

# OUR COUNTRY HOME



**A stable becomes a country paradise**

**The old-fashioned hardware store**

**What contractors wish you knew**

**... and more**

## Letter from the editor

With the promise of spring comes a time to consider rebirth, rejuvenation, renewal, resurrection and re-growth even in our country homes. This first issue of 2017 is all about building, buying and renovating, particularly as it pertains to first rites.

Are you thinking of starting a new business or buying a first home? I quizzed two experts, Gina Molinet and Lynne Carlin, of RM Farm Realty in Livingston Manor, NY, for their tips on what to look for during real estate tours, both residential and commercial. It's handy stuff I wish I had known about when I bought my house. Perhaps you want to "grow your own home," as in building it from the ground up. If so, check out Annemarie Schuetz's article on Jeffrey McMahon, and discover how he and his design team build green homes with a connection to land and community.

Renewals can come in many forms, including DIY home renovations. A visit to your local hardware store, says writer Wallis Brandt, will not only supply you with the right tools, but proprietors there are also apt to help you with some sound advice. And sometimes that advice includes hiring a professional.

If you haven't re-birthed yourself as a carpenter quite yet, there are plenty of able contractors ready to help you. They've told their stories from "life on the job" to "what to look for in a contractor" in an article by our newest writer, Joe Cooke—a must-read for new and old homeowners alike.

Our cover story, "Artists in Residence," by Jonathan Charles Fox, follows the work of two amazing artists with a bent for interior design—Walter Kenul and Janet Rutkowski—as they turn a once active stable into their 1,400-square-foot dream home.

Ramona Jan  
Section editor



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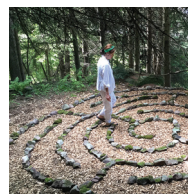
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Cover photograph by Jonathan Charles Fox. Interior of the Kenul/Rutkowski house. See article on page 14.

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# Touring real estate

What to look for when you're walking through a potential property

By RAMONA JAN

Property on Long Island, especially in the Hamptons, has always been pricey, so when Hamptons resident Gina (pronounced Jenna) Molinet saw an opportunity to buy a dairy farm in Upstate New York, she grabbed it. It was 1983 when she boldly said goodbye to her job as director of the Hampton Day School and moved to the Catskills.

A graduate of the University of Chicago with a Masters in education from Bank Street School, Molinet at first angled for a full-time teaching job, but they were hard to come by. So she picked up a stint teaching math on a part-time basis at Sullivan County Community College. Molinet also began working for Kaaterskil Realty in Monticello, a magical—even inspiring—turn of events, as it prompted her to eventually earn a broker's license. In 2003, Molinet opened RM Farm Real Estate, which is named

after her much admired older brother Roland Molinet, though he was never a realtor. At RM Farm Real Estate, one can tour both residential and commercial properties. Molinet and her associate Lynne Carlin are experts in helping new and experienced buyers understand what to look for when touring residential and/or commercial properties.

"It's a real education for the lifetime apartment dweller who is buying a house for the first time," explained Carlin. "They usually don't know anything about wells and septic systems, so we have to begin to educate them. We have to also help them to deal with financing, getting a mortgage, licensed home inspections, lawyers and all of that. We tell them about the furnace, draining the pipes, how the utilities function, how many amps are in the electric, does the electric look new and all the issues that go with a home that, say, might be just a weekend place."



TRR photo by Ramona Jan

Owner Gina Molinet, left, and associate broker Lynne Carlin pose in the sunny office of RM Farm Real Estate on Main Street in Livingston Manor, NY.



Contributed photos

Here in the Catskills homes range from rustic cabins to cottages to lakefront estates and everything in between.



## TIPS FOR TOURS

### Residential:

As a very basic rule, Molinet and Carlin recommend noting and asking the following when walking through a residential property:

1. Utilities: During the home inspection the water should be turned on for you. Ask if the heating system is filled with water or anti-freeze. Make sure systems function by running the faucets.

2. Storage space: Where is it? In the attic? Basement? Are there enough closets for you?

3. Location: What are you looking for in a location? A view? Water access? Hunting? Are you looking for a remote property or do you prefer a close proximity to amenities like grocery, library, banks and neighborhoods?

4. Maintenance: Does the property need to be snow plowed? Will it need lawn maintenance? Is the driveway very steep?

5. Roof: How old is it? What condition is it in? Is it brand new? Is it steel or shingle? Is it halfway through its lifespan, or will you have to re-roof right away?

Most importantly, a professional home inspection will give you a list of priorities of what needs to be done.

### Commercial:

"Commercial space has a lot to do with whatever the person thinks they can do with the space," says Molinet. "We've sold a few properties on Main Street and a few on Pleasant Street such as Keiser Equipment Company, which is a 36,000-square-foot facility." When looking at commercial space, Molinet and Carlin urge clients to add proximity to main thoroughfares as well as available parking space to the above basic tips. Of course, there's more to consider such as zoning and for some, trout fishing, but the above-mentioned tips are essential.

### In general:

One additional suggestion is to find one realtor with whom you connect and to stick with that person. In this way, you'll be best served. "When somebody buys a house there's a whole lot of value system that goes into their selection—people's aesthetics, their child-rearing practices, and their economics," notes Molinet, "and we'll shepherd you through the entire process."



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# The old-fashioned hardware store

*Hardly a relic*

By WALLIS BRANDT

Among today's name-brand franchises remain small but hearty businesses that are typically family-run. These welcoming stores are filled with familiar faces and friendly, personal service, which some say is the very factor that separates them from the larger conglomerates. There's no denying that "old fashioned" hardware stores top the list of essential neighborly businesses. First stop on our tour is Kohler Lumber located in Kohlertown, that short stretch of Main Street just before it enters downtown proper in Jeffersonville, NY.

