

# MWM

MAINE WOMEN MAGAZINE

## THE HOME & GARDEN ISSUE

VOLUME 13 | ISSUE 1 | MAY 2019

### SWEET HOME

*The transformation of a Munjoy Hill Victorian*

### WILD FOR WALLPAPER

*Definitely not your grandmother's*

*Studying Margaret Chase Smith's recipe collection*

### + THE LUNCH LADY

*A Mother's Day tribute from Ron Currie Jr.*



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Mary Pols

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# A PASSION FOR PINK

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## ON THE COVER

Melissa Sweet in her kitchen, with a stove she calls fuschia and we call the bomb.

Photo by Heidi Kim

I spent a good portion of April either looking at the snowflake predictions on my weather app in disbelief or muttering to myself, “maybe I don’t deserve the summer anymore, because I definitely can’t stand this winter.” When the MWM team started planning this Home and Garden issue, we talked about putting fresh blooming flowers on the cover, but as we got closer to press time and seemingly farther from spring, short of calling up one of the state’s flower farmers who grow in high tunnels or hitting Trader Joe’s flower department, that seemed like a fantasy.

Then one of my colleagues heard me talking about wanting to start running a regular feature around distinctive places in a Maine woman’s home—that perfect pantry, that charming nook reading—and told me I should check out children’s book author and illustrator Melissa Sweet’s kitchen in Portland. “Her stove is pink,” she said.

Years ago, I had a vintage gas stove in a rental apartment in California. It was pink, but a brownish shade, often called Depression pink, that conjured up pantyhose you might be required to wear with a pink bridesmaid’s dress. The stove was supposedly original to the apartment and it was fantastic to cook on. I loved it so much I would have happily bought it from the owner and brought it back to Maine with me. Except for one thing; I would have had to commit to building a kitchen around that unfortunate shade of pink.

My colleague assured me that Sweet’s stove was a very good pink. “Hot pink.” And when

I walked into that kitchen, my first thought was she’d undersold how great the stove was. Rising up from the lime green floor, it made me think of a perfect tulip. The rest of the house was similarly entrancing, full of character and personal touches but very streamlined and clean at the same time. The home—and the thought and effort that went into it—was worth a story in itself. Then there was the backstory of Sweet’s decision to leave Rockport for Portland in 2016 and how it dovetailed with our feature this month about home organizers and how Marie Kondo has affected their businesses. So we expanded a story about a stove into one about a whole house and those sudden, strange moments that can reshape a life.

All of our heads are filled with clutter, and mine could use a Marie Kondo intervention. Or not. After all, Melissa Sweet’s stove prodded the memory of the stove I left behind in Alameda, California, and a life worth missing. And that in turn reminded me of a line in my mother’s high school yearbook, written probably right around the time that pink stove in California was made. Eileen Sinnott would be remembered, the yearbook said, for her “passion for pink.” This summer she will have been gone 15 years, but still, whenever I find myself reaching for something pink, I wonder, am I reaching for my mother, or is she reaching out of me? Mother’s Day is May 12, and speaking of, make sure you don’t miss author Ron Currie Jr.’s ode to his mother in our May issue. It’s about shame and class and school cafeterias in Maine, but mostly, it’s about love.



# MWMM

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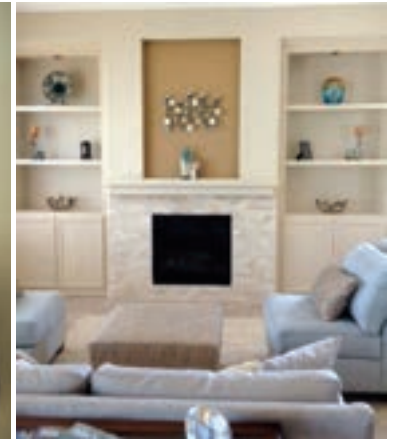
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Does putting up a tent terrify you? Northstar Adventures has a crash course on outdoor skills to make your summer more adventurous. Photo courtesy of Nancy Zane

## MAY BRINGS FASHION SHOWS, OUTDOOR YOGA AND THE MWM SPRING EXPO

BY AMY PARADYSZ

### Mesmerized

**May 3–12**  
Portland Ballet Studio Theater,  
517 Forest Ave., Portland

Snowlion Repertory Company tells the story of the infamous Dr. Anton Mesmer of Vienna, now known as the father of modern hypnosis, in its world premiere as a musical. The cast features Alan Forrest McLucas as Mesmer and Rachel Grindle as Maria Theresa Paradies, a blind pianist who he cured. Rumors of a scandalous relationship between doctor and patient ultimately send Mesmer into exile. Shows are 7:30 p.m. May 3, 4, 9, 10 and 11 with 2 p.m. matinees May 5, 11 and 12. Tickets are \$23. ([snowlionrep.org/tickets](http://snowlionrep.org/tickets))

### Fireflies

**May 3–12**  
The Public Theatre, 31 Maple St., Lewiston

What's a woman to do when love, perhaps, comes knocking on her door? A feisty woman of a certain age meets a charming drifter in this humorous romance, directed by two-time Tony Award-winner Judith Ivey and starring

Broadway actresses Caitlin O'Connell and Jennifer Harmon. Tickets available online: [the-publictheatre.org](http://the-publictheatre.org).

### Maine Women Magazine Spring Expo

**Saturday, May 4, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.**  
Former Bon-Ton store at The Maine Mall,  
South Portland

Just in time to find that something special for Mother's Day, MWM's spring expo strikes a balance between shopping, pampering and discovery. Along with a wealth of items for sale, there will be yoga and health demos, cosmetic consultations, art classes and breakout sessions on emotional health, meditation and more (including a psychic). Tickets are \$8 in advance ([bit.ly/MWM-EXPO](http://bit.ly/MWM-EXPO)), \$10 at the door. All ticket proceeds fund Hardy Girls Healthy Women.

### Outdoor Yoga at Bug Light Park

**Starts Sunday, May 5**  
South Portland

This all-levels vinyasa flow by Kelly Rich is a

soulful experience by the sea. Classes are in the field near the Bug Point Light on Sundays at 10 a.m. and Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 6 p.m. through the summer. Bring your own mat as well as water, sunglasses and sunscreen and the sliding fee of \$10–15 (cash preferred). Classes are weather permitting; check [kellyrichyoga.com](http://kellyrichyoga.com).

### The Guest Book Reading at Print

**May 8, 7 p.m.**  
Print: A Bookstore, 273 Congress St., Portland

Bestselling author Sarah Blake in conversation with Richard Russo about her new book *The Guest Book*. Blake grew up summering on a Maine island, and this novel is about multiple generations of a family that owns (and has to sell) an island in Penobscot Bay. Based on strong early reviews, *The Guest Book* sounds like a major summer book.

### Blue Wrap Runway

**Thursday, May 16, 6–9 p.m.**  
Abromson Center, University of Southern  
Maine, 88 Bedford St., Portland

Fashion designers transform blue wrap—normally used to wrap sterilized medical supplies—into runway designs in this one-of-a-kind fundraiser for Partners for World Health's work with hospitals and medical clinics around the world. In hospitals, blue wrap is used once, then thrown away. But creative minds saw potential for so much more. Support the work of Partners for World Health and local designers (including Judy Gailen, Sahro Hassan, Adele Masengo Ngoy, Roxi Suger and Susan Thomas) in this festive evening of cocktails, fashion, music and compelling stories of the power of volunteerism. Tickets are \$75. ([partnersforworldhealth.org](http://partnersforworldhealth.org))

### Blood, Sweat, Baby & Life After Orgasm

**May 15, 7 p.m.**  
St. Lawrence Arts, 76 Congress St., Portland

Midwife Katherine Bramhall wrote, produced and stars in this raw one-woman play based on her experiences helping hundreds of women through the messy, transformative, confusing and hopeful process of delivery. Tickets are \$23 in advance, \$26 at the door. ([stlawrencearts.org](http://stlawrencearts.org))

### Women's Outdoor Skills Workshop

**Sunday, May 19, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.**  
Waldo County Technical Center,  
1022 Waterville Road, Waldo

For the woman who loves backcountry adventure but isn't yet confident planning a trip



Incredibly, this gown is made of disposable medical wrap. Design by Judy Gailen. Photo courtesy of Sarah Beard Buckley

on her own, experienced Maine Guide Nancy Zane offers a one-day outdoor leadership workshop at Waldo County Technical Center, five miles west of Belfast on Route 137. The workshop covers trip planning, clothing and equipment selection, outdoor cooking and meal planning, as well as map reading and navigation with a compass. Most of the day will be spent outdoors on the Hills to Sea Trail, and the maximum group size is 20. Registration is \$75 at [northstaradventures.me/events/category/womens-adventures](http://northstaradventures.me/events/category/womens-adventures).

