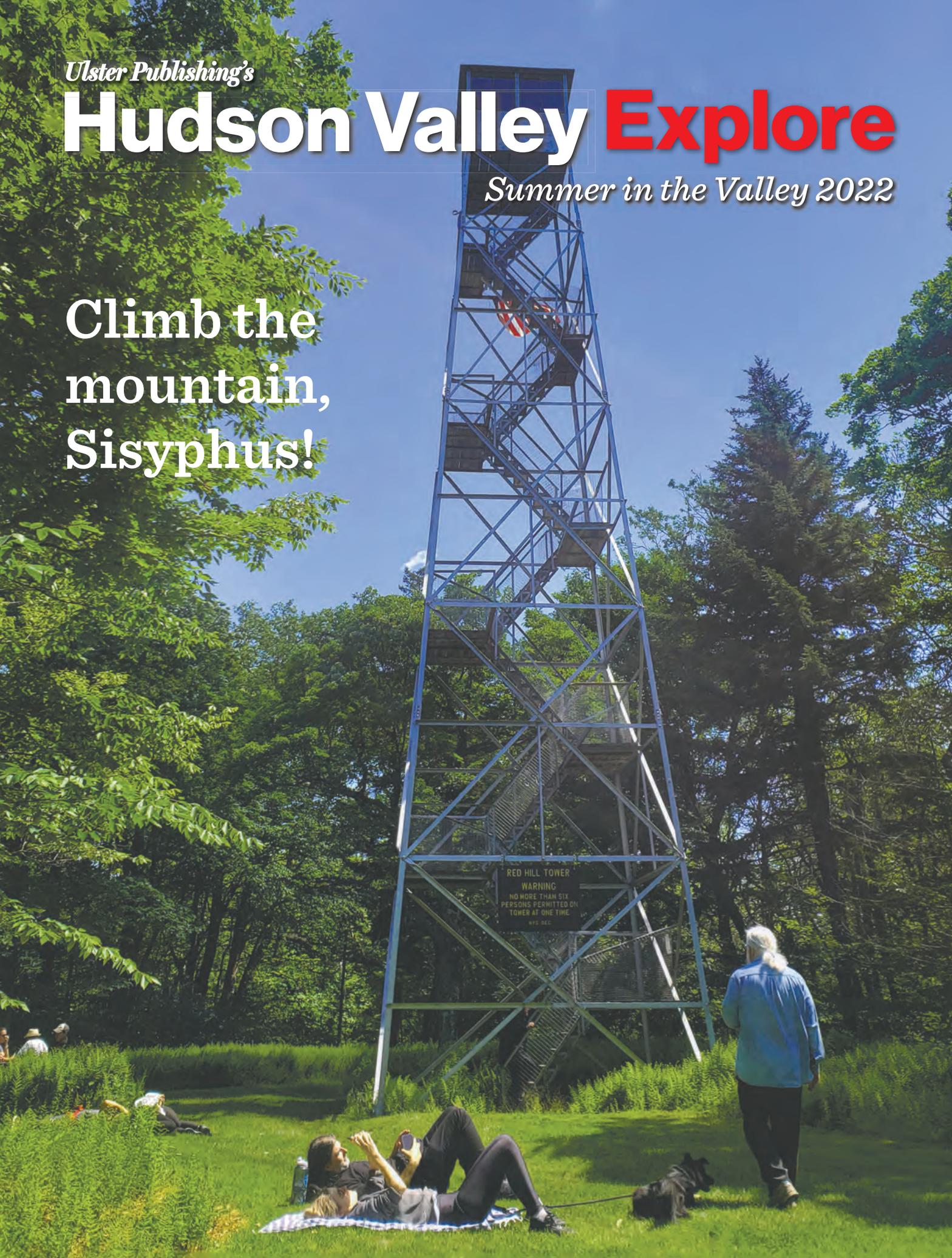


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The ice cream of the crop

Something cold for the hot weather

by Theo Sassano

AS WE BEGIN the summer season, nothing is more appealing than the prospect of a nice scoop of local ice cream on warm, sunny afternoons. A city dweller myself, I can confidently proclaim that the Hudson Valley is home to some of the finest ice-cream shops in the state. With such a wide selection, it's difficult to pinpoint the perfect location for the whole family. Here is a short list of five of my favorites in Ulster and Dutchess counties that you'd be missing out on not to try.

Jolly Cow

1620 Rte 9W, Lake Katrine

For those seeking a casual hang-out spot for friends and family, the Jolly Cow may be the perfect choice. The Lake Katrine store adapts an aesthetically old-fashioned style



PHOTOS BY THEO SASSANO

Jolly Cow.

and features a vast area for visitors to roam, including designated outdoor seating spots.

The Jolly Cow offers a multitude of classics in both soft-serve and hard-packed ice cream, as well as toppings, shakes, and sundaes. "Our most staple flavors are vanilla and chocolate twist, mint chocolate chip, cookies & cream, and orange creamsicle," said employee Mackenzie Perpetua. My family ordered these flavors

when we went. They well exceeded our expectations, especially when considering the affordable prices. Cash only.

Alleyway Ice Cream

Alleywayicecream.com

135 Partition St, Saugerties

One ice-cream shop that particularly caught my attention was Alleyway Ice Cream in Saugerties. As the name suggests, the store can be found in a tranquil alleyway, providing for a relaxing atmosphere and distinctive experience. The flavors align with this distinctiveness as well. The shop features a variety of unique flavors, including Madagascar vanilla, Belgian chocolate, buttermilk strawberry, Thai tea cookies & cream, Ube health-bar crunch, and more. "Our most popular flavors would be Thai tea and Ube," employee Madison Matthies explained. "People definitely get those two a lot, especially together."

Exclusive flavors such as these have greatly contributed to the store's success, drawing in customers who seek to uncover the mysteries behind these unfamiliar names. "I don't think another ice-cream place around here has as many unique flavors as us," said Mathies. I sampled the Thai tea cookies and cream, I could instantly see why it was so popular. To Thai tea lovers out there, it is certainly worth the visit. And for everyone else seeking a pleasant, laid-back experience, Alleyway is surely a great pick.

Fortunes Ice Cream

<https://www.fortunesicecream.com/>
55 Broadway, Tivoli

Similarly known for its unique flavors



Alleyway Ice Cream.

is Fortunes Ice Cream, located in Tivoli. Fortunes serves numerous store-original flavors including Labne strawberry rhubarb, blood orange Campari, cannoli shell, ricotta candied orange, and halva honeycomb as well as drinks and specials. “All of our Labne fruit combos [which] we switch out [are] staple products,” employee Miranda Beer said. “It’s a Middle Eastern Europe [that] we mix with sour



Fortunes Ice Cream.



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

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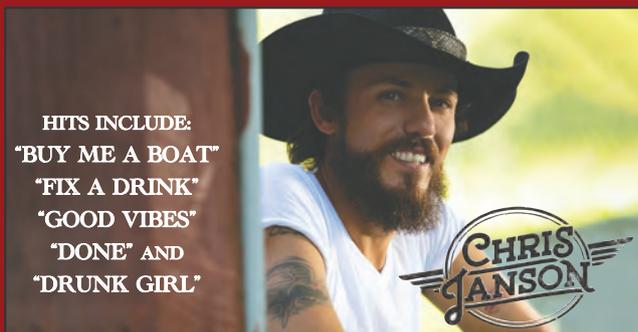
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Cherries Ice Cream.

cherry and black raspberry, and it's always super popular."

Such flavors make the shop stand out from its neighboring counterparts. "I would say the flavors and how frequently we swap them out is what [draws in the most customers]," Beer explained.

"They come and go weekly, so I think that makes people want to come in to see what's currently in store." Additionally, the store features gorgeous indoor and outdoor dining areas alongside its tranquil scenery.

Holy Cow

7270 S Broadway # 1, Red Hook

Holy Cow in Red Hook is the perfect place to shop for special occasions; the store's main feature is its signature half-vanilla, half-chocolate ice-cream cake, offered in a range of sizes and readily

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- JULY 10 **Escher String Quartet**
- JULY 17 **Daniel Gortler**, piano
- JULY 24 **Quatuor Danel**
- JULY 31 **Miró Quartet**
- AUG 7 **Horszowski Trio**
- AUG 14 **Harlem Quartet w/ Brandon George**, flute and **Terrence Wilson**, piano
- AUG 21 **Borromeo String Quartet**
- AUG 28 **Amernet String Quartet**
@6:30PM Postlude - **KASA Quartet w/ Huang Mei-Hsuan**, piano
- SEPT 4 **Catalyst Quartet w/ Dashon Burton**, baritone
- SEPT 11 **Roman Rabinovich**, piano
- AUG 27 **CAROGA ARTS ENSEMBLE**
SAT **Alexander Platt**, conductor
@ 6PM **Garry Kvistad**, percussion
Michael Klotz, viola
Yevgeny Kutik, violin

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*Except July 2

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- JULY 16 **Simi Stone** and Friends
- JULY 23 **Happy Traum** and Friends, featuring **Cindy Cashdollar**
- JULY 30 **Simon Shaheen Trio**
- AUG 6 **Christian Sands Trio**
- AUG 13 **Steve Gorn** and Friends
- AUG 20 **Anthony de Mare**
- SEPT 3 **Bill Charlap Trio**
- SEPT 10 **Jerome Jennings Trio** with **Laurin Talese**, vocals

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available to go. As someone who has opted for Holy Cow's ice-cream cake in numerous birthday celebrations, I can safely say that the dessert is perfect for winding down after a long night of festivities.

