to survive more than one season.

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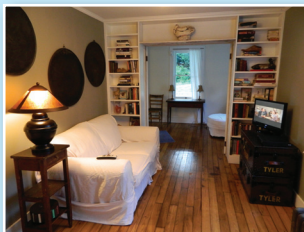


L A Z B O Y

Country Home Restoration designer, Ramona Jan, is flattered when her clients call her "scrappy" as she elegantly re-purposes much of what is already available in their home.

She always works closely with her clients in helping them realize their vision with taste and affordability. For the past ten years, Ramona has specialized in restoring and decorating many of the pre-war country farmhouses that dot the Upper Delaware River. Prior to moving to the area, Ramona was Assistant to Citibank's current Art Curator, Suzanne Lemakis. She was also a finalist on HGTV's Design Star.

Ramona can be reached at 570-224-7511.



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The green, green grass of home

Sowing, growing & eating asparagus

By LAURA SILVERMAN

After enduring a punishing winter, there is nothing more welcome than the first signs of spring poking up from the impossibly barren earth. Out in nature, knotweed, ferns and nettles are among the first things to appear. In my garden, it is the incipient tender green of sorrel, rhubarb and angelica. This year, I hope to be adding asparagus to that list, because we planted a patch last spring. Although you can forage for asparagus in the wild—the trick is to recognize the spent fronds from the year before—there is something special about being able to harvest them right outside your own back door.

Asparagus officinalis is an herbaceous flowering perennial, so once it's in, its long green fingers come up every year. Native to most of Europe, northern Africa and western Asia, it is widely cultivated and quite an easy crop for the home gardener, often staying hardy for more than 20 years. The key is to set your patch up properly. A sunny, well-drained part of the garden is best, and raised beds work well. Plant asparagus in soil with a pH of 6.5 to 7.5. From seed, it takes six weeks to germinate and adds an additional year of growing time before the first harvest, so consider starting from the root masses, known as "crowns." Select those that are fresh and firm; prune any dry sections before planting.

Crowns should be planted while they are dormant, as early as late winter, though the ground has to be workable. As long as they are covered with about two inches of soil, they won't suffer in hard freezes. They can be planted as late as mid-spring, if plump, healthy roots are still available. If you want to plant more than a few crowns, you'll need to dig a trench, ideally deep enough to accommodate a layer of compost or other organic material beneath the crowns. Plantings shallower than 8 inches will yield lots of spindly spears, while those planted deeper produce fewer but fatter spears.

Space the crowns so you get as many plants as possible in a small area, while still allowing for good air circulation to protect against disease, about 14 inches apart in rows that are at least 3 feet apart. Allot about 10 plants for each person in the family who loves asparagus, so you can harvest enough at one time for a meal. With the increased vigor of the newly available hybrid varieties, gardeners can harvest for about two weeks during the first season, one year after planting. A light harvest seems to stimulate the plant to produce more spears. The second year, you may get a full 6-week harvest, provided the average size of the spears is larger than a pencil.

Once you've established your asparagus bed, the hard part is done. During the year your plants are getting established, it's important to maintain a good level of moisture in the soil. Hybrid varieties resist disease, so all that's left are the usual chores—weed control and pest management. The asparagus beetle can nibble on spears and lay dark eggs along the surface. Scrape these off with your fingernail.

Asparagus will keep growing throughout the summer but at some point you need to allow some of the spears to mature into feathery ferns. These should not be removed from asparagus plants until after several killing freezes as they transfer carbohydrates and energy to the roots, a process essential to the development of spears for next year's harvest.

There are few things that evoke spring more vividly than the fresh, grassy taste of just-picked asparagus. Once you've sated your appetite for them simply steamed



Photos by Laura Silverman

Wild asparagus



Cooked asparagus with ramp relish

and cloaked in butter, eat them raw, thinly sliced and dressed with a citrusy vinaigrette; or roasted, which brings out the sweetness and intensifies the flavor. Wrapping them in prosciutto first takes this to a whole new level. Asparagus pairs very well with other spring flavors, including new potatoes, morels, peas, ramps and green garlic, as well as tender herbs like tarragon, mint and chervil. It also has an affinity for all things dairy—an excellent reason to pile on the butter, cream, yogurt or cheese. A stack of asparagus sautéed in butter and topped with a quivering poached egg make a perfect breakfast, lunch or dinner. Cook a bunch and purée it with buttermilk for a smooth soup that's wonderful hot or chilled. Serve a platter topped with a tart relish of chopped pickled ramps and parsley. Though it might seem implausible, try dipping blanched spears in an Asian-inflected sauce made with peanut butter, lime juice, soy sauce, chile flakes and a pinch of sugar. And, one day, when you find yourself with a great bounty of fresh asparagus, put up some pickles. They're delicious just out of the fridge a few days after you've made them, but even better pulled from the pantry shelf in the middle of winter. There's nothing that tastes more of spring.