## Designing Women Spring Show

**Saturday, May 25, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Graves Library, 18 Maine St., Kennebunkport

Fourteen female artisans from New England will exhibit their fine art, jewelry and handwoven items in this spring show, with a \$2 suggested donation benefiting children's programs at Louis T. Graves Library in Kennebunkport. Exhibitors include bag maker Pam LeBlanc, weaver Paula Robert, muralist/illustrator Toni Truesdale, polymer clay artist Diane Manzi, and jewelry designers Danielle Gerber, Trish Conant and Suzanne Anderson. ([designingwomen.org](http://designingwomen.org))



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# PRIMAVERA PERFECTION

*Start with a light, lemony chicken dish, then turn the leftovers into a comforting chili (because no Maine spring is ever easy)*

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED  
BY CANDACE KARU

Springtime is a magical, if fickle, time of year in Maine. Delicate snowdrops appear around the warmth of sundrenched ledge outcroppings, sometimes even bravely defying stubborn mounds of snow and the threat of frosty nights. Daffodils and tulips make their way onto the landscape, tentatively emerging through piles of leaves. The air is redolent with the smell of damp, loamy earth, while pale green buds emerge on the trees, each one a promise of the longer, warmer days of summer.

There is a hopeful giddiness that infects Mainers as we settle into spring. We are delighted with sporadic warm, sunny weather, but also resigned to the fact there will be a parade of cold, damp days to keep our soaring spirits in check.

My food choices reflect the season's capricious nature. At this time of year, I'm ready to shift from hearty comfort foods like beef stew or macaroni and cheese, to lighter fare that reminds me of the glorious bounty of the season to come. Visions of summer salads and grilling dance in my head.

Still, the often cool, damp weather of a true Maine spring reminds me there is always a place for seasonal comfort food. On spring nights when there is still a chill in the air, I love the light and satisfying simplicity of White Chili Primavera, a riff on my tried and true White Chicken Chili recipe. This spring version has many of the same flavors and ingredients, but is also loaded with veggies that bring the earthy taste of spring to the mix.

This recipe also includes chicken thighs braised in white wine. When I make these, I prepare a large batch and get two meals out of one preparation.

**Candace Karu makes her living writing about food, fitness and travel. Follow her on Instagram @candacekaru or at [candacekaru.com](http://candacekaru.com)**





## WHITE CHILI PRIMAVERA

A light and cozy meal, just right for a rainy spring night. You can make this with meat from a store-bought rotisserie chicken, but the braised chicken thighs are melt-in-your-mouth tender and have a bright lemony taste. They're well worth the effort if you have the time.

### INGREDIENTS

Meat from 4–6 braised chicken thighs, cut into bite-sized pieces  
2 15-ounce cans of white beans—navy, cannellini or Great Northern—rinsed and drained  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 medium yellow onion, diced  
2 medium carrots diced, about 1/2 cup  
2 celery stalks, diced, about 1/2 cup  
5 ounces sliced baby bella mushrooms  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
4 ounces baby kale, spinach or arugula  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 teaspoon chili powder  
1 teaspoon salt  
Cracked fresh pepper to taste  
1 1/2 cups chicken broth (*use broth from braising the chicken thighs and add additional broth if necessary*)

### INSTRUCTIONS

Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a large stockpot and add onions, carrots and celery. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is soft and translucent, about 3–5 minutes.

Add the mushrooms and minced garlic. Add cumin, chili powder, salt and pepper to coat the vegetables and cook, stirring occasionally, until mushrooms are softened and have released their liquid.

Add chicken, beans and chicken broth and stir well to combine. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 15–20 minutes.

Add greens and stir to combine and wilt, but not long enough to lose their bright green color.

If you want to thicken the liquid, mash some of the beans with a fork and incorporate into the chili.



## WINE-BRAISED CHICKEN THIGHS



These wine-braised thighs are deliciously moist and flavorful and are perfect when paired with asparagus and served over brown rice. Serve half the thighs immediately and save the remaining thighs for chili later in the week.

### INGREDIENTS

8–10 medium skinless chicken thighs, bone in  
1 1/2 cups white wine  
1 bay leaf  
1 medium lemon, cut in thin slices  
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice  
3 cloves garlic, cut in thin slices  
1 tablespoon butter  
1 tablespoon flour  
Salt and pepper to taste

### INSTRUCTIONS

Season chicken with salt and pepper and arrange the thighs, bone side up, in a large skillet. Add wine, bay leaf, garlic and lemon juice. Over medium high heat, bring wine to a boil then reduce heat to a simmer. Cover with a tight fitting lid and cook for 30 minutes.

Turn chicken over and arrange lemon slices on chicken. Cover again and simmer for about 15 minutes longer. Transfer chicken to a platter and discard lemon slices.

Reserve liquid. Save half for the following White Chili Primavera recipe. With the other half, make a simple roux with one tablespoon of butter and one tablespoon of flour. Melt the butter over medium low heat in the skillet, add flour and stir continuously, cooking until golden, about 3–5 minutes. Whisk in the reserved cooking liquid, adjust the seasoning and serve over the chicken.





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# OUR SO-CALLED RETIREMENT LIFE

*How one of Freeport's friendliest businesses, Bessie's Farm Goods, was born, and thrives.*

BY MERCEDES GRANDIN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MOLLY HALEY



**K**athy Heye and Deede Montgomery, co-owners of Bessie's Farm Goods, first got to know each other 20 years ago while teaching a Title 1 program at Freeport Middle School. For over a decade they supported students in reading and math while also teaching life skills with tools ranging from a spinning wheel to a worm composting farm. Then a new principal told them they'd be moving into cubicles to teach reading remediation. "So we retired," the friends, both 68, say in unison, looking at each other wide-eyed.

Not really. Early on in their so-called retirement they did some baking for the farmstand at Wolfe's Neck Farm and one day, after they'd dropped off some baked goods, they had an idea: why not create their own farmstand? "So we drove home to Kathy's house and started walking around the property," Montgomery says. A spot in front of Heye's home of Litchfield Road in Freeport seemed just right. "It was like an epiphany. We said 'We're going to build a building here.'"

When they told Heye's husband John, the former chief financial officer of Maine Medical Center, he asked to see their business

plan. Not having one, they took a course in starting a business. Montgomery recalls the instructor telling them that "best friends should never work together." They laugh. "We've disproved that," they say, their voices overlapping, as they often do.

Heye's son Sam, a carpenter and horticulture student at the time, offered to help build the 600-square-foot cabin. "He was so patient and taught us everything, including how to use power tools," Montgomery says. They used repurposed lumber and windows from Habitat for Humanity's ReStore and worked daily through the winter to open in April 2009, with help from Montgomery's daughter Grace. During the process, the women noticed chemistry between Grace and Sam, who started dating, later got married and now have a child, officially merging the two families into one.

The business is a tribute to the women who were role models to them in their youths. Montgomery's mother Grace (known by the family as Granny) Ritchie, grew up as a "thrifty Yankee" in Rhode Island who knew how to do everything and save everything, reus-



Left, Deede Montgomery (left) and Kathy Heye share a moment with Keye's alpacas. Above, the duo opened Bessie's Farm Goods in 2009 in a cabin they built with help from family.

ing buttons, string, even tin foil. During Montgomery's childhood in Medfield, Massachusetts, her mother taught her how to garden, knit, sew and cook, as well as how to enrich their vegetable gardens with manure from the sheep the family kept.

Heye's role model was her Aunt Bessie, who lived on a farm on Green Lake in Michigan, where Heye and her siblings would visit and fish, swim and explore. "There was nothing Bessie couldn't attend to and do," Heye says. "They had a coal furnace and a wringer washer that she managed by hand. She was a thrifty but good cook and didn't mind kids in the kitchen with her. She had fabulous gardens and we'd go for walks together and appreciate nature. A lot of the things that are important to me came from Bessie." And so the store bears Bessie's name. It's also got a motto, printed on a sign on the wall of the store: "There's nothing, absolutely nothing, that two women can't do before noon."

The store is filled with things the two women like to make or grow themselves, as well as arts and crafts made by other Mainers. There's

a mix of wholesale priced items and some objects on consignment. At the back is a kitchen with a counter filled with homemade baked goods. A nearby freezer contains boxes of organic Maine blueberries, and a refrigerator is filled with homemade soups and shares for their 10–15 CSA members (capped to keep things manageable). They grow the CSA vegetables and flowers on site in raised beds and gardens and mix in baked goods, like Heye's famous honey oat bread (a recipe she developed 45 years ago) or jams and other seasonal items. Montgomery knits, Heye spins and hand-dyes fiber from her alpacas and Angora goats. After her husband John passed away suddenly in 2015, Heye built a new house in the field behind Bessie's and Sam and Grace moved into the old house. Montgomery and her husband Jack live nearby.