The store's standard ice cream did not disappoint, either; I tried out cookies and cream as well as cotton candy which I would highly recommend to anyone searching for a lighter alternative. The shop often draws large local crowds, with lines going out the door at most hours of the day; It is especially busy follow-

ing dinner hours and on weekends. The store's popularity is for good reason, and so it is well worth the wait. Cash or local checks only

Cherries Ice Cream

[Http://cherriesicecream.com/](http://cherriesicecream.com/)
4162 Route 209, Stone Ridge

Cherries Ice Cream is great for anyone in the area looking for a simple, relaxing ice-cream visit to kick off the day. Despite its modest appearance, Cherries' menu is jam-packed with soft-serve and hard-packed ice cream, shakes, floats, sun-

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daes, and more. While its flavors gravitate toward the classics, there are several unique combo options, including lavender honey blueberry and coconut raspberry.

The shop is well known for its strawberry ice cream. Strawberry jam ripple, alas, was sold out on the day of my

visit. So I opted to try out the salted caramel and found it to have just the right balance of ingredients. I would highly recommend it to all the caramel lovers out there.



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Holy Cow.

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Climb the mountain, Sisyphus!

There's nothing at the top but air

by Rokosz Most

LOOKING WESTWARD FROM the fancy white deck of a sailboat out on the Hudson River. Or just taking in the sunset standing on the black asphalt of the Lowe's parking lot above Ulster Avenue. It makes no difference.

Locals and official maps concur. Those soft, snowless blue-colored hills that the sun sinks behind are in fact bonafide mountains.

The tallest peak of the Catskill mountains, Slide Mountain, only rises up 4180 feet. You'd need to stack five Slide Mountains one on top of the next to almost reach the topographic prominence of the tallest mountain in America, the singular Denali in the Alaskan hinterlands.

Heartfelt apologies to anyone from

Hudson Valley Explore

Summer in the Valley

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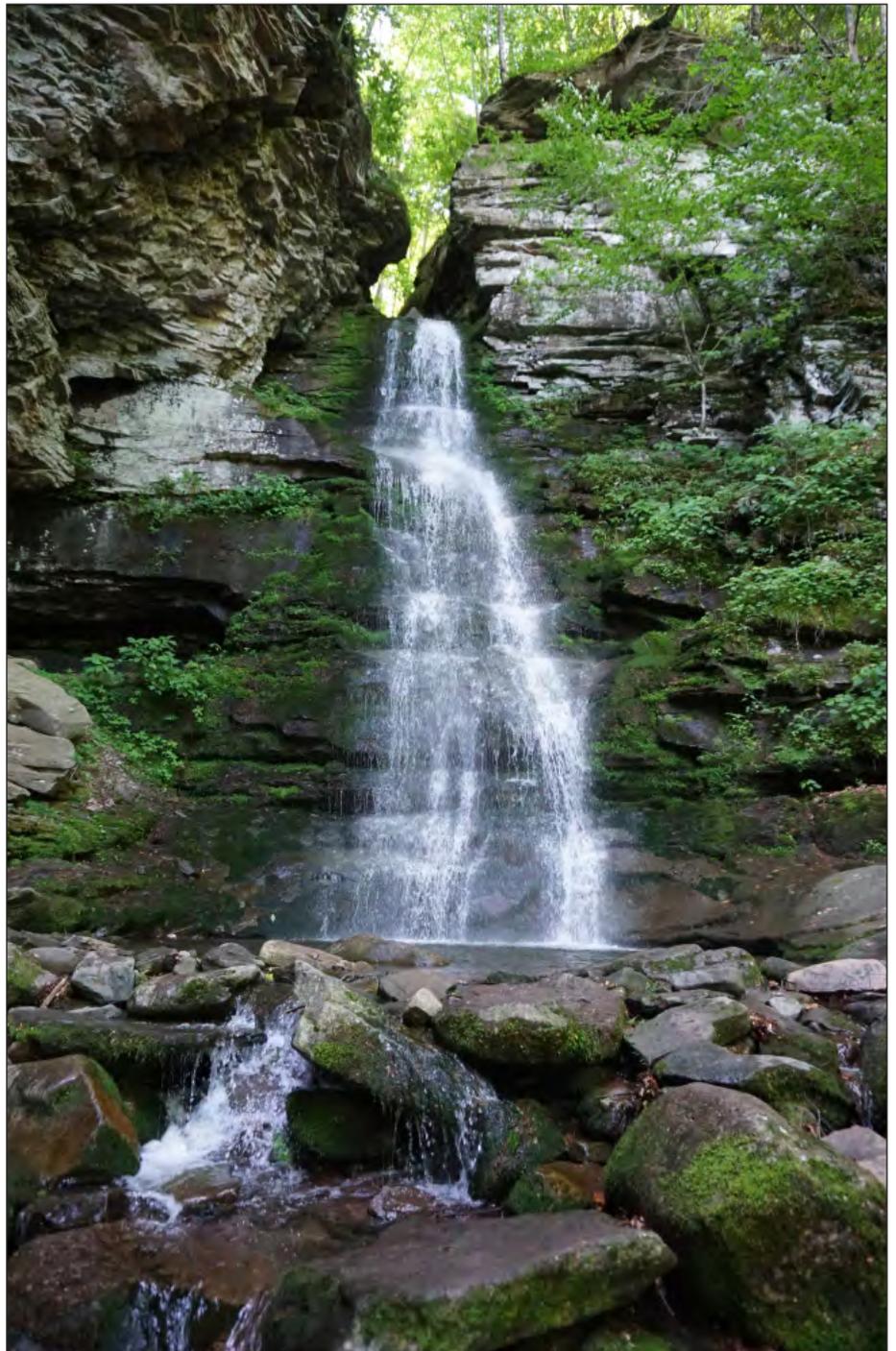
PRODUCTION: Diane Congello-Brandes,
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CIRCULATION: Dominic Labate

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Idaho, and to those accustomed to the distant cordilleras in the Rocky Mountain State. To be considered a mountain, all that is required is that it should exist in the imagination of those who live beneath it.

On fir-treed crowns of moss and rock, the Catskills gather snow in the winter. It melts down into freshets in the spring-time, when black bears forage and roam up and down the jumbled stone and soil slopes.

Whatever they may lack in the striking Grand Tetonesque sense, the Catskills

recover in quantity.

According to the Catskill 3500 club, enthusiastic mountaineers who take their name from the altitude above which its own membership is active, there are 33 Catskills mountain peaks lofty enough to qualify for their attention.

Hiking, scrambling, hill walkers all. Even some rock climbers.

All but two of the peaks rise up within the boundaries of the 710,000-acre forest preserve known as the Catskill Park. Almost half of it is protected as “forever wild” by the New York State Constitution,

and the rest is subject to some degree of state regulation

A lot of visitation

The Catskill Center, a 501(3)c non-profit which in its name busies itself with the pursuits of conservation and development, pegs the number of annual visitors to the park surrounding the mountains at 1.7 million.

In season, visitors soak in the swimming holes and under waterfalls, hunt wily prey through the foothills, fish in the valley rivers, carouse in the orange light of campfires, and sleep between the ground and stars in the pure nighttime blackness which falls early between the mountains.

There are those who can look upon mosquitoes, ticks, poison ivy, hunting, skinning and cooking game, and sleeping anywhere near where “there be bears” as monotonous or stupid or horrifying.

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Farther from the mountains, this attitude is more common. According to the U.S. Census Bureau over 80 percent of the U.S. population now lives in urban areas. The centuries have come and gone, and the multihued human race, speaking every language concocted, has fled in great numbers from the concealing darkness into the permanent light of the city.

For them, the mountains, remote and treacherous, appear even taller.

The lookout towers

Well, for the recreational pleasure of rural or urban, never mind which, fire lookout towers on the top of five of the mountain peaks in the Catskills still await.

The oldest fire tower was first framed out of wood on Balsam Lake Mountain in 1887. Its job was to keep an eye on cinder fires before they went wild. The tower frame was rebuilt out of metal in 1930.

Hiking to the summit of Balsam, one takes a trail that starts from Mill Brook Road outside the hamlet of Arkville. It is described as a moderate, six-mile, round-trip hike.

Three more towers stand on the peaks of Tremper Mountain, Hunter Mountain, and Red Hill Mountain. Above Woodstock, there's a fire tower on the Overlook Mountain, the southernmost peak of the Catskills escarpment. Behind that sudden shelf of tall rock, cloudbursts and thunderstorms flow suddenly over to ambush all Ulster County between it and the Hudson River.

