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The Garden Wagon
Of dirt and a famous old road

By Jim Dodson

I call her The Pearl. She's a 1996 vintage Buick Roadmaster Grand Estate station wagon—a true American land yacht with fake wood siding and a ride that's like driving in your living room.

I bought her a decade ago more out of simple nostalgia than anything else, thinking how fun it would be to cruise around town in a classic Roadmaster wagon just like the one my old man had when I was a kid.

After complaining in a newspaper column that our kids kept sneaking off to college with a succession of our family Subarus and Volvos, I half joked that maybe the trick was to find a vintage gas guzzler no self respecting Millennial would wish to be seen riding in—much less driving.

A woman who read my column phoned me.

"Mr. Dodson, I'm here to make your dreams come true," she said.

Her father was pushing 90 and had recently terrified his mother while driving out to lunch from their senior living community, winding up lost and 60 miles out in the country.

"He loves this car. It's really his baby. But he's starting to run red lights and stop signs and I'm afraid he might kill somebody in it." She added that a vintage car collector on the West Coast had made her an offer, but if she wished to take it for a test spin, I could go over to the garage where she'd had it towed, hook up the battery and take her for a ride.

"I had to tell my father his beloved Roadmaster was worn out—a little white lie, I'm afraid. There's actually nothing wrong with it save for a few dents here or there. That car took my sisters and me off to college and moved us several times when we were single."

The mechanic at the garage pointed out that this particular model was the last true production station wagon made by Detroit—the end of a noble line of historic Roadmasters that stretched back to the Great Depression. Buick was ditching its big road wagons for something called a Sports Utility Vehicle.

"If Buick still made that car," he added, "the company wouldn't be in the trouble they're in today." He also said that if I chose not to buy that car, he would.

An hour later, I drove it home.

My only miscalculation was that our two youngest Millennials in residence that summer actually loved my new land yacht and also wanted to drive it around town—or take it off to college.

One of them unhelpfully pointed out that the Roadmaster station wagon was listed as No. 6 on the "Top Ten List of Best Cars for the Apocalypse." He seemed deeply impressed.

"That may be," I told him, "But hopefully spring will be here before The End is near. Behold my new gardening wagon."

They laughed. The younger one wondered if I'd given "her" a proper name.

The perfect name, in fact, suddenly came to me.

"I think I'll call her the Dirty Pearl—after the Black Pearl in Pirates of the Caribbean." This movie was a big hit in the Dodson household when the boys were small. "Pirating and gardening are both dirty business," I added.

My new first mate and garden assistant seemed to agree. Mulligan the dog, whom I found running wild and free as a
lost pup, was already sitting in the front seat shotgun position — ready to roll.

It’s been exactly a decade since that sweet day of homecoming and we’re still cruising along together — man, dog and Dirty Pearl.

She had just 60,000 miles on her odometer when I acquired her in 2009. Today she has over 170,000, most of them in service to my garden or road trips for work or pleasure. Two years ago, I began researching the Great Wagon Road that brought an estimated 300,000 European settlers to the Southern backcountry in the 18th century. That road, the most traveled road of Colonial America, stretched nearly 800 miles from Pennsylvania to Georgia.

By the end of this summer, The Pearl will have traveled every mile of that fabled American road. It seems a perfect coda for the last true American station wagon.

Along the way, The Pearl has attracted an amazing amount of attention and comment from complete strangers. For some, she’s a nostalgia trip. “That’s my childhood car!” a woman shrieked with joy outside York (Pennsylvania)’s historic Farmers Market, wondering if she could simply sit in the car for five minutes and take a mental trip down memory lane.

Another man in the parking lot at Gettysburg wondered how much I would take for The Pearl. I told him she was part of the family, and thus — priceless.

Seeing her, people have tooted their horns, waved and given thumbs up signs.

This makes me wonder: Was life simpler, larger or somehow better a quarter of a century ago? America’s love affair with vintage autos is well established, a cultural fact and multimillion-dollar industry. Maybe an old car simply reminds us of when travel by road was a luxury or means of seeing the world at an unhurried pace — not the frenzied mad dash to get wherever you’re going on the freeway these days.

Back home, around town, in any case, we still go for a Saturday morning cruise to the farmer’s market, Lowe's or Home Depot or the local garden centers to buy mulch, organic soil, all of which will fit in the massive cargo hold of The Pearl.

Over our mobile decade together, she’s hauled everything from household furniture to young red bud trees, from oil paintings purchased at auctions to lumber for building bookcases. You name it, The Pearl has brought it home — including yours truly to the old neighborhood where he grew up in Greensboro.

That may be the sweetest thing of all.

The Pearl’s days of hauling anything but plants and garden soil are probably behind us. Man, dog and Pearl are all showing signs of age. My knees complain, The Mull is turning gray at her muzzle, and The Pearl’s electrical system has become a mystery known only to God, because no mechanic can seem to find a simple short in the system that occasionally drains her battery. Her air conditioner also kicked out last summer up in Virginia. Maybe The End is near, after all.

Sometime this summer, about the time you’re reading this, good Lord willing and the battery holds out, she and I and The Mull will finish the Great Wagon Road to Georgia.

I’ll be a little sad when the journey is over.

But also happy that my garden wagon made it the entire way, carrying me over the same road my ancestors took to find a home in North Carolina.

I’ll drive her home, give her a wash, and park her in the carport where she always sits and enjoys a nice rest.

Until next Saturday morning. ✌️

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Put up your feet in style with the crisp, nail head-edged 98C Yates Ottoman from Wesley Hall ($2,600) that channels timeless style with a silhouette that surprises and delights. Available through Furnitureland South, 5635 Riverdale Drive, Jamestown, (336) 822-3000.

Heart of Stone
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Midnight at the Oasis
Turn to the Palms Up! bar from Caracole ($4,820) to bring some cool, calm, collected chic to a dining area or living room. The elegant cabinet boasts hand-carved palm-patterned doors that reveal two open shelves, a deep drawer, a white marble work space and mirrored back with hanging wine glass holder. Sublime. Available through Furnitureland South, 5635 Riverdale Drive, Jamestown, (336) 822-3000.

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Jungle Love
Take a tired room and transform it into a tropical tempest with courtesy of the Ashford Tropics Palm Shadow AT7106 wallpaper from York Wallcoverings ($47.99 per single roll). Available through Dero’s, 2671 Lewisville-Clemmons Rd., Clemmons, (336) 768-7362.
Blossom Forth

Island Life
Set sail for adventure with the 24” x 30” Antilles Chandelier from Currey & Co. ($2,410) that pairs handwoven natural rattan with the functionality of nine lights. Available through Marta Mitchell Interior Design, 609 State St., Greensboro, (336) 255-9755.

Weave Some Magic
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Viva Vanity!
Woodland Furniture brings organic good looks to the bath with the rich wood Preston Vanity that boasts a driftwood-like Grigio: Antico Premium Finish (36 inches wide starting at $3,538). Do note, however, that the countertop, bowl and hardware are not included. Nor the soap. Available to the trade through woodlandfurniture.com.

Thanks a Bunch
Use the all-weather wicker Tommy Bahama Outdoor Bunching Cocktail Table from Lexington Home Brands ($629) solo or in a spirited grouping to create the perfect perch for cool cocktails upon the patio. Available through Furnitureland South, 5635 Riverdale Drive, Jamestown, (336) 822-3000.

Gray Matters
Charlotte-based textile designer Jill Seale has crafted the perfect throw pillow with her Trevi Stone pattern that channels classic Florentine-inspired marble motifs with contemporary overtones ($195 for a 22-inch pillow). The hidden zipper and down fill only add further luxe. Available through JillSeale.com.
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“We’re garden geeks,” says Cindy Jones with a laugh, pausing near the end of another busy day at Edgefield Plant & Stone Center. “Craig and I are all about helping our customers create the outdoor space that works for them — because they work for us.”

A year or so ago, matter of fact, a woman and her son purchased a new house together and hired Jones and her husband, Craig Wagoner, to design and install a planting scheme and living space for their empty backyard.

“She recently stopped by to tell us that the installation of her garden has opened up a whole new world for her and her son. They spend much of their time outdoors now, enjoying nature. They’re learning something every gardener knows — that once you begin doing it, you really get hooked. You’re constantly learning and growing.”

Jones and Wagoner hear some version of this story pretty regularly, it would seem, the result of relationships built over many years with loyal customers. “They understand we are gardeners, too,” adds Wagoner, who manages the stone and design aspect of Edgefield’s full-service team when he’s not deep into expanding the couple’s own impressive forest garden in Summerfield.

“Escapes from the corporate world, in 2004 they purchased the property where their distinctive garden center — purple with yellow trim — currently sits, “back when nearby Highway 68 was a two-lane affair,” Wagoner wryly explains, noting that the subsequent construction of I-78 eventually claimed almost a third of an acre of the center’s original property.

“It was a struggle for a while with all the road construction,” he allows, “but our customers kept the doors open and allowed us to eventually expand our services.” In addition to a full range of gravel and specialty stone, Edgefield boasts an impressive collection of unique perennials and annuals, including lots of hard-to-find native plants that attract wild birds. Their services also include architectural design and full garden
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planning and hardscape installation, depending on the desires and technical skills of the customer.

If you happen to be a dedicated tree-hugger (as this reporter is, without apology) you’ll appreciate Edgefield’s warm and highly knowledgeable staff (try asking Jones about soil amendments and her cure for pesky clay soils), and a shop filled with a vast array of organic garden supplies, pots and gifts, presided over by a trio of friendly in-house rescued felines named Merlin, Guinevere and Persephone (and occasionally a pair of rescued Great Danes named Daphne and Willow). On the grounds, EPS&SC boasts a nice mix of mature fruit trees, dogwoods, Japanese maples and hardy conifers field-grown in Oregon. From mugo pines to asparagus fern, aloe to wild columbine, there is something for every discriminating gardener.

