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Hudson Valley **Living**

Home & Garden 2021



Dion Ogust's
center spread:
Three artists'
gardens.

Cover: Detail from
Kathy Ruttenberg's
garden



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Pandemic playspaces

Stuck at home? Build your kids a wonderland!

by Frances Marion Platt

IT'S SPRING 2020. The schools have just been shut down. You pretty much can't take your kids anywhere. Their friends can't come over for a playdate. They're going stir-crazy.

You can't go to your usual place of business, either, so you suddenly have a lot of time on your hands. Homeschooling can't go on all day long. You want to use your time (and theirs) productively. You want to provide enrichment that also helps to burn off some of that freewheeling kid-energy. What do you do?

For some families who had space to spare in their homes or yards, the answer was obvious: Build them a new play structure, or add onto an existing one. Better yet, let the kids help!

One year on, there are lots of stories of people who used some of their pandemic-enforced downtime to turn their home environments into places where their children could more easily exercise their muscles and their imaginations. This is the tale about three of these families. It turns out that they had certain experiences in common.

For one thing, kids have lots of ideas of

what they want from a playspace. They are eager to lend a hand in designing and building.

For another, making a play structure absolutely does not require the expenditure of significant amounts of money. A whole lot of materials can be repurposed, whether free stuff on Craigslist or cut branches from weedy trees cleared from the yard.

Also, once in-person classes resumed and it became possible for youngsters to socialize outdoors with other kids from their pod at school, these backyard creations instantly became enviable en-



PHOTOS BY LAUREN THOMAS

Two year-old Aubrey Bartholemew of New Paltz enjoys partaking in many different activities in her backyard playground. Parents Amy and Alex have assembled this children's paradise over a number of years from upcycled parts. There are swings, towers, climbing walls, trapezes, slides, monkey bars, a zip line and a large sandbox.



The Torborg boys of New Paltz have an underground playground in their house. Ben, Sam and Peter (seven, five and three respectively) are thrilled to have a place to roughhouse.

ticements for other kids to visit.

The Torborg family

For Jeff and Jennifer Torborg of New

Paltz, that happy day of welcoming small visitors has not yet arrived, because their newly created playspace is indoors. Jeff is an electrical engineer. Jen, who was a

teacher for 16 years until her first child was born, is now teaching English online to kids in China. Forced by circumstance to homeschool, she turned the finished

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The Torborgs' underground playground was built and designed in half of a large basement by their dad Jeff, an electrical engineer. Mom Jennifer, a former teacher, has turned the other half of the basement into a classroom equipped with a large computer screen for zoom classes.

half of the basement of their 1950s ranch house into a cozy classroom with a big screen for remote classes.

Just beyond the door into the utility/

storage part of the basement lurked tremendous untapped potential for keeping their three sons busy. Ben is seven, Sam five, and Peter three.

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Spring in the Valley

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The Torborgs cleared a space to set up an art room, with materials ready to hand whenever the kids want to paint or do crafts. A big wooden table is surrounded by four colorful benches, one painted by Jeff and one by each of the boys.

Ben, Sam and Peter aren't exactly go-play-quietly-by-yourself material. They're physically active, little bundles of energy who enjoy climbing on, hanging from, swinging on -- and throwing -- things. Upstairs in the Torborg residence wasn't a great place for that, and the weather isn't always conducive to the boys using the back yard to blow off steam. "We were initially talking about the basement being a place where they could throw balls and not damage anything," says Jen.

That place for roughhousing was created when Jeff built a divider wall separating part of the basement from the storage area -- a wall with plenty of sturdy structural wood that could be used not only to bounce balls off, but also to support play equipment.

"First we thought it would be neat to make a platform that they could climb up to," Jeff recounts. "Then we thought maybe we should close it in. Then we thought it would be cool if we added monkey bars."

One corner of the new room sported a playhouse, with a window and a working door left over from a cabinet that the Torborgs replaced in the process of renovating the house when they moved in two years ago. Peter, the youngest, likes to pretend that it's his ice-cream stand, dispensing treats through the window. The older boys are more likely to use the playhouse as base when playing tag or a ball game.