At 4040 feet, the peak of Hunter Mountain is just the second highest in the Catskills, and the fire tower built

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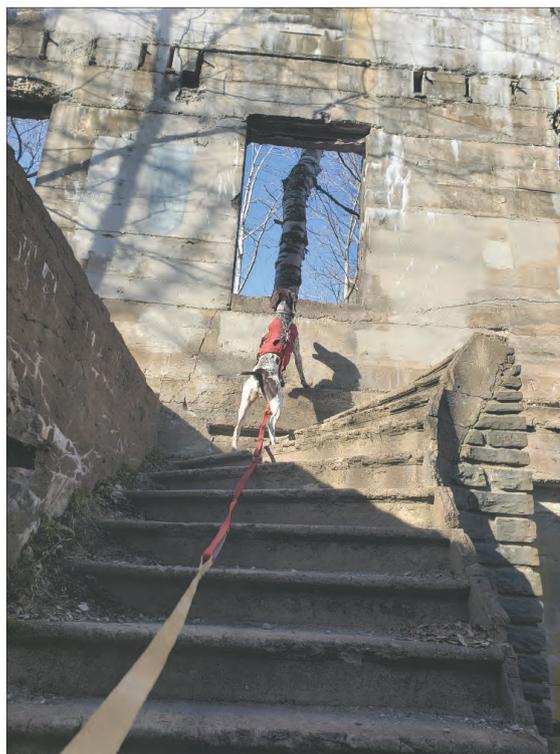
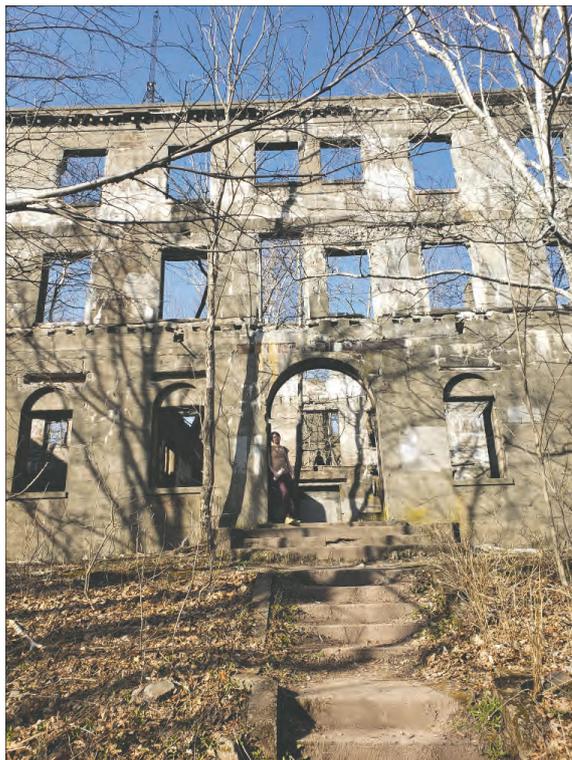
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Ruins of the old hotel atop Woodstock's Overlook.

night falls.

But this is nature on its own terms.

Mountains aren't convenient

So often city lives are lives subsumed in populous stimulation. Each person surrounded by the others, jolted with unexpected interactions. City life is friction and striking sparks.

Getting up any of the mountains, all that is left far behind. The socially or chemically addicted who walk among us may be appalled. There's nothing at the top of the mountain but air. There are no swank

there stretches it another 60 feet high.

Tremper Mountain is the most modestly sized. At just 2740 feet, it doesn't meet the test for the Catskill 3500 Club. For that matter, neither do Redhill or Overlook.

Most of the mountains with the fire towers on top are amenable to "easy mountaineering," requiring nothing more strenuous than a scrambling hike, with ski poles optional. Some summits, however, are friendlier than others.

Woodstock's Overlook's parking lot just across from a Tibetan Buddhist monastery places the aspirant at the beginning of a dirt and rock trail as wide as a driveway. Almost certainly, supply trucks used to run up to the hotel built near the top before all the wooden framing burned down. The brick walls stand there still, old and scorched. And a well-known rattlesnake population basks in the summer sun or warns from the brush.

On the way up Tremper Mountain, a natural spring pours out of a crack in the rocks. A spring has to be one of the most holy things nature can provide. Moss thrives on the moist rocks, and the cold water flows never-ending from the presumed icy heart of the mountain.

Over in Hardenburgh, Balsam Lake Mountain has an active bear population, with their headquarters in the hills around Alder Lake, the easier to reconnoiter the camp sites there after

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restaurants. There are no discotheques. Not even convenience stores.

But mountains are not convenient. Getting up them is an unceasing fight

against gravity into thinner and thinner air. Last summer featured rotting deer corpses dead from wasting sickness. This summer it's rattlesnakes and milkweed

pollen.

Tick checks never fall out of fashion.

Some say there was a paradise once, before the meteors fell and chased us into

the caves where we scribbled the facts and forgot their meaning, while outside the centuries passed before we came back out.

Some vestigial itch compels us still from under the cover of our apartments and houses to search still, into the woods. Naked, as it were, for a reunion with a forgotten childhood or the old rituals. To re-examine the darkness or just to mimic a billboard advertisement or a bank commercial. All of the above.

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Ever upwards

Take raspberries along. Or cherries. Spit the pits out as one ascends. Or take clementines. Tossing the rinds.

The wise remember water, because not every mountain boasts a rock spring. Overlook doesn't. Balsam Lake Mountain doesn't.

Of course, there may be more than one trail. As for the top, sandwiches. Desert. Some little celebration to mark the summit. Sparkling water. Pomegranate juice. Or something stronger.

On June 19, for example, from the trailhead to the top of Redhill Mountain, just off Sugarloaf Road, the wind that had picked up the day before never stopped.

Once into the woods the wind blew through the whole place, every branch and limb and leaf rustled and sighed. The wind tousled the branches and leaves so that the sun flashed through the interstices. The effect was a forest full of spinning thaumatococci. Mushrooms could be just the ticket.

Wall of moving green. Vivid green. Electric green. Brighter than memory.

Ever upwards, the trail follows a choppy river of once-flowing stones now buried into the dirt. Wind not letting up. Widowmakers threatening.

The trail is fast, only a mile and a half, one foot in front of the other. Keep watching for rattlesnakes. The whole affair



could be redundant, but it doesn't have to be. Step after step, tree after tree, this is the mistake of rushing. Don't rush. Eat a peach. Contemplate the ferns.

Hiking up a mountain, like kayaking through rapids or jumping off a high rock into deep water, then makes perfect sense if it has to. Actively fending off stagnation releases one from the cycle of perdition. Also known as repetition.

Betwixt fear and release

In this way do we pursue remarkable memories.

The spring is there closer to the top. Other people with dogs re there as well. Just have to share the forest. Hiking up, time takes time.

The fire tower is there on the top. Reminiscent of an electrical power transmission line tower. The x-shaped scaffolding, the latticed structures. Nine crisscrossing flights of wooden stairs climb up inside the frame to a metal room built at the top, like the guardroom on a prison tower.

There's some kind of tabletop navigation device up there. Sign says six people at a time. Maybe 13 people here total. An American flag billows from the highest railing, fluttering in a place where patriotism has no relevance. But the colors sure are pretty.

When the wind blows like this, some climbing the stairs to the observation room grow faint of heart and turn back just two flights from the top. Chicken wire tied along the railings closes in the safe path from the open air. It's hard to topple over the side without real effort. The wind is strong but the wall-less tower doesn't offer resistance, and the