"Kohlertown was here before Jeffersonville, because Kohler built most of the houses around here," explains Eric Kubenik, assistant vice president of Kohler Lumber. "Really, it's a gray area that starts somewhere at the Dollar Tree and ends at the horse ring." And just about smack dab in the middle of that gray area (called Kohlertown) sits Kohler Lumber, a business originally started in 1907.

Kubenik's father bought Kohler Lumber in 1975, and eventually his eldest son, Henry, became president of the business. Henry's son Jared is the office manager and Pat Hammett is the foreman. Friendly personal service gives them a leg up on Home Depot and the like.

"There was no Home Depot when my father bought Kohler," said Kubenik. "But when it did open, initially it impacted us because a lot of guys went over there just to check it out. But then they drifted back because they missed the service." As part of their service, Kohler Lumber delivers anywhere—even New Jersey and Pennsylvania—for free. And any of the Kubeniks will gladly walk with you into the recesses of their store just to help you find the right couple of nails needed to finish that DIY project you've got going on. They'll even draw you some diagrams or look at the ones you've penciled just to help you get it done right.

In a price comparison, Kohler beat Home Depot in fasteners, screws, molding, pine and many other items. "We have everything," notes Eric Kubenik, "Lumber, shingles, sheet rock, hardware, carpet, paint, flooring and Wolf kitchen cabinets, which can be semi-customized. And we offer many services that Home Depot does not offer such as repairing and glazing windows, and we make custom moldings." Plus there's no overwhelming feeling when one goes to an old-fashioned hardware store like Kohler Lumber. In fact, it's very cozy and welcoming not unlike Will Hardware in Livingston Manor, NY.

A window full of geraniums, some "outsider art" in the form of exploded cans of foam, a good dog named Max and the very mellow-mannered John Checchia (rhymes with papaya) greet you as you enter Will Hardware. "Will Hardware is one of the oldest hardware



The crew at Kohler Lumber includes Henry Kubenik, left, Pat Hammett, Jared and Eric Kubenik.

TRR photos by Wallis Brandt

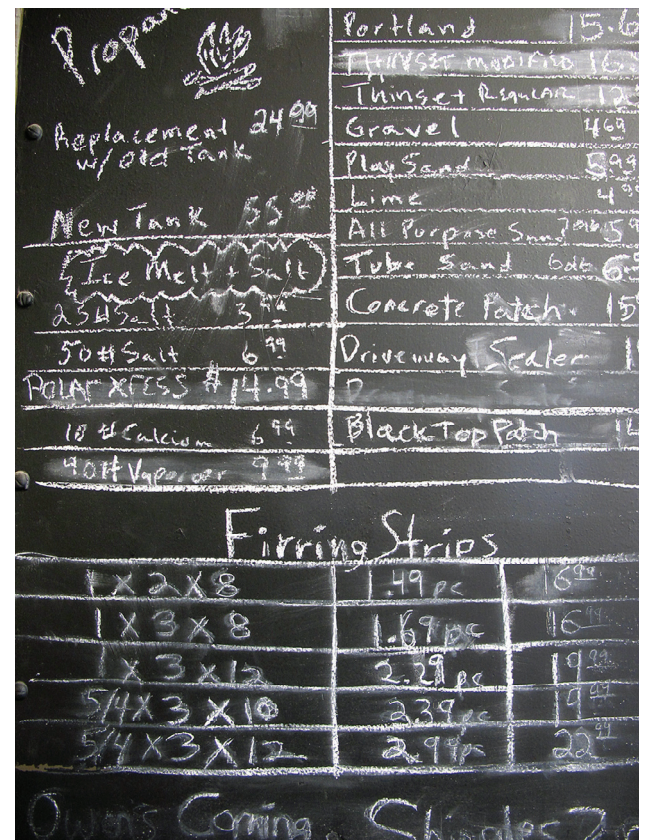


Nail bins at Kohler display unboxed nails sold by the pound.

stores in New York State, dating back to about 1874, and the building it's housed in is the oldest structure on Main Street," says Binghamton-born Checchia. But the Will family was traditional and "not ready for modern display," so Checchia removed many of the outdated units to optimize the space when he bought the business in 1992.

