A winter scene with snow-covered trees and a wooden walkway leading through an arched tunnel. The walkway is made of metal grating and is flanked by wooden posts. The tunnel is covered in snow, and the trees on either side are bare and covered in snow. The overall atmosphere is serene and quiet.

Wissahickon Magazine

IN THIS ISSUE:

**Restaurants
plan for pandemic**

CRAFTING IN QUARANTINE

**Preservation powerhouse
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From the editor

We're happy to introduce you to *Wissahickon Magazine*, the first issue of a quarterly publication that will cover the many communities tied together by the creek to which so many of us have a relationship. It's where we walk, relax and exercise. The *Wissahickon* is perhaps the most significant bit of common culture that unites people in both Northwest Philadelphia and the suburban communities along its 23-mile stretch.

We've long wanted to produce a publication like this, one for which we're very proud. It allows us to tell the sort of stories we often do at the Chestnut Hill Local but to also combine those stories with the kind of photography and page design we don't often employ in the production of our weekly newspaper.

Why, you might wonder, would anyone try to put out a magazine in the middle of a pandemic?

It's a good question. As many have learned, the shared experience of adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic has been one that has required invention. People have found new ways to keep working, new products for their businesses, new opportunities in the otherwise dark days of looming shutdowns and lost jobs.

This is a fact that's not lost on many of the subjects we interviewed for stories in this issue. We spoke to restaurateurs navigating the uncertain future that has put them firmly in the center of public policy as restrictions focus on their abilities to even open their doors. We spoke to fabric store owners about the pandemic's influence on the rise of DIY home projects, including knitting and crochet. We interviewed directors of local theater companies that are streaming their plays. And a doctor has advice on how we can seek care safely in a time with ever-increasing rates of COVID-19.

The times are uncertain, but we, like so many of the people and organizations in these pages, are moving ahead positively to carry out plans, explore new opportunities and press on. We don't know what the future might hold, but we do know what we can do right now.

We hope you enjoy this first issue.

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THEATER

The show must go on: Two local playhouses make the best of pandemic

BY DAVID HUNT



It's been a long and excruciating eight months since COVID-19 stripped us from the world we once knew. In what has been a rollercoaster year for the ages, everyone has made countless adaptations to adjust properly. For two local playhouses, Quintessence Theatre and Act II Playhouse, adapting wasn't out of mere inconvenience – it was a matter of survival.

Rules and regulations aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19 put a stranglehold on theater, an art form where the audience and their interactions are vital to the overall ambience of the experience. For many patrons, enjoying a delightful play often followed a memorable night out on the town with loved ones while enjoying mouth-watering meals and cold drinks at a nearby bar or restaurant. With all nonessential businesses shut down and Northwest Philadelphia nightlife brought to a halt, local playhouses scrambled in search of a viable answer.

"The industry came to a complete standstill, it was scary and weird and nobody knew how long it would be," Act II Playhouse's Artistic Director Tony Braithwaite said. Braithwaite is a Northwest Philadelphia native with a lifetime of experience in theater.

The solution was simple: streaming. Although it breaks all the rules

of theater, streaming plays has allowed Quintessence Theatre and Act II Playhouse to share their acclaimed performances with patrons.

At Act II Playhouse in Ambler, streaming was done with ease since everything they've streamed is owned and copyrighted by the playhouse. Streaming, along with impressive creativity from the playhouse's writers, gave them a second act.

"One thing we're fortunate about is we write a lot of our own plays so we don't do published plays that already existed because you have to go through a licensing house and get the rights to produce it. When you write it and own it, it's much easier to stream," Braithwaite said.

Act II Playhouse is now streaming *Electile Dysfunction* (a hysterical spoof of the 2020 election and modern politics) along with *Didn't Your Father Have This Talk With You?* Both plays feature witty one-liners, timely topics, outstanding acting, and beautiful cinematography. They give patrons a chance to unwind, have a good laugh, and catch a break from life in the comfort of their living room. Both are streaming through December 31.

Writing and rehearsing has taken place on telecommunications applications, such as Zoom or Skype. The only in-person interactions

transpire during filming. All artists have their temperature checked before entering the playhouse and must wear their masks at all times unless they're on stage. Once filming is finished, the plays are uploaded to the playhouse's brand new virtual theatre for streaming.

At Quintessence Theatre on Germantown Ave. in Philadelphia, streaming is a popular option as well.

"COVID-19 has absolutely transformed what we're doing at Quintessence right now because we can't have our audience members or our artists working, so we are doing virtual theatre," Managing Director David Lloyd Olson said. "It has been an exciting process to look at different ways we can bring great theatre to people in their homes."

As managing director, Olson is responsible for marketing, advertising, fundraising, and all administrative and business functions at Quintessence Theatre.

From December 9 to 27, Quintessence will offer patrons the chance to stream Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Little Princess*. This holiday classic will feature a four-person ensemble cast, directed by Suli Holm.

Another innovative way Quintessence has interacted with patrons is with the "Shout to the Void" virtual play reading festival, which took place in October.

Staff and board members have taken advantage of an empty theater by making renovations to the historic Sedgwick Theater they call home.

Built in 1928 by William Lee, the Sedgwick Theater is an old Art Deco movie palace in Mt. Airy. This architectural marvel closed in 1966, reopened in the 90s as the Sedgwick Art Center and has since returned to its roots as a theater with Quintessence.

"Since we are not able to produce theater on stage, we are working to make upgrades to make the theater safer when we are able to reopen, along with aesthetic improvements to the building," Olson said. "We have been painting the front lobby and the marquee. We have a new neon sign that's lighting up Germantown Ave. every night now that we hope will create new energy to the avenue. We can't wait to reopen!"

Along with painting and a new neon sign, Quintessence is also holding a new chair fund in which patrons are able to purchase new seating with loved ones' names on a plaque on the back of the chair and extensive roof work completed on the Sedgwick Theater. To stop the spread of COVID-19, they purchased a state-of-the-art Clorox 360 System to sanitize the entire building, new filters on the air conditioning system, and a socially distant dressing room.

For more information on plays on Quintessence Theatre and to purchase tickets to *The Little Princess*: www.QTGrep.org or call 215-987-4450

For more information on Act II Playhouse and to buy tickets to *Didn't Your Father Have This Talk With You* and *Electile Dysfunction*, visit act2.org or call 215-654-0200.



