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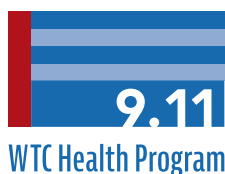
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# Modern metalsmith

*Matthew Weinberger doesn't just make adornments*



PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

by Violet Snow

“**M**ETAL IS AN incredible substance,” said Matthew Weinberger, sitting in his studio, a vast garage furnished with two forges, a milling machine, an air compressor, anvils, vises, and many other tools. “Metal is strong, but heat turns it to butter, and you can put it together quickly,” he said. “It’s archival — it lasts a long time. It’s structural but also beautiful.”

Weinberger considers himself a blacksmith, “a person who makes and repairs things in iron by hand.” Most people associate the term with shoeing horses, which he doesn’t do.

He also sometimes works with non-

ferrous metals. He prefers to be called a metalsmith, “a craftsperson or artist fashioning items out of various metals.”

The objects he designs and fashions are both functional and fanciful, from railings to furniture to the gracefully tentacled octopus, still in process, that sits outside his studio. Many of his creations can be seen around Woodstock, including the fence in front of Yum Yum, sculptures at the Station Bar, and many of the appointments at the Colony.

## Things that people need

Having trained at the Philadelphia University of the Arts, where he enjoyed silver and goldsmithing, Weinberger is a fine artist at heart. But it’s been a boon for him to have a craft that enables him to

support himself and his family. “And I like coming up with things that people need.”

Early on, he made quirky candlesticks out of iron, filled the trunk of his car with them, and sold them on West Broadway in Manhattan’s SoHo.

In his recent work at the Colony, he started by making a screen for the night club’s big stone fireplace.

His next project involved the railings on the balcony that runs around the second story and overlooks the stage, tempting customers to lean over. Installed in the 1920s, the railings were “nervously low.” He built an extension of metalwork over the wooden banisters to protect people from falling.

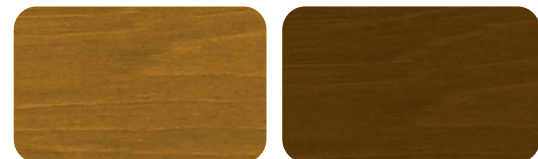
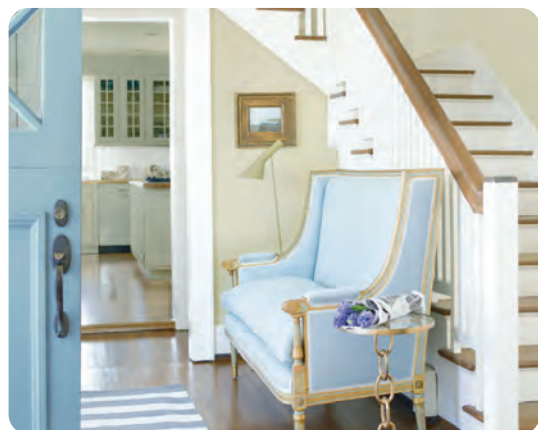
“The Colony is a beautiful piece of history,” said Weinberger. “I didn’t just



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make adornments.” He had to make sure each item he designed would match the existing style.

When the pandemic came, the venue needed an outdoor stage. It procured a commercial tow-behind trailer, which he

altered for performance use, fabricating struts to hold it to the ground and to anchor tents, tarps, and sound systems. The stage is still in use.

Weinberger especially enjoys making furniture. A chair, he pointed out, is

inanimate until someone sits in it, creating an interaction between human and object. “Some furniture fits well to the body, and some doesn’t. It can be built for long-term relaxation. In public places, they make benches that are purposely



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uncomfortable,” he said. Such benches discourage people from staying too long.

Weinberger considers it vital to make each object pleasing and of high quality: “That way it doesn’t get thrown out.”

### How it’s done

Another advantage to working in metal is the ability to upcycle scraps discarded from building sites. Weinberger picked up a palm-sized piece of steel shaped like a quarter of a pie. Putting on a visored helmet, he turned on the welder and approached a half-completed sculpture, an assemblage of rods, strips and cut-outs. Wire emerged from the end of the welding tool, along with a blue flame. As sparks flew, he melted the wire onto the edge of the metal pie piece, attaching it to the sculpture in seconds.