"This is a do-it-yourself hardware store," says Chec-

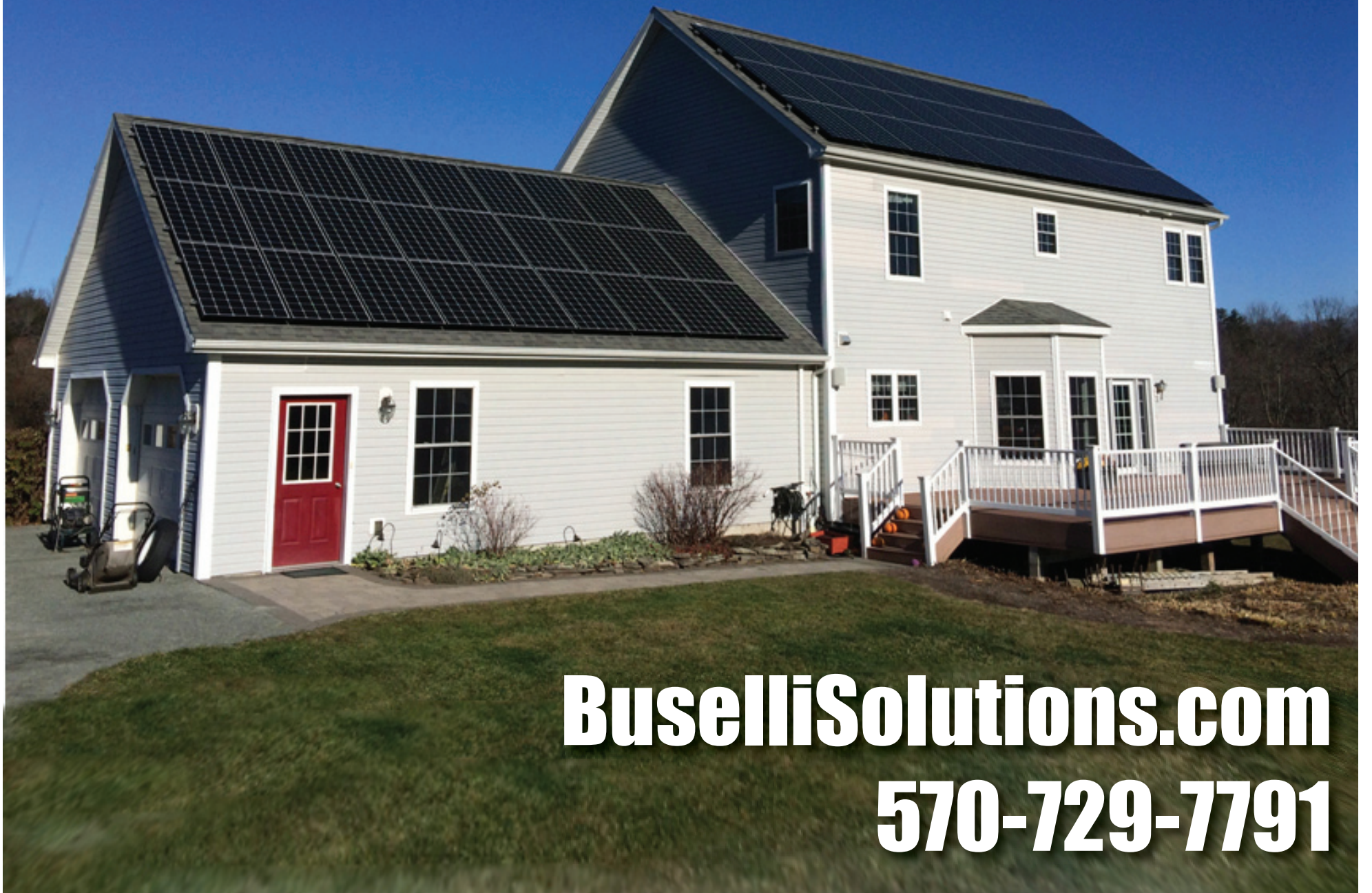
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At Kohler, a chalkboard reflects changing prices on many items.



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## HARDWARE

*Continued from page 6*

chia. "People come in and they have questions or they know what they want, and we do everything to advise them inside the home and [with the] easy stuff outside, too." No matter whether it's plumbing, electrical, painting, repairs, or lighting, Checchia will advise homeowners on simple repairs they can do themselves. "If they don't know what they need, they can just bring something in, like a part or something, and I'll guide them in their repair. For light construction that doesn't require heavy welding, structural steel, concrete or multi-story dwellings, the trades know that I am here."

For plumbing, Checchia carries black iron, galvanized and copper pipe and fittings as well as the newer construction materials such as Pex and PVC. He also keeps on hand modern faucets and shower heads. For lighting, he stocks all the basic electrical switches and boxes including round boxes for ceiling fans as well as Romex cable, lamp cord and plugs. In the carpentry section there are light hand tools, power tools and numerous accessories including work gloves and top quality tool belts and bags. Will Hardware also has a housewares section filled with small appliances, cast-iron skillets and Dutch ovens, brooms, mops and an array of specialty cleaning products that you won't find at any Dollar General. At Will Hardware there's a seasonal lawn and garden section for outdoor living that includes charcoal, smoking chips, barbeque utensils, wild birdseed and birdfeeders. Checchia cuts glass on premises up to 36 inches square. He also cuts house keys and sells Master and Schlage locks.

Besides your average homeowner, all the trades patronize Will Hardware and "when they come, I'm here for them," says Checchia, who saves just about everyone a long drive elsewhere and a lot of headaches. Just like Kohler Lumber and all the other old fashioned hardware stores around these parts, Will Hardware is here for all of us.



Proprietor John Checchia and Max outside of Will Hardware in Livingston Manor, NY



A bevy of healthy geraniums cultivated mostly from seed fill the front window at Will Hardware.

### Area hardware stores worth visiting:

Kohler Lumber  
5023 State Route 52  
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Will Hardware  
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Livingston Manor, NY 12758  
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Narrowsburg Lumber  
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# The River Reporter's 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual 2017 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

## THE BEST BALLOT IS ALL NEW!

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 2017 WINNERS in our annual Readers' Choice Awards "BEST" supplement in January 2018. Remember, you can always vote online at [riverreporter.com/trr-best-2016](http://riverreporter.com/trr-best-2016)