Bessie's is open from April through December (Tuesday through Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Last year, they shortened their Saturday hours to allow for more time with family. Much of their "free" time is also spent buying, preparing and cook-



ing food. They close after the holidays to be with their families and get caught up on their own crafts, but this year, continued making and selling soup to regulars who picked up \$10 quarts at the closed store on a designated day. (With popular flavors like Heye's African Groundnut Stew or Montgomery's Chicken Noodle they might sell more than 50 quarts a week.) In season, Bessie's is host to cooking classes, a weekly knitting circle, and community events such as apple pressing in the fall, a Mother's Day perennial plant sale and a summer ice cream social. While Bessie's profits have increased incrementally over the years (despite the scaled back hours), the women acknowledge it's not enough to "pay the mortgage" and they've been fortunate to have financial and moral support from their families. They do about 50 percent of their business between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Between them, Heye and Montgomery have seven children and 10 grandchildren, many of whom live nearby. Montgomery's daughter Lily, a horticulturist who farms in Bowdoinham, will be growing flowers and vegetables for the CSA as well as managing Bessie's

social media presence. Heye's son Sam helps with the livestock and is talking about having a nursery on the property to grow and sell perennials. In the summer, her granddaughters from out West might be found running the cash register. "We have a big workforce," Heye says with a grin.

Sometimes Montgomery's friends ask when she's really going to retire. She doesn't have an answer for them. "In this big world that's so hard, it's important to have a safe place," Montgomery says. "Why should I, when I'm doing what I love and we can adjust our time for family?" There is one thing they haven't managed to accomplish. "Kathy and I had this vision when we started that we'd sit on the porch and spin and knit while people would come in and shop. I don't think we can count on two fingers the times we've done that," Montgomery says with a chuckle. But it's good to be too busy at Bessie's.

**Mercedes Grandin is a freelance writer, editor, English teacher and tutor. She lives in Brunswick with her husband and their chocolate Labrador Fozzie.**



Left, Bessie's is filled with locally made crafts and art works. In the back, the co-owners huddle behind the baked goods counter.  
Below, the weekly knitting group gathers at Bessie's to catch up over coffee and cookies.  
Bottom left, Heye shows off some of the fiber she spins and dyes from her alpacas and Angora goats.  
Bottom right, Heye's Angora goats surveying the property near Bessie's.



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by elizabeth moss

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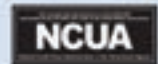
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# THE Sweetest HOUSE

**A random purchase at an airport bookstore set children's book illustrator Melissa Sweet on a course that ultimately brought her to Portland's Munjoy Hill and a house full of light and color.**

BY MARY POLS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY HEIDI KIRN

A few years ago, award-winning children's book illustrator Melissa Sweet was flying solo home to Maine from California after visiting family. She grabbed a book in the airport, devoured it on the flight and by 11 that night, was back in her home in Rockport, standing in her kitchen, surrounded by eight garbage bags full of clothing ready to be donated, sold—whatever it took to get them out of the house. As the author of the book Sweet had purchased would say, that clothing was no longer sparking joy.

"I was a house afire," Sweet says. "I was like, 'I am not living like this anymore.'" She kept purging until the house was clutter free—unless you count her geologist husband Mark Holden's rock collection—but now the house itself, a tidy Cape perched on a knoll in the seaside town, felt wrong.

"I don't know if this house feels like mine anymore," Sweet told Holden. His children were grown and gone, "fully-fledged," as she puts it. Sweet had recently finished writing and illustrating a new children's biography, *Some Writer! The Story of E. B. White* which would land her on the New York Times bestseller list.

The couple, who have two dogs, Ruby and Nell, considered buying a small, second home in Portland. But the hot Portland real estate market convinced them owning two houses was impossible. "That was completely out of our league." The Rockport house was in good shape. They'd done a lot of work on it. Thanks to that push from *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* and its author Marie Kondo, the house was also very market-ready. "It was kind of as nice as it was ever going to be," Sweet says.

It sold 10 days after it went on the market that May and by July 2016, the couple was in possession of a single-family Victorian in Portland on

the southeastern slope of Munjoy Hill, with glimpses of the waterfront from the upper stories. The sale price was contingent on taking it as is, run down and packed with the previous owner's possessions (including 200 pairs of shoes, racks and racks of furs and many antiques, because the occupant's mother had been an antiques dealer). "It was in rough shape," Sweet says. The third floor attic was empty, but for a lone chair, positioned to look out on the city and waterscape. It was, Sweet says, a little creepy, although the view totally enticing.

These days the Portland house sparks joy, for visitors as well as its occupants. After a nine-month renovation, it is a blend of old and new, modern and clean without feeling sparse. It's filled with artwork, including works by many Maine artists, including Harold Garde, Katherine Bradford, Gail Spaien and Cig Harvey. Sweet's own gift for collage is represented here and there, most prominently on the alphabet wall on the kitchen, an A to Z swirl of fanciful found objects, artwork and a 1940 map of Portland (M is for map). Sweet has illustrated dozens of children's books and won two Caldecott Honor Awards, including most recently for *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus*, a children's biography about the creator of Roget's thesaurus by Jen Bryant, who Sweet has collaborated with three times.

Then there are the splashes of color. In the kitchen, in the back of the house, is one of the most dramatic, a magenta Capital range, set against a lime green floor. "I look at it like a swipe of lipstick," Sweet says, meaning it's cheerful but ultimately almost unobtrusive. She picked the stove before deciding on the floor color; together they create almost the effect of a permanent installation of tulips. The stove comes in 160 shades, she says, and among the ones she was considering were orange and lime





"C" is for clock, and "M" is for map. Artist Melissa Sweet in front of her alphabet wall collage in the dining area in her Munjoy Hill home.



Vintage jars and shells line a shelf in one of many carefully decorated nooks in Sweet's house. The artwork is a Janet Bolton piece Sweet found at Portland Flea-for-All. Right, the many books Sweet has illustrated and/or authored, all in one bright pink library.

green. What did her husband say about these options? "He's so patient," Sweet says. "And it's not like I am saying, 'gray or black?' But he said afterward, 'I knew you were going to choose the pink stove.'"

"You tolerate the pink," Sweet said to Holden as they stood in the kitchen together on a sunny April day. He smiled. "I have learned to appreciate pink," Holden said.

And orange. There are odes to the two colors together throughout the house, more subtle than that sounds. Orange and pink on throw pillows together. A hot pink bookshelf built into a stairwell, filled with copies of the many books Sweet has illustrated. (Sweet's star continues to rise; this fall she'll be celebrated at the Carle Honors gala, an event put on by the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, a recognition of creative vision and dedication in the field of picture books and children's literature.) Upstairs in her third floor studio, which stretches the length of the house, hangs a collection of pink and orange heart ornaments. The downstairs bathroom has an orange countertop. More of it might make someone feel "like you were in a crazy place," Sweet says, but used judiciously, she believes strong colors have a calming effect. "You want your eye to go there, and then you can relax."

"I really love what Melissa has done," Holden says. He credits her with working closely with their designer, Mike Maines, and builders. The process started with taking the house down to its studs. "Which in the end begs the question, would we have been better off just creating a new house?" Sweet says. "But we were so committed to the bones." The old trim was filled with lead and had to be replaced. They exposed all the chimneys, which now serve only an aesthetic function, lending texture and color. "We took out walls because we wanted the light," Sweet says. "But we also wanted rooms," along with the sense of proportion from houses built in this era. Officially the house dates to 1880, but Sweet found a letter in the wall that indicated a ship's captain was using the address in 1876.

The kitchen floor had multiple layers of formerly fashionable linoleum and buried underneath, the original wood floors. "You could see that there was a table here," Holden says, gesturing to the dining table. There were worn tracks in the floor, leading past the table to the

“There was no such thing as an heirloom,” Sweet says.

“My parents, they were ruthless. They didn’t save anything from our childhood.”







Left, Sweet stirs a pot on top of the centerpiece of the streamlined kitchen, a hot pink stove. Above, Sweet turned a vintage work table, purchased at Portland's Blanche + Mimi, into a vanity for the master bath.

door. "You could see the whole history," he says. They tried to preserve a gigantic cupboard that the former owners had brought from an English pub, but it reeked so much of mouse urine that they ended up using just its doors on a cupboard built from wood repurposed from other rooms. "Suddenly it felt like it was the right scale," Sweet says.

The dining area opens into the living area, lined with built in bookshelves. Marie Kondo has, somewhat controversially, recommended that people keep their book collection to a minimum, but a children's book illustrator gets a pass on adhering to that kind of advice. (She did however, give away a lot of books before the move, including Kondo's). Sweet may have had a predisposition to embracing Kondo's decluttering approach. "My people purge," she says. Her parents owned an antiques store in Pound Ridge, New York. Items moved in and out of their house as the dealers made sales. "There was no such thing as an heirloom," Sweet says. "My parents, they were ruthless. They didn't save anything from our childhood."

For Sweet, the Kondo book served as inspiration. But so does the Bauhaus movement, with its emphasis on the utilitarian.. "What if we lived as if, if everything we had was beautifully crafted or functional in a way that we enjoyed?" she says. "Can I just show you this?" she adds, rolling out one of several clothing drawers built into the side of a new closet. She could have bought a dresser for the bedroom. Instead she

worked with builder Ned Merrick on this hybrid of closet/drawers. Merrick bought pre-made maple boxes, then faced them and set them on rollers into the wall. "It's way more streamlined," Sweet says. Merrick did the same with the kitchen cabinets and storage units built into the knee wall in the studio upstairs. The pale green vanity in the bathroom is a repurposed work table bought from Blanche + Mimi in downtown Portland. "It was in response to my builder saying, 'It's time to go to Home Depot and figure out what you are going to do for your bathroom, because you can't afford custom.'" She created her own form of custom, funky and unique, with objects placed just so, throughout the house, a natural extension of the collages and assemblages she makes for her books.