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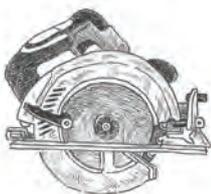
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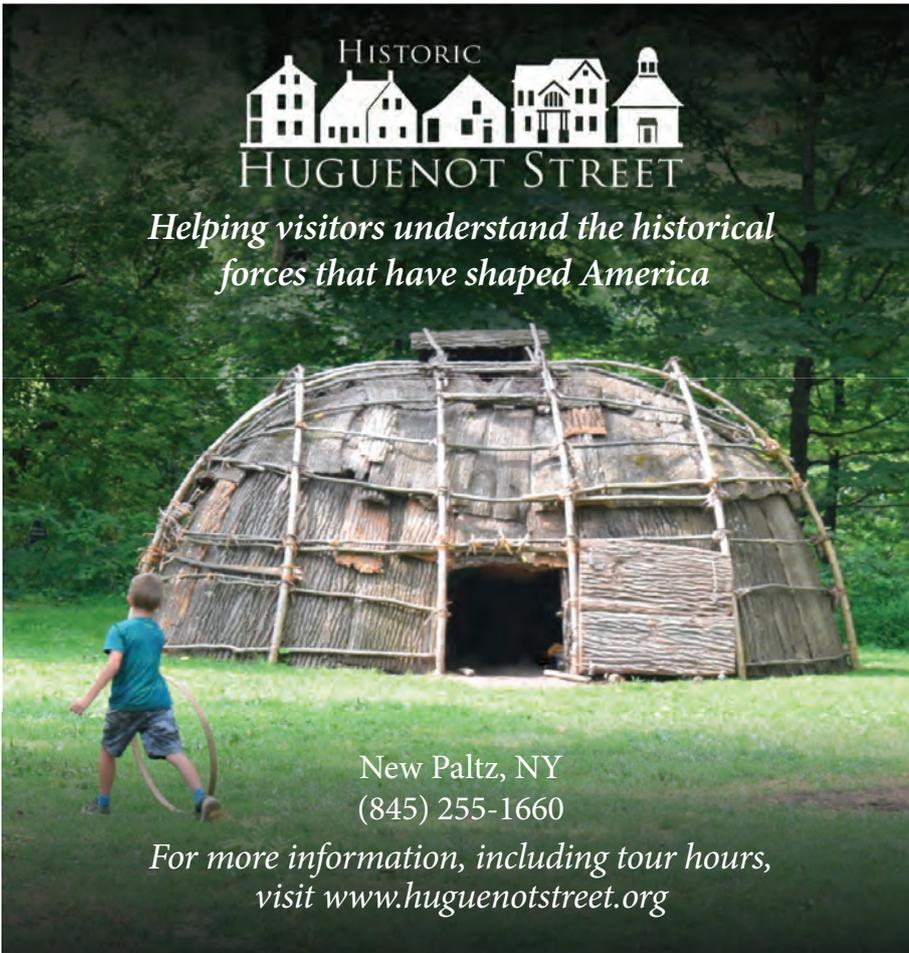
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base of the structure is wide. Engineering is sound.

The wind is strong enough to take off baseball caps or sunglasses at the top of the fire tower, above the treetops. Windows with four-square panes of glass can be opened. Then there's the 360-degree view and a sort of muted dopamine blast somewhere betwixt the adrenaline of fear and the euphoria of release, which can only be recognized in a state of absolute stillness.

A mild high

A very quiet inside voice looks to commune with front-of-brain consciousness. Compared to a fistfight or a rock concert, if you don't know the feeling you're looking for, it gets lost in the wash of blood and elevated heartbeat that comes after all those flights of stairs.

Why do it at all? If only to regale others with the exploit? Certainly.

But taking out the cellphone to snap pictures reduces it all to a five-inch window frame. Flat now, lifeless, one step removed from existence. The life one sees is again subsumed, even if it's shared across social media.

If there must be one, then let this be the purpose for hiking up to the top of a mountain: Quiet dopamine. A mild high provided after moderate exertion, free from brain.

Always remember to keep an eye on what the sun is doing. Getting caught in the half-light forest darkness while coming back down the mountain, well, that can be fun, too. Owls calling in the darkness. Climb the mountain, Sisyphus.

The Department of Environmental Conservation will honor the accomplishment of visiting all five fire towers with a commemorative patch and will extend the joy of being entered into a contest to win great outdoor prizes as a further fillip. Hurry. Contest ends January 31, 2023.

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PHOTOS BY PHYLLIS McCABE

Views of the Hudson River are the backdrop to the HVSF stage.

The greenest theater in America

Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival’s first season at new Garrison site opens July 7

by Frances Marion Platt

FOR A DECADE now, I’ve been raving about the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival. The artistic excellence of its productions rivals that of Manhattan’s Public Theater on a more modest budget. We admire the audacity of its sometimes-edgy interpretations of the Bard and other classic stageworks, its willingness to take risks, its prioritizing of great acting and directing over

extravagant sets and costumes, its trust in the audience’s capacity to imagine.

We always have to mention the setting as well. There’s little need for stagey spectacle when the backdrop is a million-dollar view of the Hudson Highlands. No one who has ever seen a play in the HVSF tent on the grounds of Boscobel is likely ever to forget that moment when

the cast first appears over the rise, with West Point, Constitution Marsh, and

perhaps a setting sun backlighting them.

Boscobel has been HVSF’s home since 1988, its second year of existence. But it was always only a rental – one that had to wrap up by Labor Day weekend so

that the estate could be devoted to its other main role as an autumnal wedding venue.

“The opposite of museum Shakespeare”



Rolling fields are part of the beautiful property.

The time to renew HVSF's lease was approaching when an extraordinary opportunity dropped into the not-for-profit arts organization's lap. It was the offer of a donated permanent home of its own, Now the first season of live performance at HVSF's new home – the former Garrison Golf Course, less than four miles away from Boscobel – is about to get under way. Happily, the vista from the site is every bit as eye-popping as the old one was.

"Nobody knows this view here except for golfers," said HVSF artistic director Davis McCallum as he gave a tour of the new site in May. Before us, as we stood where a new, permanent theater tent will be erected in 2023 or 2024, stretched a stunning northerly view of the iconic gap where the Hudson River flows through the Highlands, with Storm King on the left and Breakneck Ridge on the right. The tent opening behind the stage area will point at Breakneck, and there's a little knoll that can be used in the same way as the topography of the Boscobel site was used to shield the cast from view until the viewer is ready for the dramatic, "otherworldly" entrance.

"We're going to maintain that signature moment when the actors emerge from the landscape," McCallum explained.

The new tent will be slightly smaller and lower than the old one, better ventilated, with broad overhangs that will provide



Davis McCallum, the artistic director at HVSF.

rain protection during intermissions. It will require fewer masts to stay up, meaning that there will no longer be any seating with obstructed views. In other respects, it will resemble its predecessor, with a three-quarter-thrust stage, a sandy floor, and "a real sense of acoustical intimacy between the audience and the

performers."

The space will remain the sort of informal setting that nurtures the spontaneity of open-air summer theater – what McCallum calls "the opposite of museum Shakespeare."

Since the plans for the redevelopment of this site are still working their way through the permitting process with Philipstown's planning board, the 2022 theater season is proceeding under the auspices of a special-event permit. No new permanent construction can begin as yet.

The familiar white tent from the old site is being put up temporarily on a flat pad on a former tennis court adjacent to the golf course's clubhouse. The grassy slope next to it is suitable for picnicking, though it's not positioned to take full advantage of the viewshed. But the spot where the new tent will go and the three

picnic lawns surrounding it are only a short walk away.

To get there from the new rain-permeable parking lot – set on a former fairway, and much closer to the action than the lots at Boscobel – visitors will be walking on gently winding, ADA-accessible pathways through a native wildflower meadow. Land that used to be a monoculture of closely mowed lawn, treated regularly with pesticides, herbicides and fungicides, is being returned to its natural state.

"We have the ambition of being the greenest theater in America," McCallum says. "A golf course is anything but green."

How did this ecofriendly transformation come about? Much of the credit must go to Christopher Davis, the philanthropist who is donating 98 acres of the 200-acre golf course he owned to HVSF. Though he keeps a low public profile, declining to be interviewed for this article, Davis and his family have been a major force for environmental conservation in the Hudson Valley for decades. His grandmother, Kathryn Wasserman, was something of a legend. The daughter of a suffragette, she rode horseback across the Caucasus Mountains in Russia in the 1920s, got her Ph.D. in Geneva, and married a wealthy investor named Shelby Collum Davis.

Ms. Davis became Richard Nixon's ambassador to Switzerland, and took

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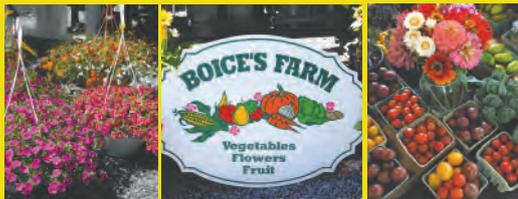
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up painting and kayaking in her nineties after a hip fracture forced her to give up tennis. She voted for Norman Thomas, snubbed Donald Trump, and lived to be 106. At age 100, she donated \$20 million to Scenic Hudson, where her grandson was a longtime board member, to save Hudson River waterfronts from development.

Chris Davis has carried on the family's environmentalist tradition, and still serves on the board of the Hudson Highlands Land Trust, which will manage the acreage of the former golf course that won't belong to HVSF. That land will be under permanent conservation restrictions.

Chris Davis had bought the property in 1999 specifically to prevent it from being subdivided for condo development, and since then has operated the golf course at a loss "while he looked around for an adaptive reuse consistent with his conservation values that could be maintained as a community asset,"

“It’s giving us chances to do things we could never do before.”

McCallum says. “He has been a patron of the Shakespeare Festival for many years, but his real interest is in conservation and environmentalism. He’s really motivated by wanting the experience of the Hudson Highlands being accessible to more people.”

While the new HVSF site and adjoining property won't be a public park *per se*, locals will continue to be able to use its trails for passive recreation such as dogwalking and snowshoeing. No longer constrained by Boscobel's calendar, HVSF will be able to continue performances in September and October, including matinees geared to "busloads of school kids," according to McCallum. "It's giving us chances to do things we could never do before."