Roasted Asparagus

Serves 4

2 pounds asparagus
Extra virgin olive oil
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
Lemon wedges
Parmesan cheese
Garlic mayonnaise, optional

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Toss trimmed asparagus in olive oil to coat lightly, season with salt and pepper and set in a shallow baking dish no more than two stalks deep, with a few tablespoons water. Cover and bake 15 minutes. Remove the cover and continue baking until asparagus is tender when pierced with a knife, 10-15 minutes depending on its size.

Serve accompanied by lemon wedges, thin shavings of Parmesan and/or garlic mayonnaise.

Cold Asparagus Soup

Serves 4

1 bunch asparagus
2 shallots, peeled and chopped
2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 cup real buttermilk
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
Sea salt
Olive oil, to finish
Minced chives, as garnish

Trim asparagus, discarding woody ends, and cut into 1" pieces. Combine pieces with minced shallot in a large medium pot and add water to barely cover. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce flame and simmer until very tender, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

Transfer to a Vitamix or food processor, add coriander and buttermilk, and blend until velvety smooth. Add a little more water or buttermilk as needed to achieve the texture you like. Stir in lemon juice and a couple of pinches of salt. Refrigerate until cold.

When ready to serve, pour soup into small bowls or rocks glasses, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle on a little coarse sea salt and some chives. Eat with a spoon or drink up!

Pickled Asparagus

Two 24-ounce jars

2 pounds asparagus, trimmed
6 dill sprigs
1 quart apple cider vinegar
¼ cup coarse sea salt
2 tablespoons sugar
12 dried *chiles de árbol*
12 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tablespoons whole black peppercorns
1 tablespoon mustard seeds
1 tablespoon coriander seeds

Place the asparagus and dill in two 24-ounce containers or jars. In a large saucepan, combine the vinegar with 1 quart of water and the remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring to dissolve the salt and sugar. Let stand at room temperature until the brine is lukewarm. Pour over the asparagus, cover and refrigerate overnight for fresh pickles or 3 days for stronger pickles; process in a hot water bath to preserve longer.



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Wonderful 3BR/2BA, enjoy the good life Lake View, Lake Rights residence landscaped so no yard work is necessary. The living room features tavern-grade red oak. The kitchen bar and all windows were custom built on premises. Upstairs floor is red pine and all improvements were made in top-dollar fashion. Home boasts a beautifully remodeled bathroom and the basement is finished with knotty pine walls and a stone floor. Featured is the "whole house" Generac propane generator as well as Hot Tub in the middle of the Trex deck overlooking Lake Jeff. Easy quick walk to the lake. Great property priced to sell.

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MLS 37897: Offered at \$299,000



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Creating inspiring spaces in our homes

By LAURA KING

Having a place to call home is meaningful to most of us. As a poetic ideal, it's a welcoming environment where we can slip into baggy pants at the end of the day and leave the mad world behind to "just be" without pretense. It's a place where we can rest, recover and recharge ourselves, as well as our smart phones.

In actuality, home tends to be a lot less serene than that. The commitments we make on every front clamor day and night for our attention. Our addictions to noise and technologies combined with our go-go-go lifestyles take a significant toll. Unless we deliberately cultivate a special environment within it, our homes become an extension of our outside world—a kaleidoscope of physical and mental busyness.



Photo by Laura King

This cozy spot was created as a tribute to love with various objects and a meditation cushion in front of a bright window.

Home as a sanctuary

"If we recognize the benefits of having home serve as a personal sanctuary and refuge, then we need a strong intention to claim it as such," says Laury Naron, psychotherapist and Andian energy healer. "We give ourselves a special gift, if we know we can regain equilibrium and reconnect with our true selves once we walk through our front door."

Creating a designated place at home to soothe our body, mind and soul doesn't require a big financial investment or the help of an architect or interior designer. There is no need for our restorative area to be elaborate, expensive or grand.

"My sacred space is a corner area of my bedroom near a window, where I can see nature—the changing sky, trees, a



Photo by Laura King

Three small Buddhas sit on top of a tiny book that has inspirational quotes penned inside, a perfect size for traveling.

hawk soaring. Most importantly, I have an agreement with myself that I do not do head work there, and I stick with it," Laury shares.