That spur of the moment airport purchase of the Kondo book changed Sweet's address, and her approach to her life. Or maybe it sped up the process: "I think it brought home that a change was on the near horizon," she says. She feels no compulsion to roll her socks anymore, Kondo style, but she's very conscious now of what she brings into the house. "Suddenly everything feels of a piece and important." Walking down the stairs from the studio to show a visitor out, Sweet says. "Knock wood, I couldn't be happier."

*Mary Pols is the editor of Maine Women Magazine. She's reduced her clutter but has miles to go before she hits Melissa Sweet level.*

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# wild for Wallpaper

**For decades, wallpaper was uncool, the wallflower of interior decoration. How and why it became the trend climbing the walls (in the best ways).**

BY KATY KELLEHER

White walls used to be it. From 2010 to 2018, every upscale home magazine seemed to feature at least one house or apartment with brilliant white walls. White dominated the page, spreading from floor to ceiling. Baseboards got it. Mouldings, doors too. Design writer Kyle Chayka coined the term “AirSpace” in 2016 to describe this aesthetic, which seemed to have moved across the globe like a virus. The semi-industrial, rustic-chic, Nordic-inspired look felt refreshing. The ultimate neutral read as youthful and contemporary, imbued with the feel-good simplicity of avocado toast. We told each other white would never get old.

But then it did. That minimalist look, with its mid-century modern chairs, clean lines and natural fiber rugs began to feel algorithmic, pre-determined, predictable. In its place an even more surprising trend has started to blossom. Wallpaper, that old-fashioned *décor* trend that dominated American homes for so many years, that *relic*, is back. Only this time around with bold colors and geometric designs, more akin to your grandma’s Pyrex than what was on the walls of her fussy guestroom.

Wallpaper is one of America’s oldest decorative arts. As soon as people began settling in New England, they began to paper their walls.



"It's like the overture in a musical," says Rachel Ambrose of the bold wallpaper in her Portland condo. "Bam! It sets the tone for my home." Photo by Heidi Kim





When designer Erin Flett put up an image of this wallpaper on Instagram, her fans went wild. Her prints include hot pink roses, olive green pine trees, orange butterflies and bright red circles.  
*Photo by Erin Flett*



“We use wallpaper on almost every project,” says interior designer Heidi LaChapelle. “It can add that extra special detail to a project.” *Photo by Erin Little, courtesy of LaChapelle*

By the 1780s, Americans had started producing wallpaper of their own, according to historian Richard Nylander, one of several authors of *Wallpaper in New England*. “It’s surprisingly early, but paper was a commodity that was being made in this country. It could be easily manufactured, and Boston was the early center in New England for producing wallpaper,” he explains. While much of the first American wallpaper copied the designs popular in England (think florals and chintzes, lots of pink, red, blue and yellow), there were patterns that were unique to our country. One of Nylander’s favorite examples showed an American handing the Declaration of Independence to “Britain,” who was shown with her head down and her hands on her forehead, he explains. “This, of course, was fully American.”

As the styles shifted and changed, Maine homeowners papered their walls with whatever was in vogue, from the primary colors of the Colonial period to the lush florals of the Arts and Crafts Movement to the conservative pastels popular during the Depression era. But before the internet and the rise of Pinterest and Instagram, design trends moved a lot slower. Nylander points out that some wallpapers were just viewed as part of the scenery. Multiple generations of a family would live and die in a home without ever changing out the décor. (This might have been a practical choice; wallpaper is hard to remove and is sometimes holding back old walls from a serious case of the crumbles.) In the 1780s, Sarah

Orne Jewett’s grandparents installed a red-flocked wallpaper in their South Berwick Colonial, and this same pattern remained in place for hundreds of years. (You can still see it today, though it has faded thanks to the bleaching effects of sunlight and time.) “From the 1890s to the 1940s, every house in New England had wallpaper in almost every room,” says Nylander. This began to change in the 1950s with the rise of modernism. “You wanted white walls, a cleaner and less fussy look,” he explains. As the demand for wallpaper slowed, manufacturing began to sputter. What was once a relatively cheap commodity, sold at general stores and available to all, became far less so. For the later half of the 20th century, people moved away from papering their bedrooms and dining rooms, favoring the ease and changeability of paint to the commitment of wallpaper.

For some people, though, wallpaper remained in style. Interior designers continued to use the decorative art in their high-end projects throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. Portland designer Rachel Ambrose doesn’t call this a resurgence. “It’s never gone away,” says Ambrose. “I’ve used wallpaper throughout my life,” she says. “I love repeated pattern and anything that repeats, really.” But Ambrose has a slightly looser definition of wallpaper than most. For her, it means any paper that has been hung on a wall, including city maps, botanical prints or old New Yorker covers, the last a trick she deployed in the bathroom at Home Remedies, her



Designer Rachel Ambrose particularly likes putting wallpaper on areas with corners, so you feel like you're "swimming right into the pattern," she says. "It envelops you." Seen here, a corner at Home Remedies, Ambrose's Portland store. Photo by Heidi Kirn

Portland retail store. Years ago, she lived in an apartment in San Francisco that featured two huge maps spread out across the kitchen wall. "It sounds silly, but there is something about attaching a piece to the wall that makes it feel different somehow," she says. "It has a sense of wow and awe." Visitors to her apartment would often comment on those sprawling old maps. She speculates that wallpaper impresses people because it expresses a certain confidence and commitment to one's aesthetic. Wallpaper says: I know who I am. Wallpaper says: I'm unafraid to be bold.

Her apartment in the India Street neighborhood makes a similar statement. The moment you arrive, you're greeted by a burst of cool color. Chartreuse, slate blue, cornflower and olive dance across an ivory background, forming a rhythmically repeating landscape of willowy trees and feathery grasses. Ambrose chose this wallpaper because it went with her overall design scheme, which was inspired by a gift from her mother in 2015, the first Christmas after Ambrose's father had died. It was their wedding china, a Royal Doulton that had been her parents' pattern when they married in 1962. "That year became the inspiration for my entire apartment. I wanted it to be mod, kind of streamlined," Ambrose says. The wallpaper spoke to her. It came in more subdued hues but she opted for the bright one. "Everything in the space goes with it," she says. "It doesn't match, but it goes. I wanted to highlight the foyer and create an interesting way to step inside. It's like the overture in a musical. Bam! It sets the tone for my home."

Interior designer Heidi LaChapelle also uses wallpaper to set a tone in her entryways. "We use wallpaper on almost every project," LaChapelle says. "It can add that extra special detail to a project." But most often she uses it in small places, where the pattern can feel like less of a commitment, the places people pass through. Vestibules, bathrooms and other small, enclosed spaces where wallpaper can create a vibrant burst of color. Ambrose particularly likes putting wallpaper on areas with corners, so you feel like you're "swimming right



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“Wallpaper is a personal exploration of what you love. There’s really no right or wrong way to choose,” says designer Erin Flett reassuringly. “If you love it, and you love the color, you’ll make it work.”

into the pattern,” she says. “It envelops you.”

Like Ambrose, LaChapelle has been using wallpaper for years. The biggest recent shift, LaChapelle explains, has been in what types of patterns are popular. Interior designers aren’t using as much chintz (think: Laura Ashley-esque florals) or chinoiserie (inspired by classic Chinese design) or toile (pastoral scenes). “We’re seeing a lot of graphics,” LaChapelle says. “It’s not the same kind of paper you saw before.” Geometric designs are on the rise, as are abstracted floral patterns, animal prints and splashy colors. Maine textile designer Erin Flett’s wallpapers fit into this mold. Her prints include hot pink roses, olive green pine trees, orange butterflies and bright red circles. The Hilary pattern, which features undulating waves of dots, has long been one of Flett’s best sellers. “Circles are kind of soothing and comforting, and visually interesting,” she says of the pattern. Flett has also made custom wallpapers for clients, including her multicolored chickadees wallpaper. The playful, bright print looks particularly enticing in a bathroom; “When I put that one on Instagram, it got a ton of likes,” she says.

Another design element that is thoroughly modern is the accent wall. According to Nylander, there really isn’t any “period precedent” of using wallpaper on just one plane in a room. “It would be interesting to know when that started, but my gut feeling is that it began in the 1950s,” he says. “I think some people are afraid of pattern.” Accent walls feel like slightly less of a commitment, especially if you’re using

a statement-making pattern like Flett’s prismatic birds. Or the leaping bunnies and stylized fox-faces popping up in nurseries. Then there are the leaping zebras, dodging flying arrows favored by New York restaurateur Gino Circiello for more than 50 years. A New York Times obituary for Circiello, who died in 2001, described him as commissioning the wallpaper from a friend to satisfy a craving he couldn’t afford: to hunt on an African safari. It was bold and beloved (replaced twice in the restaurant’s 50 years) and now it’s trendy. There’s a West End entryway that features Gino’s zebras in emerald green.