Access will be enhanced both for people with disabilities and those who previously lacked opportunities to enjoy live theater for socioeconomic reasons. "We're reimagining this as a cultural



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campus for all of the people of the Hudson Valley to feel like what used to be a golf course is a place where they can come with their family," McCallum says. The tent, grounds and clubhouse could host community events when not otherwise in use.

Part of the generous package that Davis has bestowed upon HVSF is ownership of the clubhouse, restaurant and events business, which hosts about 130 weddings a year. The organization will create a for-profit subsidiary to manage these businesses, whose income should serve to make the theatrical activities sustainable.

"The Holy Grail of not-for-profits," says McCallum, his face lit with wonder. "Nothing like this has happened in non-profit theater in several generations."

The clubhouse known as The Garrison, home to the Valley Restaurant and the World's End Bar, will make it possible for theater patrons to have a meal on-site before a show. In recent years, HVSF has had to put up its actors in motels in Fish-



Stone sculptures can be found throughout the property.

kill for the season. Eight lodging units upstairs in the clubhouse can be used as accommodations for visiting artists.

The building can also host winter arts residencies and trainings, and be used by community groups on weekdays when no events are happening. HVSF's ten-year plan – not included in the site plan currently under review by the township – envisions the construction of additional

artist housing, a rehearsal barn/costume shop, and a small indoor theater that would be usable year-round. "The first LEED Platinum purpose-built theater in America," McCallum boasts.

But first things first.

For now, audiences can get their tickets for three different productions during HVSF's first season on its new site at 2015 Route 9 in Garrison, at the intersection of Snake Hill Road. The very first show will be a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch, with very unconventional casting: The headstrong teenaged lovers will be portrayed by HVSF's longest-running stage veterans Kurt Rhoads and Nance Williamson, who also happen to be married to each other. It opens on July 7 and runs through September 18, in repertory with *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play* by Anne Washburn, with music by Michael Friedman. Davis McCallum will direct. It's a post-apocalyptic dystopian tale told around a campfire, begun by retelling an episode from *The Simpsons*.

Both plays will take a two-week hiatus in mid-August to host a stop on the national tour of the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company's production of *Where We Belong* by Madeline Sayet, directed by Mei Ann Teo. It's a solo performance by Sayet, a woman of Mohegan ancestry, exploring the relationship between Shakespeare and colonialism.

Ticket prices for all three shows range from \$10 to \$95. To order, or to find out more, visit <https://hvshakespeare.org>.

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Natural treasure



PHOTOS BY ZAC SHAW

Tiny pyrite clusters found at a popular Ellenville rockhounding site near Berne Road Park.

Rockhounding in Ulster County is an adventure in awareness

by Zac Shaw

“Not all who wander are lost. Some are just looking for cool rocks.”

— Unknown

ROCKHOOUNDING IS HAVING a moment. According to Google Trends, it is more popular now than ever before. Don't own a pick hammer?

This might take some explaining.

Rockhounding is the act of finding and collecting rocks, minerals, and fossils. But why? Who are these people sifting through stones and chipping away at mountainsides? What's the point?

You might be surprised.

Rockhounders are as diverse as the many specimens they collect. Some are outdoorsy types who incorporate hunting for tiny treasures into their hiking,

climbing and spelunking. Others seek magic-crystal energy, drawing placebo power from gems. On the opposite end of the spectrum are amateur geologists digging into the science behind regional rock formations that date back eons. You'll also find retailers and serious collectors seeking fortune with pickaxes and rock drills, in search of large deposits that can fetch hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

Growing up in the area, my childhood was full of finding fossils on the shores of local creeks and collecting smooth quartz and beach glass by the Ashokan Reservoir. Now that I have a nine-year-old daughter, I get to pass along these geological pastimes, rediscovering the adventure of the hunt and joy of the find. Rockhounding is one of the few hobbies that can bring young and old alike together in the glorious natural surroundings of the Hudson Valley.

While New York has a fascinating geological history, it is not known as a top rockhounding state. Nonetheless, many treasures are to be found. Garnet, the official gem of our state, is found mainly in the Adirondacks but also as far south as New York City. Its hardness makes it a great industrial polishing material, while collectors prize the rare gem-quality garnet for its rich, dark, ruby-red hue.

You may have heard of Herkimer diamonds, which are actually super-clear quartz. A whole tourist scene has popped up around the Herkimer region, where you can pay to search through the tailings of local mines for a chance at finding some truly spectacular quartz points that are



A pick hammer is a rockhounder's best friend. Just make sure to wear gloves and safety glasses.



Shards of clear quartz discovered at the remains of a secret Kingston rockhounding spot that's been nearly picked clean.

as clear as glass.

Knowing how to look

But what about Ulster County? How does one go about finding anything around here?

First, you don't just have to know where to look. You have to know how to look.

Google is a great place to start learning, and there are some great region-specific books like

Rockhounding New York: A Guide to the State's Best Rockhounding Sites. But you might already see the problem with hunting treasure in locations widely known as rockhounding hotspots. The secret has been out for a while, and these locations are more than likely to have been picked over.

This was our experience in Ellenville, where a well-known abandoned quartz and pyrite mine is hidden just a couple of minutes into the woods south of Berme Road Park. Use the parking lot closest to the woods, and you will see a path next to a small pavilion. Follow that path a short distance until it splits, and make a right. In moments you will be facing a massive sheer rock face smack in the

middle of the forest.

We saw glittering pyrite clusters embedded in the rock, and collected small shards of milky-to-clear quartz scattered on the ground all over. A pick hammer was little match for the super-hard surfaces, but we did find some recently discovered quartz veins that looked promising for a person with more heavy-duty equipment.

Suddenly, we were startled by a deer tumbling down the sheer rock face from some unseen origin point. It flailed as it tried to climb back up the cliff, sliding back down before hobbling off into the woods.

You need good gear

Our harrowing encounter with nature was just another aspect of proof that the excitement of rockhounding is more often about the journey and experience. Sometimes you get to take home a prize. Tiny shards of quartz and broken rocks with miniscule pyrite clusters may not be noteworthy to serious rockhounds, but to the amateur they still feel like precious souvenirs of a fun adventure in nature. Whether we go home empty-handed or

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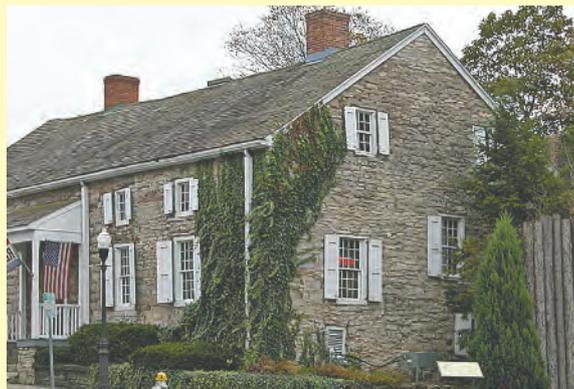
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not, we always leave with a story to tell.

Even casual rockhounds need some gear. A pick hammer and chisel or pry bar are necessary to get at anything embedded in rock. The area is notorious for having very hard, difficult rock to penetrate.

It goes without saying you need something to carry your specimens in. You'll need to experiment to find something that isn't too cumbersome and can be easily cleaned. You also don't want a bunch of cool rocks and crystals banging against each other, turning into dust.

And speaking of dust, get protective glasses. Seriously. You will have concrete for eyes if you don't. A good pair of gloves is also highly recommended, as is a magnifying loupe for ogling your collected beauties.

You don't have to hack away at granite to rockhound. We have found some amazing marine fossils lying along the Esopus Creek and at the Comeau property in Woodstock. Look near banks and bends in creeks long enough and you will start to see sedimentary rock featuring these prehistoric impressions.

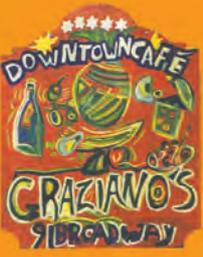
Be warned: If you are operating in the water in Ulster County, you'll want a fishing permit. One day, as we returned from plucking a few rosy quartz pebbles and a handful of driftwood along the Ashokan Reservoir, we were stopped by an officer from the Department of Environmental Protection. Unaware the area had been posted as requiring a permit to enter, we were briefly detained before being told to get a fishing permit and pretend to be fishing next time. The permit is cheap, a used fishing pole costs \$20, and a tackle box makes a great vessel for collecting specimens, with no one the wiser.

While few would mind a person taking a pocketful of worthless quartz from a state park, it's easy to see how this could escalate to larger-scale excavations of questionable legality. The prospector returning from a site with a wheelbarrow of material is likely, if caught, to be subject to returning the material at least, and criminal liability at worst.

Secrets of respectful collecting

Staying off private land is a must. Our state government has comparably strict laws against collecting and keeping pieces of nature, particularly if such activity disturbs or alters the landscape in any way. Tact is key.

Clearly the rockhounds who ravaged



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what I like to call “the secret Kingston diamond spot” didn’t get the memo on leaving nature as is.

