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WILLIAM LAVALETTE

Interior design by Meg Lavalette.

Express your personal style

by Susan Barnett

WHAT DO ALL-WHITE rooms say about the world we live in? There's a growing discussion of color in fashion and decor. Or, to be more specific, a discussion of chromophobia – the fear of color. The disorder is, according to many, very specific to Western culture. If you are addicted to online real-estate browsing or you've looked at Airbnbs on-



PHOTOS BY WILLIAM ABRANOWICZ

A living room (above) and bedroom (below) from Sean Scherer's book *Kabinet & Kammer, Creating Authentic Interiors*.

line, you know all about it. It's called the neutral aesthetic, or the vanilla-girl aesthetic. It's mostly white. Very white. White on white, in fact.

And it's everywhere. White ceilings and walls, white furniture. The floor might even be painted white. It's frosty, yet distinctly not Scandinavian. It's paired with black or gray, if any color besides white is allowed.

It's totally on trend for the majority of Americans who care about such things.

The Internet and home-design shows have ushered in the era of neutrals. Despite the Pantone Color of the Year continuing to skew toward deep, bold color (this year it's Viva Magenta), neutrals are the accepted color of luxury and privilege in home décor and in fashion.



It's so ubiquitous that there are even online parodies of children's colorless fashions, recommending "sad, beige

clothes for sad, beige children."

It began with colonialism

An article in *Psychology Today* a couple of years ago ("There's Nothing Neutral About Neutral Colors" <https://www.>

Hudson Valley Living

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Geddy Sveikauskas

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Interior design by Meg Lavalette.

psychologytoday.com/us/blog/making-sense/202006/there-s-nothing-neutral-about-neutral-colors) explored the historical origins of the rigid Western control of color. The preference for neutral, subdued tones is, according to historians, a trend that began with colonialism, and is, the article concluded, a powerful statement of someone's perceived social, intellectual and racial status.

A recent article in *Buzzfeed News* (<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/stephaniemcneal/beige-neutrals->

trend-social-media) stated, "A spokesperson for the creator-driven shopping platform LTK told me that in the past month searches looking for a neutral aesthetic" have shot up by 283 percent, with a 400 percent increase in searches for a vanilla-girl aesthetic."

It was not always thus, particularly in the Hudson Valley and Catskills. Woodstock, the historic arts colony, was once particularly colorful. Even a decade ago, décor was still often inspired by the colors of Tibet and India. Before Kingston

became fashionable, home décor there was anything but.

Now the most expensive homes in any Hudson Valley community all look very much the same.

Sean Scherer refers to it as "boring interiors for boring people."

Scherer is an artist. He is also an author, educator, and owner of Kabinett & Kammer, a Delaware County shop he describes as a contemporary curiosity shop of antiques, natural wonders, and art. He calls himself a modernist, but to him that doesn't mean spare and boring. He's the man who helped create a one-of-a-kind home in a former firehouse for CNN anchor Anderson Cooper, replete with cherished family heirlooms, deep colors, and lots of books.

That's the polar opposite of what most design sites tell you to do.

Scherer said a Nashville antiques dealer recently passed on a cabinet in his shop that she desperately wanted to buy. It was gray, with a hint of green. She said her clients wouldn't buy anything that wasn't pure white, black or gray. Their décor, she said, was white on white.

"European interiors or artists' homes in this country," Scherer said, "they're filled with collections. Modernist artist Luis Barragan's home in Mexico City has antiques in his modernist home, items collected over the years, or handed down from family. George Nakashima [furniture maker, architect and known as the Father of American Arts and Crafts] had a home filled with his collections. Even the modernists don't live the way these people are living. They have the stuff of life in their homes."

Scherer shook his head. "Too many people want their homes to look like what they see on social media, or TV shows. It looks so pretentious, even though they think it's so casual and minimal. But I think it has an opposite effect. They're creating spaces that have no relationship to the home or the region, and that's one of the worst things you can do."

It's about context

Meg Lavalette is an interior designer. Lava Interiors has offices in New York City and Franklin, NY, and she also has a shop in Franklin. Lava Atelier is stocked with unusual furniture and accents she has found on overseas buying trips. Her portfolio includes some neutral rooms, but even those feature bold accents and



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layers of textures. She agrees that any home-design decisions need to start with the home and its location, rather than a one-look-fits-all approach.

“It’s all about personal style,” she said. “It’s about context. What’s the architecture? Where is the structure located? Who inhabits the space? Those are the points of reference to begin developing the design concept.”

Lavalette isn’t afraid of color, and says people more often make mistakes on the quality of items rather than the color.