Perhaps the handiest element that distinguishes 21st century wallpaper from the old fashioned versions? Installers are great but not always necessary. “Wallpaper is finally becoming popular from a DIY perspective,” LaChapelle says. “There are a lot of nice removable options available now that make things less intense. I think companies are trying to make them more accessible, and I think it’s finally reached the masses.” All they need to do is be willing to trust. Themselves. “Wallpaper is a personal exploration of what you love. There’s really no right or wrong way to choose,” says Flett reassuringly. “If you love it, and you love the color, you’ll make it work.”

*Katy Kelleher is a writer and editor who lives in Buxton with her two dogs and one husband. Her work regularly appears online at The Paris Review and Longreads, and in print for Yankee magazine and others.*

One of Gorham-based designer  
Erin Flett's bold wallpapers.  
*Photo courtesy of Flett.*





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# Soil Sisters

**Landscaping has long been a male-dominated business, but women are increasingly getting into the field.**

BY CANDACE KARU | PHOTOGRAPHED BY HEIDI KIRN

During the early part of her 25-year-long career, Jennifer Cummings worked exclusively with men. Cummings, who owns Full Circle Landscaping in Falmouth, didn't have a lot of choice in the matter; there weren't many other women in the business. She learned a lot from those men about long work days, hard labor and the way competition can bring about newer and smarter ways of working.

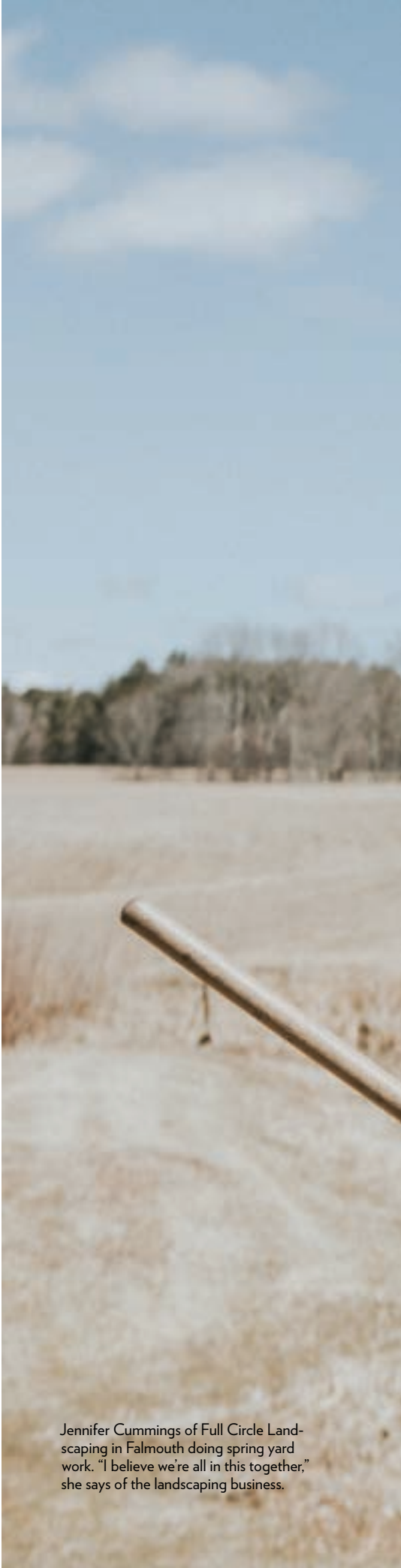
These days, Cummings' potential applicant pool not only includes more women, she's seen women she mentored go on to open their own businesses, like Kate Sanders-Fleming, owner of Buena Vista Landscaping in Portland. Sanders-Fleming has a degree in art from the Rhode Island School of Design and experience as an art teacher. She also spent 15 years working on landscaping crews, including with Cummings, before deciding to open her own business. Today her crews are co-ed and all led by women managers. As her website puts it: "We are proud to be working in a male-dominated field and we appreciate your business." Buena Vista Landscaping will never take the SWAT team approach of many roving landscaping crews, the ones that converge on

the scene in their flatbed trucks, hauling riding powers and leaf blowers. With deafening noise, they make piles of leaves, clippings and yard debris disappear in a matter of minutes. Then they're gone.

"We don't do 'mow and blow.' It's just not how we work," Sanders-Fleming says.

Landscaping is big business, paying out \$139 million in wages in Maine in 2017. The Maine Department of Labor's Center for Workforce Research & Information's most recent data for the industry shows there were 874 landscaping service establishments in the state that year, employing about 4,260.

How many of those establishments are run by women or employ women? It's hard to know. At the Horticulture Department at Southern Maine Community College, one of the state's top training grounds for landscapers, department chair Cheryl Rich says the ratio of men to women enrolled in the program is fairly balanced. Her students' interests cover a wide range of pursuits—greenhouse and nursery production, golf course management, sustainable agriculture, floral design, landscape design, landscape contracting, estate gardening and lawn care. Women are pursuing all of



Jennifer Cummings of Full Circle Landscaping in Falmouth doing spring yard work. "I believe we're all in this together," she says of the landscaping business.





Top, Jennifer Cummings of Full Circle Landscaping in Falmouth laces up her boots in preparation for some early spring landscaping. Bottom, a peek at her design plans. Opposite page, Meg Lord of Meg Lord Landscape in South Portland considers her pruning options.

these options, she says.

Ruth Pease, an economic research analyst with the Maine Department of Labor, said the state doesn't track gender breakdown specific to landscaping services. Neither does the Maine Landscape and Nursery Association. Don Sproul, the executive director of the association, points out that landscaper characteristics are particularly hard to quantify because the job doesn't require a license.

Betty Ann Listowich, past president of that group, says she's seen a natural evolution in the gender makeup of crews and that she has worked with crews that were evenly divided along gender lines. Her 35-year-old business, Norpine Landscaping Inc., is majority woman-owned, and based in Kingfield. Most of the work she does is commercial—landscaping at schools, airports, golf courses and, in the past, for the state's Department of Transportation.

She joined the board of the Maine Landscape and Nursery Association seven years ago, and though the 10-member executive committee typically is almost all men, she said she was welcomed. "Never an issue," she says. "And I didn't wave my female flag." But there are what she calls "unique challenges" for women in the business, including the constant reminders that it has traditionally been a male dominated field. "Especially in the larger, construction field there is a sense of being disgruntled about equal opportunity with the good old boy network," she says.

"I felt that," Listowich said. "To be perfectly honest, I played the system a little." Her closest colleague was (and is) her husband Jim. "I let Jim be out front," she says, specifically on commercial jobs where the good old boy network was in charge. But she's hardly a shrinking violet. She served on the board of the Associated General Contractors of Maine, one of two women on a 32-member board. "I would come in from a work job in my Carhartts and work boots and a big long braid that hangs down my back and sit down at a table with a bunch of men in suits." Clothing differences aside, it led to great contacts, she said.

Emily Buck grew up in the business and went to work with her father at Plants Unlimited in Rockport. "I can tell you that yes, this is a male dominated industry," says Buck. "Times are changing but there is still the kind of stigma in the industry that women are for flowers and



men are for the work. That women will do pots or container gardens. I think it is changing a lot, though.”

And for some, it’s true that a love of gardening does inspire a natural segue into landscaping as a profession. Like Sarah Wolpow, owner of Sweet Fern Garden Design in Brunswick, who got her start in the field as an avid amateur gardener. Years ago her garden was featured on a local garden tour, and her life changed. “I’m going to open a gardening business,” was her take-away from the experience. Today she’s certified as both a Master Gardener and a permaculture designer and has worked with the Resilience Hub in Portland to help spread the word about the benefits of permaculture design.

Does gender make a difference? Cummings says men and women landscapers don’t work quite the same. “Each brings unique traits to the work,” she says. That’s just fine, she says. “My goal is to meet people where they are and learn from them while I share what I have learned.” Mentoring is a high priority for Cummings and guides the way she interacts with her employees. “I believe we’re all in this together,” she says. “I’ve found that each person who leaves Full Circle Landscaping and starts their own business will have a different goals and interests than I do.”

Sanders-Fleming approaches her work as a teacher. “I interact with both my clients and crew that way,” she says. That experience comes into play as she mentors her employees—mostly women—not only in

the basics of plant care, but also in her business philosophy and practices. She also believes that sharing power and respect doesn’t preclude strong gender roles. “It’s a great learning opportunity for men to work for a woman,” she adds.

Her art school background isn’t all that unusual in the landscaping business. Cummings has degrees in interior design (and veterinary science) and gained much of her knowledge of gardening and landscaping on the job, but she also took every free class available, as well as horticulture courses at Southern Maine Community College. Meg Lord, who has nearly three decades experience running her own company, Meg Lord Landscaping, is a graduate of Portland School of Art (now Maine College of Art). She was raised in Cape Cod, studied botany and horticulture at the University of Vermont, and did some world traveling, including to Africa to climb Mount Kenya, before settling in Maine.