Act II Playhouse's Artistic Director Tony Braithwaite (LEFT) as Donald Trump, Will Dennis (ABOVE) and Tracie Higgins (BELOW) in Act II Playhouse's "Electile Dysfunction" currently one of several shows being streamed by the theater. (Photos courtesy of Act II Playhouse)

DESIGN

Ron Yeager: Mid-Century Modern master

BY STACIA FRIEDMAN



In Ron Yeager's Herman Street studio in Germantown, Mid-Century Modern is alive and well.

For nearly two decades, Yeager has custom designed furniture for homeowners, businesses, architects and design firms with a range that covers just about everything that can be hand-crafted from wood.

"I have been doing historic doors, built-in cabinetry, heirloom furniture, custom carpentry and stairs since 2002," said Yeager who lives in Roxborough.

As trends change over the years, Yeager changes with them.

"To be good at your craft, you have to change with the times," he said. "Right now, Mid-Century Modern is trending,"

Yeager said his personal taste run more along the lines of George Nakashima, the father of the American Craft movement.

"I'm completely comfortable making any style," he said. That includes working with clients who have environmental concerns.





OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: Ron Yeager at his Germantown, Philadelphia studio. OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: One of Yeager's pieces of fine craftsmanship. TOP: "I make pieces for myself. If someone wants it, I'll sell it," Ron Yeager said of his furniture. (Photos by Fesica Monroe)

"We can incorporate sustainable and safe materials into any project or create a fully green cabinet installation," Yeager said. "The lumber we select comes from local sawmills and is harvested sustainably or FSC certified. Hardwood plywood is now available with formaldehyde-free glues preventing harmful chemical gasses in your home. We do not use flake or particleboard in any of our cabinetry. We use finishes made from natural ingredients and selected safe non-gassing finishes. Keeping toxic materials out of your home is important."

Growing up in Royersford, Yeager came to Philly to attend Temple University.

"I always wanted to make furniture and did carpentry in my spare time, but in college, I worked in the food service industry in restaurants and catering," he said.

For a while, that became Yeager's career trajectory.

"I was running a big catering operation at the Navy Yard for the Frog Commissary in 2003 when I decided to take a gamble and go full time into woodworking," he said.

Good thing he did. Yeager's craftsmanship can be seen all over the City, including distinctive doors on Delancey Street.

"We design and fabricate both modern and historic doors to your specifications," he said. "Our custom doors start with carefully selected hardwoods oriented for good color and grain matching as well as stability throughout seasonal changes. That also goes for porches,

benches, fences, gates, and decks that need to endure the harshest conditions Mother Nature can deliver.

"Sometimes a single piece of wood inspires a design and the rest of the piece develops around it. Black walnut and white oak are popular now."

Unlike furniture that ends up in yard sales, Yeager's pieces are timeless collectors' items. "My furniture is built using classic techniques and results in an heirloom furniture piece that will be handed down for generations to come."

Philadelphia attorney Mark Gallant hired Yeager after seeing some church doors he had designed.

"I first had Ron make a large mahogany door with a glass panel for my Fairmount home. His craftsmanship and sense of design are superb," said Gallant. "I also had Ron replace my two inner foyer doors in mahogany and he built a white oak, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry and drawers designed by architect Gabrielle Canno who was greatly impressed. It elicits high compliments from everyone who visits. Ron is a true old world craftsman in modern times."

Penny Ordway, founder of Eviama, a green spa on South Street, has commissioned Yeager for 18 years to design and craft custom cabinets and countertop workspace.

"Ron also designed shelving, bookcases, display cases and saved the day in terms of my

ability to open on schedule," Ordway said. "He completely embraced the concept of using sustainable, green building materials and to this day proves that he has a creative solution for all the quirky problems I present to him. This year he produced a perfectly lovely LED lighted display case. Ron can turn something utilitarian into art!"

Yeager's clients also include former Eagles player Todd Herremans for whom he custom designed banquets at the Ritz Residences. From those banquets, the offensive lineman could take in a spectacular view of Billy Penn atop City Hall.

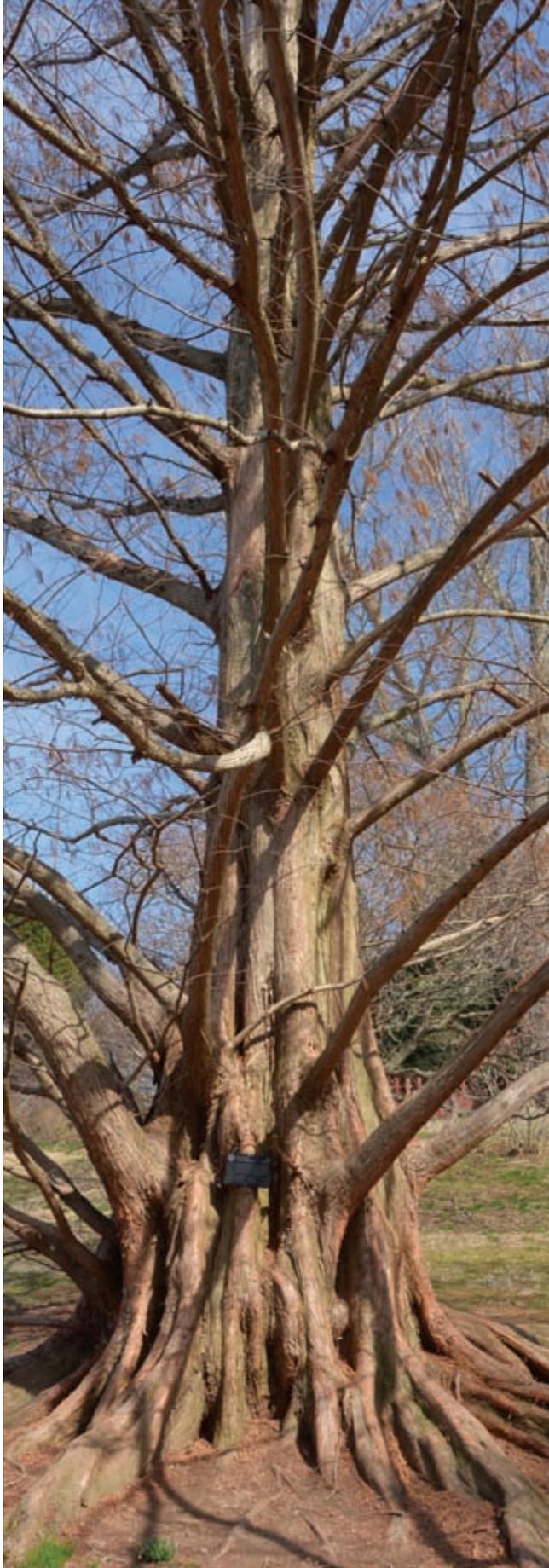
Some of Yeager's most elegant work is hidden from public view, such as five sets of handsome Gothic doors tucked inside the courtyard at Green Manor condos on 200 block of Johnson St. in Germantown. Or a pair of classic Adirondack chairs Yeager made for his home that fold up for storage.