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 Bakery \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bar \_\_\_\_\_  
 Barbecue \_\_\_\_\_  
 Brisket \_\_\_\_\_  
 Beer Selection \_\_\_\_\_  
 Breakfast Buffet \_\_\_\_\_  
 Breakfast Menu \_\_\_\_\_  
 Brunch \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Candy Shop \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Coffee Shop \_\_\_\_\_  
 Deli \_\_\_\_\_  
 Desserts \_\_\_\_\_  
 Diner \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dinner \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dinner Specials \_\_\_\_\_  
 Early Bird Specials \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Fried Chicken \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Happy Hour \_\_\_\_\_  
 Health Food Store \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hoagie \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Cooking Restaurant \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Ice Cream Shop \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Japanese Restaurant \_\_\_\_\_  
 Latin Restaurant \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Lunch \_\_\_\_\_  
 Martini \_\_\_\_\_  
 Menu \_\_\_\_\_  
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 New Restaurant \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Pizza Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Place to Have a Cocktail \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Ribs \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Electrician \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Emergency Services \_\_\_\_\_  
 Excavator \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Fitness Center \_\_\_\_\_  
 Flooring/Carpet Store \_\_\_\_\_  
 Friendly Staff \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Furniture Store \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Clothing Store Women \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Farmers Market \_\_\_\_\_  
 Flea Market \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Formal Wear \_\_\_\_\_  
 General Store \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gift Shop \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grocery Store \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Music Store \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Party Supply Store \_\_\_\_\_  
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# Artists in residence

By JONATHAN CHARLES FOX

One could think of Barryville's husband-and-wife team Walter Kenul and Janet Rutkowski as "weekend warriors" when touring their country home, which took "10 years of weekends" to renovate and complete. Situated on 24 acres, the original structures were an active stable, housing up to 12 horses, and a 1,400-square-foot building created by the original owner to resemble an "Old West saloon" that never quite got off the ground.

No strangers to design and renovation, Rutkowski and Kenul had already tackled a project of epic proportions in the form of their BFD Firehouse Studios in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, which originated in 1985. That project put the pair on a life-long journey, combining her career as a fine artist and his as a musician with a bent for interior design.

"We were looking for a weekend retreat," Janet said, "thinking that it might lead to a permanent move to the country. And the enormous stable, with a poured concrete floor, was clearly a great space for the proposed studio. That's what sold us on the property, and we purchased it in '95."

Starting with one gigantic building, the pair set about planning how it could become their dream home. Following their son's acceptance into a prestigious school in New York, they decided to split their time between residences, thinking that the country estate would provide much needed "down time." Walter, who designed and built much of the furniture in the house, decided to tackle the task of creating the outdoor terraces as well, while Janet set about planning the metal work and studio. Although they have "very different sensibilities," Janet acknowledged that their "paths cross sometimes," which led to a synergy that is evident throughout the completed 3,400-square-foot structure, culminating in a stunning blend of modern design and countrified simplicity.

As both of their design concepts and disciplines evolved over the years, so did the house. And while Rutkowski's work grew in scale, Kenul's love of repurposing antiquated found objects from renovation projects in the city provided "great opportunities" to breathe new life into discarded materials waiting to be reborn.

Pointing out the **kitchen cupboards** [1] that he had stored for a few years, Kenul shared, "I love mixing old and new, and turning the negative into a positive. There is an inherent beauty underneath what might be perceived



2.

as ugly and no longer viable." Kenul stripped the layers of paint off of the metal cupboards, discovering a beautiful patina and cool "bullet hinges" [2] that represent the genius of the original designer, flipped them upside down and installed them in the light, airy kitchen that serves **one end of the great room** [3], which is replete with a flagstone fireplace, hand-hewn wooden floors and windows, windows everywhere.

The atrium is a perfect example of the couple's teamwork. "Archi-



1.



3.

tect John Yuan, an associate of I.M. Pei, designed the addition for us," Kenul said, "and the atrium is where 'East meets West.'" While Janet designed the **metal insert in the floor** [4], Walter created the marble surround, and the pair found **the intricate metal doors** [5] in an antique shop in historic Williamsburg.



4.



5.

The glass-enclosed atrium, connecting the two portions of the house, is called a "knuckle," and overlooks one of the stone terraces that surround the house, **while a long hallway appears to go on forever** [6], with travertine marble floors leading to the bedrooms, all of which are complete suites with attached baths.



6.



Rutkowski's sculptures are scattered throughout the massive studio adjacent to the house, which was once home to 12 horses and was a working stable before the new owners began renovations.



Now that the kids are adults, bedrooms like this are part of the addition that welcomes guests who spend weekends and holidays with the artists.

Continued on page 16

## ARTISTS

Continued from page 15



Subtle earth tones adorn the walls and again, the couple's complementary aesthetic is evident. Even the **bed in the master bedroom [7]** is an example of teamwork. "Walter did the woodwork and I did the metal surround," Janet explained,

before showing off the stunning bath, highlighted by his tile work and her gorgeous "Egyptian Art Deco" design [8], which complements what the pair describe as "Eclectic Zen."



Adjacent to the main house, the **studio is enormous [9]**. More Egyptian influence can be spied in some of the towering pieces there, including a doorway originally built for the International Furniture Show a few years back. "It's all plasma-cut by hand—no lasers," Rutkowski explained while pointing out the very small anteroom that they lived in during the restoration process. "We lived here for the first six months," she said, "and had a working shower, a sink and a heater.

"Yes, it was a little rough," she said with a laugh. "Good thing we like each other!"

Entertaining friends, family gath-

erings and holidays all take place here in their country home while Janet and Walter forge ahead with their respective careers in the greater New York area. In addition to his renovation business, Walter's band, DRW/American Nomads, is enjoying tremendous success, and Janet's interior and exterior, large-scale sculptural work is in demand, as she continues to create large installations for high-end homes and businesses throughout the region.