Lord’s landscaping career developed in fits and starts—with equal parts intention, serendipity and fate. After art school, she realized that doing physical work outside, tending to plants and creating beautiful spaces was where she found her joy. “One of my first jobs was working for a friend’s father who taught me all about pruning fruit trees,” she says. He was in his 80s and at one point asked her if she could mow his property. She said yes in spite of the fact that she had no equipment to do the job. “I went to a yard sale and picked up a used push mower and headed

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over in my little pickup," she remembers with amusement. "I was so determined."

She served as a mentor to Cheryl Rich, who worked for Lord for more than 10 years after graduating from the Plant and Soil Technology program at Southern Maine Technical College (now SMCC). In 2001 Rich earned her masters degree and took a full-time teaching position at SMCC, but kept working with Lord in the summers. She only gave that up, reluctantly, after taking the job as department head. "I really hit the jackpot when Meg hired me," says Rich. "She is a talented designer with an expansive plant palette and strong environmental convictions."

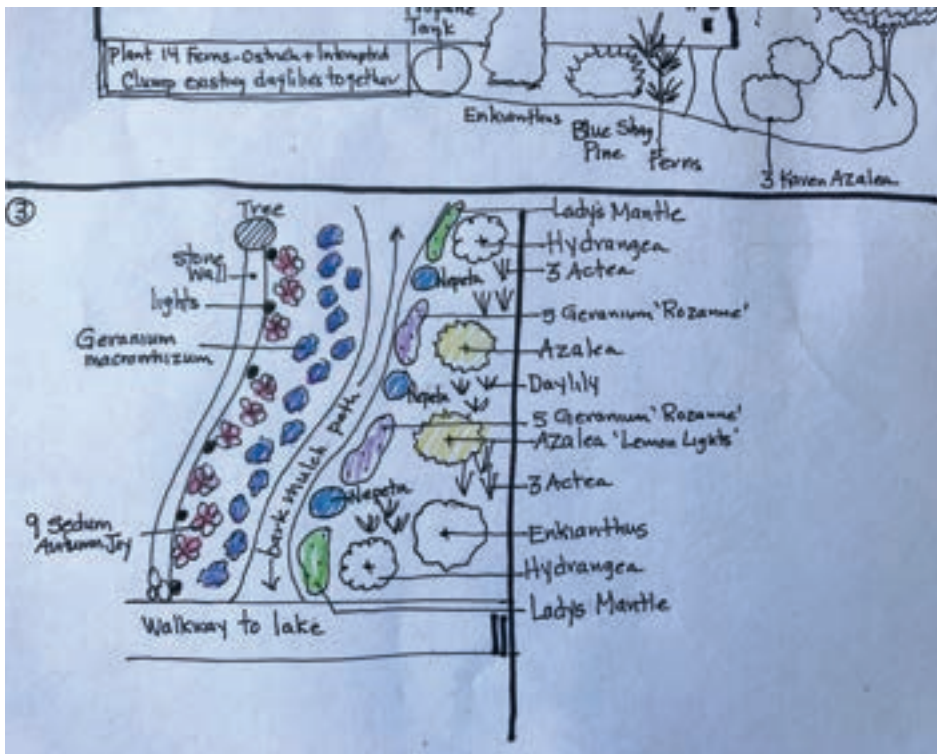
As well as a passion for both the physical and spiritual aspects of her work. "In some ways my work as a landscape gardener is just another channel for me to protect and care for what I think is truly sacred in this world," Lord says. "The earth gives us so many gifts and I believe it is our job to look after her the way she looks after us."

*Candace Karu makes her living writing about food, fitness and travel. Follow her on Instagram: @candacekaru or at candacekaru.com*




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Top, staff at Buena Vista Landscaping in Portland busy transforming a backyard. Photo courtesy of Kate Sanders-Fleming  
 Bottom, a detail of one of Jennifer Cummings planting plans.





# MY MOTHER the Lunch Lady

**A Mother's Day tribute to a woman who scooped out the American chop suey in the cafeteria while her son pretended he didn't know her.**

BY RON CURRIE JR. | PHOTOGRAPHED BY BONNIE DURHAM

Shortly before I entered sixth grade, my mother Barbara took a job working in the cafeteria at the junior high where I was about to make my debut. Being 11, of course I had no choice in the matter. First lunch period in September, there was my mom: White uniform, hairnet, beatific smile. The lunch lady. Welcome to my nightmare.

For three long years, I kept my distance. If she was running the hot lunch line, I was in the a la carte line, and vice versa. No exceptions. I gamed the system, peeking into the service area each day to see where she was, and only then getting into line at the other doorway to receive my meal.

My mother remembers this. I never acknowledged her, she says. Never said hello. Rarely, if ever, even glanced her way. I was horrified by her presence. Because what could broadcast the fact that you were poor more loudly and clearly than your mother being a school lunch lady?

This is not something I'm proud of now. In fact, I'm not very forgiving, in general, toward my younger self. He was obsessed with class. There are things I want to tell him now. You've got food in your belly and clothes on your back, kid. Your parents bust their humps providing you with such, and they don't need you slinking around all day ashamed that they can't afford to buy you Air Jordans.

Short of inventing time travel I'm unable to communicate those messages to the 11-year-old me, and in any event I'm not sure they would have much effect. He remains, for eternity, what he was: shy, sensitive, and dedicated to the belief that there's something inherently shameful about who he is and where he's from.

I did all the things poor kids do to make money—shoveling snow, de-

livering newspapers, picking bottles—but whereas the other children in my neighborhood also did these things as a matter of course, and didn't seem to think much about it one way or the other, for me there was always a bass note of shame vibrating beneath all our little moneymaking ventures. Walking the neighborhood with a shovel, knocking doors and asking if people wanted their driveways cleared for \$5 a pop, felt akin to being a beggar. I liked the paper route because I could do it under cover of darkness, before anyone was up to see me pushing a grocery cart full of the Sunday edition around. And as for digging in convenience store trash cans for sticky returnables, well, let's just say that was resorted to only after all the less-degrading options had been exhausted.

To this day I don't understand why I cared so much about being poor. I have no idea why it was the transcendent preoccupation of my early years. There is this: many of my friends had parents who worked as lawyers and doctors and accountants, and they lived in nice clean houses in better neighborhoods than mine. Was I hyper-aware of class differences because I had friends who were better-off, or did I choose friends who were better-off because I was hyper-aware of class differences? Either way, I rarely if ever invited those friends to come hang in my neighborhood, let alone my house. Even our municipal basketball court was an embarrassment, at least to me: crumbling pavement, busted rims.

Saying hello to my mother, acknowledging her in the cafeteria? That was not going to happen.

Sitting with my mother at a coffee shop in Waterville, I ask if it hurt her feelings that I so studiously avoided her for so long. She tells me no. I'm surprised, but I believe her, because she sees it totally differently than I





Waterville native Ron Currie Jr. and his mother Barbara. In middle school, he was too mortified by his mother's job to speak to her in the cafeteria. Now, he'd proudly get in her line.

did: to her, I was just self-possessed.

"You always kept to yourself," she says, meaning, apparently, not just at school, but at home as well. For a moment, I feel a blush of pride. She saw me as independent, not paralyzingly self-conscious. But the pride fades quickly, because I realize the implication of her misunderstanding: I did such a good job of hiding from everyone that not even my own mother really knew who I was.

Back then, she did her best to respect my evident desire for privacy. She didn't follow me around the school, didn't inquire with my teachers as to how things were going, in part because she wanted to avoid hovering, and in part because she was just too busy—she had work to do, and that work did not include keeping tabs on her son.

There was another guy at the junior high, Scott, whose mother also worked in the junior high cafeteria. Unlike me, he would go up to his mother most every day. Sometimes he needed extra money for lunch, because he'd somehow squandered what he'd been given that morning. Sometimes he just chatted her up, because he was that kind of kid. Scott seemed to have no misgivings about his mom being a lunch lady, no misgivings period, in fact. He was always confident and good-looking and gregarious. The opposite of me, in short.

I barely remember that Scott's mother worked in the cafeteria, let alone that Scott was always talking to her. My mother reminds me of this. We have a laugh about it, the contrast between me and Scott.

I hadn't thought about him in a long time. I remember how he had such

a big personality and was a good athlete and popular with girls. But after my mother reminds me of Scott and how he would chat up his mother in the cafeteria, I get to thinking, too, about how when we were in our thirties, Scott committed suicide. There seems something of significance embedded in these facts: Scott, self-assured, friendly, and dead by his own hand. Me, reserved, self-conscious, and still drawing breath. I'm just not sure what the significance is. Maybe it's something about the way shame moves and takes new shapes over the course of a life. Or maybe it means nothing at all.

At the coffee shop, I tell my mother that the worst thing, for me, was feeling that to a certain extent she was doing the bidding of my peers (and never mind that she did mine on a regular; that was different). If they said pizza, she provided pizza. If they wanted a chicken sandwich, she made with the chicken sandwich, and hop to it. When they were done making a mess of the tables, she came out and cleaned up after them. As the adult she ultimately held the power in these interactions, but still: they were issuing orders, and she was taking them, a fact I didn't like then, and don't especially care for now. Call me old-fashioned, but I'm of the opinion that children should never be allowed to mistake themselves for the people in charge. And yet, at least in my 11-year-old eyes, that was the case: my classmates were telling my mother what to do, and she was doing it.