Other than feeling good to us, there is no right or wrong way to design a contemplative corner, personal altar, or cozy nook at home. Inspiring personal spaces, small and large, come into existence easily when we simply connect from the heart with the things that give us joy.

"Avoid the trap of holding off to make an honored space in your home until it is perfect—forget it!" Laury laughs. "Gather a few things together that you love and call that your beginning. Then add and revise as objects speak to you," she said. As an intimate expression of our inner self, our special space can be expected to evolve as we do.

Inspiration for our special space

So what might we feel drawn to include in our personal refuge? Consider a cozy chair and small shelf or table for starters. Add a pretty light, symbolic of the illuminated self. Be generous with creature comforts, like soft throws and pillows. A sketchpad, books of poetry or religion, knitting basket, soothing music source

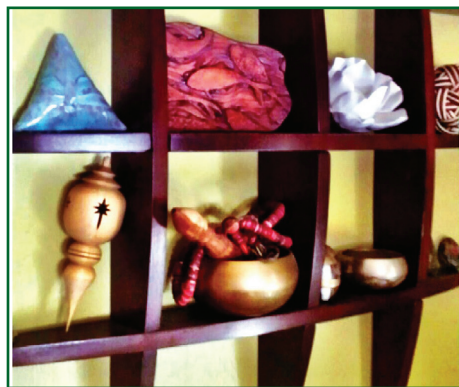


Photo by Ellie Bragha

Natural and ritual objects gathered on a shelf create a "personal power place" in a hallway.

and natural objects that celebrate beauty, spirituality and nature can help direct us inward.

We may also wish to include a statue or art image of a religious figure, or a photo of someone we see as a teacher or guide in our space, wanting to be informed by them on some level. Following Eastern practices, we could incorporate offerings—water bowls, incense, candies, flowers and crystals are traditional. Lighting a candle or ringing a soft bell when we enter and leave our sanctuary could signal us to be fully present to receive the gifts it has to offer us.

By designating a supportive environment where we can engage in whatever quiet activities our heart knows we need, we take steps to connect with our highest selves and our inner treasury of wisdom, love and joy.

Remembering who we are

"Daily quiet time is so important for our personal journey and our relationships," said Rev. Pat Filiault, a retired Unity minister. "The Gospel of Mark includes one of my favorite verses, 'Come ye apart awhile and rest.' It's special advice, even if all you can find are a few meditative minutes in your favorite chair."

As opposed to one designated space, Tammy Sola, master Reiki practitioner and spiritual counselor, places objects and assemblages for contemplation throughout her home, "to catch the eye and call to the soul."

"I have lots around to speak to me, and they tend to be simple," she says. "At times, I make more permanent altars for special prayer work, but big always gets complicated. I generally create arrangements without much fuss, and follow the seasons. A bowl of lemons and a sprig of mint. A seedling I can watch grow. A collection of found objects—beach sand, shells and a child's ball; a photo of the hospital I was born in and my husband's baby shoes; anything that grabs me, brings a smile and calls me to remember,



Photo by Laura King

This offering collection of glittery glass objects represents wisdom light.

'Ah, what a gift to be alive!' or, 'Yes, this is who I really am.'"

Sharing our peace

Native American spiritual leader Jimi Castillo asks us to think broadly, and, while we may have one area that we use for prayer or contemplation, declare our entire home to be a sacred, healing space. "We can turn our house, which is just a structure, into a home by making it always welcoming, nurturing and respectful. One of my favorite expressions is, 'If you see a person without a smile, give him one.' I want my home to feel like a hug whenever someone walks in the door."

Following Native American ritual practices, Jimi suggests that four times a year, perhaps solstices and equinoxes, we engage in a small ceremony to "clean our homes of negativity that may have entered and invite in loving energy for a fresh start." Smudging doors, windows and drains with sage or sprinkling water are traditional rituals for cleansing, but, since "sacred" and "special" are personal concepts after all, designing a ceremony that resonates in our hearts for this purpose is appropriate, too.

It's a fact we may not often consider, but the most important work we ever do happens within us. Creating a sacred area—and attitude—at home can be the foundation for a beautiful and peaceful life.