"I would love to just make hand-crafted furniture but there is a lot of competition now with imported furniture that looks similar and is less expensive," said Yeager.

Fortunately, some clients appreciate Yeager's meticulous handcrafted work. Case in point: an elegant Cherry Tall Table Yeager originally made for his wife which was later commissioned by several clients.

"I make pieces for myself. If someone wants it, I'll sell it," he said.

For more visit yeagerwoodworking.com.



Metasequoia glyptostroboides, one of Morris Arboretum's 13,000 labeled and scientifically documented trees and shrubs of over 2,600 taxa with 32% of wild origin. Morris Arboretum's 92-acre public garden is an ever-changing horticultural display featuring a spectacular collection of rare and mature trees in a Victorian landscape. (Photo by Judy Miller)

Winter Tree Care

GARDEN

BY PETER FIXLER, PAUL W. MEYER CHIEF ARBORIST,
MORRIS ARBORETUM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

What is better to see than the vibrant colors produced in spring by a tree's rebirth? Could it be the lazy hot days of summer made in the shade of your favorite tree? Or perhaps the vibrant leaf changes that come with a crisp cool autumn breeze?

In order to see your trees flourish year-round, the hard work has to be done in the winter. When it comes to the care and pruning of trees, now is the time to get busy. Finding a reputable arborist and scheduling tree maintenance now can sidestep a host of issues that can plague trees throughout the year.

I will not argue that spring and summer allow you to see the most obvious problems with your trees. In winter though, you are without the obstruction of leaves so you can see the tree more thoroughly.

Many homeowners will use the warmer months to have their trees looked at and assessed for potential work. The care of trees any time of year is great because, as the homeowner, you are the steward of the trees on your property and seeking professional advice on their care is something I wish everyone to do. A great resource for finding a tree professional is the website TreesAreGood.org. The website is part of The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). They certify arborists by having them continually take educational courses to maintain their ISA certification. As a homeowner, your best value would be to find an ISA certified arborist that will assess your trees and perform the work. This specific setup is rare to find, but there are plenty of other tree companies with ISA certified arborists.

Why should you have to consider pruning your trees in the winter? The main reason is simple: so many problems with trees can start with the insects that are flying through the air or crawling on the ground. In the warmer months, pruning wounds emit a pheromone response that attracts insects to pruned trees. We have all seen a spotted lanternfly on our property. Have you seen one in the winter? Do you really see any bugs in winter? Those bugs often are the harbingers of stressors to trees that can take many forms depending on the tree and the bug. Winter eliminates that stressor. If you are planning to do any pruning that will remove 25 percent or so of the canopy it is a good rule of thumb to not prune when the leaves are falling (autumn) or flowing (spring).

Also, keep in mind that your trees, whether in an urban, suburban or rural environment, are no longer in the natural environment they evolved in for thousands of years and therefore grow in ways that can cause structural problems. Whether the tree is young or old, an ISA certified arborist can make pruning recommendations to prevent costly problems so many homeowners face after it is too late. A recommended schedule of structural tree pruning is one that can be done once every three to five years, depending on the age of the trees.

Structural pruning in winter can pay big dividends by remediating small problems before they become very costly future problems. The winter is the time to do this work if you have the patience to wait for the colder months. As a homeowner you will be more likely to recognize problems with your trees when they are in leaf. At that time have an ISA certified arborist assess and make a plan to care for your trees, but make sure to schedule the work for the winter.

While you are reading this article in winter you may think, "I should have had my trees looked at while in leaf." It is not too late! Any certified arborist with experience should be able to assess your trees just as easily in winter as in summer.

Another added benefit of scheduling tree work in winter? Most tree companies are not carrying the backlog of work that may keep them from getting to your property in a timely manner.

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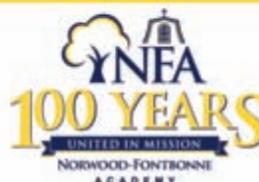
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Make a resolution this year to improve your health.

HEALTH

Healthy New Year resolve

BY APRIL LISANTE

New Year's health resolutions are made with earnest intentions, whether it's losing weight, quitting smoking or starting an exercise routine. Very often, the intent lasts until January 2, or maybe the end of the month, if we're lucky.

But this year should be different. This year, health resolutions are more important than ever and should be made and kept. Millions of Americans have spent quarantine dodging routine testing, physicals and even their medications, afraid to go to doctors' offices and hospitals during the pandemic.

The truth is they are only delaying critical care, basic health needs and the chance to catch health problems before they worsen.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Americans delayed everything from routine check-ups to dental care and annual screenings from the beginning of the pandemic well into the summer. It estimates that roughly 41 percent of people delayed some sort of medical treatment, and 12 percent even ignored urgent medical needs, including heart attacks or strokes.

It is also estimated that just during the first few months

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that the pandemic gripped the country, up to 80,000 cancer diagnoses were missed or delayed as well.

Despite increasing COVID-19 numbers, you should not delay routine care. Doctors and hospitals have stringent protocols in place to make visits safe. COVID patients are not seen in offices where patients do routine visits, exams and screenings. And many physicians have virtual visits available.

“Never put off emergency care,” said Dr. Michael Hirsch, M.D., of Tower Health Medical Group Family Medicine Flourtown. “If you are experiencing chest pain, shortness of breath or the signs of stroke, get to an emergency room quickly. Staff is ready to provide you with safe, quality care.”

We asked Hirsch to talk about what should be on everyone’s medical checklist as the New Year arrives, and it runs the gamut, from making sure your pills are current to getting a flu shot for you and your kids.

- Go for your annual physical. This is one of the most critical boxes to check off, according to Hirsch. Even if it’s been a while – a long while – since you’ve had one, this is the appointment where doctors can ask questions and screen patients for everything from diabetes to depression.

- Seek help if you are depressed. Studies are already showing that the elections, the virus,

unemployment and worry have taken a toll on people. “We are seeing a three-fold increase in mood disorders during this time,” said Hirsch. “We have a lot of patients who are stressed and anxious.”