“Color shouldn’t be scary. It should be liberating and fun. If you’re worried about making a mistake, start with a neutral base and then layer color on top, playing with saturation, application, hue, and any other variation to see what feels good to you. Discover what colors and tones speak to you. If you need guidance, look to your wardrobe and other items you’ve already collected.”

Scherer calls his personal style Old-World Layers, and employs an artist’s eye to create interesting vignettes from collected items. His new book, due next year from Vendome, will focus specifically on guidance to create your own home displays of beloved items.



WILLIAM LAVALETTE

Interior design by Meg Lavalette.

His first book, “Kabinett & Kammer: Creating Authentic Interiors,” is in its third printing. Anthropologie is stocking it in its stores, he says, so “clearly someone’s into what I do.”

His inspiration has been the homes of other artists and collectors.

“If you look at the most interesting homes of collectors, it’s layered, it’s filled. They’ve filled the walls because they can’t stop collecting art. If you’re reflecting the self that you see online, it’s not you. You’re just copying someone else.”

Down with the rules

Scherer and Lavalette agree that some of the time-honored rules of home décor are nonsense.

“People think color or dark colors in a small space makes it smaller, which is not true,” Scherer said. “To me, nothing is more cold or makes a space less interesting, scale-wise, than white. As soon as you put a color in it, boom! – the space looks huge. Can’t have a big piece of furniture in a small room? A big piece of furniture actually makes the scale feel bigger everywhere.”

Lavalette also calls it a myth that dark, bold colors make a space smaller. She said it’s all a question of what you do with those colors.

“If you paint a room black and do nothing else with it, it’s going to be horribly strange, unless you’re wanting a cave vibe. Two of my favorite black rooms are Adam Levine’s bedroom by Mark Haddawy and



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Trey Laird’s library by Jeffrey Bilhuber. Playing devil’s advocate, black walls give the perception of more space because the visual limits aren’t as keenly perceived due to the depth from the deep hue.”

It’s not, Lavalette said, about the so-called rules. “Color doesn’t mean maximalism, and neutral doesn’t mean minimalism. Josh Young Design House is doing neutral maximalism in a captivating way right now. He has a look, and it’s layered, and very white, and mixes

periods and styles.”

Scherer said social media is driving the trends right now, but he points out that the white-on-white look actually began in upscale hotels. “But if you look at boutique hotels now, they’re not white on white,” he said. “They’re layered. They’re wallpapered. They have color. But it’s going to take a lot longer for it to trickle down.”

For Scherer, the plain white interior says something about who we are right now.

“When I worked with Anderson Cooper, it was very clear that that was his home, and very personal to him. It was clearly someone’s personality, someone’s home,” Scherer said. “And that’s what I see missing in most interior-designer homes. I can appreciate them, but I never really feel like there’s a personality attached to the interior. I think it’s part of our boring culture, our sameness. It’s kind of a cultural flatness. I always say the best interiors don’t look like they’ve been ‘done,’ they look like they happened. You just need some authenticity. Everything’s looking very forced. You have to allow for things that don’t fit in.”

Are you looking to add a little color to your life? Scherer says it’s about color as well as texture. Keep your plain white sofa, he advised. But add velvet pillow with different hues of one color, and a beautiful throw in a nice color. Then throw a colorful kilim or a piece of art on the wall. You’ve changed the feeling of the space.

Meg Lavalette, an interior designer and owner of Lava Interiors, was named as a 2022 Interior Designer to Watch by First Dibs. She also owns Lava Atelier. She works in the tri-state area and offers virtual design services at <https://www.lavainteriors.com/services>.

Sean Scherer is an artist, educator, collector, decorator and author whose Delaware County shop Kabinett & Kammer serves as inspiration for clients around the globe. His work has been featured in House Beautiful, Country Living, and The New York Times, among other publications. His second book is due this year: <https://kabinettandkammer.com>

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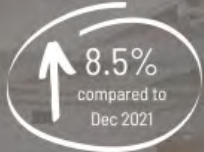
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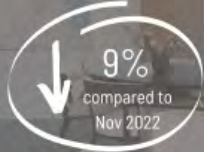
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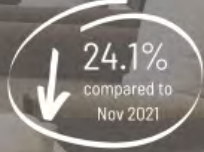
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Life with Mama Hoot

My chickens came home to roost

by Jenny Bella

KEEPING CHICKENS HAS always been something I had wanted to do. When we finished our garden one beautiful summer day, we decided it was time to plan for where we wanted to build a chicken coop. We drew a site plan, trying to provide adequate room, utilizing our limited space as efficiently as possible. Time flew by. With so many projects going on, the chicken coop was put on



JENNY BELLA

The author's original batch of baby hoots.

the back burner until the next spring. I was over at a friend's house late that winter walking around with her and

her son Jonah in their back yard. Jonah showed me his coop and the different varieties of chickens he was raising. He

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was explaining how docile and friendly the Appenzeller Spitzhaubens, a black-and-white breed with silver feet, were and how they like to fly up and roost in the trees.