In short, Edgefield Plant & Stone Center is the kind of place you can drop in for a quick look round the premise and find yourself heading home to your own garden with a couple rare perennials you’ve never heard of — but that will star in the garden for years to come.

The firm’s location — though once under siege by a new freeway — is now something of a strategic advantage, placing the Center conveniently between the rapidly growing suburbs of the Triad. “We also get a nice share of customers coming down from Virginia,” reports Wagoner, a former chairman of Guilford County’s Open Space Committee. An apt title for someone who prefers life on the wild and natural edges. ✽

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Split Level Home
Two personalities, one decor

By Jane Borden
Illustration by Meredith Mortens

S
ince I moved to Los Angeles in 2013, I have be-

come an importer of Southern arts and decor. OK,

the accurate term is smuggler. Each time I fly to

Greensboro for a visit or holiday, I pack an empty
duffel in my suitcase. During my stay, I fill said duffel
with whatever my mother and sisters are giving away. Paintings,
objects d’art, platters, china, silver, crystal, clothing, shoes and pil-

lows have all traveled the friendly skies on United Airlines.

Those are just the smaller items and recent acquisitions.

When we first drove across the country, it was in a U-Haul
filled with my grandmother’s hutch, plant stand and four-poster
bed; my other grandmother’s gaming table; and an antique end
table gifted from an aunt on my wedding day.

I don’t sell these things in L.A. But I do make money, in

a way, as they relieve me from spending funds on new items.

More than anything, they fill my home, though far away, with
family and the South.

It creates an odd aesthetic, to mix the staid antiques with
motley pieces I collected over years from Brooklyn galleries and
thrift shops. When my friend Eliza, who grew up in Roanoke,
Virginia, first visited my new L.A. home, she said, “It’s half
Southern Traditional and half Weird Art.”

“Thank you,” I said, having never felt more seen.

But only she recognizes the Southern items as such. Most
people just think I have eclectic taste, and also, where in the
world do you find these unique pieces so unlike SoCal style?

Most of my L.A. friends live among mid-century furniture, low
seating and Art Deco splashes. If I were in North Carolina, I’d
be one among many who own a hutch. Here, they ask, “What’s
a hutch?”

Context is everything. On the playgrounds and preschools
of Raleigh, little smocked dresses are a uniform that makes
some moms comfortable and others feel stifled. I feel neither,
when my daughter Louisa dons her cousin’s delicate hand-me-
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down dresses. In L.A., where fancy kid clothes are black or stark or Stella McCartney, smocking makes Louisa unique. My friends see her roll up in a pale-blue pleated dress with ducks embroidered on it, and lose their minds.

"Where did you get that darling dress?" they ask.

"Straight off the runway of RDU," I reply.

When I'm in my aunt's hand-me-down black cashmere sweater, friends demand to know its origin.

"Montaldo's," I say.

Some version of "Mom—what?" typically follows. I imagine telling them that Montaldo's is the capital of a small country in Eastern Europe where, much like my aunt's house, women skip dinner to keep their figures, but have chocolate for breakfast.

Most recently, I have been pirating my sisters' closets. After reading about the ecological (and global economical) damage of fast fashion, I have endeavored to purchase as few new articles of clothing as possible. I attend clothing swaps, hit up thrift and vintage stores, and when I'm home, ask my sisters, "What do you never wear anymore? Want to clean out your racks?" I have returned to L.A. with dresses and blouses made of beautiful silk, or in pastel colors, or dotted with lace, or generally looking like nothing you'd find in a Silver Lake or Los Feliz boutique.

Our closet sessions are usually harried, so occasionally I pack items I didn't have a chance to try on. Sometimes pieces wind up not fitting well or matching my skin tone. For whatever reason, I will bring these to the next clothing swap, where they stand out from the standard, casual, floppy SoCal sensibility. My friends delight in them, and I get something else in exchange.

In Brooklyn in the aughts, upstart vintage purveyors trolled Florida, looking for items to resell to hipsters. They hit up Florida because the region's large retirement community led to a surplus of discarded clothing from the '60s, '70s, and '80s. Brooklyn was in turn flooded with pantsuits, shift dresses and branded fitted tees. The result was an entirely new style, spread by 20-something rockers and poets, disseminated by independent stalls at pop-up markets, and created, ultimately, by Miami octogenarians.

Sometimes I wonder if my sisters' discarded pieces will start a Southern-style trend in L.A. Will preppy and frilly replace the current obsession with floppy and slouchy? Will there ever be a fashion adjective that doesn't sound like a rabbit in a Beatrice Potter book?

My life is a split existence: California and North Carolina, urban and suburban, hard and soft, adventure and comfort. I worried over this split for a while, convinced that it was psychologically unhealthy to be divided. Now I embrace it. We are all a combination of circumstance and choice, where we come from and who we choose to be. You only get half of each. I often wonder what my wardrobe and home would look like if I had the time and means to seek only those items that precisely express my personality and style. But what if personality and style aren't inherent after all? No amount of furniture, clothing and paint could change the fact that we are created by friends and family as much as by choice. Anyway, raising my family's items is a choice.

If I'm two, and always will be, then I can't by definition be split. I must have created something altogether new. When Louisa pairs her smocked dresses with high-top Vans sneakers, she isn't thinking she has a disjointed identity. She just thinks she's dressing like Mama. 🌟

Suspecting that Jane Bowden is downplaying her roots among Eastern European royalty, Angelenos now refer to her as the Mambaess of Montaldo's.
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Fifteen years ago, I attended my first High Point Market as a young product editor for a home furnishings industry trade publication, Home Accents Today. I learned to sort through the thousands of new product introductions that flood each market to formulate overall market trends and emerging style directions. During my time as an editor, I discovered a love for interiors and a desire to be on the creative side of the industry. I returned to school at Randolph Community College to obtain a second degree, this time in interior design (my first was in journalism from UNC-Chapel Hill), and after training under Lindsay Henderson Interiors in Greensboro, opened my own design firm, Kara Cox Interiors, in 2010. I haven’t missed a High Point Market since that first visit in 2004, but this year I returned, not as an editor or interior designer (though I still managed to fit in shopping for clients while I was there), but as one of eight individuals who are officially designated as international Style Spotters who represent the High Point Market Authority.

Granted, the title may sound a bit lofty, but the several interior designers who serve along with me are there for a reason. Before Market begins, we peruse new product introductions and receive information from manufacturers about new collections and special initiatives launching at Market.

During the market, we work to see as many exhibitors as possible during a five-day period and are tasked with curating the top style trends in the marketplace. We then share these trends at a panel discussion at the end of Market to inform buyers and manufacturers of what is coming ahead in the next few months in the home furnishings industry. As a North Carolina native, I have a vested interest in the strength of High Point Market and our state’s furniture industry. Not only was it an honor to be selected as one of these eight style ambassadors for 2019, it was an amazing experience to represent the design industry at that level. In the years ahead, I look forward to bringing the trends and new introductions to my clients, and to introducing new trends to my clients. I plan to incorporate some of the following trends I spotted at Market this spring.

Brown is Back

This spring marked the return of warm neutrals with the resurgence of brown in home furnishings color trends. Wood tones and fabrics alike have been warming to more traditional colors of walnut, caramel and tan. Gray is gone and cerused finishes (i.e., those that are manipulated in such a way as to bring out the wood grain) are giving way to waxed or oiled wood tones. Brown is pairing again with blue in all tones, from fabrics to art. Warm neutrals are not only seen in a strengthening of traditional finishes, but also bring a natural element to upholstery and case goods, mixed with materials like woven rattan and caning. This return to brown is not defined by your grandmother’s mahogany table but will pair nicely with it.
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Curves Ahead

Rounded forms have returned to home furnishings in every category: from upholstery, case goods and decorative accessories. Upholstery is highlighting these curves in rounded backs and shapely arm details. Case goods are rounding edges and taking away corners. Even hardware details are featuring curved open handles, and circles are repetitive motifs across categories. These shapely curved introductions are softening the edges and blurring the lines.

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Sculptural Quality

Trending this spring were detailed geometric shapes found in many case goods from table bases to intricately carved millwork. The standard nail head became a pyramid shape, cabinet doors created interest with carved geometric shaped doors rather than highlighting the standard hardware. Even table legs took a turn with stacked geometric shapes creating a form with interest from the base up. The larger trend here is toward detailed artisan quality across the industry and a move away from super sleek lines. Companies are highlighting shape and form with a high design quotient and artisan level detailing.

As a true lover of the arts, Kara Cox serves as a board member of Greenshill N.C., the center for North Carolina art, and regularly travels to galleries and art museums searching for inspiration — when she isn’t on the back of a Harley with her husband, Stephen, running her two kids to various activities, or entertaining friends with vintage china, her grandmother’s silver and a good Valdalia onion dip from the local deli. To see examples of her work, go to page 48 or karacoaxinteriors.com.
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CHAMPAGNE

The Champagne Name

It’s not just any old bubbly

By Angela Sanchez

Champagne is classic, timeless, associated with elegance and class. It is a mark of distinction and celebration. The sound of the cork popping tells you something great has just happened. It gives you a feeling of fun and accomplishment at the end of something you have just achieved. The beautiful bubbles billowing up through the glass are a symbol of celebration the world over. There are countless bottles of sparkling wine made by various methods on store shelves and restaurant lists, but are they really Champagne? Of course not. Champagne is more than just a general term used to describe a wine with bubbles. Real Champagne can only come from one place in the world, made of certain types of grapes, with its production regulated by law. Champagne’s climate, topography and production — its terroir — are what make it unique from any other sparkling wine produced anywhere.