- Have blood drawn for a basic blood screening. This is how doctors can routinely screen for high cholesterol and blood sugar. Untamed blood sugar can lead to diabetes, especially if a patient is obese. Blood testing can also detect anemia and thyroid problems.

- Women: get your routine screenings. Women 40 and over should be having their mammograms annually, and all gynecological patients should have a PAP smear if they haven’t recently. Women over 65 should also be screened for osteoporosis, especially if they are at risk for fractures.

- Men 50 plus: have a PSA, or prostate cancer screening. Men should also have a digital rectal exam.

- Go for a colonoscopy. If you are between the ages of 50 and 75, especially if you are overdue, go. Locally, doctors estimate that thousands of routine colonoscopies were never scheduled this past summer, putting patients at risk of cancer going undetected. There is also an at-home option, Cologuard, which can be ordered by mail to do a genetic test for colon cancer.

- Talk to your doctor about making your vac-

inations current. “The flu shot is extra important. Even if you don’t normally get your flu shot, this is the year to get it,” Hirsch said. Without the flu vaccine, any flu-like illness will be treated and tested as if it is COVID-19, keeping patients out of work and in self-quarantine. This is also a good time for those 65 and older to inquire about pneumonia vaccines and those 50 and up to have the two-dose shingles vaccine. It is also critical that children whose healthcare appointments may have been delayed getting their vaccines as well.

- Establish an exercise routine with your doctor. If you are overweight, have heart problems or other preexisting conditions, talk first with your doctor before hitting the gym full force. “That will be assessed during the physical,” Hirsch said. “Ask about exercise and have a guided approach. Some people may need a stress test first.”

- Make sure your medications are all current and you have an adequate supply. So many patients either didn’t order them or the shipments were delayed by mail this year. “Make sure you have a supply on hand and that they are not out of date,” Hirsch said. “Order them with plenty to spare so you don’t run out.”

- Remember your eyes and teeth! Dental cleanings and eye exams were put way, way back on the backburner in the past few months. Make sure to check off those boxes, too.

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DINING

For restaurants, a winter of pandemic precautions

BY APRIL LISANTE



Staff at Chestnut Hill Brewery and Taproom (from left) Anthony Fary, Cassidy Nash, co-owner Nick Gunderson, and Lindsay Morris of the Chestnut Hill Brewery. (Photo by Fesica Monroe)

2020 has been a rough year for restaurants and for our dining out experiences

Dining out is such a big part of our winter traditions. We love sitting down with a glass of Merlot to enjoy a nice cassoulet, or simply watching a game with friends over a plate of nachos. We reserve our tables early for New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day, anticipating a chef's tasting or three-course extravaganza.

But 2020 has been a rough year for restaurants and for our dining out experiences. First, restaurants had to shut down. Then, they were allowed to open at 25 percent capacity, or only as much as 50 percent. Some were never equipped to do take-out, so they never reopened. Others pushed tables into the streets, to hold on as revenue slipped. And still others, stalwarts like Bourbon Blue and The Spicy Belly in Manayunk, succumbed to the trying times and permanently closed.

So what will the restaurant landscape look like as we enter some of the most indoor-social and celebratory months of the year? While this year may look a lot different than years past, let's just say restaurants are fighting back against COVID-19, trying to keep a positive outlook and getting creative for the winter despite historic restrictions.

The dilemma restaurants face as the weather cools down is three-fold: many have to relinquish outdoor seating, some have small places that won't be able to seat at full capacity and some just can't host large holiday parties as they once did. That leaves many scrambling to come up with original solutions, like how to heat an outdoor patio, turn over what indoor tables they do have a lot faster or retool a menu for take-out or catering.

The Chestnut Hill Brewing Company Taproom is hunkering down for winter



with some of its own ideas to combat the social distancing pains. Owner Lindsey Pete said that this year, the Taproom will be doubling down on its successful outdoor seating arrangement and firepit with heated high-top tables, added stand-up heaters and blanket rentals. Yes, blanket rentals. For about \$2, customers can rent a clean blanket to cuddle up with outside for the night, or they may be able to buy a custom logo blanket and store it there for future use. There will also be spiked hot rum and whiskey drinks like hot toddies and ciders, which can be enjoyed outdoors in Yeti-style mugs, as well as some indoor dining and an increased menu with take-out friendly foods like sandwiches and apps.

"Fingers crossed that we're going to have a relatively mild winter," Pete said. "Last year's winter would be ideal for this year."

Chestnut Hill's McNally's, which only used to seat just a couple dozen at a time indoors before the pandemic, has relied heavily on street seating and isn't planning to give it up. Third generation owners Anne and Meg McNally are setting up a tent and heating it for the winter, as well as selling blankets and "McNally's gear" like sweatshirts and turtlenecks on site. Anne McNally stressed how important it will be for residents to support businesses on the Avenue, from tipping staff to patronizing establishments regularly.

"I'm nervous for all of my fellow businesses," McNally said. "This [pandemic] is the first time for all of us. It could be a win-win for all of us if [customers] do their part."

Perhaps one of the biggest question marks is what Manayunk and Roxborough will look like this winter with an absence of college students on local campuses and local revelers dining and

drinking along Main Street. Two of the street's most beloved party venues, Bourbon Blue and Mad River, are gone. They shuttered this past summer, unable to weather out the pandemic. Restaurants staying the course aren't sure what to expect, though organizers plan to keep things festive by at least lighting the street.

"I think that the holidays are going to look different but there will still be a festive feel," said Paris Rose-Antonogiannis, event coordinator at Main Street's Manayunk Brewing Company. The Brewing Company is taking extra precautions this season. While it typically seats 200 outside during fair weather months, it will heat a tent outside for only about 20 people this winter.

"Because you can't really encourage mingling. We really want people to feel safe," Rose-Antonogiannis said. "I think that if people follow the guidelines and wear a mask it will be ok."

And while some restaurants rethink their approach, others feel they are already prepared for the long winter months, since they never had al fresco dining in the first place. When a restaurant already has a routine that relies on take-out, and owners aren't losing outdoor seats this winter, the seasonal transition may be a bit smoother.