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From flea market find to art gallery

Dee Rivera thrives on the art of repurposing

By JANE BOLLINGER

Finding inspiration in items other people get rid of, mixed media artist Dee Rivera creates unique *objects d'art* that might best be described as three-dimensional collages. Her work is all about putting together parts of found trinkets and everyday items—pieces of jewelry, a handle from an old drawer, a candle holder, an old cheese board, vintage buttons, broken watches, wooden and tin boxes. “I’m always looking for things that have an interesting texture, or shape, or color,” she said of her flea market excursions. Once she’s found her treasure, she takes to her studio in the Bronx or sometimes to what she calls her “bone yard” behind her home near Narrowsburg; there she lets items weather or rust, and in good weather, she works there outdoors, too.

“I think I am a junk collector,” she reflected recently, “and in my mind junk is treasure waiting to be re-purposed. It brings me so much joy to take an old piece of wood and a few pieces of rusty metal and make a work of art. The transformation is like making magic. Once the piece is completed I am off to the next project and the magic starts all over again.”

When Rivera is ready to start a new piece, she lays everything out on her work table and starts combining elements. “It’s almost like writing poetry,” she said. “You put in a word and then you know you have to change it. For me, when I look at a piece that’s not finished, I feel like there’s no reason for that piece to exist, and so I just keep working until the piece tells me when it’s ready.”

Rivera is self-taught when it comes to her artwork, but her background in the fashion world served her well, starting her on the path to becoming the artist she is today. “I was a pattern maker in the fashion business, and I did go to fashion school. Being in fashion and seeing jewelry and accessories all the time and seeing people design these things was fascinating.”

In fact, Rivera started out making her own jewelry. “But I didn’t find making earrings and necklaces to be all that exciting,” she said. Still, she couldn’t shake her



Dee Rivera



In this piece, titled “In Times of Trouble Mother Mary Comes to Me,” the Mary figure was the centerpiece of an ebony necklace, the halo behind her is a hoop earring, the orange material is a coral necklace. The artist says: “This box was made after a very dear friend passed away of cancer. The coral represents the tears his mother shed. Behind the halo is a piece of black ebony signifying the dark cloud that hung over her head at her son’s passing, and the white mother-of-pearl circle represents the peace she received from her prayers. Mother Mary to me represents all women and the suffering we go through. In the end it is love that gets us through.”



The artist brings found items back to life in the form of three-dimensional artworks.

fascination with jewelry, and soon started collecting vintage pieces, reusing parts of them to make collages. “Today, when I see something with a design that interests me, I say to myself, ‘Well, that’s nice, but I can make it into something else. I can turn a button into an owl, or anything else I like.’”

“Old wooden boxes always excited me,” she said, “and tin boxes, too.” Rivera turns many of these small boxes into little shrines—take, for example, her “Blessed Mother Rusty Tin Shrine Found Object Assemblage” (www.etsy.com/shop/Benamaris). And then there’s her “Buddha Shrine Found Objects Assemblage.”

Rivera also has a special attraction for making angels, each one different (www.etsy.com/shop/Benamaris). “Since my work is assemblage from repurposed materials, my pieces are like a moment in time,” Rivera explained. “You can come close to repeating it, but no two items can ever be the same.”

“People find what I do to be curious and interesting. The work has a kind of spiritual feel to it. The fact is that it was once something else, something that someone discarded, and I am able to bring it to life again and do something different with it, it isn’t junk anymore. People seem to find inspiration in that.”

Rivera has shown her work locally at the DVAA’s gallery in Narrowsburg and hopes to show some works there again this summer.

What’s next for Dee Rivera? For now she’s studying to be a metalsmith with the goal of making free-standing sculptures one day. “One of my aims is to create a big sculpture in rusty metal and let the elements add to its basic form. It’s a vision, but that is how everything starts.”



Rivera reclaims not only flea market treasures, but also works with items found in nature, as with this small wooden box (seen in closeup at the far right).



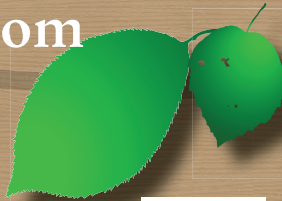
Photos by Elizabeth McGee

This box is a commissioned work, with items found on a walk in the woods. The skull is a placeholder for a found fossil that will be added later.

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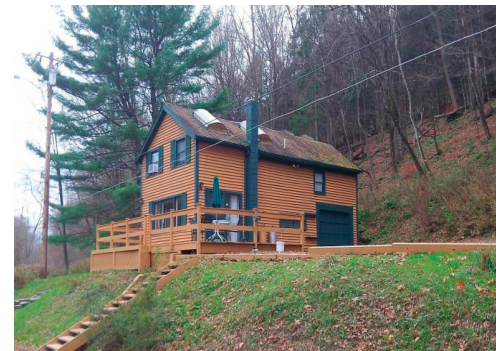
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