I was fascinated. He told me his Spitz hen had gone missing. He figured she had flown off, and one of the many predators we have around had got ahold of her.

I looked at him. He looked back at me

and shrugged his shoulders, "It's just one of the things that happens when you keep animals," he said. "I don't get attached."

We continued around to the garage, from which there was another entrance

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to the inside of the coop. As we made our way through the packed space to the door, I noticed movement. I was startled.

I saw it again and told Jonah about it. He looked over. "It's the Hoot!" he exclaimed.

There was the Spitz, perched up on some boxes protecting five small eggs and one tiny chick.

Before I knew it, Jonah and his mom were setting up a transport tubby, collecting some starter equipment, and setting it up in the back of my car.

I couldn't possibly take the little creatures home, I protested. My coop wasn't done, and it was still cold at night.

"I thought she was gone, and I was okay with that," he said. "Now she is meant to be with you. You will have plenty of time to get it all set up. Bring them home and keep them in the house for a few weeks.



JENNY BELLA

Mama Hoot.

That should give you enough time to get your coop finished."

I was now on my way home with my very first flock.

I couldn't count my chickens before they all hatched. By the time I got home and set up a spot in the house to keep

my Hoot, two more eggs had appeared. And by the next morning the last two eggs had hatched.

I now had my Mama Hoot and five chicks.

I just fell in love with Mama Hoot, watching her teaching her chicks. I had thought keeping chickens would be great and all, but I had never thought I would enjoy them as much as I did. And do.

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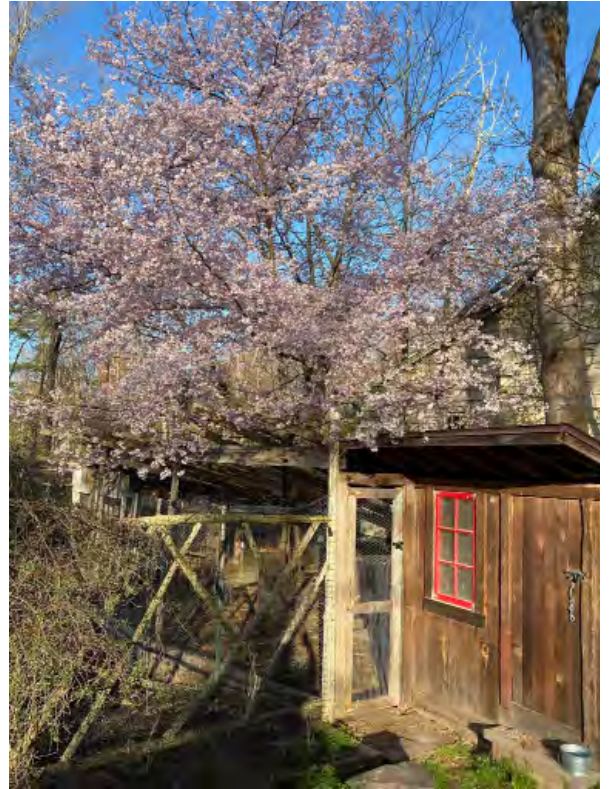
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JENNY BELLA

Chicken coop building supplies (left) and the project completed (right).

Luckily, I already had the majority of the materials I needed to finish the coop. We had been collecting stuff for a while. I had a run (enclosed outdoor space) dug out, and it all came together within a matter of weeks. By then it was Memorial Day weekend, and it was warm enough for the chicks and Mama Hoot to get out to

their new house.

In the next few weeks, I got six additional chicks for my flock. The chicks grew into pullets (the next stage).

Two of Mama Hoot's chicks were roosters. New to the chicken game, I wasn't quite sure what to do. Jonah reassured me that all would be fine. Having a rooster is

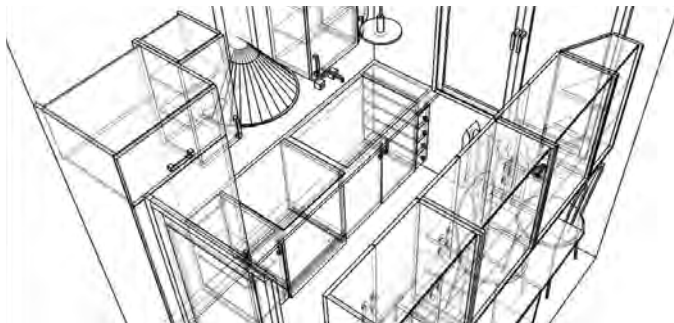
good to help protect your flock. But more than one rooster can be trouble with a small flock. As they grow, he said, they will fight with one another and can get more aggressive with the hens.