According to legend, a monk named Dom Perignon accidentally discovered sparkling wine while making white wine in the Champagne region of France in the 1600s. While the story is a matter of folklore, his “method” is what we now consider méthode champenoise or the “traditional” method of making sparkling wine. Basically, a wine will undergo a second fermentation in the bottle, producing the bubbles we all love. All Champagne from the Champagne region of France is, and must, be made using this method. While other wines around the world can be made similarly, it doesn’t make them Champagne. The method of production is the first key distinguishing real Champagne. The grape varietals and the growing region are the others.

There are seven allowed grape varieties in Champagne. The best, and widely planted are chardonnay (adding acidity and structure), pinot noir (adding elegance, aromatic qualities and fruit), and pinot meunier (adding richness and darker fruit characteristics). The last four of the seven, pinot blanc, fermant, petit arbanne, and premier miler, while not as widely used — accounting for less than one percent of plantings — can add brightness, rustic qualities and additional structure and intensity. Most Champagne consists of the best known varietals and most producers depend on them to develop a house style that will be the consistent base for their non-vintage wines. This way, you will always have a bottle of Veuve Clicquot or Tattinger non-vintage Champagne that is consistently the same year after year ensuring you get what you expect. Knowing what grapes will go into the wines is key for producers and knowing where they are grown is the root of the entire production.

The region of Champagne is located 93 miles northeast of Paris, an easy train ride away. It is 84,000 acres in total growing area and consists of four major growing regions, the Montagne de Reims, Valléedela Marne, Côtes des Blanc and Côtes de Bar. The AOC (Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée) for Champagne was established in 1927, codifying its distinction and classification by law. Since producers must only use grapes grown in this region to produce Champagne, the vineyard land is highly sought after and among the highest priced in the world. The region consists of 320 villages or “crus,” averaging 18 acres each. The limestone and chalky soils allow for great drainage and, because they are porous, act as water reservoirs for the vines. The cool climate of the region is why chardonnay and pinot noir do so well there and produce wines that have longevity. Location, location, location! The climate and rugged terrain are unlike anywhere else in the world.

It is special, unique, original. It is Champagne. The header on the Comité Champagne website reads “Champagne only comes from Champagne, France.” In no way does that diminish the beautiful and special sparkling wines made elsewhere in the world, festive and delicious in their own right. They can be consumed and enjoyed — perhaps even more often because of their easy access, price point and style — but should be called by their own names or style. Enjoy bubbles anytime you can. They make a regular day special and a special occasion more memorable, just don’t call them Champagne if they’re not. If you have never experienced the uniqueness and quality of Champagne, try a bottle and enjoy it. Celebrate its one of a kind style, history and terroir. That’s the best way to understand what makes Champagne, Champagne.

Angela Sanchez owns Southern Whey, a cheese-centric specialty food store in Southern Pines. She was in the wine industry for 20 years and was lucky enough to travel the world drinking wine and eating cheese.
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Summer 2019
Wild Kingdom
Making peace with wildlife in an urban garden
By Cheryl Capaldo Traylor

I have a confession to make: Yours truly was once a cold-hearted executioner. A new gardener driven by glossy magazine photos, I wanted the perfect landscape free of nibbled leaves and scrawled blooms. So, I lured the soft, slimy bodies of slugs into shallow jars filled with cheap beer. Each morning I would check my traps and, sick to my stomach, sit down by the hostas and cry. This lasted less than a week, a few days at most. I also poisoned voles, because they, too, were eating my hostas, my phlox and my dahlias. As a pacifist, I realized that harming animals made me feel worse than the animals’ eating my plants. Those poor slugs and voles were merely doing what creatures — humans included — do, which is forage for food to ensure their survival.

If you’ve cultivated a plot of earth to grow flowers, vegetables or fruits, you know the pain of walking into the garden at dawn and seeing the overnight destruction caused by wildlife. Birds eat berries and fruits. Bunnies eat vegetables and ornamentals. And deer, well, they eat about everything! It creates quite a conundrum, for although I am a gardener, I am also a passionate lover of wildlife. I am part of the ecology of my land, and I believe a garden can be a place for balancing ecology and horticulture.

I’m not alone in this balancing act. In her delightful book, *My Garden* (Book), Jamaica Kincaid complains about the families of rabbits or woodchucks that eat the beet leaves right at the moment of harvesting. “I plot ways to kill them but can never bring myself to do it,” she writes. Nowadays, I see more than slugs and voles in my garden. Last spring two foxes ran roughshod over my peonies while chasing a rabbit. Shortly after, a bat got caught in a hanging turn on my deck. A young fawn made himself at home in a thicket of coralberry. And in the neighboring neighborhood, coyotes have been roaming through the streets. It’s like Wild Kingdom up in here! What’s a gardener to do?

Turf War?
Due to urban sprawl, wildlife habitat is rapidly shrinking, leaving many creatures homeless. As wilderness is destroyed, animals are venturing further into occupied areas in search of food and shelter. Those occupied areas just happen to be our gardens, intended to be occupied only by us and those we invited.

Over the years, I’ve tried countless deterrents to keep pesky animals out of my garden, such as physical barriers, squirrel baffles, homemade sprays and organic fox urine (maybe that’s what attracted the foxes). I even set out store-bought carrots and lettuce in hopes the rabbits would leave my flowers alone. I watched from the window as they nibbled a pot of hostas and then moved on to my generous offering for dessert. “Well, I never!” I cried. To which my everamused husband answered, “Uh, yes, you did.”

The Choice
I decided I might as well keep an optimistic approach to the problem, something I call the garden-as-guru method. This half-baked plot is teaching me, by degrees, patience first, then acceptance, followed by surrender. And, perhaps, especially coexistence. Merriam-Webster defines coexistence as 1. to exist together or at the same time 2. to live in peace with each other especially as a matter of policy.

Years ago, a chewed plant angered me, but yoga practice has introduced the lessons of nonattachment and expectation. And aging has pounded the truth of loss into my life. I’m ok with knowing at the moment of planting this lily or that fern, there’s a 50-50 chance the plant won’t survive the season. The fact is these creatures are part of my garden, my world. It helps to remember I share this earth with all living beings: the adorable, and the less adorable. It doesn’t matter who was here first; we are both here now.

I keep doing my best with this leaning into coexistence. I plant some flowers. I place a small cage around a special Daphne odora until it grows bigger. I feed the birds. I plant a few more flowers. I drink the beer myself, and turn my head as the slugs crawl along the flowerbeds, maybe occasionally scooping one up and placing it ever so gently near the compost pile. I still swat and kill mosquitoes, and doubt I’ll ever evolve out of that. But, the older I get, the more I tend to agree with Theodore Roethke, “I’m sure I’ve been a toad, one time or another. With bats, weasels, worms . . . I rejoice in the kinship. Even the caterpillars I can love, and the various vermin.”

Ah, the peaceful kingdom. Is it here yet?

Cheryl Capaldo Traylor is a writer, gardener, reader, and hiker. She blogs at Giving Voice to My Astonishment (www.cherylcapaldotaylor.com).
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Summer Almanac

By Ash Alder

Trumpeet creeper is blooming. Queen Anne's lace adorns roadside ditches. And in the kitchen, tea is steeping on the stovetop, sugar bowl on the table. Summer is sensuous, flavorful, dreamy, Dahlia and daisies. Fried squash blossoms. Beach trips and sunburns and roadside stands. Pull over. Load up on pickled okra. Homemade salsa and salsas and jars. Baskets of plump, juicy peaches. And watermelon. You flash back to childhood. How exciting it was to see that first-ever melon carried inside like a newborn, thick green skin cut open to reveal juicy bright pink fruit. Was it Fourth of July? That first piece was sliced like pie.

"This must be what they eat in heaven," you said.

It is the chief of this world's luxuries, king by the grace of God over all the fruits of the earth. When one has tasted it, he knows what the angels eat. It was not a Southern watermelon that Eve took; we know it because she repented. — Mark Twain

The Summer Flower

Remember meeting that first giant? Being dazzled beyond words by its radiance and splendor, gazing as if you'd just entered a world alive with magic beans and singing harps and ornate birds with eggs of gold?

Or perhaps you met a field of them! Smiling sun gazers. Stiltswalkers among a carnival of phlox and anninias and late summer bloomers.

Nothing says summer like a host of majestic sunflowers. As they follow our blazing sun across the wispy-clouded sky, these towering beauties remind us that we, too, become that which we give our attention.

Given optimal growing conditions (plenty of sun and space), the sunflower can grow up to 13 feet tall in as few as six months. And once summer and her birds have harvested the last of its seeds, the head can be used as a biodegradable scrubbing pad. Talk about good clean fun.

Gifts for Papa

Father's Day falls on Sunday, June 16. I think of Papa's old fishing hat, a gift from one of his children, then remember his hearty laugh. A few seeds of inspiration for the beloved father-figure in your life:

A new feather for the old cap
Homemade bread for 'mater sandwiches
Pickled okra - local and with a kick!
Homemade mead
Seeds for the fall garden: lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, pumpkin

Get You a Ripe One

Cucumber salad, pickled melon, cantaloupe gazpacho — all well and good. But no summer picnic is complete without homegrown you-know-whats.

Guy Clark surely knew.
He knew what to pair them with, too.

Eat 'em with eggs, eat 'em with gravy
Eat 'em with beans, pinto or navy
Put 'em on the side, put 'em in the middle
Put a homgrown tomato on a hokkaido griddle...

All well and good.
And they taste even better than their names.
Don't get me started on Cherokee Purples unless you're going to slice one up.

Some Like it Hot

According to the Old Farmer's Almanac, the hottest days of summer coincide with the rising of Sirius, the Dog Star, beginning July 3 and ending August 11.

Meantime, sit beneath the shade of a favorite tree.
Sink your teeth into a just-picked peach.
Lose yourself in a tangle of wild blackberries.
And as you watch the busy ants march along empty watermelon rinds and overripe berries, remember there is work to do.

Stake the vines.
Can or freeze excess harvest.
Prepare the soil for autumn plantings: Purple top turnips and Chinese cabbages, Ebeener onions and cherry belle radishes; spider lilies and autumn crocus and greens, greens, greens.
Allow yourself to enjoy it.