Rubber mats cover the area under the monkey bars. In the middle of the playroom, a spinning swing made of netting hangs from the ceiling, encouraging boisterous movement within a small radius. Along the walls are basketball hoops



Eight year-old Alma and ten year-old Raya (l-r) are the daughters of John and Helanna Waldie. The girls helped their dad build a backyard treehouse with a twist. "I didn't want to attach it to the tree," John says, "I wanted to give the tree space to grow." What resulted was a free standing structure built around a young maple. Waldie figured out how to do this by watching YouTube videos.

Jeff cut out of wooden planks. The boys painted it, Ben also painted a wooden target with numbers for scoring points,

like a dartboard. Blocks sawn from two-by-fours create a climbing wall leading to the playhouse platform.

"This is a project that keeps growing and growing over time," says Jen.

What's the next improvement? Murals on the playroom walls, perhaps -- using the kids' own designs, blown up with a projector, as templates.

The Torborg boys are waiting for it to be safe to invite visitors over. "What this space needs is friends," says Jen. "The other kids can't come inside yet. Things like this playhouse become more exciting when you can share it with a friend."

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The Bratman-Waldie family

Because their little wonderland is spread out along one side of their three-acre back yard in Gardiner, ten-year-old Raya and eight-year-old Alma Bratman-Waldie have already been able to enjoy playing host to their podmates from school on their days off. That yard also has room for a big garden, the domain of their mom, Helanna Bratman, who works in an agriculture program for youth run by the Cornell Cooperative Extension in Beacon.

Their dad, John Waldie, who teaches art at Washingtonville High School, admits to being "kind of a project addict." Constructing things in the back yard for his kids is



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an ongoing enterprise. It uses skills accumulated, he says, largely from watching YouTube videos. "I call it a combination of bravery and ignorance," he jokes.

Several of those structures predate Covid-19: a zipline, a rope network for climbing, a ladder made from downed branches, a sort of xylophone made from hanging lengths of PVC pipe. But the cancellation in 2020 of the girls' usual primary summertime activity, Wild Earth's outdoor day-camp program, inspired John to raise the ante. "When Wild Earth closed for the season, we figured we've got to find something to occupy our time," he says. "Alma was the one asking about wanting a fort."

With the two girls as his helpers, John undertook his most ambitious outdoor construction yet, an elaborate freestanding treehouse that surrounds the trunk of a young maple. "I didn't want to attach it to the tree. I wanted to give the tree space to grow," he explains.

He designed the treehouse using a balloon framing technique. The studs go from ground-level up to the railing level, with concrete block as footings. "We laid it out on the ground, and these two whacked in a lot of nails," says John, indicating his daughters. "It was almost like an Amish barnraising, without the Amish."

The structure was cobbled together from a combination of repurposed lumber, naturally downed trees, and other materials that John cut as part of a thinning project in the more overgrown sections of the yard. The platform for the sitting area in the top of the treehouse is made from fancier stuff: "Because of the lumber shortages during the pandemic, all that

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we could get was cedar," explains John.

With or without friends over, the girls love to sit in the kid-sized Adirondack chairs in their new eyrie. "It's a nice place to read," says Raya. "You can watch the deer. They come around to the same spot at the same time every day."

"We pretend that this is our house," adds Alma.

Getting up to their lofty perch is half the fun, with "lots of trails to get up there," in John's words. The aerial pathways are ingeniously intertwined. "This is like a pirate ladder," says Raya, demonstrating how to climb the rigging. For lifting necessities to their hideaway, the girls devised a dumbwaiter from an old joint-compound bucket and a rope. John says that he obtained many other components of the structure for free, or nearly, including a slide from the materials exchange at the town transfer station.

Despite its disparately sourced parts, the overall effect of the treehouse and its adjoining play structures is of something that grew organically over time. How will they expand next, as the community rebounds from the pandemic? That remains to be seen, but the Bratman-Waldies still have a lot of weed trees they want to clear out.

If those girls start watching do-it-yourself construction videos on YouTube, there'll be no stopping them.

The Bartholomew family

Another back-yard paradise for kids has been created in the course of several years behind the New Paltz home of Amy and Alex Bartholomew. Amy teaches astronomy and Alex teaches geology at SUNY New Paltz. They have two daughters, six-year-old Annabeth and two-year-old Aubrey. "It's kind of like this Frankenstein thing that keeps being added onto," explains Alex.