It all worked out. I had a friend who wanted a rooster, so one of mine went to a good home.

I'd be lying if I didn't mention that there's a fair amount of work involved, though I think it's worth it. There is nothing better than fresh eggs that are still warm when you collect them. Eggs from your own hens. Hens that are

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Debra Miller**



Being involved in Interior Design and Construction for over 30 years has been a great joy for me. I take pride in my work of making beautiful, healthy spaces for people to live and work in. I spent 11 years out in Nevada Designing Model Homes and doing Exterior Colorizing for Major Builders such as Toll Brothers, Greystone Homes, and Lennar Homes to name a few. I then moved back to New York in 2007 and started Project Designs and have been focused on bringing Homes and Businesses to life through Wall Covering Installations and Painting. I love being a part of making a house a Home!

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chicks they don't want to be around as outcasts. Pecking orders and bullying can occur. Nobody likes to talk about it, but chicken cannibalism is a thing, It needs to be nipped in the bud before it

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Axel, one of the author's original rooster baby hoots.

gets out of hand.

Knowing your flock is tremendously important. Each bird has distinct features that can make it identifiable, which is helpful when you need to separate or isolate any of the birds.

Curiosity has almost gotten the better of me. I have considered getting chicken video cams. I'd like to know what they are saying to each other when I'm not around.

I have been keeping chickens for over ten years. I am so thankful that Jonah

and his mom insisted I take home those hoots. It was the best introduction a person could have to raising chickens.

Mama Hoot proved the quintessential chicken. She would follow me around and come to the back door. She would perch on the steps chirping sweet little songs. If the back door was open, she would come in and sit in the sink.

Mama Hoot is no longer with the flock, but she is with me every day in the life of keeping chickens.

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NY Heartwoods is an all women owned and run business.

All beauty, no waste

New York Heartwoods turns doomed magnificent trees into exquisite furniture

by Frances Marion Platt

PLANNING TO BUILD, renovate, redecorate or furnish a home or place of business in the Hudson Valley? Is money no object, while aesthetics and sustainability are high priorities? You'll want to know about New York Heartwoods, a women-owned company based in Accord in the Rondout Valley. Established in 2011, Heartwoods keeps a low public profile, but is the provider of choice for many discriminating customers who want their intimate surroundings to reflect the essential, authentic beauty of wood. What makes this company different

from other high-end woodworkers is the owners' commitment to what they call "full-circle design." What that means is that they manage the entire process of harvesting local storm-fallen trees (or those fated to be culled for road widening or because they threaten buildings), sawing them up into timber and taking them all the way to finished furniture. This whole-tree approach to silviculture is analogous to nose-to-tail, farm-to-table agriculture. Nothing gets wasted. Many of Heartwoods' clients come to them specifically because they want something beautiful made from a tree on their own property.

"We specialize in the creation of sustainable heirloom-quality wood furniture

and the transformation of site-based trees into finished goods," says New York Heartwoods' mission statement. "At the center of our practice is the desire to connect and share our deep love for design, process and the natural world; to restore forests through enduring fabrication methods and the creative use of local resources; and to build exquisite objects imbued with story and rooted in place."

A native of Missoula, Montana, founder, owner and manager Megan Offner says that she "grew up around a lot of clearcuts" and at an early age developed an aversion to the waste of trees. "My mother took her first woodworking class to build me a dollhouse for my fourth birthday," she recalls. There was never



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Wood interior (above) done by NY Heartwoods from storm fallen trees (below).

a barrier in her mind to fine carpentry being an appropriate trade for a woman.

Offner obtained a double liberal-arts degree from Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, followed by certificates in permaculture and sustainable building and design. She bought and renovated a house in Portland, and then another one in Brooklyn. “I felt the effects of working with traditional building materials, the toxicity; it ended up making me chemically sensitive. After that I wanted to work with natural materials.”

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The waste that she saw also made a deep impression on her. “I spent seven years in New York doing set design for fashion and print advertising. The sets would end up in the dumpster at the end of the day,” she says. “One billion

board-feet of lumber are thrown away every year in America.”