SEASONS • STYLE & DESIGN 39
“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date.”

— Sonnet 18, William Shakespeare
Patience Makes Perfect

With a designer’s help, an older Greensboro home is carefully — and brilliantly — refreshed

By Nancy Oakley • Photographs by Michael Blevins

When Amy and Matt Eskridge returned to the Triad in 2012 after being away for several years, they knew they wanted to live in an older house. Matt’s budding career as a urologist, combined with his military service, led the couple to Charleston, South Carolina where he did his residency — and then to Las Vegas. “When we lived in Charleston, we lived in new. When we lived in Las Vegas, the only option was new,” Amy says. “We were buying cheap, newer houses because we were poor. But the doors felt plastic, and I just wanted to feel like we had something a little sturdier.” Sturdy like their old house in Winston-Salem’s Ardmore neighborhood, where the couple — both Twin City natives — had lived while Matt was in medical school at Wake Forest. “It was in Ardmore on Miller Street,” Amy remembers.

“And I thought we’d done a fixerupper there. But in hindsight, all we did was paint and refinish the hardwood floors. I thought “oh that was fun!” But it wasn’t anything compared to this house.”

This house is an unassuming abode built around 1935 in the heart of Greensboro’s Irving Park, a convenient location for Matt, who spends a good deal of his time at Wesley Long Hospital and Cone, and nearby Alliance Urology Specialists. The location certainly works for the Eskridges’ two children, Ann Phillips and Winston, students at Mendenhall Middle School and Page High School. But when the couple bought the house in 2013, it was a little worse for wear. “It was in foreclosed,” Amy says. “It had vines growing on the
windows." And "small, choppy" rooms, she adds, some of them painted dark brown. All it needed to become liveable, was "a good cleanup" — and with time, a great deal of forethought and an expert's eye, to become a stunning jewel.

Before they moved in, they redid all the bathrooms, "because I thought that would be too hard to live through," Amy explains. The Eskridges would then wait to replenish their budget. And wait. And deliberate before making any other major changes. "We had a vision," Amy says. Even so, when you're living in small, dark, chopped up spaces, how best to let in the light?

With a starburst, of course, the signature emblem of Greensboro-based designer Kara Cox. "They've been in that house six years now," says Cox. "They have taken it slowly and done it well, instead of rushing through or doing things halfway. They waited to have it be the way they want. And that patience paid off."

Cox has been with her clients from the beginning. Around that time, she was enhancing her reputation, having designed a girl's bedroom for Adamsleigh, the Sedgefield estate and site of the Junior League of Greensboro Show House. Using a palette of neutrals with pops of soft pink and gold, hand-crafted furnishings, local artwork and one of her beloved starbursts, Cox created a sleek space reminiscent of the Jazz Age but still very much 21st century.

It spoke to Amy Eskridge while she was touring the house. "Her room was my favorite," she says. "I didn't know Kara at that point. I contacted her because I just loved her style."

The Eskridge home's gradual transformation began with the dining room, situated prominently in the front of the house and directly across from the living room — and one of the rooms painted in that deep shade of brown. Cox would let in the light and turn the ugly duckling into a showstopping swan. The first element that arrests the eye is an accent panel on the far wall, a chinoiserie print of birds flitting among pale pink and white peonies set against a pale aqua background. "It's a handpainted silk wallpaper that we framed in to keep that moment," Cox offers. The remaining walls she covered in a metallic grasscloth, which, according to Amy, subtly shifts to a deeper shade at nighttime. The effect is calming, especially when combined with a white hutch, white trim, cream-colored draperies and gold accents — an abstract sculpture, gilt frames surrounding some subdued prints, and most notably a chandelier suspended from a leaf-shaped base and glass globe. "I would never even have considered
it,” Amy says of the light fixture. “But it works.” As a final touch — and because her client needed some — Cox chose dining room chairs upholstered in two tones of velvet, repeating the pale aqua of the panel on the seats, and using a turquoise on the backs. Velvet? With two teenagers? “Yes,” Amy confirms. And thanks to advances in stain-treatment fabrics, “We host a church retreat every March with 20 middle-schoolers, and they eat every meal in here. I've even served spaghetti in here!”

Cox continued the blue motif in a small office on the far side of the house, where one of its windows lets in the morning sun. Because of the early a.m. bright light, Cox went bold — with a deep shade of peacock, taking the hue all the way up to the trim that abuts the ceiling. “Blue is a classic color. I just think it doesn’t ever go out of style. It’s an easy color to live with,” the designer asserts, owning its popularity among clients to its frequent appearance in nature. And, “it’s easy to pop other accent colors off of,” she adds. Accents, such as — what else? — a starburst that fairly blazes against the deep teal backdrop. The same holds true for some of the original pieces of artwork the Eskridges favor, like the two landscapes hanging side by side on one of the office’s walls. “Everywhere we’ve lived — and we’ve moved a lot — we’ve tried to get a piece of art,” Amy says. “When we were in Las Vegas, I was like, ‘What in the world am I ever going to get in Las Vegas that I’m going to keep with me forever?’ But there are the mountains, the Red Rock Mountains that we could see from our house,” she muses. Similarly, a watercolor of a leafy alcove surrounded by a red brick walkway hangs on the opposite wall.

“My husband went to N.C. State,” explains Amy, (a Carolina Tar Heel, by the way). “That’s where he proposed.” In the living room are more pieces with personal connections: a stunning landscape of Lowcountry marshland by Laura Lloyd Fontaine, an acquaintance from the Eskridges’ time in Charleston; an abstract by Asheville painter Molly Courcelle — a former classmate of Amy’s at R.J. Reynolds High School; two classic wing chairs covered in a taupe jacquard weave — which Cox was eager to dispense with or update, according to her client. But Amy insisted that they stay. “They were my grandmother’s,” she says. “I love mixing old and new.”

Not only that, Amy and Matt were mindful of keeping costs under control, weighing each house project carefully. In addition to the dining room and office, they made a statement with the vestibule just inside the front door. Though small, it greets visitors with a jazzy, black-and-white wallpaper and two custom-made demilunes, serving as built-in shelves, and lacquered in shiny black, the perfect stage for the bright green-and-pink abstract hanging above. With Cox’s help, they also carved out a powder room underneath the staircase leading to the children’s bedrooms. “It was a little arched phone room,” Amy says. And “little” is an understatement. So tight is the space, she wondered how to configure a sink. But leave it to Cox, who thought to use faucet fixtures attached to the wall. Amy found a remnant of marble through Ivery Lane and had it fashioned into a surround that accommodates a sink. The final touch? Walls and ceiling painted a soft gray and then lacquered, “so that it would have a little reflection in the space because it’s so dark, and there’s no natural light.”
Cox explains. "It wasn't a room where we could start or stop a wallpaper. It really needed to be treated the same way on the ceiling and on the walls. So that was our solution." And as the ever cost-conscious Amy observes, the price for wallpaper and lacquer was about the same. "It's probably my favorite room," she says.

But by far, the most ambitious project, and the most elaborate, would include an entirely new kitchen and family room.

In the house's original 1935 design, the kitchen was situated down a hall, beyond the dining room, toward the west side of the house. It included a small dining nook, just big enough for all four members of the Eskridge family to take meals before the dining room redo. Across the hall toward the back of the house was the family's TV room, a guest bedroom and bath, and a screened-in area overlooking the backyard and guest cottage. In other words, another choppy layout. "My kids' friends would come over and get confused trying to find their way to the front door," Amy recalls. At one point she had consulted Kernersville-based contractor Larry McRae who felt the kitchen would be better placed at the back of the house, the site of the TV room, guest bedroom and screened porch. By last summer, when the stove in the old kitchen was down to two working burners, Amy Eskridge had had enough. "I said, 'We've either got to do this or move.'" With her son just starting high school, she wanted a functioning kitchen while her children were still at home. But, she laughs, "I told my contractor we could not bring in a hammer until he was done with exams!"

High Point's Ned Eldridge General Contractors got started in mid-June of last year, converting the old kitchen into a guest bedroom, and the adjoining breakfast nook into a bath. The exposed brick alcove, which once contained the stove (with the aforementioned two working burners) remains, and Amy intends to keep it that way, as an accent wall. The crew would have a much tougher job opening up the back of the house, which would require moving more than 50 percent of its load-bearing points to create the new kitchen and family room. Because the workers were dealing with lead paint, the area had to be completely sealed off with plastic. "We never moved out. We stayed in our bedrooms. It was not fun to live through," Amy says, recalling how they made do with a toaster oven, microwave and refrigerator in the guest cottage. "It was very loud. They had the big fans and the space suits, and they'd have to shower off when they came out." Additionally, as Kara Cox points out, the house has "some of the thickest plaster walls I've ever come across — more like cement walls."

Though Amy had been consulting with Gina Arledge at Kitchen Studio for years with the aim of creating a design consistent with the era of the house, using timeless accents such as marble (another find from Ivey Lane) for the island countertop and a white subway tile back splash, it was Cox who literally shed more light on the equation. She suggested enlarging a window into
elegant French doors leading to the backyard, and bumping out the adjacent wall adjacent to accommodate a brand new dining nook with a banquette. It is now situated across from a conversation area, delineated with comfortable, neutral furnishings, which the Eskridges bought as soon as construction was completed, a week before Christmas — along with a Charlie Brown tree, “the last one they had left at Lowe’s,” Amy remarks. The addition of some Lucite barstools, a complement to the crisp, white of the cabinets — some filled with Amy’s grandmother’s crystal — strikes a modern note in the otherwise time-less, airy space with a sort of beachy vibe. The cool, clean tones of white, ivory and an oh-so-subtle pink-infused beige echo in the master bedroom just across the main hallway to the right of the stairs and new powder room.