About three years ago, a friend took me to a spot in Kingston along the Hudson, directly adjacent to a city park. There, having been tipped off by another rock-hounding friend, she had been prospecting for super-clear, Herkimer-like quartz. Accessible only during low tide (unless you use a rope to climb down, which we did) were small, glittering, ice-clear quartz shards everywhere. The riverbank, which climbed steeply, had a few large gouges where excavation of larger chunks of quartz was clearly taking place.

Though the quartz clusters and shards were small, they were of exceptional clarity and beauty.

Having returned to this spot a few times this year, we found it had been picked clean. It looked as though the steep riverbank was about to cave in on itself. Someone had come through here with pickaxes and/or rock drills and taken a massive chunk out of the landscape.

Rockhounding secrets don’t stay secrets for long. Today, you’re lucky to find more than a handful of tiny quartz pieces ... but I’m still not telling you where it is. Rockhounding requires a balance of insider knowledge and a good sense of judgment

when it comes to respectful collecting.

If the prospect of prospecting in Ulster County piques your interest, the Mid-Hudson Valley Gem & Mineral Society is the hub for amateur and serious rock-hounders alike. To find the best spots, you need to be networked with experts in the field. Group trips and meetings are your best bet, as you won’t get too far visiting well-known locations. Serious hobbyists and professionals often team up to share the latest and best spots to look (while keeping a few secrets to themselves).

Our collection and our list of hunting grounds is small but growing. We’re looking forward to networking with other rock buffs and finding new spots. As fun as it is, collecting is not the most rewarding part of rockhounding. As with many things in life, the adventure is even more precious than the treasures we temporarily acquire on our passage through time. We unearth rocks to unearth ourselves.

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All-time high

They're not your father's comic-book store

by Genia Wickwire

MOST PEOPLE THESE days have heard of the evolution of comic books. Marvel movies have hit an all-time high in audience reach. There are more female characters, more ethnically diverse characters, and more queer representation.

Local comic-book stores even go one step further, not only selling books that represent all types of people, but also providing a place for other avenues of community-building. They provide spaces for card games, role-play games, and good old-fashioned board games.

Some assume comics stores serve only a modest niche market. For those of us who grew up in the Eighties, some of these games can conjure up old ideas. Who are these kids and adults that play games at comic-book stores?

Dungeons & Dragons in the Eighties was depicted as a game for anti-social nerds. Now according to the New York Times article "Who's Playing Dungeons & Dragons These Days? The Usual Fans, and Then Some," the game is played by an ever-increasing audience that even



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Game night at POW! Card Games and Comics.

includes celebrities like Tiffany Haddish and Anderson Cooper. According to this article, it isn't that D&D isn't nerdy, but more that being nerdy has become kind of cool.

So really, if you were wondering, are

these games nights open for everyone? The answer is yes!

I talked to the owners of POW! Card Games & Comics, October Country Comics, and World's End Comics. The owners of these stores all have a similar mission:

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GENIA WICKWIRE

World's End Comics' game room.

POW! Card Games & Comics

175 Broadway in Port Ewen, offers the following game nights:

Wednesdays: Magic The Gathering Draft at 6 p.m. Entry is \$15, which gets you three booster packs! All ages and skill levels are always welcome.

Friday: Yu-Gi-Oh! Advanced Format Tournament at 6 p.m. Entry is \$5, which gets you a promo pack. All ages and skill levels welcome!

Saturday: D&D at 1 p.m. Free to play. Sign up only, ages 14 and up unless accompanied by a guardian. Please contact the shop to sign up.

Sunday: Magic The Gathering Commander Madness from 1 to 5 p.m. Entry fee of \$6 gets you a promo pack. Commander pods fire all day, so entries until 4 p.m. All ages and skill levels always welcome.

October Country Comics

246 Main Street, Suite #5 in New Paltz. October Country is owned by Devon Sprenger and Kiel Ferris.

Wednesdays: Youth Dungeons & Dragons for 8-to-15-year-olds from 5 to 7 p.m. \$5.

Fridays: Graphic Novel Club forming now for ages twelve and up. Call for more information.

They offer Magic the Gathering games for pre-release whenever a new set of Magic cards are coming out, They have games using these new cards one week

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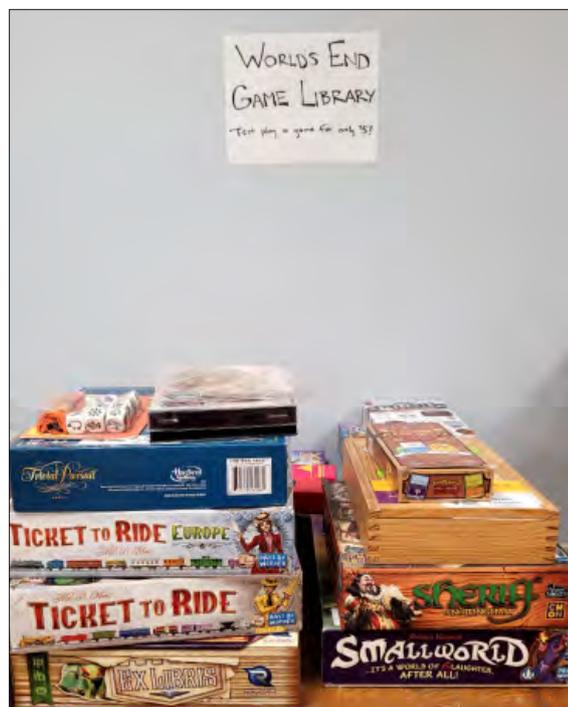
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to create a safe and fun space for kids and adults of all ages to come and play games. The more the merrier, and everyone is welcome!

What I also found out was that these owners love what they do. They are the definition of a small, local, independent business. They have a wealth of knowledge about all things related to games and comic books.

They work to provide an inviting space not because they will make millions but because they really, really love what they do. They welcome new players, people with questions and conversation, and seasoned oldtimers, so stop by one of these locations and get your game on.



GENIA WICKWIRE

The game library at World's End Comics.

before their actual release.

World's End Comics

319 Wall Street, Unit 1 in Uptown Kingston. Owned by Michael Humiston and Christopher Livecchi.

Last Sundays: Game night 5 to 7 p.m. \$5
 Fridays: chess club 4 to 6 p.m., 8 years and up. Free.

Alternate Wednesdays: Learn/play Magic the Gathering 3 to 6 p.m. \$5.

Sundays: Commander 2 p.m.

D&D games are done on a flexible schedule without a long-term commitment. Email or contact them through social media in order to sign up. You can sign up for one game or stay in touch about the schedule.

They have a huge space in the back with a games library. They encourage people to come use the tables. They would also be happy to host any game that you would like to set up. They ask for \$5 per hour during store hours and a little more for after-hours.

They will announce game night for various occasions. For example, they had a Pride game night in June to help celebrate pride month. Stop by any time to check out the games available or bring your own and enjoy their space.

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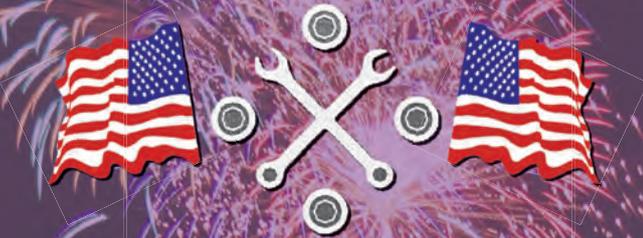
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“Shelter” at White Pines

A Woodstock exhibition that's a commentary on mankind's interaction with nature

by Lynn Woods

THE 16 SCULPTURES and installations comprising “Shelter” constitute the first outdoor exhibition in two years on the grounds of White Pines, the historic house owned and maintained by the Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild. The theme is especially relevant following the isolation of the pandemic, when we all took shelter.

The show is a collective stock-taking that resonates with nature as well as the healing of human trauma. The pieces range from a site-specific temporary structure to a steel-rebar sculpture mostly



Work by Tristan Fitch.

PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

fabricated in Brooklyn.

A stroll across the terrain of lawns, forest, streambed, and terraced stone surrounding the former rustic mansion of Ralph Whitehead and Jane Byrd McCall, founders of the Byrdcliffe arts colony, is pleasant under any circumstance, but the hammerings of woodpeckers and tree-clad vista from the hillside take on magical properties when seen through the lens of the imaginative realms that surround and are defined by each piece, which in turn interact in interesting ways with each other.

Curator Melinda Stickney-Gibson, who partnered with each artist in deciding the placement of each

piece -- a task that involved extensive clearing of 100-year-old wisteria vines -- has done a magnificent job of ensuring the dialog between artwork and environment is consistently intriguing. Each reflects, in very different ways, some aspect of the idea of shelter -- “a basic need not only for humans, but ... all living organisms,” according to the statement printed on the map one can pick up on the porch. It’s a theme that relates more generally to the notion of protection, “a place that feels safe in your soul,” as Stickney-Gibson put it.

Varieties of shelter

At the entrance, one is greeted by Tristan Fitch’s *Space 3—3D*, a sprightly

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Modernist hieroglyph formed of russet-stained boards taken from the Russian Constructivist playbook. Fitch has cleverly hinged two identical, multi-sided flat forms consisting of several intersecting triangles along the top plane to create a three-dimensional structure casting a spiky shadow.