Kathlyn Egan, longtime owner of the Avenue's Tavern on the Hill, has been surviving on take-out service alone, doing curbside pick-up and delivery with DoorDash and Grubhub. Egan never reopened for indoor dining and says she is still too fearful of it in her small, cozy restaurant, so she is focused now on making winter stews and holiday cookies for take-out, as well as offering high-end

(Continued on page 29)

Diners this fall eat at the Iron Hill Brewery on Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill. (Photo by Fesica Monroe)



ART

Exhibition showcases

Philadelphia Abstract Expressionist Sam Feinstein

BY KAREN TRACY

Two major Chestnut Hill institutions are now offering a rare glimpse into the work of Sam Feinstein, a prominent Philadelphia artist in the abstract expressionist style. The retrospective exhibitions, two at the Woodmere Art Museum and one at SCH Academy, provide a career-spanning perspective on Feinstein's work and are running through the end of January 2021. *Sam Feinstein: The Early Years*, in SCH Academy's Barbara Crawford Gallery, features early works by the artist including watercolors, oil paintings, and illustrations. Woodmere, whose mission is to showcase the work of Philadelphia artists, features an exhibition of Feinstein's later works—*Sam Feinstein: Immersive Abstraction*—as well as a show entitled *Group '55 and Midcentury Abstraction in Philadelphia*. Feinstein was the founder and leader of Group '55, a group of artists, including architect Louis Kahn and painter Sam Maitin, who set out to educate Philadelphia's public and elevate the level of cultural dialogue in the city in the mid-1950s.

Feinstein was a protege and then close colleague of Hans Hoffmann, considered the leader of America's abstract expressionist movement. Feinstein briefly taught at Chestnut Hill Academy in the late 30s prior to the war. He married fellow artist Barbara

Crawford who succeeded him as head of CHA's Art Department. His connection to the school continued for many years, with many of Crawford's CHA students, as well as students from

Springside School, traveling to his Center City studio to work with him. A catalog available at the SCH exhibition includes essays by some of these students. The journey that led to these exhibitions began in the fall of 2018, when Patricia Stark Feinstein, wife of the artist and curator of his estate, approached SCH and generously offered to loan the school a canvas by her late husband. Representatives from the school were invited to an art storage facility in New York City to view the collection. On that fortuitous day, a team from the Woodmere Art Museum, led by Director William Valerio, was also present, and the idea of mounting shows jointly was born. "Collaborating with our partners at the Woodmere to tell the story of Philadelphia's art and artists has been wonderful," said Head of SCH Steve Drugan. "We both treasure and believe in furthering the arts in Chestnut Hill." To visit SCH's exhibition,



A signature piece of the abstract expressionist artist Sam Feinstein currently on display in the Barbara Crawford Gallery at Springside Chestnut Hill Academy. For more information: www.sch.org/feinstein.

please see www.sch.org/feinstein for gallery tour dates and more information. The SCH exhibition has been made possible by the generous support, mentorship, and generosity of Patricia Stark Feinstein and the Samuel L. Feinstein Trust.

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CRAFT

Crafting through quarantine

People everywhere have turned to knitting, crochet and more as pandemic persists

By APRIL LISANTE



"There has been a definite move toward the fiber arts," said Lisa Kathryn Johnson, owner of Hidden River Yarns on Main St. in Manayunk. (Photo by Bradley Maule)

Everyone likes a good yarn, these days, it seems, from that new John Grisham thriller to a Netflix original to, well, a nice big fat skein of yarn.

If there is one thing the pandemic has done, it's kept everyone indoors, and that isolation has spawned the need not only for entertainment, but the solitary pursuit of relaxation and a Zen form of artistic meditation. For many, this has translated into an insatiable appetite for DIY, whether it be baking, puzzling, home improvement – or the great wide world of fiber arts.

The pandemic has given new life to age-old handmade arts like crocheting, quilting, knitting, weaving and even that 70s obsession macrame, with no signs of abating now that chillier weather has arrived. What might have begun with a simple DIY quarantine macrame plant hanger tutorial on YouTube has burgeoned into an obsession with all things thready for many locals.

Kissa Reckamp is a West Mount Airy mother, outdoor climbing instructor and a legal assistant, but the one obsession she can't give up right now is crocheting. After learning as a child, she didn't pick it up again until

recently. Now, she does it because it is meditative and as a DIY project, the self-professed "not artistic" Reckamp likes that she ends up with something she created.

"I do find it soothing and relaxing," said Reckamp, who plans to tackle new patterns this winter. "Once I get into it, it is very meditative. You are doing stitch after stitch and you start with a ball of yarn and end up with half a blanket in your lap. I always say I climb and I crochet, I must really like my thread!"

The resurgence of these fiber arts, which were once considered old fashioned and passe, is worldwide and spans all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures, spurring yarn sale spikes, interest in YouTube and online classes, and even live classes, proving the pastime isn't just for grannies anymore. Its far-reaching hold even surfaced in fall clothing lines. One need only peruse Anthropologie or Neiman Marcus to see tunics, cardigans and cable-knits are queens of autumn, albeit for \$300 a pop.

But why buy something when you can make something from sustainable materials with your very own hands? Those with nothing but at-home time and the need for a com-

forting, repetitive exercise to relieve stress say they have found solace in the arms of a homemade, farmhouse-style chunky blanket or tweedy tunic.

When the quarantine first began, craft stores nationwide reported floods of customers trying to get their "stashes" of yarn before everything shut down. Since then, stores have reopened and the frenzy continues, with everyone from kids to septuagenarians taking up some sort of yarn craft to pass the time. Even those who continue to buy online show no signs of stopping. One of the oldest and largest domestic yarn companies, Lion Brand Yarn, reported an 80 percent increase in online sales during this time, despite the fact that people can't get the tactile experience of touching what they are buying, according to market analysts.

Though sales stalled temporarily in the spring at local brick-and-mortar craft shops, the fall showed a positive uptick in purchasing, with an anticipated increase for the holidays, owners say. People are now stocking up for the chilly months, buying high-end yarns, looking for specialty hand-dyed styles and small batch artisanal skeins, and even re-

questing machine-washable fibers, a sign the projects are utilitarian as well as decorative, according to shop owners.

"There has been a definite move toward the fiber arts," said Lisa Kathryn Johnson, owner of Hidden River Yarns on Main St. in Manayunk. "Knitting, weaving is a big interest, and quilting. It goes along with all things we didn't think we had time to do before we were confined to our homes."

Johnson says the phenomenon can be attributed to a confluence of things. Yes, everyone is confined to the home and social lives are close to nonexistent. But more than that, people are seeking comfort during the tumultuous time. Studies show the repetition involved in making stitch after stitch can actually be therapeutic, inducing a meditative state often called the "new yoga," according to the Craft Yarn Council. Other studies go as far as to say it can be mental exercise that decreases worry or even slows Alzheimer's or dementia.