It’s a trend Cox’s clients are requesting more frequently. “I think there’s a larger trend of people being visually overloaded with all the imagery we’re processing through social media and our phones, our technology,” she observes. “They just want to come home and feel like their space is very restful and quiet and soft.”
Amy says she didn’t consciously choose the palette, though she readily admits that life in the Eskridge household is often, a matter of “survival mode,” with husband Matt’s busy schedule, two teenagers—and her own recent enrollment in real estate school. “I get on Zillow and look at least every day or every other day. I love it,” she says, attributing her penchant for houses to her mother, a Realtor for 20 years. It was Mom who deemed the Irving Park house “perfect” for a family with two kids and Matt certainly thinks so, too. “My husband thinks we’ll be here forever, and it’s a house we could truly die in,” Amy says matter-of-factly. “We’ve got two kids upstairs, they each have their own bathroom, so we don’t see the mess. Eventually, when we don’t want to deal with stairs, we’ve got our bedroom and another bedroom on this level. And we’ve got the back house, which has become like the hangout house for our kids and their friends,” she adds, mentioning a ping pong table and TV to entertain them. “But,” she says, pausing, as a gleam appears in her eye “I still look at houses all the time. I would move and do another one.”

Nancy Oakley is the senior editor of Seasons and its flagship, O.Henry.
Tickled Pink
Anne Rainey Rokahr’s colorful, eclectic style
By Nancy Oakley • Photographs by Amy Freeman
In Anne Rainey Rokahr’s world, there are, quite literally, no shades of gray. “It’s depressing!” exclaims the energetic designer of the recent trend toward interiors done in the subdued tone. As owner of Winston-Salem’s Trouvaille Home, as well as its venerable consignment store, The Snob Shop, Rokahr doesn’t just preach the gospel of color, she lives it. For proof, step into the cozy living room of her 1920s bungalow in the city’s West Salem neighborhood— and don a pair of sunglasses, all ye sensitive types who enter. The room’s walls are painted a dazzling hot pink: “I love color, I absolutely love it! Pink is one of my favorite colors... and I don’t have a husband to fight with about it,” Rokahr quips in machine-gun fire cadence before breaking into a throaty laugh. She believes that small rooms, which she likens to jewel boxes, actually lend themselves to bright hues. “And if you’ll notice, the scale of the furniture is very small,” she observes, before declaring: “I’m a maximalist.”

An understatement if ever there was one. For lining the tiny room just beneath its windowills, are, sure enough,Low-slung, mid-century sofas upholstered in a hot pink-and-cream floral fabric, a reproduction of a 1930s Indian block print that repeats in the Roman window shades. An elegant crystal chandelier that looks like it was snatched right out of Grandma’s parlor hangs above a round, mid-century Fornasetti coffee table with gilt flourishes on its glossy surface. This rests on a faux fur rug, creating a nexus for the sofas and two matching armchairs opposite one another, covered in softer shades of pink.
("Pairs of chairs are my thing," Rokahr allows.) The hot pink walls provide a backdrop for various genres of paintings, including a huge portrait of a 1930s blues singer that looks as though it belonged on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine.

Another splashy, buttercup-yellow painting titled The Spark Between Us, by local abstract artist Kendall Douly, hangs over the mantle, which is filled with various objects: a pair of brass oak leaves, a fox figurine, another of a deer, both of them "protected" by a stately and much larger tiger figure sitting by the hearth, and across from the fierce-looking feline, a large turtle with a tabletop back. "I can't help it. And it's one of those things, you don't know when you're doing it," Rokahr reflects, fondly recalling a game of "count the animals" with her godchildren when they would come to visit.

But the most important creatures are the ones who aren't there. On an end table, a black-and-white photograph reveals a smiling Rokahr with "the first love of my life," her dearly departed English bulldog, Abe, and beneath the table, a dog bed for his successor, Henry.

The animal theme echoes in a leopard print rug covering the sunny sitting room across the narrow hallway from the pink living room. "Animal prints are, I think, neutrals," Rokahr says, adding that she's dubbed the space her "Florida Room," where she likes to take her morning coffee. Its bright yellow walls complement another pair of chairs upholstered in an Impressionist-style floral print, continued in the window shades. Once again, the designer's use of color lends
itself to displaying several paintings, many of them nightscapes, which pop against the yellow walls. There is one exception, a watercolor of a cityscape in daytime, the work of A.H. Rey, illustrator of the Curious George children’s books. “That was [from] my aunt and uncle,” says Rokahr. “They were great collectors. They left me that and some pieces that were just incredible. A Noguchi coffee table. You don’t know what it was when you’re a kid, but later, oh my God!” The centerpiece of the room is a chartreuse sofa, flanked by two dark end tables with gold accents. “These end tables actually belonged to Earline Heath King, says Rokahr, referring to the late Winston-Salem native and sculptor, who created the iconic equestrian statue of R.J. Reynolds downtown and another of Bowman Gray, which stands before the Wake Forest School of Medicine in Innovation Quarter. "They were in her studio. They were bright blue and I had them painted," the designer continues, pointing to a lamp with an oblong ceramic base that rests on one of the tables ("my aunt’s mid-century"). Atop the other end table is its counterpart, with a white ceramic base shaped like a pineapple. "I found it somewhere else," Rokahr says, straightening one of the gewgaws on the sitting room’s mantel. “Even though I’m a maximalist, I do like surfaces to be organized and planned,” she says. “There’s a method to the madness."

She became mad for decorating and interiors as a child — as far back as third or fourth grade. "Much to my mother’s chagrin — she would come home from work and I would’ve rearranged the whole house, taken stuff out of her bedroom and put it in the living room and put the sofa in a different direction. She was just like, ‘OK, whatever. She would just let me do it,' Rokahr recalls as her irrepressible laugh bubbles up again. “She was like, ‘Well at least she cleaned up while she did it.’ But the self-taught designer’s real education and ‘love of stuff and decorating and furniture and antiques and everything’ came later, when around age 12 or 13 she started working at The Snob Shop, Winston-Salem’s — and possibly North Carolina’s first — consignment store.

The brainchild of original owners and founders Marguerite Lord and Margo Majette, The Snob Shop opened in 1974 on West End Boulevard, at the convergence of Reynolds Road and Broad Streets and has been a fixture of the local retail scene ever since. Generations of shoppers have filled houses and apartments with housewares and books they pulled off of shelves that abutted bulging racks of prom dresses and cocktail attire, casual wear and children’s clothing. Rokahr remembers walking to her part-time job from Wiley Middle School. “The first thing I had to do when I came in was to empty all the ashtrays,” she says with a chuckle. “It was a mess. It was such a mess! Tangles of jewelry and stuff everywhere."

But here, too, among the madness was method: "They kept all the records by hand. All by hand. Every piece in there had a consignor number, description,” Rokahr says, recalling the clerk who pains-
takingly entered all the information into large accountant’s ledgers. “It was crazy! I wish I had those ledgers, I would totally have them displayed,” she says wistfully.

It would be many years before Rokahr’s journey would come full circle, preserving The Snob Shop’s legacy as its latest proprietor — or as she prefers to say, “caretaker.” In the intervening years, Rokahr left Winston-Salem for Randolph-Macon Woman’s College in Virginia and ultimately, New York. There, she poured her boundless energies into a career in documentary and commercial filmmaking that took her to points across North America, Europe and the Middle East, with a stint as a publicist for the fashion and beauty industries in between. After a couple of years of living in Dubai, where she relocated in 2006 as head of production for Desert Door Productions, Rokahr began to feel the pull of home.

So, in 2008 she returned to the Twin City and closed on the West Salem bungalow. “I wanted to be here! I love this town!” she says enthusiastically. “There is such a renaissance here! And the number of women entrepreneurs — it’s crazy!”

She became part of the entrepreneurial class in 2009 with the purchase of Snob from its third owner, Maggie Reece, but it was in 2015 that Rokahr took her passion for interiors to the next level when she opened Trouvaille Home. Situated on Burke Street, the short stretch connecting the West End neighborhood to downtown, Trouvaille, along with 1502 Fabrics upholstery store, anchors what is gradually becoming a design district of sorts, with other smaller home furnishings boutiques and services cropping up — including The Snob Shop, which Rokahr moved from its cramped quarters to a much larger space last fall.

The name “Trouvaille” [pronounced troo-VYE-uhl] derives, in part, from the French verb, “trouver” meaning “to find.” When cobbled with its near-unpronounceable suffix, the word translates to “lucky find.” Indeed, luck is on your side once you step inside Rokahr’s vast operation, filled with a constantly rotating and artfully arranged assembly of eye-candy that the designer susses out at big antiques dealers’ auctions primarily in the Northeast, (where she’s often the only woman, she’s quick to point out). New pieces of furniture mingle with antique and vintage pieces, rugs, lamps, objets d’art, glassware and curiosities — such as the “fox in the box,” a taxidermied fox mounted in a glass case. “You’d never know I was chair of the Humane Society,” she says drily. “Isn’t it ridiculous?”
Scampering among the oriental rugs and cameo chairs and mid-century Z chairs (all thoughtfully set in pairs, don't you know) and carts of vintage barware in Rokahr's "date" to the Forsyth Humane Society's Fur Ball gala last fall, 4-year-old Henry, the English bulldog whose likeness serves as Trouvaile's logo. Having started out in a pack-and-play in the store's back office since he was 5 weeks old, Henry is not just any old shop dog, but "head of p.r." Rokahr says halfjokingly. Half, because a large part of his job is to put customers at ease. "Our whole thing is: it's gotta be liveable. So when people come through our door, we say, 'Let me take your bag, let me take your coat. Plop down on everything. Throw the pillows on the floor. Try out the sofas. Don't be scared.' You've got to see how it feels, you know? And we hope that with the dog running around — we all have dogs and kids ..." her voice trails off before she finishes her sentence with, "Life is messy."