However overblown my own preoccupation with the class aspects of mom being a school lunch lady, the fact is that class did figure into it for

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everyone. She tells me this herself. The sons of lawyers and doctors—always the sons, mind you—were sometimes arrogant and haughty with her. They demanded more than they were allotted, grabbed food instead of asking for it, ignored and laughed off her admonitions to behave and ask for what they wanted. She was just a lunch lady, after all. They didn't have to listen to her.

For her part, though, and to her credit, she simply called for the principal and didn't let any of it get to her. Because as cynical and misanthropic as her son can be, she did then and does now seek and see the best in people, particularly children. She did not confuse providing meals to kids with being their servant—even if sometimes they did. And though some kids could be a pain in the ass, as kids sometimes are, she still enjoyed the work.

Really?" I ask. I'm not sure why I find it so hard to believe, but here we are.

"Really," she says. "Besides, whether I liked it or not was beside the point—I just needed the work."

When I think of the bill of goods called trickle-down economics, of people who work too hard for too little money, of jobs that seem almost designed to break your body and give you little in return, I think of my mom. It's not overstating it to say that watching her work had as great an effect on my political and moral convictions as anything (and when I say "work" I mean the labor she did in addition to parenting, which she covered about 80 percent of). She's the reason I understand and appreciate how hard most women work just as a matter of course. She's the reason I believe labor unions are the only entity that has done a damn thing for blue-collar people (and more specifically, blue-collar women) in this country. She's the reason that, even though I make my living sitting at a desk, I still endeavor to have calluses on my hands, as ongoing proof that I know what it is to labor, and that I understand its value and its cost.

My mother has a more substantial and permanent reminder of the cost of labor than mere calluses. Her right thumb is fixed and rigid, more like the bony appendage pandas have on their forepaws than an actual human thumb. This is attributable to decades of hard work with her hands—carrying sheet plans, lifting stock pots, emptying garbage cans. Over the last couple of years she's had surgery on the thumb so many times that I've lost count. Each procedure has taken place in Portland, where I live, and afterwards I've picked her up at the surgical office, listened to and signed off on the post-op orders, gotten her situated in her

She's the  
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hotel room, brought her to dinner and checked to make sure she's taking the right meds at the right times. She's got other problems, too, that constitute the legacy of her working life—a bad hip and feet, the result of years standing on the tiled floors (and underlying concrete) of service kitchens. Her back is a little wonky as well, which, ditto.

But it's the thumb I come back to as emblematic of a life spent making and serving food to others. Hand and wrist issues are epidemic among food service workers, particularly waitresses. In her case, the lower joint of her thumb had been worn down until it was bone-on-bone, and it got worse from there, the damage cumulative and implacable. The only silver lining is she's a lefty, just like her son.

Because watching her work through my childhood turned me into a class warrior, my first inclination is to view the state of her hand through that lens—like so many others, she worked too hard and too long for too little, and the inevitable physical cost of that labor is now hers to bear alone. It's unfair, even immoral, the way our economy commodifies and exploits the bodies of the poor.

But there's another, more generous way to look at it, and that's the way I'm choosing now, in part because I'm no longer the cowed, self-conscious boy mortified by the fact that his mother works in the school cafeteria. Blue-



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collar men often go on and on about how this or that on their body hurts, lest anyone should fail to notice how hard they work. Blue-collar women, in my experience, sacrifice their bodies, bit by bit, year by year, with more smiles and fewer complaints than their male counterparts. And “sacrifice” is the operative word, here. My mother Barbara did work for which she was paid a wage, that much is true. But the state of her thumb is evidence not just of the jobs she had, but also of the fact that she was happy to provide for both others and her own. She liked making food for kids, plain and simple. That it happened to be something for which she got paid was almost beside the point. She wouldn’t change it, even with the panda-thumb.

By contrast, there are a few things I would change—starting with choosing to get into her line at lunch on the first day of sixth grade.

**Ron Currie Jr. is a novelist and screenwriter. His nonfiction has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Salon* and elsewhere. He lives in Portland.**



Ron Currie Jr. and his mother Barbara look over yearbooks from the era when he was a middle school student and she was one of the “lunch ladies.” Barbara Currie has had numerous surgeries on her right thumb, due to the strain of working in food service for so many years.

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# The Marie Kondos

**The Japanese declutterer is all the rage. But some of Maine's professional organizers pre-date her. Others model themselves on her.**

BY SARAH HOLMAN | PHOTOGRAPHED BY LIZ CARON

Before there was world-famous Marie Kondo and *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, there was Dawna Hall. She started her Portland-based company Organize ME! in 2008 to help homeowners declutter and organize their lives. Organizing was always instinctual for her; back when she was a graphic designer, Hall would slip off to tidy the break room or the supply closet. It got her away from sitting in front of a screen, and it was satisfying. These days, it's her full time job. She has two employees and sees two clients a day, five days a week.

She is grateful that the Japanese-born organizing guru has put organizing in the spotlight on a mainstream level. "I love that *Tidying Up* and simplifying is trending," Hall says.

Trending may be an understatement. Kondo, who began her tidying consultant business as a 19-year-old university student, has had back-to-back New York Times bestsellers, a Netflix series, a celebrity life in Los Angeles and legions of "Konverts" all over the globe who follow her advice with cult-like devotion. She's also got a fleet of 231 certified consultants, including a few in Massachusetts, but none in Maine. What she does have here is enthusiastic followers. Kondo inspired Brunswick resident CeCe Camacho to start her own organizing business after Camacho and a friend, using *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* as their guide, sorted and tidied each other's

clothes over the course of two six-hour sessions. "Those two days were revolutionary," Camacho says. "No doubt on a physical level in my drawers, but also on a mental and emotional level in my life."

Camacho had been trying to figure out her next career move after leaving a position as chief operation officer for a global nonprofit called Sustainable Health Enterprises. While she was meeting with a micro-enterprise specialist from New Ventures Maine, a state-wide educational service for Mainers in career and or financial transition, Camacho couldn't stop talking about her experience with the KonMari method. (The company name is a contraction of Kondo's name as written in the Japanese style, Kondo Mariko.) The specialist recommended she explore it as a business idea. Two weeks later, Camacho launched Prune (she uses the lowercase in her business name), which she describes as a lifestyle company to help people make space for what matters most in their lives.

Camacho herself exemplifies Kondo's philosophy, which goes beyond sorting and putting things away. The first step in the KonMari method, before any tidying even takes place, is to visualize the life you wish to have in a clutter-free space. Kondo believes a life-changing transformation occurs when we put our homes in order, and references former clients who went on to launch businesses, change relation-

ships and lose weight, as if no longer being stifled by their cluttered spaces opened them up to new possibilities.

There are methods the Maine versions of Marie Kondo all seem to agree on, like there being no need to buy anything special to organize with. Bringing in more objects is never part of the goal. (Kondo famously uses shoe boxes as drawer dividers). But none of the Maine-based professional organizers say the explosive popularity of Kondo and her KonMari method dictates how they work with clients. First published in 2011, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (her sequel of a sorts is *Spark Joy*) starts with an aggressive, category-based period of discarding based on the owner's response to the object. For example, all clothing and all sentimental items are assessed at once, regardless of what rooms they live in. This can take a long time and be tiring, says Hall, whose training includes classes from both the National Association of Professional Organizers and the Institute for Challenging Disorganization. Many of the clients Organize ME! helps are struggling to keep a consistent tidying system in place, sometimes due to personal challenges like attention deficit disorder.

Moreover, while Kondo insists a one-time overhaul will keep your home permanently clutter-free, for many of Hall's clients, the relationship is ongoing. "Sometimes clients need a tune up," she says. "The system [we estab-

# of Maine

lished] may not have been maintained as well as it could be, so it's just a matter of putting things back where they belong and doing a little purging." Like Kondo, Camacho tends to organize by category, but she also believes the idea of tackling a whole house at once is too much. "It is emotionally and physically laborious to prune," she says. "It brings up feelings, and I want to make sure there's time and space to talk about those, if the client wants to."

The trademark question Kondo asks her clients to answer, "Does this item spark joy?" regularly comes up in professional consultations in Maine, and Hall says, "It either resonates with people or it doesn't." But if Hall has a professional catchphrase, it might be "limits." In a broad sense, she says, your home is a container for your stuff. And within the home, there are smaller containers, starting with rooms, then narrowing down to closets and eventually, drawers and shelves. When those containers exceed their limits, Hall says it's time to purge. Too often people use storage to solve the issue of too much stuff, she says, and next thing you know, you have a basement full of bins you haven't looked at in years. Instead, Hall says, approach all those containers as you do your refrigerator. "We don't question the limits of our refrigerator," Hall points out. "If it's full, we toss the old items to make room for the new. Items are in constant rotation. We need to think of the rest of the items in our home this way."



Dawna Hall started her company Organize ME! in 2008, before anyone in the United States had ever heard of Marie Kondo. She left a job as a graphic designer to join the new field.