In fact, it's a challenge to tease out which components went up pre-Covid and which are the newer additions.

Out front of the house is a cluster of chairs and little tables that Amy recently acquired – "purely a pandemic purchase," she says – as a way to congregated socially before friends could be invited indoors. Out back, the yard slopes downward from the house, with the top level featuring a couple of new structures, a "garage for the toy cars" and a big tent protecting some cots and chairs from the rain, ostensibly for back-yard camping. "My daughter

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Left to Right: Joseph Belluck, Jordan Fox, Kristina Georgiou

plays with them like they're her castle," says Alex.

There's also a pink playhouse that dates back to Annabeth's fourth birthday, sporting the family's street number plus

"½." "We put it together and painted it together," says her dad.

Downslope is a bench made from a tree trunk, an enormous sandbox that Alex built from scratch two years ago,

and a swingset of similar vintage. A new crossbar made from a sturdy limb is a new addition, along with some replacement swings. "It has been morphing," says Amy. "Just about everything in our yard is free or from a yard sale."

That swing set forms the oldest side of a big square formation of play equipment. In aggregate, there are four towers, two climbing walls, seven swings, two trapezes, five slides and two sets of monkey bars. Some elements are brand-new, squeezed into place during long hours of not being able to teach during the pandemic. "I got that part free on Craigslist from a lady in Stone Ridge who used to run a daycare," Alex says, pointing to one connecting section.

A little further downslope is a line of trees where several new play features were installed this past year. There's a tire swing, and a zipline with a handsome wooden platform and ladder for climbing onto the upper end of the line, with a bosun's chair for Aubrey to ride in and a disc seat for Annabeth. A mulberry tree with no low limbs has been rendered climbable by the attachment of wooden blocks threaded with straps that buckle tightly around the trunk. "My daughter wants me to build a treehouse in this tree," says Alex, gazing up into the mulberry, contemplating a future project.

At the lowest point of the back yard, nature takes over, with a little stream running through. The trees growing more thickly together are actually a sugarbush, says Amy: "We tapped a bunch of our maple trees this spring and made maple syrup."

As the pandemic wanes and mid-Hudsonites begin to emerge from their isolation, these enhanced play-places become welcoming sites for young and old to gather. "It has been nice for kids to come over. Annabeth just turned six in May, and she had the first birthday party we've heard of in a year," Amy notes. "Before, on a kid's birthday, there was always an activity. Now they're just happy to play outside."

At *chez* Bartholomew, as at the other homes, the whole family gets involved in the never-ending building projects. Alex says that he sometimes works on them with toddler Aubrey strapped to his back.

Any teases Alex, asking whether he's just building what he wished he had as a kid, Ah, don't we all?

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Decluttering

Emptying the house, clearing the mind



by Erin Quinn

WHEN I TOLD my best friend that I was writing an article on clutter cleaning, she told me that when she was cleaning out her attic she had found no less than three copies of *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui*, a decluttering classic by Karen Kingston.

I laughed so hard that I couldn't resist telling a mutual childhood friend that tale. "I found two copies of it in my box-of-things-to-get-rid-of that I never got rid of," she confessed. "What we're dealing with here is a perennial problem. It's like

knowing you should eat your vegetables, but grabbing the bread basket. Or telling yourself you'll feel so much better if you went for a walk, and but then kicking back with some inane social-media stalking on your phone instead."

I have read Kingston's book, and several others on the art of *feng shui*, and I'm awakened anew every time, motivated to haul the advisory tomes to the dump, the recycling center, the Goodwill, or the library book fair-shed. My copy of the book remains, collecting dust on the bottom rung of a coffee table or nightstand.

Our energy is impacted by what we surround ourselves with, whom we sur-

round ourselves with, and what kind of environment we are surrounded by. That has never been more apparent than this past year, when we were asked to shelter in place, work remotely, be schooled remotely, exercise, dance, and socialize remotely.

We were on an island of our own making. There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. We had ample opportunity to look at our surroundings day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute.