For more information on Kenul and Rutkowski, visit [www.bfdfirehousestudios.com](http://www.bfdfirehousestudios.com)



TRR photos by Jonathan Charles Fox

**Walter Kenul and Janet Rutkowski love their country home, situated on 24 acres in Barryville, NY. The glass atrium featured in the center of the house is where "East meets West" and seamlessly connects the renovation design to the original structure.**

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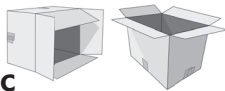
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# WALK THE WALK *Building a meditative stone labyrinth*



*Contributed photos*

**A friend named Gloria walks the labyrinth while Glykokokalos' dog, Sophie, watches.**

By NANCY L. DYMOND

High on a flowering cliffside in Honesdale, PA, secreted beneath the deep shade of towering spruce trees, lies a newly created wonder of the ancient world. Moss-covered rocks delineate winding pathways that lead both into and away from a circular center. Artist and sculptor Pauline Glykokokalos constructed her stone labyrinth five years after she experienced her first labyrinth walk at a meeting of area artists.

"I'd never walked a labyrinth. I'd never seen a labyrinth. I'd never even run across a labyrinth in literature, aside from the famous labyrinth at Knossos with the Minotaur and all that," said Glykokokalos.

"I was struck by how visual it was and how intriguing it was, how it had this kind of latent energy about it. I had the same feeling about it as I do when I walk into a hardware store. It's just like all the possibilities are there. You could tell it was a relic from the past. It looked like it had done a time skip from the time of Achilles and landed in Northeast Pennsylvania. I thought that is fantastic! I have to build one of

these things!"

The origin of the labyrinth design is lost in the mists of antiquity. It is known, however, that the pattern in its 11-circuit form was built in the Cathedral at Chartres in the 13th century as a spiritual pilgrimage, an alternative to making the long and torturous journey to Jerusalem. Over the past 25 years, the labyrinth concept has experienced a resurgence, appearing in private residences and public spaces as creative, playful and spiritual works of art. At <https://www.labyrinthlocator.com>, you can find the locations of over 5,000 labyrinths in 80 countries.

Glykokokalos' garden labyrinth was designed to be a prototype for a proposed public labyrinth, but the third-tier space she chose was too small for the nine-circuit labyrinth she had envisioned. Undaunted, she prepared the space by moving earth and using wood chips to level the ground, pulled out poison ivy and worked around giant tree roots. Laying out her design using ropes, she found that her space would support a five-circuit labyrinth. "This was a fairly small space, so I believe anyone with a regular size yard could do it."

*Continued on page 22*

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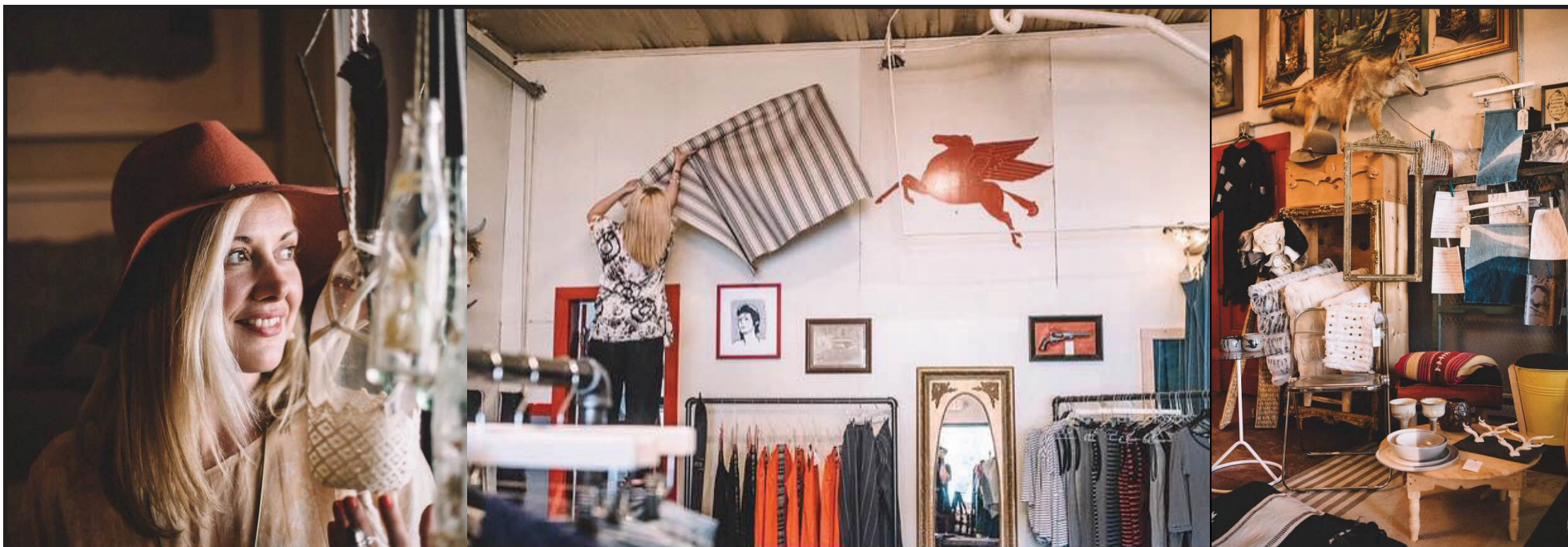
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## WALK

Continued from page 18

The project took three months to complete: six weeks to level the ground and six weeks to gather stones. She gathered small, fist-sized rocks to mark the walls of the labyrinth. By collecting moss-covered rocks, she gave the labyrinth a feeling of age. "I personally prefer that look of antiquity. You can make that connection with the past by what kind of materials you use."