Offner went to study with some of America’s top gurus of sustainable silviculture. One of her mentors was forester Jim Birkemeier, whose Timbergreen



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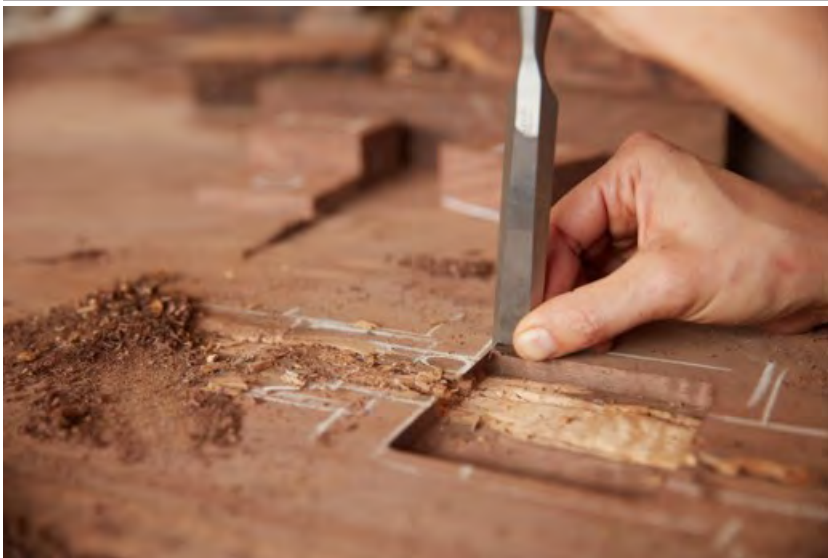


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NY Heartwood fine woodworking produces work like this headboard made from storm fallen trees.

Farm in Wisconsin makes high-value finished products from salvaged dead and dying trees. “They use the worst trees first, which is a Native-American



NY Heartwoods’ Megan Offner, Ashira Isreal and Lindsay Black.

tradition,” she explains. Another major influence was Jed Bark of Bark Frameworks in Long Island City, who trained her in fine millwork – mostly custom frames for art galleries. “They let me set up a business on their land. Then people started asking for furniture.”

As she started spending more time upstate, Offner “fell in love with Northeastern forests,” and decided to start a new business. “I moved upstate the

weekend of Hurricane Irene. The question became, “How do we reclaim all of these trees?” She founded New York Hardwoods and began working with the mayors of Warwick and Kingston to find ways to repurpose the downed trunks.

“I spent the first five years milling my own wood, and then the furniture thing picked up. I started to work with clients who want things milled from their own trees. So, now I work with local sawyers and millers, and

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do the fabrication in-house.”

Three years ago, Offner established a partnership with Ashira Israel, an artist, architectural designer, fabricator and professor with degrees in architecture from Pratt Institute and in fashion design from the Fashion Institute of Technology whose “passion lies in blurring the boundaries between art and architecture.” Israel became the company’s head of fabrication, and provided a new home for the company on a former chicken farm in Accord.

In 2022 New York Heartwoods built what they term a “hypersustainable 100 percent solar-powered workshop” in about 5000 square feet of space. The workshop contains the equipment to turn reclaimed timber into fabulous works of decorative art.

The third member of the Heartwoods triumvirate is master fabricator Lindsay Black, a classically trained furniture maker and teacher with degrees in education and woodworking. “This is the first time it’s been all-women,” says Offner. “This

is the dream team.”

She’s thinking about offering classes on subjects such as “tool confidence” to help women and gender-nonconforming people get started in the woodworking trades in the foreseeable future, and is starting to compile a contact list of interested potential students.

But for now, the roomy new shop is open by appointment only to clients when actual production isn’t happening. Everywhere you look are exquisite pieces of furniture, either finished or in progress, and enormous slabs of wood, finely milled, air-dried, and ready to be made into useful objects.

At one workstation, Black is busy applying a non-toxic oil finish to some pieces nearing completion. “We really stand behind no-VOC finishes,” Offner says, Lacquer is sometimes used on pieces that will be exposed to the weather.

There are display shelving units made of reclaimed maple from old desks for the new Etsy headquarters in Hudson; an enormous extendable dining table

made from a fallen walnut tree harvested from the client’s property; and custom doors pieced together from new white oak and recycled wormy chestnut. For someone’s palatial residence, there’s a cherry headboard 13 feet across designed to accommodate a king-sized bed with side tables, drawers and shelves on either side, and with integrated lighting and outlets.

Recent large commissions for the company have included 7000 board-feet of installation materials for the Dia Gallery in Chelsea, made from trees cleared from the Ashokan rail-trail, and new paneling and dining-room tables made from trees cleared to create new ski runs for the Little Cat Lodge in Catamount.

What if you don’t have a lot of big logs that need to be cleared away, but just want some bespoke handcrafted furniture? New York Heartwoods has those on hand as well, in several distinct design lines. The prices are not for the fainthearted, running to four figures for a single piece; but these are collectible works of art.

“Our furniture is meticulously crafted to serve our clients’ personal design needs and one-of-a-kind due to the provenance and character of the wood used. Every piece we construct is a meditation on how to best honor the material and highlight its unique beauty,” says the Heartwoods website.

You can get a look at some examples at www.newyorkheartwoods.com/collection-index.