I applaud all of you who took that opportunity to purge and cleanse and slap on a fresh coat of paint or finally tile those clapboard floors or prepare the soil for



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If you were not one of those people, we can be friends. Like me, you still have piles of unread mail and magazines stacking up, bags of clothes that should go to the Salvation Army, a treasure trove of

knick-knacks, broken picture frames, a drawerful of unmatched socks, an array of bizarre items that wash up against the floorboards and corners of rooms and on top of surfaces that you have no clue what to do with, and a closet you're scared to open.

Like daily exercise and eating well, we all know that being more organized, clutter-free and clean will make us happier, lighter, more motivated, and less stuck in our own lives. What do we really need? Food, water, shelter. A little love is nice, too, and some natural light, which we can get more of if we clean off our window ledges and wipe down the glass.

I'm no expert, but here's the test I give myself when I get inspired to declutter. Do I need it? Do I use it? Do I love it? If I can't answer yes to any of those, then

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I'm supposed to get rid of it. If I were someone who didn't care much about the waste stream and just wanted to throw, I would be fairly clutter-free.

My sticking point -- and we all have our sticking points -- is that I don't want to be wasteful and therefore want to compost things, donate or give them to a good home, recycle them, or -- and here's where it gets tricky -- simply throw them out. It's not that I think my stuff is too valuable not to be thrown out, it's that I feel guilty putting it into a landfill.

Play that in reverse. I have to take that same approach whenever I bring something into my home. What about mail and the kids' projects from school or gifts from loved ones or the plastic containers that your flower pots came in, or those clamshell containers of fruit and vegetables that claim to be recyclable but really aren't? I tell myself, "Progress not perfection," and try to keep the throwing to a minimum.

I think it's critical, at least for me, to start small, to start where I am. If that means cleaning for five minutes a day, starting with the sock drawer, the pantry, the half-empty bottles of shampoo that no one has used in years, then that's where I start.

I wish I were a homesteader. I wish that I was so on top of my game that I grew my own food, fed by my own compost and mulch, sheared my own sheep, wove

my own wool and made my own clothes and blankets, and lived in a cob home. I wish I were so handy that I could create my own wind-power, collect water from a rain barrel, and utilize the sun to heat

although I aspire to be cool enough, to model myself after one of my friends who has never purchased a new item of clothing since she was 16. She only buys used clothing and makes any alterations herself. I've never seen anyone so beautiful and stylish and unencumbered by crap in my life.

Those might be the big goals -- a tiny house, an airstream, a solar-powered greenhouse, and an electric bike charged from a miniature wind-turbine. That's admirable. Or maybe I could design and build my own home from locally sourced materials and have a wall of glass facing west and a bluestone walkway with a zen-inspired garden and a minimalist interior design that's fantastic.

In the meantime, the less stuff I bring in, the less stuff I have to organize and

"The objective of cleaning is not just to clean, but to feel happiness living within that environment." — Marie Kondo

and cool my house.

I am none of those things. Sadly, I can't even sew a button onto a shirt or handle a screw gun. I'm not even cool enough,



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the less stuff I end up having to get rid of. It's kind of simple, but as I write this, I see clutter everywhere. It makes me feel heavy, claustrophobic, dirty and lethargic. In places where there is no clutter, and I have those spaces, too, I feel airy, happy, expansive and focused.

Yes, cleaning is hard to start. I want to persuade myself that getting rid of things or sorting out personal relics and refuse can make me feel other than nostalgic, sad, shamed or defeated. In the end, when it's all sorted, thrown, returned, removed and cleaned with some hot water and soap, I want to persuade myself that I will feel great. There's no end game. It's

a constant process. Building in some joy with the decluttering -- maybe a family member or a buddy or a podcast or a free-wheeling playlist -- can help make the dust-busting easier. Whenever I roll up my sleeves, take the plunge into the dirt, grime, mess and maelstrom, the activity takes on its own rhythm.

I've never truly gotten to the *feng shui* level. I hung a mirror in a corner once or was mindful of emptying a section of our house that let some cash come flooding in. With three kids, two jobs and a dog, I was just trying to find my way through the beginning and end of a day.