The dynamic form, conjuring up a racing flame or giant insect, contrasts with Christine Genaglia's closed gable-roof-like piece, entitled "fills and empties," located nearby. The architectural structure's premise of solidity is undermined by its suspension a foot or two above the ground, suggesting the portability of a caravan. The four black circles painted on the slanting plane of one of the clapboarded roofs suggest holes or portals, an illusionistic carving out of space.

Farther up the driveway and to the right, in two cleared areas, stand Dan Devine's *Stranded*, a chunk of white Portland cement resembling a ruined architectural fragment, and an actual brick building covered in crumbling ce-

ment with a gabled roof formed of two bluestone slabs.

Covering the opening of the building's cement face is a plexiglass rectangle etched with an abstract design resembling a network of roots. Stickney-Gibson said she and artist Suzy Surek discovered the structure after removing a dense growth of wisteria, revealing a shrine with a cast-bronze crucifix housed within the opening. Surek installed cut roots and solar-powered LED lights in the space and then placed the semi-transparent plexiglass across the opening, which glows with a golden light at night.

"Shelter and home seem an outcome of atrocities of displacement," Surek wrote

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in the artist's statement referencing the Russian pogroms that uprooted her Jewish ancestors as well as the current displacement of Ukrainians under siege by Russia. Hence the title of her piece, *UpROOT*.

A mixture of materials

Moving toward the house, three stones wrapped in copper wire sit atop one small section of the low, winding bluestone wall bordering the terraced lawn. Their irregular forms contrast with the wall's ordered geometry even as they are made

of the same stuff. The integration of the wire with the stone to this viewer's mind was most successful on the left-hand stone, where the wire covering is thickest, rusting in places, created a tension with the inanimate stone, which seems to be pushing against the bonds like a large fish ensnared in a tangle of fishing line. The title of the piece by Jared Handelsman is *Bound Rocks*.

Sprawling across the lawn is Stuart Farmery's *Time Apart*, an assemblage consisting of two cage-like structures built out of pallets connected by a long,

sinuous tree branch, hewn and stripped of bark, broken in two pieces. Visual interest is created by the subtle differences between the tilted cages and the way they are connected to the branch — it's inserted into the open end of one and runs along the spine of the other. The organic quality of the tree provides a contrast with the vernacular prefabricated material of the cages.

The simplest of means spurs a rich allusion of meanings. For example, the breaks in the tree trunk could refer to breaks in time, and the two cages to two individuals or distinctly separate experiences. Or the cages could refer to the matrixes of time itself, linked by a thread of memory. The piece also suggests a kind of lumbering organism, and through that association plays with scale, as literal object or tau-tological model.

White Pines itself is brought into the fold: a series of colored neon scripts are displayed in the front windows, each expressing the concept of *homesick*, the title of the work by Erika deVries, in Japanese, Ukrainian, and Spanish. Around the corner, the neon script spells the word out in English. The piece could refer to

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Sculpture by Hudson Valley Bee Habitat (left) and Mimi Graminski (right).

White Pines’ history as the former home to many artists in residence, or it could be making timely references to issues of immigration and war. Or both.

Like deVries’ piece, Eileen Powers’ *A Room of One’s Own* is an outlier in this

nature-themed show. The Powers work consists of four yellow ladders propped together to form a teepee-like structure, within which hangs a long red sleeveless formal dress. The piece has a theatrical quality, as if it were part of a stage set.

Its placement close to the side of the house, whose dark wall creates a kind of dramatic backdrop, invests the piece with psychological tension.

One could read it as a symbol of the exile of a fictional girl or woman living

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in the house who felt she didn't belong or more generally to a kind of dream consciousness accompanying the traditional female role. Together, deVries' and Powers' artworks communicate a conversational narrative.

The stainless-steel decorative hexagonal cover of Hudson Valley Bee Habitat's *Solitary Bee Habitat*, positioned on a post near the house, recalls the nature-inspired motifs that graced the crafts once produced at Byrdcliffe. It provides access to the wooden bee habitat, consisting of numerous drilled holes hidden behind it.

Building with nature

Following the path into the woods to the left of the building, one encounters the scattered and stacked log ends of Mimi Graminski's *Remembrance*, each log delicately stenciled with old lace patterns in white. The markings echo the pattern of fungi encrusted on some of the



Work by Jan Harrison and Alan Baer.

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Sculpture by Eileen Power.

log ends, and because they will gradually fade further harmonize with nature.

Ash trees, which have been decimated

by the emerald ash borer (EAB), are central to the pieces by Alison McNulty, Michael Asbill and Michael Fortenberry,

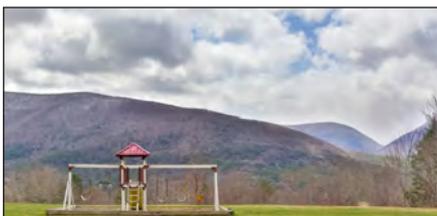
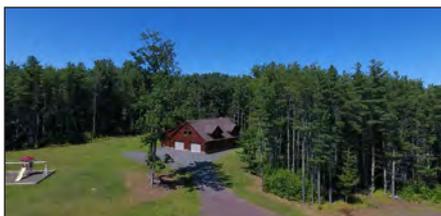


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and Julian Rose.

McNulty dragged a hollowed-out dead ash trunk she discovered on the property to its current site in the woods. The monumental, weathered shell, which attenuates at the top into two spiky, gothic-like spires of decayed wood, is nestled in a base of piled bluestone, sourced from a nearby quarry. The sculpture seems dreamed up by the forest spirits themselves.

Asbill and Fortenberry take a different but no less pure approach, in the sense of materials and methods used, in their piece *Encroachments*. They create a series of interventions on two sections of stone wall amid the wreckage of a fallen ash tree by filling in three gaps in the bluestone slabs with pieces of charcoal. Aside from these fillings, it is difficult to tell where the hand of man has interfered with the mind of nature, although one

fallen log looks to have been cut and certain stones seem realigned.

Rather than attempt to impose order on the chaos of nature, the artists have taken their cues from the chaos using a material cultivated from that very chaos. “We see these collisions [where the branches collide with the wall] as symbolically central to the narrative of that site,” wrote Asbill in an email. “The builders of that utopian colony cut back the forest and terraced the slope. In periods when no one was available to tend the gardens, nature would begin the process of reestablishing itself. At some point, the ash tree took root next to the stream and then it was cut down. The living stump and roots sent up shoots, which became the three massive leaders of that tree. What had been the primary branches of its canopy crashed down on the wall when the tree succumbed to the emerald ash borer (spooling the encroachment narrative even wider).”

Julian Luca Rose has taken a smooth, polished plank of ash and buried one of its long ends in the earth, and then embedded the tops of the two upright sides with bits of driftwood soaked in red ink. The encrustations are like rose-colored fungal growths or stiff blooms, strangely otherworldly even as they seem to naturally sprout from the plank. The piece beautifully expresses the tension between geometry in the form of the plank and organic form in the encrustations. Weeds growing along the base suggest the passage of time.

The title “*When my hand told tales. Motionless by the rosebush*” refers to “a memory I had as a child — looking at my hands,” writes the artist. “Wondering what they’d look like as I grew. Also thinking about time is non-linear and how my hands will change, how I will change, but this moment will always be existing.”

The light and the shade

Heading back through the woods to the house, be sure to look up, so as not to miss Jan Harrison’s and Alan Baer’s *Creatures in the Canopy* and Ian Laughlin’s *Treetop Diner*.

Dangling from the leaf canopy over a burbling stream, shifting, bobbing up and down, and swirling in the breeze, are dozens of Harrison’s fired porcelain white figurines resembling fish, birds, seals, seahorses, worms, or some such

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combination. They are suspended on wires of different length from a web of cables devised by Baer (the cables are attached to the tree trunks by means of wide rubber tubing, which doesn't damage the trees). It's a piece that reveals itself slowly. First you catch a glimpse of a low-hanging figure, then you see others, then amid the light and shade of the foliage you see clusters of many more, extending into the uplifted branches, as though it were the depths of the sea.

Laughlin's *Treetop Diner* is an owl house built of old-growth hemlock milled in the 1850s. It is attached to a large tree trunk 18 feet off the ground and reads, along the bottom, Who Cooks for You?, which identifies this as specifically a nesting place for the barred owl. Viewers can access a solar-powered trail cam by positioning their cell phones over the QR code painted on a block of wood on the forest floor. The on-line video will reveal the inhabitants of the owl house over a period of six months. In his artist's statement, Laughlin notes the need for such eco-friendly methods of assisting owls in the face of many threats, including the use of poison bait traps for catching



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rodents, which devastates the entire wildlife chain.