Forges are similarly efficient. Instead of the traditional blacksmith’s huge wood-burning hearth, Weinberger has a gas-powered forge and a coal-powered forge.

He placed a sheet of metal into a device called a Beverly shear, a giant, heavy-duty paper cutter, and lowered the blade to slice off a strip, commenting, “This is my quietest tool.” As the fire inside the gas forge emitted a steady roar, he inserted the newly cut strip through a slot that extended into the glass-fronted chamber.

“When metal is heated up, I can elongate it or shorten it,” he said. “I can curl it around like plastic.”

A few minutes later, he used forging tongs to withdraw the red-glowing strip and clamped one end into a vise. With a few turns of the pliers, he twisted the end of the strip into an elegant spiral.

### When the vibe is right

The vast majority of his pieces are not to be found in the studio, since they reside with customers. Weinberger paged through an album of photographs of his past work, such as a giant metal skull he



once created for a motorcycle club.

When he goes to New York City, he likes to see the sign he made for the Mudd Club in the Nineties, still hanging on the building.

One of his clients wanted to plant a tree in a rusted-out Volkswagen bus. Weinberger modified the bus to make it child-safe and fabricated a sign. The bus and tree stand in a Woodstock sculpture park.

Now that his work for the Colony is completed, he hopes to spend more time on his own artistic creations, both sculptural and two-dimensional. At the far end of the studio, a wall is hung with

riotous abstract paintings reminiscent of graffiti. “My paintings are all about color,” said Weinberger.

He confirmed the graffiti influence. When he was growing up on Long Island, his father was a New York City fireman who sometimes took him into Brownsville, Brooklyn, where the liveliness of the abundant graffiti made an impact on the boy.

He admitted that his sculpture works best “when the vibe is right.” Weinberger still has time to craft functional creations for homes and businesses. He can be reached at 518-248-1342 or Matthew-WWeinberger@gmail.com.

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DION OGUST

Be prepared for those harsh winter storms.

# Practical preparedness

*Essential Hudson Valley home improvements  
to weather any disaster*

by Zac Shaw

**T**HE HUDSON VALLEY, with its picturesque landscapes and charming towns, is not immune to the harsh realities of natural disasters and potential crises.

Whether it's a harsh winter storm, a prolonged power outage, or even the end of the world as we know it, preparing your home to withstand such events is both practical and wise. Even if you never have to face a serious disaster, these ten home-improvement tips will still enhance your everyday living.

That said, the world is feeling more chaotic and fragile than anytime in recent memory. The future is coming on fast. Better to be safe than sorry.

## A reliable source of heat

The Hudson Valley is known for its cold, sometimes snowy winters. While modern heating systems are efficient, they rely heavily on electricity or gas, both of which can be the first thing to go during a disaster. A wood stove is a valuable addition to any home, providing a dependable source of heat that doesn't depend on external utilities. It's also so very Catskills and on trend.

In an extended power outage, a wood stove will keep your home warm, prevent pipes from freezing, and even serve as a backup cooking option.

Furthermore, the Hudson Valley's abundant forests mean that wood is a readily available fuel source, making a woodstove both a practical and sustain-

able choice. Best case, you save money on utilities. Worst case, a wood stove may save your life ... at least until springtime.

## Power when you need it most

A generator is a critical asset for any home in the Hudson Valley, where storms and severe weather can lead to prolonged power outages. A generator ensures that essential lighting and appliances continue to operate during an outage.

For disaster preparedness, a whole-house generator powered by natural gas or propane is ideal, as it can automatically kick in when the power goes out. You'll be able to maintain a level of normalcy and comfort during shorter power outages, and in the unlikely event the grid is down for weeks or months, it will



quickly become one of your most prized possessions.

### Protecting your sanctuary

In times of crisis, the potential for

crime and looting can increase, making a robust home security system crucial. A comprehensive system that includes surveillance cameras, motion detectors, and reinforced doors and windows can deter

intruders and provide peace of mind.

If you're one of the many local residents who live in a home that's more isolated, a security system that can operate independently of the grid (perhaps with battery

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backup) ensures that your home remains protected even during widespread power failures. Advanced systems can also alert you to environmental hazards such as fire or carbon monoxide, further safeguarding your family.

That said, always remember that there is no better security system during a disaster than having strong connections with your neighbors and community.