We rented an affordable Airbnb on the outer Cape this past week, just before

Memorial Day. It was actually affordable. The place was what people who own beach houses call a cottage. It's much larger than our home in New Paltz.

What I loved about this house inspired me to get myself clutter-clearing again. Everything in it was functional, comfortable, or pleasant to look at. A big comfy couch with throw pillows and blankets. Beautiful artwork that varied from prints to driftwood to oil paintings and vintage French perfume advertisements. Because the bedding was clean, soft, and plain, the artwork stood out more.

The kitchen was large, open, functional. No bells and whistles. The living room was spacious, relaxing, with a small bookshelf that made people you actually want to read the books and a well-placed television that would allow some of us to watch the NBA playoffs while others caught up on their e-mails. Whatever was actually needed was accessible and easy to locate and use. Whatever was not needed wasn't there.

I think that's the goal. Have what you need, some of what you want, and the energy to create the rest.

Hudson Valley Explore

Summer in the Valley



A local perspective

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To mow or not to mow

Change your ideal of a perfect lawn

by Lee Reich, PhD

LAWN LOVERS, PREPARE for battle. By now, your defenses surely have been dulled by the weekly mowing ritual.

Ecologically, the “ideal” lawn is not much better than an asphalt parking lot. A recent study by Yale University estimated that we here in the U.S. use about 600 million gallons of gasoline to mow and trim our lawns. And millions of tons of fertilizer, whose manufacture

also is based on petrochemicals, are used each year to keep grass green. Much of this fertilizer is carried away by rain as a nutrient-rich solution which eventually trickles into lakes and streams, causing them to become choked by excessive weed growth. Too often, lawns are drenched with insecticides to kill such insect pests as chinch bugs and grubs; with fungicides to knock out leaf spots, brown patch, and snow mold; and with herbicides to stop crabgrass.

And what about noise? I still remem-

ber the musical clickety-click sound of the push mower on weekend mornings when I was a child. Now the angry roar of gasoline-powered mowers and the high-pitched whine of power trimmers fill the air.

The lawn of today is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the middle of the 19th century, the lawn was not the close-cropped, homogeneous phenomenon that it is today. Rather, the lawn of yore consisted of wild grasses and wildflowers, maintained with the swing



PHOTOS BY BY LEE REICH



of a scythe four or five times a year, or with grazing sheep.

Once the lawnmower was invented, in the middle of the nineteenth century, you no longer needed to own a flock of sheep or have hired gardeners to maintain a

greensward. There are over 30 million acres of lawn in the U.S., and the number is growing. Much of that acreage is watered, making lawns the largest irrigated crop in the nation.

Less obvious is the effect of lawns on

wildlife. It is no surprise that the lack of diversity of plants in these large expanses of green support little wildlife.

NOW THAT I'VE GOTTEN ALL THAT OFF my chest, I can admit to loving the fresh



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scent and the attractive appearance of a freshly mown lawn. And what a nice surface a lawn is on which children can tumble. Lawn Institute research found that people feel “green is clean.” A beer can is less likely to be tossed onto a lawn than an unkempt field.

The quintessential use of a large expanse of flat lawn is, in my opinion, that social institution familiar to many towns of the Northeast, the town common. Here, the lawn is at its best, providing a place at which to eat, to read, to meet friends, and to stroll.

How can the good be balanced with the bad when it comes to lawns?

First, treat a lawn correctly. Grow a grass adapted to your site's soil and light conditions. Mow regularly to a height of about two inches (high mowing inhibits crabgrass). Unless the clippings are longer than an inch, leave them where the mower blows them. Less fertilizer is needed if the clippings are not harvested. Do not apply chemicals routinely. And, if you must water, water deeply and

infrequently.

Second, consider alternatives to a lawn, or at least some of your lawn. Ground covers such as euonymous (*E. fortunei*) or sedum grow well in the sun; for the shade, creeping myrtle or pachysandra are *de rigueur*. For something a little different, how about a deliciously edible groundcover, such as cranberry, lowbush blueberry, or lingonberry. Another plus: the last three are native plants). Or a deliciously scented lawn, such as creeping thyme or chamomile, both of which also grow low enough to walk on and tolerate some foot traffic.