Johnson also believes that because people now have more time at home, they are willing to invest the money and the manhours it takes to produce something gratifying with sustainable materials that they will have for a long time to come. Yarn skeins can range from a standard \$3.99 to high end chunky numbers for upwards of \$40 a piece.

"People are willing to spend more money on good materials because when you are put-

ting your purchasing power toward something that has permanence," she said. "These things are not done in an hour or two. It is money and time spent making a project and enjoying it for a long time.

"Before the pandemic, we might have taken \$100 and gone out with friends and had a couple of drinks, then dinner and a movie," Johnson said. "Now, you could take that same \$100 and go to a specialty craft store and spend that money and come out of it with something permanent."

Who are these fiber fanatics? At Knit With on Germantown Ave. in Chestnut Hill, shop owners are seeing both longtime knitters returning to the craft after a hiatus, as well as new knitters looking for instruction, though it's impossible to give a hands-on lesson from six feet away. In all cases, customers say they are spurred by a need for stress release.

"People are highly stressed and they devise something to cope," said Jim Casale a Knit With partner. "Knitting is a very capable coping mechanism."

For many newbies who were attracted to the idea of knitting or other yarn arts during the quarantine, the idea of buying needles and other apparatus was off-putting until their curiosity got the best of them, and they took a class.

At A.R. Workshop in Chestnut Hill, owner Rikki Renz has been offering in-person classes at fifty percent capacity to instruct

crafters using a hands-only knotting method for chunky blankets, pillows and now even tree skirts and conical Christmas trees. She says customers desperately want a peaceful outlet to all the drama swirling around them. For \$65 and about 5 skeins of yarn, even a handful of men have come to partake in a Zen couple of hours. Yarn classes are much quieter than the woodworking or canvas classes, she said.

"I think a lot of people come in and they want to do something without a screen in front of them," said Renz. "They want to do something they enjoy. I have a lot more stay-at-home moms now and a lot of women in their 30s. What they say is 'I always wanted to do this but never had the time to.'

"It's kind of therapeutic. The time flies by once you get into a groove, they just sit there and it is quiet. A place of solitude."

Now, even kids want in on the action at the Germantown Ave. studio, she said. She received positive feedback from kids who purchased her take-home DIY kits over quarantine, noting that they wanted to do larger projects, like blankets and pillows. She plans to offer those more elaborate projects this coming summer at her art camp, in addition to the traditional Boho wall hanging projects they typically make.

"Kids want to do it," she said. "They come in for a birthday party and say, 'Can I do a blanket?'"

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PEOPLE & PLACES

Preservation Powerhouse

Kim Sheppard's Whitemarsh Foundation has preserved one of the Wissahickon Valley's most picturesque plots of land

BY KATE DOLAN

In the center of a picturesque, pastoral Whitemarsh Township landscape sits a restored 1850s farmhouse, a sentinel guarding dozens of acres of meadow and farmland. This is the headquarters of the Whitemarsh Foundation, an organization created two decades ago to preserve the past and guard the future of portions of the historic Erdenheim Farm.

The farmhouse abuts the Dixon Meadow Preserve, 14 rolling acres that are home to more than 30 species of native trees, 12 species of native shrubs and six species of native grasses and wildflowers.

Over 150 species of birds and animals pass through the meadow on this portion of repurposed farmland.

"We have coyote and fox. Most recently, we had three rare bird sightings," said Whitemarsh Foundation President Kim Sheppard of the nature preserve on Erden-



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Whitemarsh foundation President Kim Sheppard. (Photos by Bradley Maule)

heim Farm. “The Preserve is a true jewel in the community.”

The nature preserve became a reality in 1999, when concerned neighbors, who feared the storied 450-acre Erdenheim Farm would fall to developers if the right agreements were not made, began meeting to discuss general land preservation. In 2001, the Foundation formed with a mission to protect Erdenheim Farm from development. The Foundation is now working to assist other organizations in conserving open space in the Whitemarsh Valley and surrounding areas.

If one is driving on Flourtown Road or Thomas Road, the rolling green landscape is unobscured. That is in part because by 2009, the Foundation had raised enough funds to purchase and preserve two tracts of land totaling 180 acres. The remaining acreage was purchased by the McCausland family who continues to operate the land as a gentleman’s farm, raising livestock like Black Angus cattle, chickens, and Cheviot sheep. The family also produces vegetable and fruit crops, breeds horses and stewards a greenhouse and orchard.

This agreement marks the concerted effort of Natural Lands, Whitemarsh Township,

Montgomery County, The Dixon family, The Hill at Whitemarsh, Montgomery County and the State of PA.

“The Preserve is a living example of meadow management,” said Sheppard. “And it continues to evolve with new native plantings.”

The Dixon Meadow Preserve has become a place for visitors to enjoy open space, observe wildlife and to learn about the land and land conservation. It is a reflection of the Foundation’s expanding mission to increase awareness of open space preservation, while providing access to those places and educating about their flora, fauna, wildlife diversity and stewardship.

“During the preservation process, one goal was to ensure that education play a vital role in the outcome,” said Sheppard. “Since the Preserve was built in 2014, seeing the hundreds of birders who visit each year or meeting community members who take part in our classes is really exciting.”

Finished in 2016, the Farmhouse serves as an education center for water quality and local climate change, as well as the Foundation headquarters. It was named the Dixon Meadow House to commemorate Edith R.

Dixon and her late husband Fitz Eugene Dixon Jr. and his family, who owned and operated the farm from 1912 until his death in 2006.

Sheppard says those rare bird sightings, which include the American Bittern, attracted people to the Preserve from all over Pennsylvania and other states.

“We realized that we created a landing spot for birds,” said Sheppard. “We had created new migratory patterns for birds. It’s become an important destination for birders in our area.”

Whitemarsh Foundation has partnered with Wissahickon Trails, Morris Arboretum, and The Hill at Whitemarsh among others for educational programs. Visitors can access the Preserve and in the future, a trail system that connects to the Montgomery County Green Ribbon trail system.

Aside from the birdwatching appeal, visitors also come to walk along the trails and boardwalk that winds through the Dixon Meadow Preserve.

“The safety, the beauty, and the pristine environment, it’s an opportunity for people to get a look within the farm that they don’t normally get,” said Sheppard. “This is different, easy to access and really very special.”