According to Glykokokalos, the main things to consider when planning your own labyrinth are space and weed control. Because she chose a deep shade location under evergreens, Glykokokalos doesn't have to worry about weeds. "I don't want to spend more time maintaining something than I do enjoying it," she said. For sunnier locations she recommends excavating six to eight inches of topsoil from your space and filling it with crushed stone or pea gravel. "If you don't excavate, you'll end up having to use weed killer or using a lawn mower if your pathways are wide enough."

Glykokokalos has spent 20 years creating her fantasy garden of zigzagging terraces. From the base tier, where she plants her vegetables and cutting flowers, meandering pathways lead up through sculpture-adorned garden rooms, beneath tree-lined tunnels and over playful plots of aromatic, creeping



Along the stone labyrinth, a meandering pathway beneath a tree-lined tunnel (pictured) leads to Glykokokalos' garden of zigzagging terraces.

thyme. "I love pathways," she admits. "I spend as much time taking care of my pathways as I do with the garden."

Glykokokalos uses the labyrinth as a "time-out," like having a cup of tea. It gives her a sense of wellbeing. "First I stomp around in the thyme patch and wander around through all the pathways before I walk the labyrinth. Having a labyrinth is like having a destination."



Photo by Nancy L. Dymond

Pauline Glykokokalos stands at the center of the labyrinth she created.

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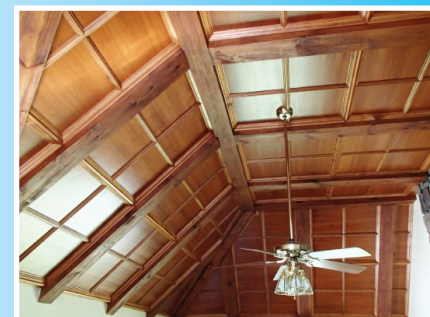


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# Growing home

By Annemarie Schuetz

It starts with dirt and a vision.

A plot of land, a view, a place just begging for the perfect house, a building that is so fundamentally part of the landscape that you'd think it had grown from the ground like a tree.

Most people cannot be their own architect, and acting as your own general contractor may lead to sleepless nights and hair loss. So you hire someone to help. Someone like Jeffrey McMahon, a design builder and former North Branch resident who has done a great deal of work in the Upper Delaware River region.

## Construction as self-discovery

"Life is complex, and we want the comfort of home," McMahon says. So it starts with the design process, sorting out "needs vs. wants vs. 'I really really want.'" To work with McMahon means excavating your own hopes and dreams, deciding what "home" means to you. This is emphatically not about an easier McMansion.

So first, the homework. What is your budget? What are your priorities? Number of bedrooms? Bathrooms? Will you age here? Will you entertain a lot? Clarity is needed. You will discuss expectations and inspirations. "It becomes a very dynamic conversation about what is possible," McMahon says.

Then at the construction stage, he manages the subcontractors, finds the best and greenest materials. "The client is the executive, making decisions" with guidance from McMahon and his team, some of whom he's worked with for 15 years.

## Ecology as a science of place

Though he now lives in Brooklyn, McMahon spent years in North Branch and is aware of the importance of the land to both newcomers and locals here. When he builds, his construction approach is fundamentally green.

No, that's not an oxymoron.

"It's a primary part of my work. How

are we serving the area?" Creating a small carbon footprint matters to him, and he starts with what can be controlled: a dramatic reduction in energy usage. Many of his homes are 100% electric and pull it off with new types of insulation; windows that keep heat in or out, depending on the season; LED lights. "It's really about smart insulation and construction."

Nowadays, there are more options than ever before. Green building is, McMahon is sure, the way of the future, because we cannot go on as we have been. "Humans are moving, expanding, and unless you believe in reducing consumption," there will be a point of no return. "We have to constantly make decisions about the impact of our actions."

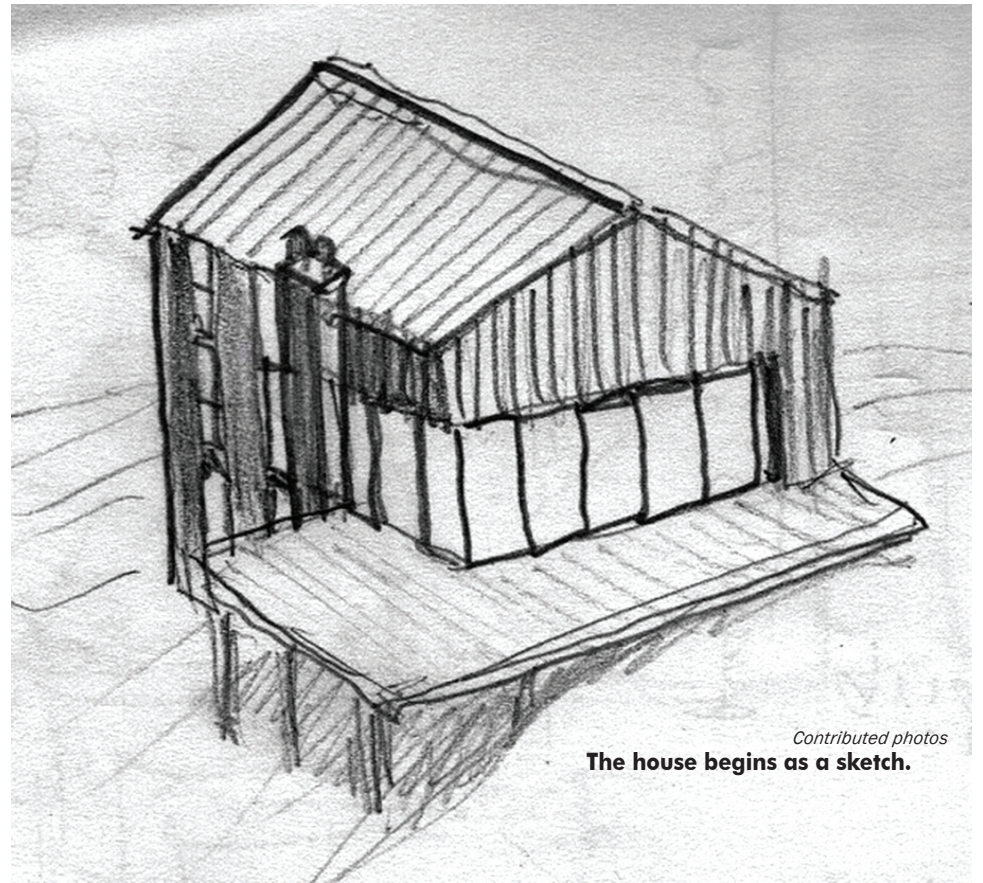
Luckily, science is there for us, because sustainable construction is driving innovation, which leads to new products and techniques and an expanding understanding of the left-brain part of ecology. Although his background is in fine art, McMahon is necessarily comfortable with science too: building well is all about the engineering and mathematics, materials, analyzing the location and constructing something that will hold up despite whatever the changing climate will throw at it.