Third, change your ideal of a perfect lawn. Let some clover and ground ivy mingle with your grass. Are dandelions really unattractive? A perfect lawn can be boring. The perfect lawn easily slips over into looking like nothing more than artificial turf. My lawn has received compliments (in spring and fall, and in summers when sufficient rain has fallen), yet the only care I give it is correct mowing.

And fourth, convert a part of the lawn into a meadow. A meadow consists of grasses with a healthy dose of annual and perennial flowers. The grasses for a meadow would include bunch grasses (such as sheep fescue or chewings fescue) which stabilize the soil but do not spread as do lawn grasses. Annual flowers such as plains coreopsis, cornflower, icelandic poppy, and corn poppy splash color

in the meadow their first season, then resow themselves for subsequent years' blooms. Biennial and perennial flowers — yarrow, chicory, purple coneflower, butterfly weed, evening primrose, even such commonplace beauties as chicory, buttercup, Queen-Anne's-lace and gold-erod — remain year after year.

THE MEADOW NEED NOT BE LARGE, FOR even a small back yard can be brightened by a small patchwork of wildflowers. The only care demanded by a meadow is once-a-year mowing (with a hand scythe, a mower, depending its power and the height of the vegetation, might get bogged down) and occasional weeding by hand. In my *The Pruning Book*, I write about sculpting out these two tiers of mostly grassy growth, something I have termed “lawn nouveau,” with the crisp boundary between tall and low grass keeping everything neat and avoiding the appearance of an unmown lawn.

A wildflower meadow is the obvious choice for large fields. On a backyard scale, use a small meadow as a transition between, for instance, mowed lawn and tall trees, a stream, or a property line. And if your meadow has any size to it, occasional swaths cut through it beckon a stroll.

I am fortunate to have a meadow as part of my property. Like many pieces of reasonably fertile, well-drained land around here, this field became a meadow not because it was deliberately planted as such, but because annual mowing has prevented the encroachment of forest. I periodically scythe parts of my meadow and rake up the mowings for mulch and for food for my compost.

From spring to fall the grasses are livened by colors from wildflowers, the progression of which changes somewhat from year to year and depends on the weather and the timing of its annual total mowing. A mowed path invites a stroll through the meadow and a closer look at the goldenrods, bee balm, yarrow, Queen Anne's Lace, Joe Pye Weed, New York Ironweed, and — yes — dandelions, also.

New Paltz writer Lee Reich, Ph.D. is a garden consultant specializing in soil care and growing fruits and vegetables. He hosts workshops at his New Paltz farm-don and webinars, via Zoom. For more information, go to www.leereich.com.

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The Andes Rail Trail.

Bucolic opportunities

Exploring the western frontier

by Susan Barnett

WHEN WE MOVED to Franklin in Delaware County from Ulster County three years ago, most people had the same question. “Why?”

What a difference 2020 made.

The year of the shutdown saw my real-estate business shift into overdrive. The number of downstaters who sheltered in Delaware County and then decided they wanted to move here full-time spiked upwards, and real-estate prices have done the same.

Lately I’ve been hearing from friends who have decided Kingston is too crowded, the Hudson Valley is too expensive – they want more elbow room. All they require is reliable Internet. The question they’re asking now has changed.

“How,” they ask me, “do you like Delaware County?”

I like it a lot.

This is not completely foreign territory for many of them now. They took long drives just to get out of the house during the shutdown. Countryside they once dismissed as way too remote suddenly felt comforting and peaceful. There are fewer people. No traffic. Long views. The

real world seems very far away.

In fact, Delaware County’s northern border is less than two hours from Kingston via Route 28. There are lots of opportunity to wind down and connect with nature. Maybe that sounds good to you, too. Here are a few suggestions along a circular route easily done in a day, and tailored to a world still somewhat pandemic-restricted.

Head west on Route 28. If the Arkville Bread & Breakfast is open, that’s where you should get your breakfast. There are plenty of good options along the way, but they’re far from undiscovered. The converted caboose is my favorite place to



SUSAN BARNETT

The Blue Bee Café.

get a cup of coffee, and there's generally plenty of places to sit outside. It's not undiscovered, either, but it still feels like it is. The whole idea is to get away from the real world, isn't it?