REAL ESTATE

The Kimball House

A Modern
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BY PETE MAZZACCARO



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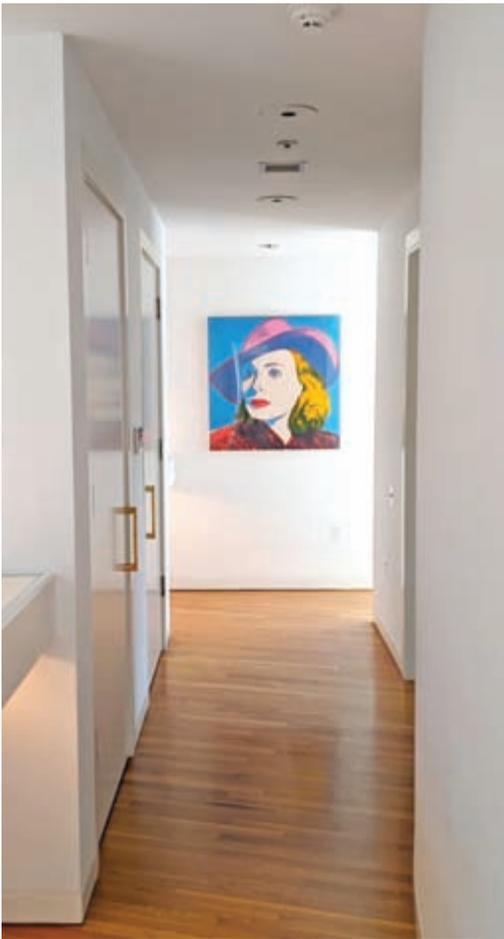
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About half a mile west from where the Wissahickon Creek winds through Wissahickon Valley Park, just below Fort Washington State Park, sits a magnificent modern home designed by an architect with long ties to North-west Philadelphia.

The Kimball House in Flourtown is a four-bedroom, six-bathroom, 6,895 square-foot home that sits on a 1.69-acre lot. It's listed with Michael Sivel's Sivel Group, Berkshire & Hathaway Fox & Roach Realtors, for \$1.75 million.

The house was designed by Joel Levinson, an architect who has long lived in Philadelphia's Mt. Airy neighborhood. His firm, Levinson and Associates was formed in 1967. His many residential projects, including the Kimball House, are part of the University of Pennsylvania's extensive architectural archives collection, alongside the works of renowned firms like Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates and Louis I. Kahn.

Levinson designed the home for Dr. Ron and Janet Kimball. The Kimballs are art enthusiasts with tastes that match the modern character of their home. Warhol, Miro, Lichtenstein and more help enhance the feeling you're walking through a genuine mid-century home despite the fact it was built in 1993. The family is moving to be closer to their children and grandchildren.

The home was designed to the Kimballs' eclectic and artistic tastes, and the couple let Levinson indulge his design preferences for unconventional angles, radiating shapes and curves. Levinson, a writer and photographer, has written and discussed a theory of design he calls "diagonality," a preference for non-right angles, the addition and subtraction of triangles from otherwise square structures. Those design sensibilities are on full display in the Kimball House.

Despite its design daring and size, the Kimball House is a surprisingly cozy home. It is also open, airy and full of natural light that pours into the home no matter where the sun sits in the sky. It has a remarkable front office surrounded by built-in bookshelves, it has an indoor gym, a three-car garage and a small bar connected to the aforementioned office by a secret, bookcase door. Its other noticeably modern feature is a wealth of built-in shelving and benches.

"Some might think they're dated, but I think they're a key feature," Realtor Michael Sivel said of the built-ins.

Sivel said the home is definitely the sort that would most appeal to the kind of person with a fondness for the modern that matches the Kimballs'.

He noted that a couple from New York who collected art was interested.

"Younger families haven't found it homey enough," he said. "But for the right buyer, someone who likes natural light, and this architectural style, this is an amazing place."



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Kimball House photos by Pete Mazzaccaro

DINING

(Continued from page 17)

bottles of wine to go.

"I am hesitant about indoor dining right now," Egan said. "But we are encouraging our take-out winter fare and we will get through this!"

Cantina Feliz on Bethlehem Pike in Fort Washington is a local hot spot for modern Mexican. The festive bar and restaurant made a brisk trade of take-out during these

It's been a constant evolution of figuring out what is working and not and adapting to that.

– Cantina Feliz owner Brian Sirhal

restrictive months, and never had outdoor dining, even when capacity was limited to 25 percent indoors. Owner Brian Sirhal predicts that while he may lose larger holiday tables of eight to 10 people, as well as private events typically associated with holiday celebrations, he will continue to reconfigure the dining room seating according to mandates and offer a strong menu retooled with take-out in mind.

Normally he'd have a lot of space to make accommodations for larger dining parties but can't because of socially distant spacing in the dining room.

"It's been a constant evolution of figuring out what is working and not and adapting to that," Sirhal said.

He heavily promoted take-out for Halloween and the night before Thanksgiving, nights when no one typically wants to cook. New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day, packed, reservation-driven nights where the Cantina typically turns over tables four times and caters heavily to locals, will look a lot different this year, but Sirhal is confident that the same protocols that have gotten them this far will carry them through the season.

"I think we've been fortunate at the Cantina that we've been doing a lot of take-out," Sirhal said. "I think take-out will perhaps increase this winter. But holidays, those are things that will definitely be impacted. Those are the nights we really thrive on in the restaurant business - to see people having a good time."



Cantina Feliz owner Brian Sirhal. (Photo by Feisca Monroe)