## The complex web of community

"Home construction is interesting," McMahon says. "It's the cross section of different kinds of people, material, color, landscape, and local resources." He doesn't want to be one of those builders who only uses stuff bought elsewhere, people from elsewhere, pulling money away from the community.

"The Upper Delaware River area is full of helpful people and resources," he says. "Where are our materials coming from? Can we buy them locally? Can we work with a local mill?" He sees it as "developing valued relationships," something that will reverberate through people's lives, a source of pride.

Community is a web, made stronger when we rely on others within the net-



Contributed photos

The house begins as a sketch.



The house has bones: a detail of the framing.

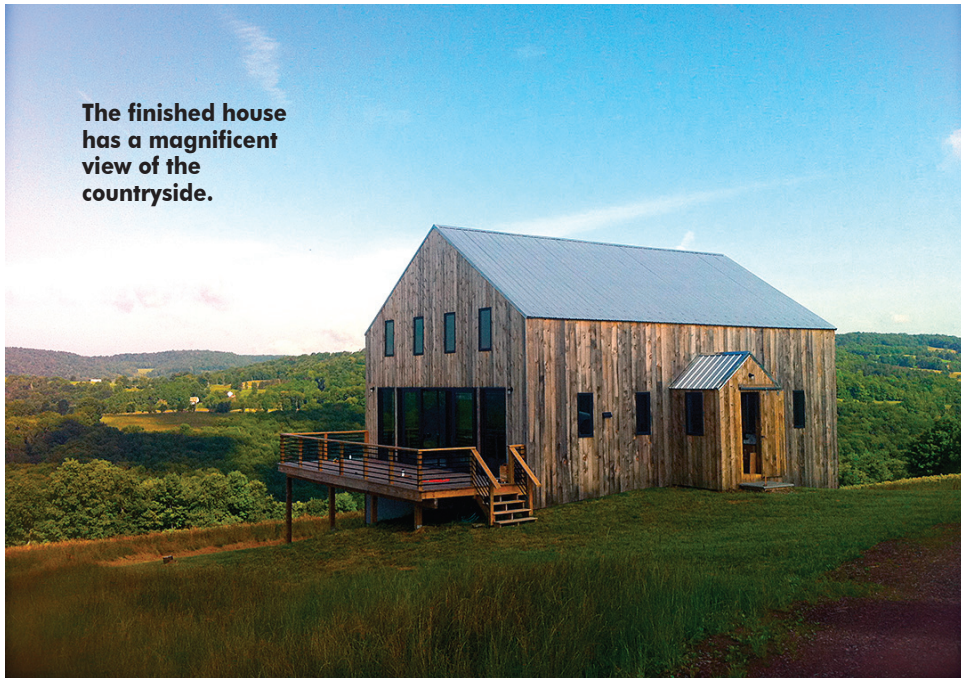
work. Rural economies become less fragile. It's the power of conscious decision-making, a theme McMahon returns to over and over. "We need to decide based on local and long-term impact." Not just on the grand, planetary scale, but on the small, local scale. "But there's a lot of synergy. People want to invest locally."

## Reclaimed wood as metaphor

Reusing wood is recycling, of course, green building. You take from a building that is due for demolition or is already in pieces, and integrate it into the new home. "It's beautiful and sustainable," McMahon says, describing the ways timbers from old barns or woodwork from



The ridge beam is craned in.



The finished house has a magnificent view of the countryside.

old homes, pieces of old furniture, can be woven into a dwelling. For those who see new construction as soulless, reclaimed wood brings in the ghosts of buildings past. It's another strand in the web of community, tying the new home and its new occupants into something larger than themselves.

Barriers between locals and city people are starting to fall, McMahon says. We talk to each other now. We can make those decisions consciously, knowing the people they will affect. Knowing what will happen, to ourselves and to our neighbors. But the possibilities are endless, "and exploring possibilities is one of the most powerful things."

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Talking green: Jeffrey McMahon, right, and Greg Swartz, left, converse surrounded by local produce.

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# What contractors wish you knew

By JOE COOKE

The headline sounds like newspaper clickbait (if there is such a thing), but it's an important subject for the new homeowner: What do contractors do, should you ask a contractor before hiring, what should people do to keep their homes working well, and what might change in the future? We asked some local experts.