Hop back onto Route 28 and climb into the mountains. Just before Andes, you'll see a sign for the Palmer Hill Trail near the crest of the steepest part of your climb. Stop. Pull in. Do not pass it. This is an essential first leg of your tour.

If you want to walk, there's a couple of lovely, not-too-strenuous hikes you can do. But even if you just park the car, you're in for a treat. In that parking lot is a long, long view back toward the Hudson River. It's a view of Ulster County that may well take your breath away, equal to anything offered by far more strenuous hikes, and all you have to do is park and look. Breathe. It's your reintroduction to nature.

Your next stop should be the Andes rail-trail. The folks who care for the trail

are justifiably proud. It's beautiful, it's quiet, and it will even make you laugh. The old train station is a beauty. The trail is quiet, and loops through just about every possible kind of Catskills scenery, from meadow to forest to pine barren.

Read the markers along the trail. All of them are interesting, and one of them is just plain funny. Apparently a Hollywood movie that was filmed on a now-demolished bridge by the train tracks. Apparently the extras, two feuding groups of Andes neighbors, delighted the director with the remarkably authentic energy they brought to their fight scene. Sadly, their film of that melee has been lost. But it sounds like people in the mountains haven't changed much in the past couple of hundred years.

From Andes, get back on Route 28 and go to Delhi. You've probably been to Delhi before. If you are hungry and you haven't been to the Blue Bee Cafe, you

haven't lived. For your sake, I hope it's open when you go.

Another surprising dining option is Catskill Momo's, home of the authentic Tibetan dumpling. Also, the Delhi Farmer's Market is a particularly good one, if you happen to hit it.

If it's the weekend, definitely continue on 28 to Route 357 and Franklin. Franklin's village is on the National Historic Register. If you like well-kept old homes and quaint villages, you're going to be very happy. If you like high-end fashion and home décor, Sean Scherer and Gary Graham at 422 Main Street are must-stops. Blue Farm Antiques and Letterpress Printing is just a few doors down. And if your taste runs

more toward country quaint, the Mercantile on Main is across the street.

If you are lucky, Bea's Market and Cafe will be open, or the Tulip and the Rose will be serving brunch. Weekends are your best bet for all of them, at least until summer arrives. The small weekly farmer's market will be open on Sundays, and the Franklin Stage hopes to resume performances this year, too.

There is an edible walking trail behind the park in the village, and on the hill above town is the North Star blueberry farm.

Keep that in mind for a future visit. Then get back in your car because the most amazing scenery is yet to come. If you go back toward Delhi, but turn right on County Route 14, you'll get to Delhi via Treadwell, the quaint little artists' village with the stream running through its center. The rolling hills beyond Treadwell are something pretty special, and a nice warmup to what you're heading toward.



SUSAN BARNETT

Palmer Hill.

In Delhi, make a left on Main Street and continue straight on Route 10. You're heading toward Kortright and Hobart, the book village. But in between, your eyes are going to be treated to some of the most spectacular scenery the Catskills have to offer. It's just a road through a river valley, but what a valley! It's hard to imagine anyone making it all the way to Hobart without stopping to take a picture. There's a rail trail, too, if you want to get out and see the sights more slowly.

Hobart can be a full day's visit when the book shops are open. But eventually you should continue on to Stamford, the old Victorian spa town.

At that point, you have some choices to make. There are routes that can take you through Roxbury (a charming little historic village), or even into Hunter and Tannersville. But here's my suggestion for your first visit: take a right on Route 23 through Grand Gorge and Prattsville.

Prattsville was practically wiped off the map by Hurricane Irene, but it's a vil-

lage with heart. You'd hardly know what happened when you visit now. Prattsville feels like a big victory celebration, even when nothing's particularly happening there. There are some walking trails on the hillside in Prattsville I've never explored. But I intend to.

Then bear right on 23A to Lexington. Lexington is home to some massive, Victorian buildings that have always fascinated me. The last time I saw them, the old hotel closest to the river was in dire shape, but the others looked like worthy projects.

A right on 42 will take you to West Kill, a remote little hamlet that has way more charm than I can explain. I've driven there just to park on the main road and take a walk through the old cemetery. It's just a lovely spot. There's nothing there, really. But somehow when you stop, you want to linger.