### Sustainable water supply

Water is a fundamental necessity, and in a disaster scenario municipal water supplies may become compromised or unavailable. Installing a rainwater collection system allows you to harvest and store rainwater for various uses, including gardening, flushing toilets, and even if properly treated drinking.

Our area receives ample rainfall, making this a viable and sustainable option. By connecting your rainwater collector to a filtration system, you can ensure a reliable supply of clean water, reducing your dependency on external sources during emergencies.

### Harnessing renewable energy

Solar panels combined with battery storage systems offer an excellent way to generate and store energy, providing independence from the grid. In the Hudson Valley, where sunny days are frequent during much of the year, solar panels can produce significant amounts of electricity. When paired with battery storage, this energy can be saved for use during the night or in times of power outages.

This setup not only lowers your energy bills but also ensures that your home remains powered during an extended blackout, making it an



Natural disasters often lead to power outages around the Hudson Valley.

indispensable asset.

### Ensuring safe drinking water

Even if you have a rainwater collection system, ensuring that your water is safe to drink is vital. A high-quality water filtration system can remove contaminants, bacteria, and viruses, making any water source potable.

Especially for the many local homeowners who have wells, having a backup filtration system in place can protect against waterborne diseases if the primary water supply becomes contaminated during a disaster. Whether it's a gravity-fed filter or a more complex reverse osmosis sys-

tem, having a reliable way to purify water is non-negotiable in a survival scenario.

### Growing your own food

Food security is a major concern in any disaster scenario, and having a source of

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ON THE COVER: Metalsmith Matthew Weinberger at work in his studio, photographed by Dion Ogust

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Ulster Publishing (est. 1972) is a Hudson Valley media company with its office at 322 Wall Street in Kingston. For more info on upcoming magazines, including how to place an ad, call (845) 334-6200 or (845) 334-8202 for a complimentary ad kit. The pandemic has led to a surge in home improvement projects, and the company is currently producing the pandemic. An



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### Extending the growing season

A greenhouse allows you to grow food year-round, regardless of the weather. Since our winters can be harsh and frost can occur well into the spring, a greenhouse is particularly valuable. By creating a controlled environment, you can extend your growing season and protect delicate plants from the elements. This ensures a continuous supply of fresh produce, even during the winter months.

In a long-term disaster scenario, a greenhouse can become a crucial resource for maintaining your family's food supply. In regular life, you can be assured your salads are always exquisitely delicious.

### Storing food for the long haul

A root cellar is a time-tested method for storing food without the need for refrigeration. Our temperatures can vary widely, so a root cellar provides a cool, stable environment for preserving fruits, vegetables, and other perishables. By utilizing the natural insulation of the earth, a root cellar keeps food fresh for months.



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### Cooking off the grid

A permanent outdoor cooking area, such as a fire pit or brick oven, allows you to prepare meals without relying on electricity or gas. Outdoor living is a cherished part of the Catskills lifestyle. During a disaster, when indoor cooking may be impractical or unsafe, an outdoor cooking area provides a vital means of feeding your family.

Having a reliable outdoor cooking setup ensures that you can continue to prepare meals even in the most challenging circumstances. If those challenges never manifest, this writer would consider us lucky. He would also consider an invitation to your next barbecue.



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*A meditation room of one's own*

by Sparrow

**S**TARTING IN THE 1980s, fashion magazines began emphasizing yoga, tai chi, nature walks (what we now call “forest bathing”) – the idea that true beauty comes from within. But what about a house? Can’t a dwelling have “inner beauty”? The more you commune with your divine nature, the happier your house becomes.

Meditation is hard. I’ve been doing it for 49 years, and I’m still mostly daydreaming.

There are a few ways to improve one’s practice. One is to set regular times to sit (which I can’t manage to do). Another is to have a room dedicated to this purpose (That I have, which is why I’m writing this essay).

The first meditation room I ever encountered was in Marvel Comics. Doctor Strange had a Sanc-



HEATHER AYMIE

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tum Sanctorum in his Greenwich Village mansion, where he prepared to battle the evil Baron Mordo and other metaphysical foes. The room was dark, layered with richly brocaded Asian tapestries.

How did Stephen Strange fortify himself? By sitting crosslegged and entering a deep trance, often aided by the Eye of Agamotto, a golden amulet affixed to his chest.