Which is not to say that life can't be gracious at the same time. And that's where Rokahr and her staff come in, offering customers not just pieces for sale, but also a full array of design services. "Tell people when they come in and they're moving and they don't know what they're going to do. 'Go through first and look at the sofas and chairs. The upholstery, [all of it made in North Carolina, by the way] Because that's what we've got to do first. The stuff that we've got to special order. Those are your big, expensive pieces,'" Rokahr explains. A softgoods designer can fashion drapes, skirted tables and pillows. Just choose from the fabric samples in the back of the store. How about a one-of-a-kind pillow with one side consisting of bright blue velvet, and another in classic, Schumacher Chiang Mai dragon print, with gold trim? Or maybe you'd like to see how those small pairs of Z chairs look in your living room with the 12-foot ceilings. No problem, says Rokahr. "If you can fit it in your car, or if you want to pay for delivery, you can take anything home and try it first. Anything. It's so much better that way. We encourage it." Working with a decorator, she says, "can make your life so much easier. If you want a home for entertaining, and you want it to look nice, it just makes it so much easier, to have people present something to you."

Rokahr moves about the store, demonstrating a folding buffet that's recently been refinished. "It's totally '80s I love the '80s," Similarly, she opens a painted secretary, revealing an ongoing nautical theme rendered inside its upper cabinet, museing, "I gotta find the right house for this thing." She recalls the store's first year when she and her cohorts put in 15-hour days. "We would just sit and drink wine in the evenings, and be like, 'Ooh! Don't you wish your house looked like this?" We just loved it so much! There's nobody to tell you 'Oh, no, Corporate wants you to put it this way.' I just buy what I love and show it in here." She guesstes at the ceilings at the chandeliers, one from the 1970s recalling the vibe of 2001: A Space Odyssey, another that looks like curled ribbon; and yet another, a whimsical tote fixture in the shape of a hot air balloon, "Italian. From the 1960s," Rokahr explains.

It recalls another tote chandelier hanging in the bright green-and-black kitchen of her bungalow — a far cry from the mod cluster of glass cylinders in the dining room, or the traditional crystal piece hanging from the ceiling of the hot pink living room. All of them reflect her proclivity for mixing periods and styles, a tendency that is also instructional. "My clients, they worry so much," Rokahr says.
"They'll say, "Can we have this in an adjoining room? Can we do this? Can we do that?" And I'll really, almost always turn to pictures of my own house," Trouvaille Home and her personal space are intertwined throughout. "These are from my shop," Rokahr offers, gripping the backs of the dining room chairs situated a round table. Some are mid-century with a chain-link pattern for the backing; others are 19th-century pieces that Napoleon III might have admired. She entertains "constantly," and repurposed the house's old mudroom by adding built-in shelves and a bold magenta and green oriental wallpaper as a place to store her various china patterns, some of them stately, elegant pieces she's inherited, others dainty — and lucky — finds, as if they are waiting to be set for tea or an afternoon garden party on Rokahr's back deck. "In the summer this is a great house for entertaining, because you have the front porch coming through and then the back," she says.

She loves the flavor of the transitional neighborhood, with its diversity of people, professions and income levels, where folks stroll about in the evenings, and she even converted a dilapidated house across the street into a duplex, which she rents out. When she isn't lending a few precious, extra hours to the Humane Society, Rokahr serves on the UNC-School of the Arts' Board of Visitors. But most days, you'll see her dashing around Trouvaille Home or at Snob just down Burke Street, greeting customers with a wide smile, chatting them up, offering them a coffee, or on Saturday evenings, a glass of wine. "You get a lot of people in the store," she says, "but I've had days where there are 15 people in here and they all know each other." She wouldn't have it any other way, this affable hometown gal, who got her start emptying ashtrays, and grew up fulfilling her dreams — and so many others.

Info: trouvaillehome.com; facebook.com/TheSnobShop
A Son of the Earth

For floral designer Randy McManus, the soul’s journey begins in the soil

By Jim Dodson
Photographs by Amy Freeman and Aesthetic Images Photography
As he suddenly steps in to help one of his employees maneuver a massive floral centerpiece spilling over with spectacular late-spring flowers out the front door of his shop, Randy McManus offers a tiny smile over his shoulder.

“I used to overwork. But now I work smarter,” he says. “I surround myself with really good people and am not afraid to take a morning off to work in my garden.” Who needs a psychologist? “Getting my fingers into the earth clears my mind and resets me. I’ve been striking my fingers in the dirt since I was 9.”

The remark is telling. In a world animated by sudden change and constant motion, success in the flower design business can be as ephemeral as a vase of Asian lilies. Yet it’s exactly this rare balance of passion and hard work along with perspective gained from the ground up that has made Randy McManus Designs one of the most respected floral designers and special events companies in the state, if not the wider Southeast.

With another busy summer season on the doorstep, McManus—a trim and fit man who will turn 60 this summer—appears almost as calm as a garden Buddha, even in the midst of the activity buzzing all around him at his shop at Dover Square, between Greensboro’s Dover Road and Battle Ground Avenue.

In the shop’s principal work area, for instance, half a dozen staffers at a long prep table, dressed in zippered gray hoodies that read “Randy’s Team,” are busy putting together table arrangements of jonquils for Greensboro Country Club’s annual Easter dining room display—same place the massive centerpiece is headed—while Marty Emory in the back office is busy booking the latest summer and autumn weddings and anniversaries that seem to arrive in bunches with the arrival of sunshine and warmer weather.

Several regular customers, meanwhile, roam a retail display floor that resembles the curated aisles of a fine museum’s gift shop, filled with stunning house plants, terrariums, home and garden supplies, fine ceramics, unique candles and other decorative pieces—all under the watchful eye of Tango, the boss’s 2-year-old poodle/Jack Russell mix.

“He grew up on a horse farm, but he’s really making himself at home,” McManus explains, briefly settling behind the neatly ordered desk of his inner office, while Tango relaxes below in his own miniature teepee. “We’re both from the country.” Longtime friends of the Greensboro florist know how difficult it was to let go of Frida, the friendly Jack Russell who was a fixture in Randy McManus’ life for a decade and a half.

“We carpooled together to work for 16 years. When I lost her,” he adds, “that was the first time since my third birthday that I didn’t have a dog.”

Such fidelity speaks volumes about this quiet son of the earth.

In a world filled with overnight success, McManus’ long but steady rise from a close-knit family farm South of Greensboro to the cream of the floral design world has been built from the ground up on values of faith and loyalty learned early in life.

“His understanding of people is extraordinary,” says his friend Gail Boulton. “He instinctively seems to know what they need, which comes out of his deep compassion for people. I think this is why his work with flowers is in such demand.” Randy, she says, “puts his soul into his work—but even more so into the people he serves. He’s this angel who shows up to give them a lift when they need it most.”

She points to Friends with Flowers, a program McManus quietly created in May of 2004, which uses flowers leftover from the week’s production work to create dozens of arrangements made by volunteers and delivered to Beacon Place of Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro, Kids Path and Hospice of the Piedmont in High Point. Thousands of patients and families have benefited from the simple gift of these flowers. His volunteer floral team averages 65 bouquets a week working on Mondays and Thursday afternoons.

It’s this synthesis of compassion and creativity that prompted Cone Health’s
Heart and Vascular Board to invite McManus to join a committee formed to enhance the healing environment of the hospital. "I was really out of my comfort zone at first," he recalls with a chuckle. "Here were these world-class medical authorities and I'm just a guy who grew up on a farm south of town. Little by little, though, it was good for me. I was able to reach out and make a contribution. It felt good."

Among other sympathetic ideas, he has championed use of original artwork in patient environments to produce a more humane atmosphere—suggesting even a partnership with UNCG's Weatherspoon Art Museum on a rotating basis. He also promoted the idea of transforming the food services to healthier, more holistic dining.

Meanwhile, life and business flow together at Randy McManus Designs in the form of incoming perfect weddings to plan, anniversaries to celebrate, births and deaths and almost any kind of special event made better by the language of flowers. From mountains to coast, the Hamptons to Charleston, the McManus mystique continues to expand and grow.

If gently pushed on this subject, he will admit that he has been urged by some larger market clients to carry his talents to a bigger stage where he could not only elevate his profile but his income.

"But why would I do that?" he says, hopping up to greet a longtime customer who has dropped by the shop to buy his wife birthday flowers. "I've learned what is enough for me. I'm so fortunate. I have an eight-minute drive to work every day, a garden at home where I love to dig in the dirt, a team of 10 or so wonderful people who can do almost anything and know the Randy Rule."

So what is the Randy Rule?

"They can do anything Randy doesn't want to do," he explains with a laugh. "I've learned to step away and enjoy living on this Earth, to be with friends and share whatever success I've had. That doesn't just mean money, I don't take any of it for granted. It's been a long journey and a lot of hard work from that 9-year-old kid digging in the dirt."

His people were farm folks dating back several generations in the Summer community off Randleman Road south of Greensboro.

Father Clyde worked for the Guilford County Sheriff's Department. One of his specialties was tracking down bootleggers and escaped prisoners with the two bloodhounds, Mutt and Riley, and a German Shepherd trained to guard him.

"They were just part of our lives," he recalls. "My dad built them a fancy brick doghouse. Mutt tracked down nine escaped prisoners. Only two got away — and only because they managed to get in cars."

His mother, June, worked for an insurance company and kept a big garden where Randy gravitated early in life.

June and Clyde noticed that their young son wasn't reading well and was falling behind other kids in class. They took him to UNC-Charlotte for testing and learned he had something called "dyslexia."

"They didn't know much about the condition in those days. I had teachers who had never even heard of dyslexia. The experts then thought forced reading was about the only thing that could help. It didn't really help me, however. I grew bored by memorizing words and lost interest. My grades reflected this."

He was placed in special education classes with kids in wheelchairs, more or less warehoused in public school. "That didn't bother me. I got to see kids who were really struggling and felt sorry for them. It wasn't a place where I could learn phonetically, but it did teach me to be compassionate for others. It was like being in the dark. I would just put my head down and sleep."