Back at the house, take the trail that leads directly behind the building to see Wendy Klemperer's not-to-be-missed piece, *NEST #6*. Pieces of steel rebar are woven together, much as a bird would intertwine twigs to create a nest the size of a child's wading pool. Beautifully positioned in a shaded clearing in the forest, *NEST* is also a weaving of disparate associations, of nature and industry, and in an art-historical context, to pop, specifically to the giant pencil, typewriter eraser, and ice-cream cone of Claes Oldenburg. It is simultaneously ugly and beautiful, offputting and compelling, married to the earth and utterly foreign to it. One can imagine it's a thousand years into the future, and this is all that's left.

Shelter, Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition at Historic White Pines, on display through October 23, 454 Upper Byrdcliffe Road, Woodstock. Printed maps are available on the table on the porch. The catalog available at the end of July will be distributed at the Kleinert/James Center for the Arts.

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'LET'S PLAY SOME MUSIC TODAY'

Follow the foodies

Ulster Eateries Unfiltered builds local restaurant buzz

by Zac Shaw

HE TRAVELED FAR and wide to find the best food on the planet. He supplied and supported Hudson Valley restaurants for decades. Now Jason Bover wants you to discover the food of your dreams here in Ulster County.

He and a thriving community of foodie co-conspirators have created Ulster Eateries Unfiltered, a free, public and fast-growing Facebook Group with over 3600 hungry members. It's the only place you'll find a fiercely local crowd having an honest, uncensored (but well-moderated) dialogue about restaurants in our area. If you care about local food, you're either already a member or you're likely loading Facebook now to become one.

What makes Ulster Eateries Unfiltered a must-follow? Bover's passion for great eats is matched by a life of experience in the field. He has built a true community beyond the core group. What started as an online forum for promoting and debating the best food in Ulster County has evolved into an offline community of foodies, restaurateurs and casual diners voting for the best food in a given category and then mobbing the winner's establishment with hungry customers.

"Every month I pick a topic," Bover explained. "We did best pizza, best bagels, best wings, best sandwich, best donuts We open up the poll to everybody. Whoever wins that month, we visit them next month for the get-together."

These meetups are more than a fun night of food worship. Restaurants are struggling these days. Thirty customers packing an eatery, celebrating the cuisine, and posting about it to social media is a big boost to an establishment's morale as well as its bottom line. And the love lasts, with many attendees developing relationships with business owners, becoming regulars.



ZAC SHAW

Ulster Eateries Unfiltered creator Jason Bover at Half Moon Cafe Coffee & Donuts with proprietor Kaira Tiegan.



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A donut exclusive

Recently, Bover's ambition around boosting the best of local dining has reached even deeper than his list of hangouts, into inspiring, one-of-a-kind collaborations with local chefs and owners. "I reach out to the poll winners and ask if it's possible to do something special off the menu just for Ulster Eateries Unfiltered to try and drum up some business," he said.

Recently he worked closely with the owners of the Half Moon Cafe Coffee and Donuts in Kingston to produce a spicy honey peanut-crunch donut, an exclusive for his monthly meetup.

"We're having our next get-together at Urban Fork on June 29th," he continued. "I put my head together with the owner over there. We came up with a spicy pineapple

crack sauce. I actually grow my own hot peppers and make my own hot sauce. So I've combined my favorite hot sauce, which is a Trinidad Scorpion pineapple, and we've mixed it with Urban Fork's crack sauce. We're excited for that."

Idolizing Bourdain

Join the club. Literally. Anyone on Facebook can join, no questions asked. Once you see the group's luscious food photography and passionate reviews, it's clear Bover's love of food is contagious and has deep roots.

"I was raised as a child of an eccentric food and beverage distributor," he said, "making monthly trips to Canal Street and Arthur Avenue, riding in the back of the delivery van, back when car seats were optional. Going to food tradeshow across the country... fermented, pickled, aged or vegan - whatever your fancy, it was all the norm."

Like many culinary aficionados, Bover



Jason Bover with the legendary Anthony Bourdain.

PROVIDED

grew up idolizing Anthony Bourdain, fantasizing about competing on *Chopped*, and witnessing inventive cooking on *Iron Chef* and other Food Network shows.

"I started traveling to New York City monthly to hit up as many spots as possible, as I saw my favorite chefs do on TV," he said. "Once Bourdain showed me how travel can really open up my food experiences, I was hooked. I would frequently travel up to two hours just for lunch in New Jersey, Massachusetts or Connecticut. Since then I've food crawled across the Caribbean, France, Spain, Germany, Austria, Colorado, and up and down the East Coast from Maine to Florida."

Negative reviews

This is the kind of person you want curating your food reviews and organizing your local foodie community. Our area got lucky. He's a longtime local. The coronavirus lockdown nudged Bover to focusing more and more on dining in

his native county. He enjoyed the sense of community that quickly built as he met the proprietors of the area's eateries.

Folks primarily come to Ulster Eateries Unfiltered to post reviews of recent visits to Ulster County restaurants, although Bover and his moderation team also post specials and announcements from area establishments whom he freely promotes and supports. He's developed a sort of cult following among several local restaurateurs and food retailers who bravely stand behind his decision to tell it like it is, and allow others to do so.

Negative restaurant reviews can be a touchy subject. Yelp reviewers are often seen having an outsized impact on a restaurant's bottom line. Fortunately, more and more consumers are savvy enough to recognize the absurdity of entitled Yelpers whining about their unrealistic

expectations not being met, fracturing their delicate egos.

Still, undisclosed paid reviews (or, on the flipside, vindictive personal grudge reviews) muddy ratings on Yelp and other sites. Bover sees reviews on their way out anyway, with community and of-the-moment social-media buzz increasingly the deciding factor in dining decision.

Under the spell this negative-review paranoia, other Facebook groups have been known to delete and ban even the slightest whiff of criticism. Some even post sponsored reviews without disclosing that they are paid for, and require expensive membership in a club as a precondition for a review.

Bover started his group partially in response to this fakery. "Some of my earliest supporters and restaurants messaged me and were really thankful for what I'm doing. They all verbalize that one honest review is worth much more than five fake reviews," he said. "In the



ZAC SHAW

Jason Bover shows off his collab with Half Moon Cafe Coffee & Donuts, a spicy peanut honey crunch donut.

restaurant industry, you have to earn respect and pay your dues.”

Knowing the details

He expanded on his views.

“You need to wash the dishes before you cut the carrots,” he said. “You need to cut the carrots before you cook the appetizers. You work your way up and everyone respects you. Restaurants need to pay their dues. They need to work hard over the long run to earn a reputation which precedes itself. You can’t just buy positive feedback and reviews and expect it to last. People are going to come in and say, ‘This isn’t what I read online.’ When there’s a disconnect between their reputation and what they are actually putting out is when a restaurant slowly declines.”

On his thinking, the hunger for authen-

ticity is connected to a hunger for a sense of community.

“Local businesses are having a hard time, and they want exposure and publicity,” he explained. “They want the real foodies. We’re more concentrated in terms of people who really care about food. In some of the other groups, people just want to see a menu and get a pizza on a Friday night. A lot of our people want to know, ‘Is the pizza crispy or is it soggy? Are the fries double-fried or not? Is the chicken organic? Is the fish from the Hudson River? We want to know all the details.’”

Bover is sensitive to the needs of local restaurants due to his wealth of experience in the field. “Delivering to the back of hundreds of small cafes and restaurants throughout the Hudson Valley, I have been able to predict whether a restaurant

will stay in business a year or two in advance,” he said. “If you’re not well-oiled enough to order in a timely fashion and don’t have money in the register when the delivery arrives, and then take weeks to pay If I call to ask for a check and none of the employees have a clue what I’m talking about or where the owner is, that’s a red flag from a mile away.”

Such an unhappy scenario is sadly on the rise. Inflation, supply-chain issues, a housing crisis, and a labor crisis are among the contributing factors.

Just getting started

Bover sees Ulster Eateries Unfiltered as a way to boost the best local restaurants without pulling punches on those that may be overrated.

At the end of the day, it comes down to the quality of the food.

“The one good thing hipsters from New York City have brought to us is the elevated food quality,” he observed. “Now you have to use the freshest local organic ingredients sourced from all over the world. It’s what we expect. And if you don’t meet those expectations, you fail.”

What’s next for Bover and Ulster Eateries Unfiltered? More meetups and more collaborations, for sure. One gets the sense Bover is just getting started. He’s beginning to develop a business around consulting for restaurants, offering 360 degrees of expertise, from social media and content marketing to menu planning and reputation management.

Bover is no stranger to running his own business. His husband-and-wife wedding photography operation Above Photography has served as the springboard for business ventures in the food space.

And at least for now, he’s keeping it real, and there’s a growing community of people who are grateful. Are there occasional kerfuffles involving negative reviews lodged by folks with an axe to grind? Certainly. Bover handles these with aplomb, engaging with all sides. He strictly enforces moderation rules to excise anyone overstepping the boundaries of decency.

Ulster Eateries Unfiltered is an inspiring driver of connectivity in our community at large. As locals already know and newcomers are beginning to learn, money cannot buy a sense of community. It takes openness, honesty and respect. Ulster Eateries Unfiltered is striving to dish those traits up daily.

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