My friend Omkar Lewis meditated daily for 15 years: “My meditation practice was open-eyed, and I would walk into a room and look at the view, and then I would say, ‘Oh, I can sit in this room.’ Once I spent two years in Thailand because I didn’t like looking at a wall. In Oakland, someone built a wall in front

of my meditation room.”

Even when I’ve been poor (which is essentially my entire life) I’ve often had a chamber devoted to stillness. In two different homes – one in Gainesville, Florida, the other on Manhattan’s Upper West Side – the living room was used for group sittings. In another apartment (in Washington Heights), a spare bedroom

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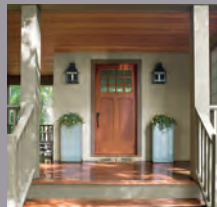
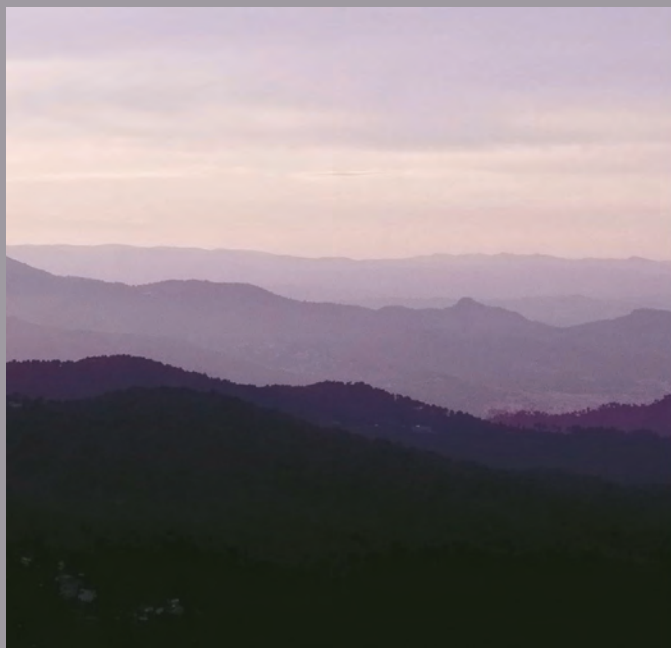
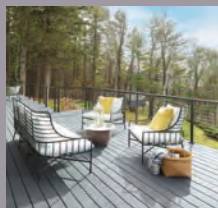
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It's largely about breathing,  
and the Catskills region has  
extremely high-class air.

sufficed as a destination for meditation.

My wife and I are blessed with a  
doublewide trailer, with three bedrooms:

our “master” bedroom (I believe this term is out of date, replaced by “primary”), my wife’s office, and a room for mystic self-reflection.

My meditation room has several purposes: yoga, mind-cleansing, physical therapy exercises, and kiirtan (a type of chanting, often accompanied by dancing, used in yoga to prepare

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the mind for concentrated silence). My meditation group, the Ananda Marga Society, employs the mantra "Baba Nam Kevalam," which they translate as "Love Is All There Is." Try chanting it sometime, you may find that it elicits a happy sensation.

Most meditation rooms have altars, but I dislike all forms of worship, so mine is empty except for numerous rubber mats and pillows – plus a blanket – for "senior-citizen yoga." A guitar stands in one corner of the room, as an aid to chanting (It's a seven-string guitar my wife bought in Russia in 1971, and it's totally out of tune – but luckily, I am an "experimental guitarist," inspired by non-Western modal tunings).

The only decoration, actually, is on the door knob: a string of sandalwood beads and a sash with a rusted bell.

My room has one window, and I like to keep the window at least slightly open, even in winter. Meditation is largely about breathing, and the Catskills region

has extremely high-class air. Monks come to live at the Zen

Mountain Monastery in Mount Tremper and Karma Triyana Dharmachakra in Woodstock partly to breathe the quiet yet tasty air.

There are various rules, or perhaps I should say "traditions," about meditational refuges. One is to forbid pets. My wife and I don't own a cat or dog, but once in a while we dog-sit, and we aren't strict about forbidding the creature to enter our Room of Emptiness. Also, sleeping is usually forbidden, but if we have a large number of guests we sometimes lay a mattress in the room.

My point is, our house is a home, not a temple. We have to be flexible.