The place he felt at home was in his family's yard and garden.

"We were a family of gardeners. We had dogs and had every [kind of] farm animal," he remembers. "My parents are the reason I have the confidence I do today. They told me I should do what I loved and was drawn to — which was working with living plants in the garden and the yard. I'd go out in the winter and dig up maple trees and plant them in our yard. My grandfather told me if you dig up a tree in winter, you could successfully plant it. Fine trees, boxwoods, you name it, I planted it. Some of those trees are huge now around my home place."

In the ninth grade came a different kind of breakthrough.

He was failing at typing when an art teacher at Southeastern Guilford named Eva Benbow — one of the Benbows of Greensboro furniture fame — took him in hand and proposed a personal curriculum of art for stimulating his mind.

"From then on, she introduced me to art — to painting and designs, to colors, shapes and different shades of the same color. It was amazing, transforming. We did clay on the wheel, sculpture, mixed glasses, sketching, water colors,
acrylics, you name it." She also introduced him to art in history and architecture, "giving me a way to understand the world around me. It was a different way of learning. My mother described it as an awakening. It changed my life."

Eva Benbow also loved plants. She gave him plants from her garden, showed him the basics of color, texture and design. "She gave me some beautiful strawberry begonias from her own garden. I've moved five times since then. And I've always taken her strawberry begonias with me."

By the twelfth grade, his dad had built him a greenhouse and he was propagating plants, helping friends and neighbors with their gardens. He basically "figured it out in my head" and began making "dish gardens" out of rooted seedlings and began selling them through Greensboro florist shops.

This led to a successful gig taking care of indoor plants at a piano store at Carolina Circle Mall, which in turn grew into a business looking after plants for commercial businesses. In the 1980s, he merged with another company that expanded to caring for plants in office buildings, with a growing list of clients. In 1998 he sold his interest in this company and, owing to a two-year no-compete contract, moved into the garage apartment of friends, the Ayers family of Sedgefield. That same summer he did their daughter's wedding flowers out of the residence's garage.

"By then I'd decided flowers were the way for me to go," he says. Although he had no formal training in flower arranging, he slowly realized he seemed to have this natural ability. "When it comes from God, you don't question it. You just say 'wow' and do it." Today, that daughter, Smedes Ayers Linder works in the shop for Randy.

After years of doing weddings and special events of all kinds out of the Ayers' family garage, he found the perfect spot for a shop behind Greensboro antique maven Caroline Faison's iconic shop on Battleground Avenue. "Her clients and mine were very sympathetic. And she was a terrific landlord for many years."

It was good timing. The economy was doing well and McManus could suddenly display his design versatility. "I had the virtue of creating the demand before I had to pay rent. That was a blessing and a very important business lesson." The other important lessons he learned came from his childhood and family: "The value of hard work. When I had my first little greenhouse, I heated it with wood and had to stay up all night just to keep plants alive."

An unexpected benefit came from requests for him to decorate top showrooms at the High Point Furniture Market. "It was difficult work—you have to set up late at night and spaces are restricted—but I got to work for and with several designers from around the world, really gifted people who basically provided a free education in sophisticated design. I listened and paid close attention. What fell off them was like a free college education."

McManus still works with select furniture designers at market time, but today operates out of the roomier commercial store on the backside of Dover Square on Battleground Avenue.

Something equally vital from his childhood colors his perspective, a sense of spiritual gratitude embodied by a prayer he recites every day—sometimes several times a day—in his meditations.

It's called the "Prayer of Jabez" from the Book of Chronicles.

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested."

"I start my day with it every day and have for 15 years," he explains. "It
might seem a little selfish asking God to grow your property. But it’s really about keeping a proper perspective on your life and work so that you can provide blessings to those around you.”

He was taught the power of the prayer by his friend Alejandra Thompson, a Hispanic businesswoman whose Thompson Traders firm has become a major force in the home furnishings world. They share a passion for faith, philanthropy and beautiful things. “Randy,” says Thompson, “is the most giving soul I’ve ever known. And he can make any place work like a dream.”

Like the passage of seasons in the life of a plant, so it is for this son of the Earth.

Several years ago, as his father Clyde approached death, he advised McManus that he didn’t want to die in a nursing home or hospital bed.

“He wanted to die at home and he wanted me to build him a cabin from trees he’d cut down on 10 acres overlooking a lake in Liberty, where he could look out and see wildlife.

“My father always gave me the difficult jolts,” he explains with a little smile. “That’s what I told his minister.”

But the son built his dying father the cabin he wanted, with a great view of the lake and sky. Randy visited every day, too—to sit and talk about everything from the weather to Randy’s mother, who passed away in summer, 2016.

“He was a big man, a real man of the earth who could figure out anything and do it well—from building things to chasing down bootleggers. I remember that near the end he told me, ‘Randy, this old shell’s worn out. But I’m okay with it because your mom’s come into my head.’

“I think you’re right,” his son agreed, “but it’s been a good life.”

“I’m assuming I don’t need to order flowers,” his father quipped.

The minister from the church in Liberty brought him—and his entire Sunday school class—communion outside at his firm.

Clyde McManus passed away in mid-August of 2017. Together, they’d picked out the place where his father wished to be buried in the cemetery of his country church.

And this helps explain why Randy McManus is rooted in the earth that made him.

“It’s all about my body and mind,” he says. “This place makes me happy. It’s where people come into my shop just to say hello. They are incredibly kind. Since my parents died, it’s as if friends and customers have adopted me. If I ever left, it would be like leaving family.”

Jim Dodson is the editor of Seasons and its sister publications O.Henry, PineStraw and Salt.
It’s Gettin’ Hot in Herre!

There’s no greater muse than the outdoors for inspired gifts and quenching the thirst

By Amy and Peter Freeman

As the weather heats up, we get a little perky, peeling away from the couch and the comfortable confines of inside and make our way to the wonderful world outside. The front door stays open a little longer. We strip away the spring’s yellow film of pollen from the porch, putter around in the garden, stoke the grill and wave down the neighbors for a quick howdy-do. The rituals of spring cleaning usually dawdle into summer.

And after our work is done, we heed the siren call of the new, lush, green foliage. In essence, our living space expands, and we find delight in the senses of the season. The smell of budding flowers and new growth, the sounds of active critters, the warmth of sun-soaked surfaces and light dancing overhead casting smaller shadows—all of them contribute to an urge to linger outside.

Amy and I always get caught up in the spell of summer, which inspires us to adorn and celebrate the gifts of the great outdoors—with a happy-go-lucky buying spree. Apparently, we are not the only ones. We discovered on a recent jaunt the trends and products available for outdoor living have blossomed, if you will. The availability of fire pits, lighting, music and outdoor culinary accoutrements abound. Sculpture, water features, gardening accessories and the wealth...
of outdoor furniture can be overwhelming. The season is ripe with gift-giving occasions—graduations, Father’s Day, and, of course, June weddings—prompting a search for warm-weather gifts... and a little self-indulgence.

We were initially inspired by our visit to the Cohab Space courtyard on English Road in High Point for “Arts in the Garden,” a sculpture exhibition sale held in April and presented by the Southwest HP Renewal Foundation of High Point and Cohab Space. A variety of sculptures, including large-scale and kinetic pieces, are available and on display. They are curated among a variety of garden doodads and other outside whimsies, including furniture, pottery, planters, and succulents. With appetites whetted, we continued our al fresco splurge to the Camel City in search of additional trimmings. What we found was the delightfully eclectic House of Plants on Harvey Street, a block removed from South Stratford Road. It is an irresistible collection of everything outdoors and more, all housed in a colorful assemblage of a repurposed dwelling, sheds, and lean-to turned retail bazaar. We found everything that belongs and quite literally grows under the sun.

After an entire afternoon of satisfying our curiosities and buying several gifts along the way, we found ourselves parched but not quite ready to go inside. As I was forming the words on my lips, Amy blurted them out: “Half-priced wine on the patio at 6th & Vine!” and off we scooted to the Downtown Arts District for a sipple, reminding us of that there are plenty of warm-weather nectars to enjoy outside of the garden.

Amy and Peter Freeman include among their pastimes, mindless wandering. Amy, a photographer and Peter, an architect, are perpetually in search of new gigs, fresh digs and fun swigs.
The Historic Beach House

A classic gem in Greensboro’s Fisher Park echoes with the lives of its various inhabitants

By Jim Dodson

I

f and when it happens, for Mary and Jeff Beach, saying goodbye to their spectacular century-old house in Greensboro’s Fisher Park Circle will be a bittersweet occasion. “This house holds so much history, including our own family’s,” says Mary Beach. “Not only did we restore it and loved living here, but our boys grew up here. For 30 years this house has been a fantastic place to bring up a family.” Their sons have grown up and flown away to their own busy lives. But memories live on.

The tale begins on June 1, 1989, when Jeff and Mary closed on the house where well-known Greensboro attorney, the late Bynum Hunter, grew up on Carolina Street, a majestic brick Georgian that spoke the language of craftsmen from a bygone era.

“The classic beauty of the house struck us right away. But unfortunately it wasn’t air conditioned,” Mary relates with a laugh. “We had a 1-month-old baby at the start of Carolina summer!” Mary, a Texan by birth, knew about Southern summers but had fled to Manhattan after college, where she lived and worked as a top executive at Bergdorf Goodman and Geoffrey Beene for more than a decade, eventually meeting and marrying Jeff Beach, a UNC-Chapel Hill graduate. It was his business interests that brought them home to North Carolina in 1989.

Their first renovation of the house — original blueprints of which indicate it may have been completed in 1922 — prob-
ably planned at least two years earlier—solved the air-conditioning issue and provided the foundation for an even more comprehensive renovation of the 5,000-square-foot property undertaken in 2009.