*Contributed photos*

## Mark Keoppen

### Mark Keoppen, general contractor, on the job and the life:

I started in woodworking, in old houses. When those houses were built, modern engineering and codes were nonexistent. So I had to learn engineering, studied old construction, learned to replicate old moldings using new woods and finishes. It's been 35 years. I no longer run a crew, but still take on some projects.

With your crew, a good contractor has to be able to identify skills and allocate the work. If you do that, you can do a lot of really good stuff without hiring specialists.

Here's what happens after we take on a job: Look at the plan. Figure out the materials, how many subcontractors you will need, what percentage you will make on the job. Get those numbers together, and then trust your subs.

One of the challenges we face is timeliness, getting it all done when we said we would. I want to deliver a worthy product on time, but everyone needs to be direct about their timeframe. Changes throw it off. Sometimes people add stuff to do, and then I do a change order. Old houses can be tough; sometimes there are surprises in the walls. That can make the project take longer and be more costly.

The job is a responsibility—to the crew and to the owner—and it's a life. It's so integral to the way I think and live.



## Michael Roosa

### Michael Roosa, electrician, Wurtsboro Electric Service, Wurtsboro, NY

My degree is in electrical engineering, and I've been a master electrician for over 30 years. I have experience in all aspects of electrical work, including residential, commercial and industrial settings.

If you're going to hire an electrician, you need to ask if they're licensed. Are they insured? Ask to see proof. Many times an electrician will have a license but it doesn't cover where you're located. In New York State, different locations require different licenses, sometimes more than one. I'm licensed in Sullivan and Orange counties, the City of Port Jervis and the state of California.

One thing people do not realize: if you have an unlicensed person do work on your home, it is illegal. In addition to any fines that the worker may have to pay, the property owner can be liable too. Electrical contracting, if done incorrectly, can kill someone or burn down their home. If an unlicensed or uninsured person does any work on your home that causes a fire or other catastrophe, it is possible that your insurance will not cover the loss.

Always keep in mind, the third largest cause of residential home fires in the United States is faulty electrical work.

Contact: [www.wurtsboroelectric.com](http://www.wurtsboroelectric.com)



## Bill Buselli Jr.

### Bill Buselli Jr., Buselli Solutions, Beach Lake, PA

Ask how long a plumber has been in the area. We find there are a lot of people who come into the area for a short amount of time, do poor work, and then are gone, never to service anything. My father learned from his father-in-law who lived and worked in the area for over 30 years. In 1984 my father started out on his own. We plan to be around a long time to provide service, not just installation.

What plumbing fixes should a homeowner not do? Know your limitations. Some people are more handy than others, and it is simply a matter of self-awareness. Remember to turn off your water when you leave home for more than a day. Second-home owners have had a pipe rupture and experienced terrible water damage. This is not something pleasant to come back home to.

You also need to change your water filters.

Most plumbing issues here come from hard water. This, over time, erodes copper and brass pipes and fittings, making them weak and brittle. Whenever homeowners remodel a kitchen or bath, always replace the water lines when you have the opportunity. The money they spend now will be a lot cheaper than when they have to fix leaks later.

Contact: [www.busellisolutions.com](http://www.busellisolutions.com), 570/234-8668

### Doug Santoro, DJS Plumbing and Heating, Callicoon, NY

I worked with my father and grandfather; been at it 30 years full-time. DJS covers about 20 to 30 minutes of drive time from Callicoon; it's a local business. This is my home and how I conduct business matters.

Heating is a major use of energy. It's interesting because in technology America follows Europe, and European tech is always advanced. Fuel is expensive there and so is transporting it.

So what's on the horizon? Propane is gaining momentum. Propane is a byproduct of gas manufacturing that is captured, utilized and refined. It makes modern equipment run really well. And it isn't piped. If you have a 500 gallon tank it's actually very inexpensive if combined with modern equipment.

But I think the next big thing will be wood pellets. They are locally produced. The pellets are uniform and the stoves are regulated. You don't have to worry about humidity. It's efficient. New stoves allow you to store energy in tanks, like batteries.

Long-term, electric will be the answer. Solar panels. Wind energy. We can harness the oceans. That's a never-ending energy source. It's free and it's there.

For maintenance, homeowners need to keep the area around the machinery clean. Pet dander, lint, damp and mustiness—that will damage the machinery and make repairs harder and more expensive.

Contact: [djsph.com](http://djsph.com), 845/887-6309



Doug Santoro

**Anie Stanley, Woolheater's Wares, Narrowsburg, NY.**

I transitioned my business and life as a Bergdorf Goodman window dresser from New York City to Narrowsburg in 2006, but I have deep Catskills roots. Woolheater's Wares is named after my great-grandfather Woolheater, who in the 1800s had a livery service near Margaretville. I wanted to bring my family name back to the Catskills.

I collaborate with Juliette Hermant and offer design and sourcing services at Maison Bergogne. Women in the business here are few. It is a very physical and often dirty job. But it doesn't take a big truck or big attitude to impress a client.

I restore older farm houses, boardinghouses, bungalows and cabins. Restoration often entails removing layers to unveil the original character of the house, then painting, plastering and restoring wood. I have subcontractors I work closely with for electrical and plumbing issues, and consult with or refer to local architect Karl Wasner.

Most of my clients are second-home owners. They want authentic design advice, resourcefulness, communication skills, quality materials, accountability, an aesthetic sense and above all, trust.

My other projects range from custom-built designs with reclaimed wood and hardware, to restaurant design at Ba & Me in Honesdale, PA, The Heron in Narrowsburg, NY and more.

Contact: Woolheaterwares@gmail.com, Maison Bergogne, 226 Bridge St., Narrowsburg, NY.



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