But it's nice to keep electronic devices out of your mystic chamber. We have no clock in ours. I would never play a radio in a meditation room. I want a refuge that could exist in the sixth century B.C.

Probably I have never walked in that room wearing shoes.

What about incense? You must make your own decision. I burned so many aromatic sticks in my adolescence – many of which I bought at Woolworth's – that I still have an antipathy to that saccharine smell.

Incidentally, if someone asks to meditate in your quietism room, you must

allow them. There are strict rules of meditational hospitality.

The increasing price of real estate, and of rent, has made a meditation room a bit of a luxury – unless you buy one of those Amish-built outbuildings (if you own a house), or work out a barter deal with a rich

meditating friend. You water her plants while she's in the Bahamas in

return for sitting crosslegged on her Tibetan cushion twice a day.

Another option: an outdoor meditation spot. Behind my house is a niche where the root of an oak tree forms a natural seat. In warm weather I

meditate there, leaning against that tree.

Sometimes an angry squirrel will screech at me for 20 minutes – but I refuse to be intimidated. It's the price one must pay for reciting one's mantra in the bosom of nature. Of course, a devoted practitioner can meditate outdoors even in bitter cold, as many yogis and yoginis have proven over the millennia.

Incidentally, there are some magnificent meditation halls in the Hudson Valley. One of my favorites is the room Vivekananda used at Ridgely Manor in Stone Ridge. (Vivekananda was the first swami to visit the USA, in 1893.) When you enter this chapel-like room, the meditational aura hits your forehead like a frisbee.

## There are some magnificent meditation halls in the Hudson Valley.



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PHOTOS BY LEE REICH

A San Piero fig, breba.

# Fig lore

*A piece of the Mediterranean in your backyard*

by Lee Reich

**I** TAKE A TRIP to southern France around this time each year. In my dreams. These aren't real journeys, but imaginary ones in which I am carried aloft by the taste of figs I pick from my own trees.

The experience of biting into a dried or fresh store-bought fig pales beside that of savoring the truly ripe fruit, which because of their delicate texture don't travel well much further than arm's length.

You don't have to live in California or the South to take these figurative trips. Winter temperatures at my farm in the Hudson Valley regularly drop well below zero degrees Fahrenheit.

Fig is native to the sunny, hot summers

and mild winters of the Mediterranean Basin, but it is an adaptable plant. For starters, fig is a subtropical — not a tropical — plant, so it tolerates and enjoys a certain amount of cold weather. Stems are cold-hardy to about 15° F.

Since the plant is deciduous, it doesn't

mind being lopped back or cramped.

Figs have a unique fruiting habit that adapts the plant to cold-climate growing. Some varieties such as Flanders, King, and Verte, bear a so-called breba crop, ripening in midsummer on the older portions of last year's stems. Other varieties

-- Brown Turkey, Celeste, and Magnolia, for

example -- bear mostly a "main crop," in late summer and on into fall, on currently growing shoots. And then there's Conadria, Petite Negri, and Negronne, which bear both ways — potentially yielding two crops

each season!

To harvest a crop of figs this far north, the plant's branches must be protected from cold, and the variety needs to be matched to the length of the growing

**Figs grow lushly in summer, so be ready with a hose or watering can if needed during that season.**

need light during its leafless winter rest.

Although the tree can grow quite large in Mediterranean climates, it's easily coaxed to become a more easily protected bush or small tree. Even the roots don't





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A fig espalier in the greenhouse.

season and the protection offered.

For instance, a short growing season or a desire for summer figs means growing a variety that yields a heavy breba crop, and making sure year-old branches do not suffer winter damage.

Main crop varieties, on the other hand, can stand having each year's new shoots lopped back to a couple of feet of older wood. New shoots will spring from the upper buds of that older wood to bear and ripen fruits.

A fig tree's tolerance for cold and abuse to its roots as well as its unique bearing habit opens the door to many ways of coaxing fruits from its branches in our climate. (I dive deeply into details of all this in the pages of my book, "Growing

result in more figs but also something heavier and more unwieldy to muscle into the plant's winter quarters. Figs grow lushly in summer, so be ready with a hose or watering can if needed during that season.