The ambitious scope of their second renovation required the family to move to smaller accommodations in the neighborhood for 14 months, an inconvenience that happily added another thousand square feet of living space highlighted by an expanded kitchen and utility area, a detached two-car garage addition and a stunning classical terrace framed by an expanded private yard.

In addition to its classic exterior, the functional charm of the house resides inside its three-storied walls. The Beaches not only preserved original architectural elements throughout—including triple moldings, all four fireplaces and most window treatments—but engaged an old friend and designer, Christopher Ostdin, from Mary’s days with Bergdorf Goodman, to transform their living spaces into a seamless flow of contemporary rooms that strikingly complements the classic lines of the house. Burnished wallpapers in earth-tone browns and a variety of elegant modern patterns are made invitingly warm by high ceilings, abundant natural lighting and contemporary mirrors and accent fixtures. A dramatic staircase and landing, along with a cozy den/family room that features ebony, textured walls, give these peaceful family spaces the air of a fine museum. A spacious master bedroom and a pair of equally elegant bedrooms with updated full baths are rivaled by a finished and spacious third-floor, where the
Beach sons enjoyed their own private living space.

“The boys basically lived up here until they went away to school,” Mary Beach explains during a third-floor tour. “The house is so well-built and quiet, we could hardly hear them up there at times.”

She notes that with their boys grown and gone, it was really time to begin thinking of a smaller house that fits their needs.

“They still come back for the holidays,” she adds, “and I think for all of us, the idea of saying goodbye to a house that was our home for 30 years will be really difficult, when the moment comes.”

She glances at a spectacular family photo wall that includes informal portraits of generations from both sides of the Beach family’s journey from Texas to New York and back home to North Carolina.

“Wherever we go — somewhere in the neighborhood, we hope — these will go with us, of course.

“My hope,” Mary Beach allows as she leads the way down the magnificent foyer staircase, “is that whoever buys the house will love it as much as we do, and will want to create their own story here.”

Vital Details
900 Carolina Street, Greensboro
Asking price: $1,150,000
Listed by Tyler Redhead & McAllister (336) 274-4717 or trmrealestate.com
Blades of Glory
For the love of lawns
By Noah Salt

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "lawn" simply refers to a mowed field or open area of grass. But in fact, an American lawn is much more than that, the reason those who maintain them, whether homeowners or maintenance crews for highways, municipal parks or sports fields, spend upwards of $60 billion a year just keeping our grass green and visually pleasing.

This tab covers 40.5 million acres, making lawns the most cultivated crop in the United States, consuming an estimated 30 trillion gallons of water each year just to look pretty as a picture.

We can blame 16th-century Europeans for our modern obsession with our lawns. In Middle English, the word "lawn" simply translates to a "stretch of grassland that resembled a glade" as were common in approaches to medieval castles and walled fortresses — kept clear of trees so approaching friends and enemies alike could be seen. In villages about that time, grassy areas known as "commons" developed where locals could graze their livestock, the grass kept efficiently trim by grazing cows and horses.

In the 18th century, as Scientific American reports, "the use of green, expansive spaces began to appear in landscape design in France and England. At the palace of Versailles, a small lawn — a tapis vert (i.e., a green carpet) — was installed. And in England, the trend inclined toward more open landscapes with fewer fences and hedges. This space was covered by closely mown grass. Thomas Jefferson, who was among the few to see these changes firsthand, was greatly impressed by the large swaths of green turf that were common to English country estates and tried to emulate this style at Monticello," says Scientific American.

"George Washington hired English landscape gardeners to achieve a similar end," the magazine continues. "Mount Vernon had a bowling green and a deer park, also common elements in English garden design. The popularity of Washington and Mount Vernon helped the contagion of the idea of a lawn as images of Mount Vernon were produced and distributed throughout the United States into the 18th and 19th centuries. This gave wealthy Americans something to copy and aspire to. Coming from a leader such as Washington lent credence to the perception that this was a break was the norm and unique to America."

Until the mid-19th century, across Europe and America, houses were generally built close to roads for purposes of commerce and transmission of news. But beginning about the time of America's Civil War, larger houses began to emulate English estate houses that were typically built in meadows or glades with trees, idealized landscapes that became living symbols of affluence. Well-maintained grass lawns were a significant feature of such landscapes.

By the 20th century in America, beautiful lawns were unapologetic emblems of wealth and social status, as typified by the narrator of Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, who recounts his wealthy Long Island neighbor's disdain over the state of his own yard on the eve of a romantic luncheon. "We both looked at the grass — there was a sharp line where my ragged lawn ended and the darker, well-kept expanse of his began," Carraway laments. To solve the problem, the mysterious Gatsby dispatches his own gardeners to take care of the offensive patch of grass.

A couple of other factors boosted the concept of a beautiful lawn irrevocably into the hearts of the average American homeowner. The rise of automobile and train travel fueled the growth of civic beautification programs designed to make cities and towns more attractive to visitors and folks just passing through, contributing to a growing national obsession with attractive neighborhoods. Following WWII, an explosion of federally-financed home construction symbolized by sprawling suburban projects like New York's mass-produced Levittown — where homeowners were required to mow and maintain the lawns at least once a week — made the idea of the "perfect" lawn not only a source of homeowner pride but a means of competing with one's neighbor. Lawn services took over the role traditionally performed by staff gardeners.

These days, even as the chemical lawn crews quietly cruise the neighborhood, there is a definite move toward more "natural" landscapes in the form of eco-friendly water-saving concepts like xeriscaping and designing areas that need little in the way of fertilization and constant attention, preserving both aqua while keeping the run-off of phosphates into the groundwater at a minimum.

Still, we freely admit, there's something fetching about a lovely green lawn on a lazy summer afternoon that invites our admiration and beckons exploration by bare feet.

Besides, mowing the grass is something of a cultural institution to many of us who grew up in suburbia, addicted to such blades of glory. ☀️
Flood Zone
The fragility of a shelter from the storm

By Brion Faulkner

The next time I get rained on big time last summer. You may remember. A gazillion gallons of water fell in our neighborhood, as much as 10 inches in 10 days, thanks to a train of tropical thunderstorms that stormed up from the Gulf and never seemed to stop. The rain was welcomed at first because things were turning brown but then became a problem when it invited itself into our basement. By the time we remembered to check, water had soaked the carpet and made its way into a raft of cardboard boxes that had been moored to the floor for decades.

This was the basement we'd threatened to clean out since forever, the one checkers-block with schoolwork, report cards, four kids' worth of school drawings, countless business records, and other marginally valuable stuff. But now it was rubber-meets-the-road time.

First to go was a dozen or so second-hand kitchen cabinets we'd thought about installing in the basement. Then several bulging file cabinets had to be shoved aside to get at the water-logged carpet underneath. Job No. 2 was cutting each carpet section out piece by piece and dragging it up an incline to the driveway (work done by my son, who, as soon as he finished one nasty job, was miraculously game for another). As time went on, the moving and tossing got to be almost fun: weary bones and aching muscles aside. Our kids were far less picky than me about what to hold onto (good for them, good for us). Five energetic grandchildren spilled in and out of things, too, making art with cast-off boxes and otherwise adding their unique brand of energy to the occasion.

All told, it turned out a blessing.

This experience reminded me of a water story my mother told us growing up. She was just 20 during the Great New England Hurricane of 1938 and loved to tell how the river came sliding up her street, bubbled up through the sewer grates, ate the sidewalk, climbed the front steps and lapped at their front door. It was smelly, cloudy water, led by a nameless hurricane that had churned up the Connecticut River Valley like nobody's business, dumping huge amounts of rain on towns along the way. Most of it ended up in the river and, having no other immediate plans, invaded the nearby neighborhoods. Mom's family watched the water rise with disbelief and good bit of fascination as it inundated their new Dutch Colonial only a block and a half from the river. It filled their basement and crept "this high" on the kitchen wall, leaving a mark that got painted over many years later. My brothers and I grew up in that house and thought we were big stuff when, one by one, we grew taller than that mark; no river was going to come up over our heads—maybe the little guys down the street, but not us!

More hurricanes came rumbling up our valley during the 50s, but the river never breached the concrete dikes constructed after 1938 to keep it at bay—at least not in our neighborhood. I can recall how delicious it felt to sit on top of the thing and watch the angry water roll below our dangling feet, just out of danger's reach (not sure the parents ever knew us brothers had got ourselves up to that particular mischief).

Mom's flood, which she occasionally mentioned in letters to me 40 years on, was serious business—a slow-onset disaster compared to the 2004 tsunami that inundated Indonesian, Sri Lankan and other South Asian coastlines in 2004. I recall the riveting TV images: people lashed into inaction by the extraordinary sight of a receding sea prior to an onslaught of water that came raging inland, leaving ruined lives in its wake. We're wary of blowing weather and storm surges here in North Carolina and so no longer are shocked when floodwaters spawned by hurricanes with innocent sounding names like Matthew, Fran and Florence transform generations of hard work and cherished memories along our coast into so much flooded junk and then, like the tsunami, turn tails and sneak back out to sea.

Our house has a stream on one side and a small lake on the other. Both are well below our level, and we tell ourselves no imaginable force could possibly cause them to rear up and knock at our doors. But nobody expected a flood in my mother's neighborhood back in 1938 either, because up until then the river had pretty much minded its own business. Whether we make our homes near water or on a suburban high spot, the truth is that we are a fragile people on a planet subject to unpredictable forces: quakes and windstorms, mudslides, drought, flood, fire and pestilence. Last summer's deluge may have had us thinking about gathering family close and checking the internet for Ark plans, but our rains never came close to that biblical flood from Noah's time—or, for that matter, to the hurricane-driven flood that just about drowned my mother's house 80 years back.

And for that we are grateful.

Among other things (most having to do with writing or marketing), Brian Faulkner is a five-time Emmy award-winning writer and narrator of magazine-style programming on UNCTV. He has lived in the Triad most of his life.
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