To watch a video of a client’s lightning-struck 300-year-old red oak being transformed into gorgeous lumber, visit www.instagram.com/p/CpQfYM8joqs.



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Hudson Valley hardware

Generations of tools and paint

By Genia Wickwire Sveikauskas

WHEN YOU USUALLY think of the Hudson Valley, you picture small towns nestled among the mountains or alongside the Hudson River. Each town consists largely of independently owned, unique creative businesses more often than not run by people who live and grew up in the town. They know the neighborhoods, they know the people in them, and they are committed to the community.

The local hardware stores are among the staples of these towns. It makes sense. Every time you need a nail, a light bulb, a sewing needle, some pens or new cups, it's where you go when you want to fix a leaky pipe, deal with chipped paint, need to dig a hole or mend a fence.

You can find thousands of specialized objects at your local hardware store. The chances are you know the friendly face directing you to just the right one.

An abundance of hardware stores in our neck of the woods are not only owned by a local family, but they have also been owned by that same family for generations. Tips and information have been passed down. Ideas have been reshaped by eyes that grew up watching these

hardware stores progress and change with time. When they see you, they know you. They know the house you live in. Maybe they know your dad or mom, too.

They have everything you might expect to find in a hardware store, and quite a lot you might not even know you needed. They have kept adapting to new products,

new technologies and new consumer needs. It's comforting to know that part of what they do is to figure out what the community needs.

Herzog's Home and Paint Center

The year was 1909. Like a gritty black-and-white photo, things looked different,



Herzog's Wall Street store.



Left, to right, Founder Matthew Herzog, treasurer Todd Jordan, marketing director Julie Jordan, president Brad Jordan.



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PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

Left, Rick Smith; right, Jacob Smith, the youngest generation at PC Smith Hardware.

but Kingston was bustling. Its many factories were employing thousands providing goods for the rest of the country, and indeed for the world. The area brickyards and bluestone quarries were in full swing, sending building supplies to help New York City grow. The first Model T car had come out the year before, and cars were on the cusp of surpassing horse-drawn carriages on the less bumpy roads.

Matthew Herzog decided to open a paint, wallpapering and picture-frame store on Wall Street in Kingston on May 10, 1901.

Fast forward to 2023, and you will find that a lot of things have changed. Kingston has been through many highs and lows. The name Herzog has remained. Still owned by the same family, Herzog's over the decades worked its way up to becoming a full-fledged hardware and paint center with multiple locations.

Under the attentive eye of each successive generation, Herzog's has continued to prosper and grow. In 1959, Robert Herzog, the son of Matthew, bought Kingston Lumber. In the 1960s the family created what is now Kingston Plaza. In the 1970s their hardware store moved to the plaza. In 1985, Todd Jordan joined his grandfather, Robert Herzog, in running the family business. He took over as presi-



Left, 4th and 5th generation of Smith's Hardware; right, PC Smith Hardware on Main Street, Saugerties.

dent following his grandfather's death in 1992, and was joined in the business by his brother Todd shortly thereafter.

Over the decades Herzog's has expanded to include additional paint centers in Albany, Latham, Poughkeepsie and Fishkill. It has opened a garden center and gift shop at its Kingston location. Each year it has improved and expanded various parts of its stores, regardless of world problems and local challenges. Despite wars, recessions, the advent of big-box stores, and severe supply-chain problems during the recent pandemic, Herzog's continues to prosper.

How was it able to survive all these events? Todd's wife Julie, who helps run Herzog's, offers a number of answers:

Resilience: "We prioritize tradition, but pivot with change."

Dedication: "Our dedication to customers and employees runs deep. For over 110 years we've provided outstanding expert service with quality products. We realize our employees are the future, so we encourage them to gain new skills and give them opportunities for growth. And we never take them for granted because it's their dedication that keeps us going decade after decade. We have created a workplace culture strong in diversity,

inclusion and belonging. It's important to us that every employee feels like they belong."

Trust: "We make sure our staff provides reliable honest information to fill our customers' needs and build strength in those relationships."

Hardworking experts: "Our staff will always go the extra mile to help get any problem solved. We strive to hire people that know their area of expertise extremely well." Because the Herzog family has lived here, they grew up here, and they understand the community, it helps them to understand the needs of those around them.

PC Smith Hardware & Son

Phillip C. Smith started business as a roofer and tinsmith on Market Street in Saugerties at the turn of the century. His son Albert joined his business in 1904 at the age of 14. It was Albert who created the official PC Smith & Son Hardware around 1914. It moved to its current location on Main Street in 1920. The business passed from generation to generation, and is currently run by siblings Rick and Sharon and Rick's son Jacob.