## Figs have a unique fruiting habit that adapts the plant to cold-climate growing.

Another way to grow a fig around here is just as described above, with one wrinkle. You drill some holes in the side of the pot and then set the tree, pot and all, into a hole in the ground each spring. After a few waterings, roots will grow out of

the hole into the surrounding soil, and the fig becomes not only self-sufficient as far as water but also capable of much more growth — and bearing more fruits than a plant whose roots are confined in a pot. Come late fall, slice the roots with a shovel back to the surface of the pot, lift the pot, and move it to a protected location for winter.

Years ago, when I lived in Wisconsin, I

Figs in Cold Climates."

The most straightforward method is to grow fig as a potted plant brought in late fall to a protected area, such as an unheated basement or garage, or a mudroom, ideally between 30° and 45° in winter.

For best growth, the plant will need root pruning every year or two. Any size pot or potting soil will do. A larger pot will

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A potted fig.

remember a large fig tree that each year ripened hundreds of figs! This plant, with a trunk about six inches in diameter, was growing in a chest-high trench into which it was bent each fall. Old doors were laid on top of the trench, then leaves piled on high. Come spring, the tree was uncovered and the trunk hoisted up with pulleys. With ground temperature a few feet deep everywhere hovering year-round at about 50 degrees, it's easy to see how such a tree could survive Wisconsin winters.

There's no need for such heroic efforts with this method around here. A shallow trench will suffice.

One trick to make it easier to bend a fig to the ground is to grow it like a shrub, retaining only young, supple stems. In late autumn, cut away any stems that are two years or older. Leave remaining stems full length for breba crops; shorten them by a third for main crops. Forcing a spade into the ground to cut the roots on one side of the plant makes it easier

to bend the whole top to the ground in the opposite direction. Once the plant is down, cover it with leaves or straw, as well as a sheet of plastic or some other waterproof material.

About 25 years ago I upped my fig game, erecting a 400-square-foot greenhouse in which to grow winter salad greens and — of course — figs. Figs planted directly in the ground! The greenhouse is warmed enough to keep temperatures just above freezing, which is fine for the greens and

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the figs. (And for the vegetable and flower seedlings I raise there in spring.)

The figs, now with eight-inch-diameter trunks, are trained as espaliers, with permanent horizontal arms from which new shoots grow skyward. Fruits grow from almost each leaf node.

The fruits ripen sequentially from the bottom to the top of the growing shoots, fueling and extending with their syrupy sweet fruits into fall my end-of-summer voyage to the Mediterranean.

*New Paltz writer Lee Reich, grows more than a dozen varieties of figs and is the author of, in addition to Growing Figs in Cold Climates, eight other books, including A Northeast Gardener's Year and The Pruning Book. He's also a garden consultant specializing in organic growing of fruits, vegetables and nuts. He hosts workshops at his New Paltz farm. For information, go to [www.leereich.com](http://www.leereich.com).*

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# This old house

*Welcome to York Street in Malden-on-Hudson*

by Carol Graham

**T**HIS IS THE story of an old house, a house with many stories. The names of its inhabitants from records in the town hall conjure up versions that might be or might not be real: DeMeyer, Zeilman, Kiselbrack, Whitney, Schafer.

A recent walk-through was evocative. Built some time around 1790, in Malden-on-Hudson (formerly called Bristol), this stone-and-clapboard home was surely created by the boat builders of the era for the men and their families who worked the river. It offers original bead-board closet doors and ceilings, fireplaces, the bluestone foundation at the back of the original house, hand-hewn beams, and windows looking out to the Hudson.

**This is the story of an old house, a house with more tales than stories. The house is simple, with restrained details.**



PHOTOS BY DION OGUST



The house is simple, with restrained details. Though at its beginning it had no indoor plumbing, it was made as energy-efficient as possible for its time: fireplaces on each floor, with stone-and-plaster and horsehair walls to hold in the heat. Both staircases were originally enclosed with doors at the top and bottom. Its pair of doors on the back, side by side, lead to the outside.

It is likely that this abode was once a two-family, and that one of the doors led



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The walls have been adjusted to create a third bedroom.

to the main level and the other to the upper floors. Rumor has it that at one time, it housed as many as twelve people.