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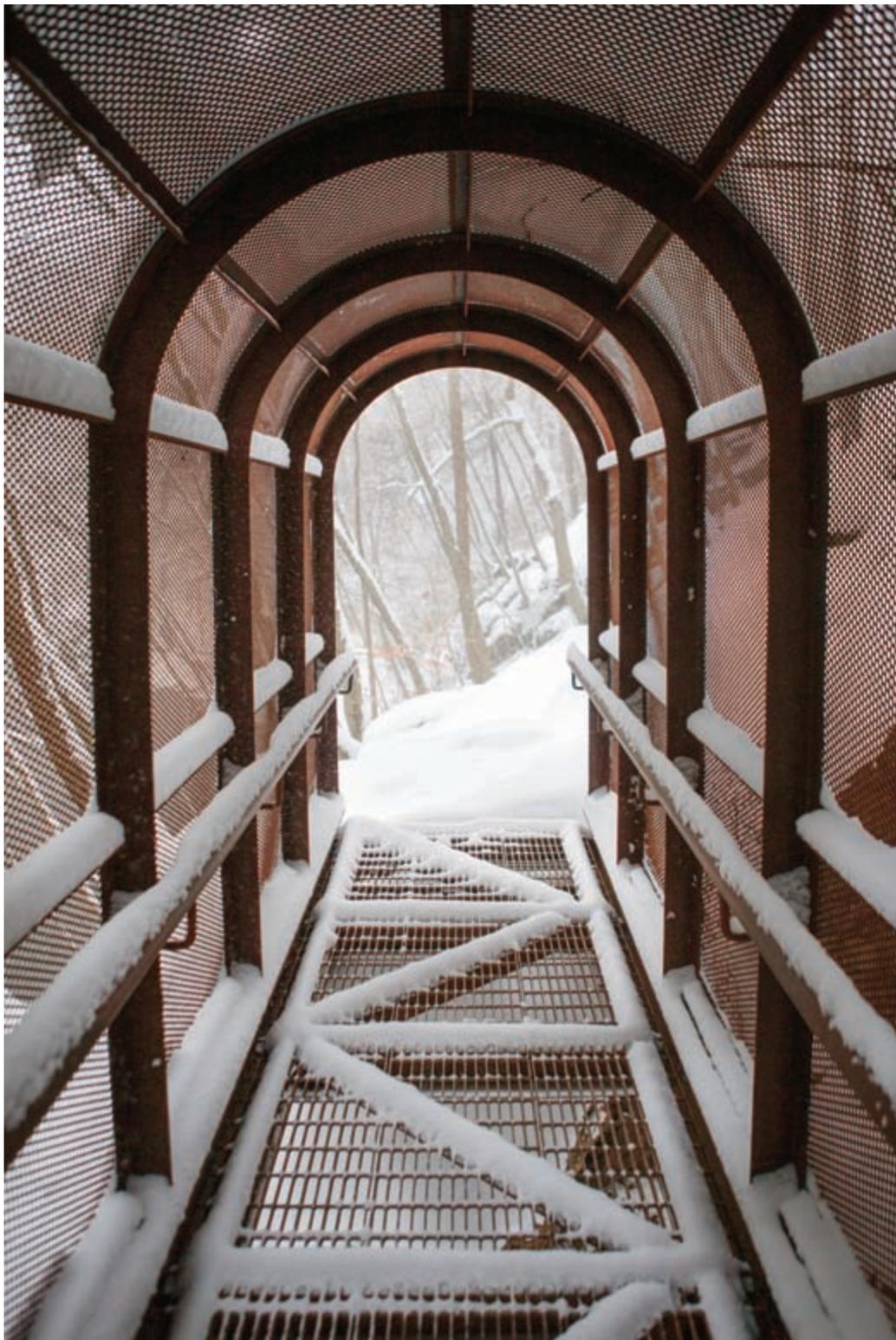
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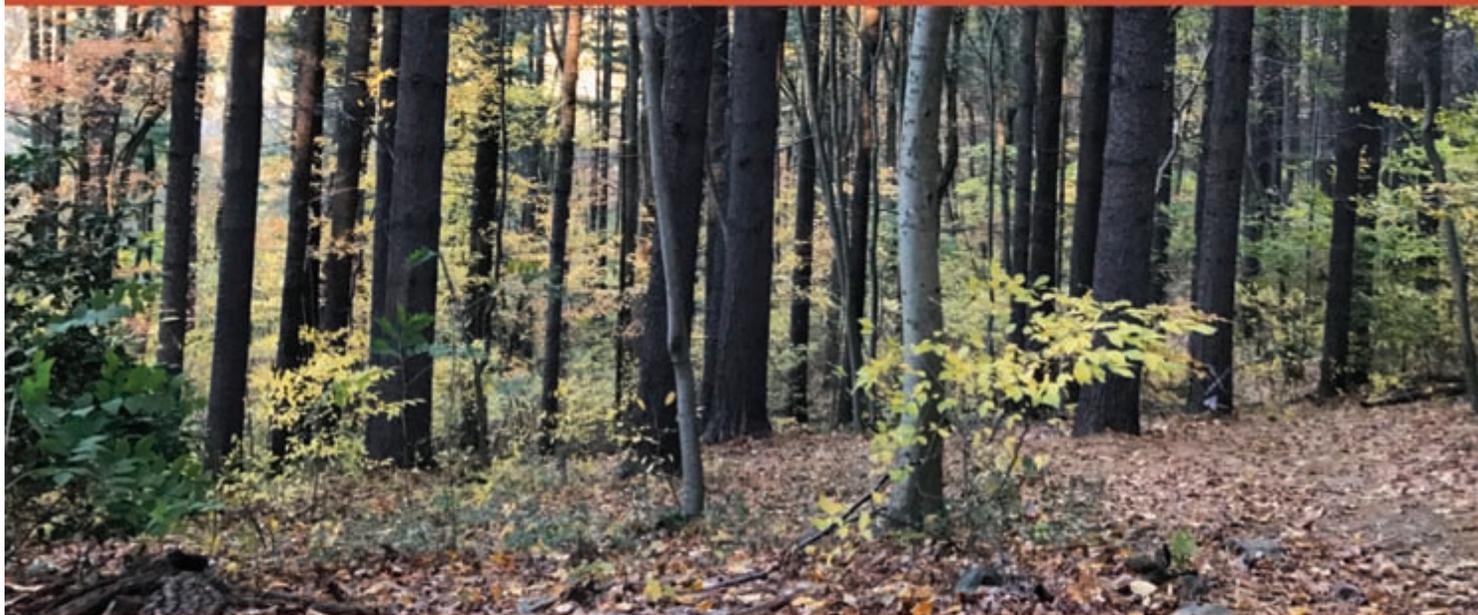


THE FINGERSPAN

Perched atop an outcrop of schist on the Wissahickon's Orange Trail, Fingerspan carries the hiker across a dramatic ravine — and across several eras. Installed via helicopter in 1987, the bridge of Corten Steel was one of three permanent installations Philadelphia received from “Form and Function,” a utilitarian public art project led by the Fairmount Park Art Association. Sculptor Jody Pinto drew from her family's Italian homeland to find the form she needed to bridge the ravine: the slightly bent finger of God giving life to Adam in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel masterpiece. Pinto chose the finger to symbolize connection — the connection one makes between land and air, body and spirit — when encountering Fingerspan on a trail in the woods.

(Photo and text by Bradley Maule)

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