Back in the car, continue on and within a few minutes you'll wind along the mountains back to Route 28 at Shanda-

ken. Turn left, and you're headed back towards the Hudson. But I suspect you'll be carrying some memories with you that are likely to linger.

You'll be back.



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Green energy nudge

*Hudson Valley jurisdictions
make renewables their default electricity source*

by Crispin Kott

COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE Hudson Valley have begun signing on to Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) agreements, which set the default electricity rates and source for municipal customers who opt in. Increasingly, these programs use renewable energy, allowing climate-conscious consumers to help the environment without adding solar panels to their own properties. A CCA allows communities to pool electricity demand by leveraging their collective buying power in an effort to secure energy rates that are both competitively priced and contractually stable.

Participating municipalities as of May

2021 includes the City of Beacon, Town of Clinton, Village of Cold Spring, Town of Fishkill, Town of Marbletown, Town of New Paltz, Village of New Paltz, Town of Philipstown, City of Poughkeepsie, and Town of Red Hook. On July 1, Saugerties and Rhinebeck are among four more municipalities planning to join the CCA, which uses solar energy.

Hudson Valley Community Power (HVCP) is the program manager of a CCA partnership between itself and program administrator Joule Community Power. “There’s just this beautiful design in the program,” said an enthusiastic Jeff Domanski, principal of Hudson Valley Energy. “By creating a virtual commercial entity out of all of these small customers within a community, you reverse their

leverage within the marketplace and just using the existing market. You can actually have your cake and eat it, too. You can support renewables at a very cost-competitive rate that’s fixed, and it can be better than the price of non-renewables. It’s totally turned around the way that people think about renewables just by utilizing existing capitalistic markets.”

Doing the math

The Village of New Paltz’s new CCA agreement recently locked in participating consumer rates at 6.573 cents per kilowatt-hour, up slightly from their CCA’s current rate of 6.361 cents. Central Hudson’s rates fluctuate based on market trends: Their standard rate as of May 12 was 4.417 cents per kilowatt-hour, down



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/TOM CORSER

from 6.739 cents on April 13, and 9.525 cents on March 12. But since the term for CCA is typically one year, the more appropriate comparison would be to Central Hudson's twelve-month average, which was 5.357 cents per kilowatt/hour for the term ending May 12.

In that case, the CCA rate turned out to be higher than the regular Central Hudson rate. But had market conditions gone another way, then the non-CCA rate might have spiked while the CCA rate would have been stable. Beyond the easy access to renewable energy, this stability is the program's chief selling point.

"HVCP provides a fixed rate, while Central Hudson rates are variable monthly and move up or down with the underlying wholesale markets," said Sherry Rothenberg, vice-president of marketing with Joule. "Therefore, over any particular period, it is difficult to accurately predict price performance. What we can say is that we are confident we have secured very low fixed rates for both renewable and standard supply options that will provide great value to customers."

Easy access to renewables

Domanski said that a CCA might never have occurred to some property owners

before. He's compared it to the Costco membership model, where members collectively keep prices low. "It's the idea of kind of equity empowerment from this for a lot of homeowners who wouldn't even think about it, that they are empowered to be part of it, which I think is no small thing at all," he said. "I call it decision-making justice. This idea that people are so burdened and for a handful of reasons they don't think about this, or they don't want to think about it, or they just can't because they have too many other things to think about."

With Saugerties on the verge of joining the CCA, preparations are under way to let the community know the advantages of staying with the program as opposed to opting out. Said Mary O'Donnell, chair of the Saugerties Conservation Advisory Commission and coordinator for the Saugerties Climate Smart Task Force, "The Town of Saugerties has been really very forward-looking in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, particularly for town buildings. So the more renewable energy that we can use, not only within the town government, but throughout the community, the more greenhouse gas emissions will definitely go down, and that's all tied

into addressing global warming and the whole climate crisis."

Homeowners are able to opt out at any time. "The program provides a robust layer of customer protection," Rothenberg said. "We are able to dictate the terms of the deal, and customers never have to sign a contract or commit for any period of time. Customers are free to opt out or exit the program at any time, for any reason, without penalty."

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