Built on a bluestone foundation and part of Benjamin DeMeyer's 18th-century farm, the residence on York Street is just uphill enough from the Hudson to be safe, and close enough to provide beauti-



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Both staircases were originally enclosed with doors at the top and bottom.

ful seasonal views and lovely walks to the water's edge. It was upgraded in the 1980s, when the owners used its natural

stone ledge -- part of a very old drainage system that prevented water from collecting by redirecting the flow on the back



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Above, lots of original details remain, although bathrooms have been added; right, an artist lives here today.

of the kitchen -- as a starting point, they lowered the level of the floor to restore and update the French drainage by adding five tons of gravel, a vapor barrier, and the bluestone floor. An underground stone wall allows the benefits of a thermal heating and cooling system. The temperature is regulated by the earth.

The fireplaces were rebuilt. Those stewards also put in the first bathroom, and created a working kitchen, with walls of stone nearly two feet thick.

Today, an artist lives here. The home's heritage has been





respected, despite the many updates to the plumbing and electricity, and additional comforts born of need. There's now a sink on the top floor, and a sliding wall that creates a utilitarian addition used as the studio. The walls have been adjusted to create a third bedroom, and there's a romantic bath.

Malden-on-Hudson is a special neighborhood, and this York Street home sits in a special spot within it. It is part of a quiet world, a private enclave for those who seek to appreciate what has been before. Watch the moon rise over the ethereal Hudson from one of the upstairs windows. It will change you.

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PHOTOS PROVIDED

Michael Robbins.

# A passion for design

*Hudson woodworker pays homage to his materials*

by Cloey Callahan

**M**ET MICHAEL ROBBINS, a self-taught woodworker and craftsman.

Michael Robbins was born and raised in rural Oneida in Central New York. His home was a log cabin that his parents built. Today, he owns and operates the self-named furniture company Michael Robbins, founded in 2011

Robbin's designs are distinguishable by exceptional design and quality.





and based in Hudson.

Robbins didn't plan this path. He originally pursued a formal education studying photography at SUNY Purchase, but he ended up spending most of his twenties living off the grid as a carpenter building houses in places like Vermont and New Mexico.

"I got obsessed with designing objects for use," says Robbins.

He's been perfecting his craft for the last 15 years. It started with making and selling objects he had made as simple as rolling pins and candlesticks. That soon turned into bigger, more complex builds like seating objects. Today, Michael Robbins sells everything from dining tables and chairs to credenzas and armoires.

The firm creates made-to-order pieces distinguishable by exceptional design

**"I got obsessed with designing objects for use."**

and quality, paying homage to the materials and surroundings of various landscapes.

"Growing up where I grew up, which was on a large piece of land that has been in my family for a long time, certainly has a connection to craft," said Robbins. "Whether I knew it or not, it's always been ingrained in me. I think that's how my interest in furniture started: producing this whole world that is created by you and surrounding yourself with hand-made objects."

Robbins says he has a deep love for big empty spaces and wild terrain. But it's his sense of adventure that fuels his vision of creating furniture that is both formal and meaningful.

His residential and commercial furnishings have been featured in The New York Times, Architectural Digest, Elle Decor, and other fashion-involved

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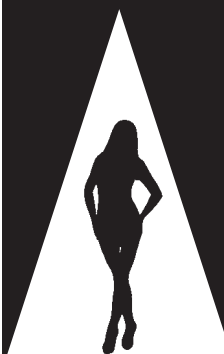
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"They have a lot of playfulness to them," said Robbins. "They certainly have a lot of curves and circular aspects."

media. His team includes Roger French, who is the shop foreman with 15 years of experience, production manager Adam

Foote, and builder Mark Sheffer.

"This team produces the furniture with me," explained Robbins.

Although everything is made, at the main shop in Hudson, there is a Michael Robbins showroom in Germantown that

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Solid wood is the main material used, though Robbins said he wasn't afraid of mixed-material projects. Leather, brass and cork are often used.

can be visited by appointment.

"We change seasonally and fluctuate," said Robbins. "There, clients are able to see a nice, rounded-out vision of our furniture and get to experience the materials firsthand, sit in the chairs, and play with the cabinets. It's a tangible idea of what it's like to experience our furniture."

For the most part, the studio works with interior designers, around the country and internationally, who come to them looking to source furniture for clients who are either building a new home or renovating. Only a small portion of customers are homeowners. Customers can choose the wood they prefer and make minor changes to match their needs.