Their location on Main Street in the center of the village has helped them be

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successful. Ultimately, however, it is their expertise in assisting customers that is most useful. Rick says that people will often come in with a broken item and ask for direction. The Smiths and their eight employees walk them through the steps of what it will take for them to complete their project. This kind of one-on-one customer service, passed down through the generations, has helped Smith Hardware remain a vital part of the community.

Each generation has also been able to bring something new to the table. Ja-

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PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

Left, H. Houst and Sons, family owned for generations; right, Ned Houst ran the hardware store for over 50 years.

cob, for example, completely digitized the store, bringing it into the present century. PC Smith is now able to track 35,000 active items, keeping up with seasonal and area trends. This advancement became vital during the pandemic, when their business markedly increased. Jacob credits that uptick to the fact that people felt safe with them during a scary time. They were trustworthy and local, kept items clean, had a strict mask policy, and offered curbside delivery.

H. Houst & Sons Hardware Inc.

Woodstock in the 1930s was a well-established arts colony, but even artists depend on someone practical to provide them everyday services. It was here that Henry O. Houst set up a small electric-motor repair shop on Rock City Road in 1932.

As time went by, he added a place to sell tools, hardware and paint. A decade later, his son Henry T. joined the business. Henry T. bought the current location on Mill Hill Road in the very center of the hamlet. The store remains there to this day.

Henry T. left the business to his two sons, Henry L. and Milton. Henry L.'s son Ned tells the tale of coming to Woodstock to give working at the family hardware store a try after three years as a naval officer. He was going to give the job a year to see how it worked out. "It's been a long year," he quipped after over a half-century of seeing how it would work out.

Currently Jody Bryan, Ned's stepdaughter, and her husband run H. Houst and Sons. She has been working there since she graduated college, and has never looked back. "The hardware business is never boring. After all these years, I still



Left, Jody Bryan, Ned's stepdaughter, and her husband currently run Houst; right, everyone loves a good hardware store.

learn new things."

The business has changed over the years, and the staff all work hard to stay in tune with the needs and wants of the community. The store used to sell clothing and school supplies. Now it instead hosts an improved kitchenware section.

Cultural and environmental awareness is important. The store no longer sells lawn and garden chemicals. It seeks alternatives to plastic containers.

Houst's encourages their customers to do their own trouble-shooting and repairing. Rather than things being thrown away, repairs keep them working longer. To help with that, Houst's stocks specialty items that often can't be found even in big-box stores. Houst's also now runs a large equipment-rental business so that not every tool or piece of machinery needs to be purchased.

"For over 90 years now, it is the people, our staff and our customers, who have made us what we are," Jody says. "Everyone loves a good hardware store!"

Jody left us with an affectionate tribute

fashioned by Woodstock poet Will Nixon. Unsurprisingly, it's entitled:

H. Houst & Son

Heaven and Hell in the same aisle as the helium balloons you buy to knock some sense into the sky.

Oil for the paraffin lamp so you can write poems by the light Emily wrote by.

Umber for the moods too much like March you begin to miss by July.

Suppose you weren't born with the genes for splicing wires or hanging chandeliers.

There's still hope at the hardware. The same two clowns who manage this place, the General & the Saboteur, also happen to manage your psyche. One never fails. The other always has fun.

So buy the dog bone shaped like an Olmec god. The squirrel-proof feeder that squirrels prefer.

Order the 1/4" screw latch bolts with that only costs 39¢ whatever the hell it's for.

Nobody votes against hardware. Rumor says there's a light bulb in back that burns forever.



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Shear delight

Advice on pruning tools for the home gardener

by Lee Reich

SOON AFTER THE first human deliberately pruned a plant, ideas for designs of specialized pruning tools may have taken shape. About 2000 years ago, a Roman named Columella wrote of the *vinitoria falx*, a grape-pruning tool with six different functions.

I've never seen just one pruning tool that'll do six different jobs. Depending on your plants and horticultural aspirations, you may not even need six different tools. But anyone who grows plants probably needs at least one pruning tool.

Here's a guide for what you may need:

Think about what you'll be cutting, so that the tool is appropriate to the size of the cut. Too many gardeners attempt to shimmy and wiggle hand-held pruning shears through branches too thick to be cut effectively with this tool. Using the wrong-size tool makes pruning more difficult — even impossible — and leaves a forlorn-looking plant with ragged stubs. It can also mess up the tool.

If I was going to own just one pruning tool, it would probably be a hand shears (what the British call *secateurs*), which is useful for cutting stems up to about a half-inch across. The business end of hand shears has either anvil or bypass blades. With anvil shears, a sharp blade comes down on the flat edge of an opposing blade. The flat edge is soft metal so as not to dull the opposing sharp edge. Bypass shears, in contrast, work more like scissors, with two sharp blades sliding past each other.