Solid wood is the main material used, though Robbins said he wasn't afraid of mixed-material projects. Leather, brass and cork are often used. "They have a lot of playfulness to them," said Robbins. "They certainly have a lot of curves and circular aspects."

"The collection has evolved and defined itself over time," said Robbins. "What I keep coming back to is Danish design,

mid-century Shaker design."

There have been many months that have gone by where there have been no new designs. When that inspiration does strike, however, the rest is history. "When it does come, I try to harness it and utilize it and exploit it," said Robbins. "I like designing new things. That's my favorite."

Robbins resides in a home in German-town that he built himself. His son sleeps in the bed that his father made for him and places things on a nightstand, also built by his dad.

"That stuff for me completes the circle and informs new designs moving forward," said Robbins.

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# Check out Marbletown

*A town that embraces both the past and the present*

by Theo Sassano

**T**HE HISTORIC TOWN of Marbletown is a marvel to experience. Settled in 1669 and with 53 residences only three years later, it was one of Ulster County's first-established settlements. Now, 355 years later, a piece of its history seems embedded at every turn.

Each of Ulster County's 20 municipalities has its own distinctive character, a unique local culture rooted in the interaction among its people, its resources and its past. A kind of intense local pride has evolved in each of them with an intensity unusual in our increasingly transient and homogenized society.

With its agricultural heritage, four historic districts, historic hamlets such as



Stone Ridge and High Falls, and a variety of traditional buildings and landscapes, Marbletown's embrace of the past presents itself in many different ways.

The town serves as a prime example of the fun that can be derived from learning, offering plenty of activities to satisfy visitors while also educating them. Visitors and locals enjoy venturing through Marbletown's history-filled old-timey hamlets.

"With 3420 acres of protected land, plus another 5600 acres of farms, more than a quarter of Marbletown's area is undeveloped," wrote New York Times writer C.J. Hughes in 2007. Hughes could not resist noting there was no marble in Marbletown but rather a lot of the limestone used to build the town's many stone houses.

For those aspiring to learn more, the D&H Canal Historical Society in High Falls is the perfect spot to begin. The museum



PHOTOS BY THEO SASSANO

offers a detailed look into the development of the 108-mile, 108-lock Delaware & Hudson Canal, a National Historic Landmark that had a major impact on the growth of New York City.

The canal, completed in 1829, was responsible for the transportation of anthracite coal from mines in Pennsylvania to New York City. The pre-railroad-era canal from Honesdale, Pennsylvania to the Hudson River port of Rondout in Kingston





was a marvel of its era. The D&H Canal's creation was a sizable milestone in civil engineering, and the museum's founders are deeply passionate in spreading their abundant knowledge of it.

The half-mile Five Locks Walk near the museum offers a scenic trail travels along a small part of the D&H Canal's towpath. It provides a pleasant experience for all.

The Stone Ridge Orchard has preserved its expertise for over 200 years. Its 115 acres of farmland boasts produce of superlative quality. While pick-your-own produce does not become available until the fall, the orchard is deserving of a visit in all seasons. The farm offers a farmers' market every Sunday and a farm bar.

Some nearby attractions geared towards children include Marbletown Park on Tongore Road in Stone Ridge, which offers a variety of children's facilities in-

cluding athletics courts, ball fields and playgrounds. The park's open grounds are also perfect for casual walks.

A two-minute drive from Marbletown Park is the Den of Marbletown, a family-run teddy-bear museum and cafe. The museum features over 5000 collectibles from Steiff, the company that invented the Teddy Bear. The Marbletown Den contains a gift shop offering kids' toys, teddy bears, t-shirts, and more.

A great place to stay for weekenders and visitors from the city, the Hasbrouck House on Route 209 offers a luxury retreat within the compound of a historic Dutch Colonial mansion. In addition to the extravagant stone house, the hotel includes a farm-to-table restaurant, an outdoor burger and salad shack, 50 acres of parkland including a private lake, a pool, and more. Even those not looking to stay may book dining reservations.

Offering a glimpse into the serene world of the Hudson Valley, the Hasbrouck House is particularly popular with second-homers and city dwellers. It's also a promising option for Hudson Valley residents looking to do some vacationing without long-distance travel.

Marbletown provides opportunities for people of all ages and circumstances. For its considerable significance in both the past and the present, the town is worth checking out more than once.







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