Anvil shears generally are cheaper than bypass shears — and the price difference is reflected in the resulting cut! Too often, anvil blades crush part of the stem at the end of the cut. And if the two blades do not mate perfectly, the resulting cut is incomplete, leaving the severed stem hanging on by a thread of bark. That wide, flattened blade also



PHOTOS BY LEE REICH

Privet and crabapple hedge.

makes it difficult to get the tool right up against the base of a stem you want to remove.

A pair of hand shears is a very useful tool. I always check the weight, the hand fit, and the balance of prospective candidates before settling on one. You can buy special shears tailored to fit small

hands or left hands. Check out how easily the blades of a particular pair of hand shears can be sharpened; some shears have replaceable blades.

Okay, I'll go ahead and name names. I do lots of pruning and have many kinds of pruning tools, including many hand shears. My three favorite hand shears, all



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A good selection of pruning tools.

hang on the rack near the door out to the garden. (Why so many tools? I amassed them in conjunction with writing a book, “The Oruning Book.”)

My personal favorite hand shears is my ARS shears. Coming in as close seconds are my Felco shears, useful for heavier cuts, and my Pica shears, which are light shears that I’ll often toss in my back pocket when going out to the garden even with no special intention of pruning anything.

Pruners, loppers and chain saws

For pruning branches larger than a half-inch across, up to about an inch-and-a-half in diameter, you’ll need a lopper. This tool is essentially the same as hand shears, except that the blades are heavier and the handles are a couple of feet long. Like hand shears, the lopper’s business end may be either the anvil or bypass type. The long handles of the lopper give leverage to cut through those larger stems, and allow me to reach into the base of an overgrown rose or gooseberry bush without being attacked by thorns.

Some loppers and hand shears gain extra cutting power with a gear or a ratchet mechanism. Extra cutting power is what I particularly like about my Fiskars loppers, my favorites in this kind of tool.

Where more cutting power is needed than my loppers can provide, I go to my shed to grab a pruning saw. In contrast to woodworking saws, teeth on pruning saws are designed to cope with green wood without clogging or gumming. Best are the so-called Japanese blades (sometimes called “turbo,” “tri-cut,” or



Folding pruning saw.

“frictionless” blades), which cut quickly and cleanly. All come in various sizes, from those that fold up to neatly fit in your back pocket to those you carry in a belt holster.

We can’t leave the subject of pruning saws without my mentioning the chain saw, a useful but dangerous tool. These gasoline or electric saws make quick work of large limbs, human or arboreal. A chain saw is overkill where you have only a backyard full of plants to prune. If the size of a cut dictates the need for such a tool, rent one for the job, or, even better, hire a professional with a chain saw to do the job for you.

Experience with chain saws breeds respect for this useful, albeit dangerous, pruning tool. If you feel the need to own a chain saw, purchase one scaled to the wood you’ll be cutting. And when you

make your purchase, also buy a pair of goggles, ear protectors, and chaps.

If you have formal hedges to care for, you’ll need hedge shears to keep them shapely. Hand shears, looking like giant scissors, are fine for a small hedge. For larger hedges or quicker shearing, go for electric shears whose straight bar, with its oscillating blade, serves the same purpose as the hand shears.

I have a long hedge of privet, another of crabapple, and one of boxwood, in addition to a couple of shaped yews, so I use electric shears. Battery-powered hedge shears make the job very enjoyable, enough to have inspired me to more fancifully sculpt the plants.

Consider safety issues

Over the centuries, lots of pruning tools have been devised for very specialized



Pole hedge trimmer.

purposes. Examples are a hook for grubbing out raspberry canes, a sharpened cylinder for cutting strawberry runners,

and battery-powered pole hedge shears, the latter of which I own and use for reaching upper parts of my tall hedges.

Of all specialized tools available, one that I would recommend against is the high-limb chain saw. It's merely a length of chain saw with a rope attached to each of its ends. You throw the device over a high limb, grasp onto the end of each rope, centering the toothed chain over the limb, and then alternately pull down on the ropes. The results can be disastrous, with the worst-case scenario being the limb toppling on top of you as it tears a long strip of bark from the trunk.

A pole pruner is a saner way to deal with high limbs. My pole pruner is capped by both a shearing blade and a pruning saw, giving me a choice of cutting devices once I work the tool up through the tree to the branches. A rope activates the shearing blades, allowing this tool to perform the same job as hand shears — except many feet up in the tree. The pole pruner is a useful tool even if not quite as versatile as Columella's six-in-one tool for pruning grapes.

New Paltz writer Lee Reich, author of The Pruning Book, Weedless Gardening and other books, is also a garden consultant specializing in fruit, vegetable, and nut growing. He hosts workshops at his New Paltz farmden. For more information, go to www.leereich.com.

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