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Hall employs a crew of two and has clients booked every day of the week. Customers are repeats. "Sometimes clients need a tune up," Hall says.

Dawn Hellier of Object: Organization, a professional organizing company based in Eastport, takes what amounts to a fire drill approach to helping her clients get started. The fastest way to really take stock of your possessions, Hellier says, is to ask yourself this question: If you had five minutes to leave your house forever, what would you take (besides people or pets)? "Your answer will immediately help you identify what is important," Hellier says.

When Hellier first read Kondo's book, she'd been in business for a year, but she was already unknowingly utilizing many of the same techniques as Kondo, including her approach for folding clothes. (File, don't pile!) Hellier began her career as a lawyer and says there are commonalities between the two professions. "To be successful in either case it is important to listen, observe, have a certain sensitivity and integrity," Hellier says.

Often professional organizers are hired to help before or after a major life event, like a move, the death of a loved one, or transitioning an elderly parent into a care facility. "It's hugely personal work," Hellier says. "It's an honor to be invited into a person's home and to deal with very intimate aspects of their lives." When people struggle to part with items they



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“We’re thrifty  
Mainers and  
we don’t want  
to just throw  
things away.”

no longer need but feel attached to, she says there can be a greater sense of peace when those items are passed on instead of put in the trash. Hellier has made photo books for clients to keep as momentos, and she’s donated items to local libraries, museums and historical societies where they can still be viewed. Hall, who participated in an episode of *Hoarders and Hotel Impossible* on The Travel Channel, also does a lot of donating so that nothing goes to waste. Hall says. “Clients are more apt to let things go if they know it’s going someplace where it’s appreciated. I’m happy to deliver any donations to local charities at the end of our session.”

Camacho says the pruning process she oversees can also help people become more thoughtful about future purchases, by providing an opportunity to realize how much of a burden these things can become. Investing in organization, she believes, can help save money in the future on acquiring material possessions. The process, if done correctly, also establishes sustainable practices to keep things in check. “It’s about reframing how we connect with objects, ourselves and others,” Camacho says. “Pruning is a lifelong practice,” Dawna Hall agrees, calling organization a process, not a state achievable in one day. “The most important part happens after I leave,” Hall says. “Maintenance.”

**Sarah Holman is a writer living in Portland. She is enthusiastic about cheese plates, thrift shop treasures and old houses in need of saving. Find her online at [storiesandsidebars.com](http://storiesandsidebars.com).**



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# Mixing it up with Margaret

**A story of recipe cards, sociological inquiry  
and a political icon**

BY AMY PARADYSZ

**A** truly unlikely first female candidate to run for President of the United States, Margaret Chase Smith never went to college, never claimed to be a feminist and never lived anywhere but small-town Skowhegan until she followed her husband, U.S. Representative Clyde Smith, to the nation's capital in 1936.

Long before Mrs. Smith went to Washington, she had perfected a down-home charm for connecting with voters as a politician's wife, bringing along their tiny dog and knitting in hallways outside meetings as well as sharing her favorite recipes. Behind the scenes, she responded to her husband's mail, conducted his research and wrote his speeches. So, when he fell deathly ill in 1940 and asked her to run for his House seat that fall, she did. Smith became the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress and the first Maine woman to serve in either. No other Republican woman has served in Congress longer.

When she ran for the presidency in 1964, Smith was still sharing recipes—handing out mimeographed instructions for Maine Blueberry Cake, Maine Baked Beans, Maine Clam Chowder and Maine Lobster Pie, all on Senate letterhead stationery. The originals, handwritten or typed out on index cards, are in the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Skowhegan. When Amy Blackstone, a sociology professor at the University of Maine Orono who leads the university's Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center, came upon them last year, she was intrigued in more than just a culinary sense.

"I find it so inspiring to look at the strategies that women used to be involved in politics," Blackstone says. "Women still live with this bind of having to demonstrate their competence or commitment to all spheres."

Blackstone connected with Rachel Snell, a history lecturer at UMaine Orono with expertise in using 19th-century recipes as biographical source material. "I had never thought of Margaret Chase Smith as a domestic person," Snell says. "And had been completely unaware that she had a recipe collection. I was really quite curious about it."

"In a lot of ways Margaret Chase Smith was extraordinary and unusual in that she was widowed, never remarried and never had children," Snell says. "She almost had to portray herself as a domestic being so that she could be a likeable candidate rather than a threat."

That homespun approach did land Smith



Above: Is it done yet? Smith checks the condition of what looks like very rare meat in this photo from 1960. Opposite page: Margaret Chase Smith stirs up some batter in her Skowhegan kitchen, circa 1936-1938. Photos courtesy of the Margaret Chase Smith Library

in a controversy in 1964 during the presidential primary. Smith's recipe evangelism irked another candidate, Nelson Rockefeller, who said that Smith was using her gender to her advantage. (He retaliated with a rich and decadent fudge recipe.)

For sophomore Makenzie Baber, who has Snell as her Honors College advisor, this bit of Margaret Chase Smith lore prompted a research project. She compared Smith's 1964 culinary drama with Hillary Clinton's cookie fiasco during Bill Clinton's first presidential campaign in 1992. On the campaign trail, Mrs. Clinton, who was often accused of "wearing the pants" in the family, told reporters, "I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was fulfill my profession, which I entered before my husband was in public life." She then spent the next several weeks apologizing to housewives and submitted a chocolate chip cookie recipe to Family Circle magazine for a bake-off against Barbara Bush. (Clinton won.)

Baber and Snell presented this study at a national academic conference last fall, drumming up significant interest on campus among students who weren't even born when Smith died in 1995. And that was the beginning of the Margaret Chase Smith Recipes Research Collaborative.

In its simplest form, the collaborative is a bit like a book club: Fourteen or so women—the researchers happen to be women—meet once a month to discuss something they've read, such as "Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes" by folklorist Diane Tye, and to share a bite to eat, such as Smith's Queen Muffins. (Only once those

Queen Muffins were baked and appeared with peaked tops reminiscent of a crown did the collaborative understand where the name came from.)

On a deeper level, each member of the collaborative has a research interest on the intersection of food, politics and history. Reading between the lines of the recipe cards and other records, political science major Dominique DeSpirito is looking to see if all those Maine ingredients in Smith's recipes show she was ahead of her time in terms of promoting local agriculture. Food science major Caitlin Hillery is looking at the evolution of recipes over Smith's long life to see whether there's evidence of her becoming more health conscious over time (perhaps that's why Smith never followed the molded salad trend?). And political science major Harley Rogers is comparing the presidential campaigns of Smith and Clinton, writing an honors thesis called "Female Political Campaigns: Just the Right Amount of Femininity."

In sending out recipes, the majority of which were distinctively of Maine, was Smith trying to popularize Maine agricultural products? Was she playing up her traditional homemaker role to appeal to conservative voters? Or was she simply getting requests from constituents and publishers of community cookbooks and responding, politely and efficiently, with tried and true recipes from back home, where there would be no blueberries but Maine blueberries and no beans but Maine beans?

These are questions the collaborative ruminates on while sharing Margaret's Impossible Pie (a hit) and Blueberry Cake (a miss, at least



Top: As a Senator, Smith hosted President Dwight Eisenhower for a traditional lobster bake at her house in Skowhegan in 1955.

Above: The politician attends to a centerpiece. Photos courtesy of the Margaret Chase Smith Library

## IMPOSSIBLE PIE

Harley Rogers of Lincoln loves this custard-like pie made with instructions from Margaret Chase Smith's recipe cards. It was a hit at her Thanksgiving dinner—and again at Christmas. Smith's recipe called for "Oleo" the popular name for margarine at the time, but we've translated it.

1 stick margarine (*if you want to be true to Smith; we'd opt for butter instead*)

2 cups milk

2 teaspoons vanilla,

1 cup sugar

4 eggs

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 cup shredded coconut.

*Preheat oven to 350 degrees.*

*Grease and flour 10-inch pie pan.*

*Put all ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth. Pour mixture into pan and bake for 30 to 40 minutes until it sets. Pie will form its own crust. Cool in pan.*

when prepared by students unfamiliar with cooking with lard).

"When people do remember Margaret Chase Smith, they remember her as a politician," Rogers says. Smith didn't make it to the White House or even past the primary (Lyndon B. Johnson did). But she was an influential congresswoman for 33 years. She sponsored the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which regularized the status of women in the military, and was the first senator to publicly challenge McCarthyism. "This collaborative is working to show another side of her. And we're hoping to publish a cookbook with her recipes with vignettes and research sprinkled in."

"Recipes are such revealing sources," Snell says. "Margaret's recipes were serviceable and practical. They do what they say they will." She hesitates before adding, "If I were looking for a recipe to add to my own collection, I would keep looking."

That said, Smith was a lot like her own recipes. And, for a politician, practical and dependable aren't bad things to be.

***Amy Paradysz is a freelance writer from Scarborough who fell deep into this Margaret Chase Smith rabbit hole of recipe inquiry. So much so that she's not sure whether she dreamed that Margaret Chase Smith gave out campaign potholders.***

Photos by Whitney J. Fox Photography



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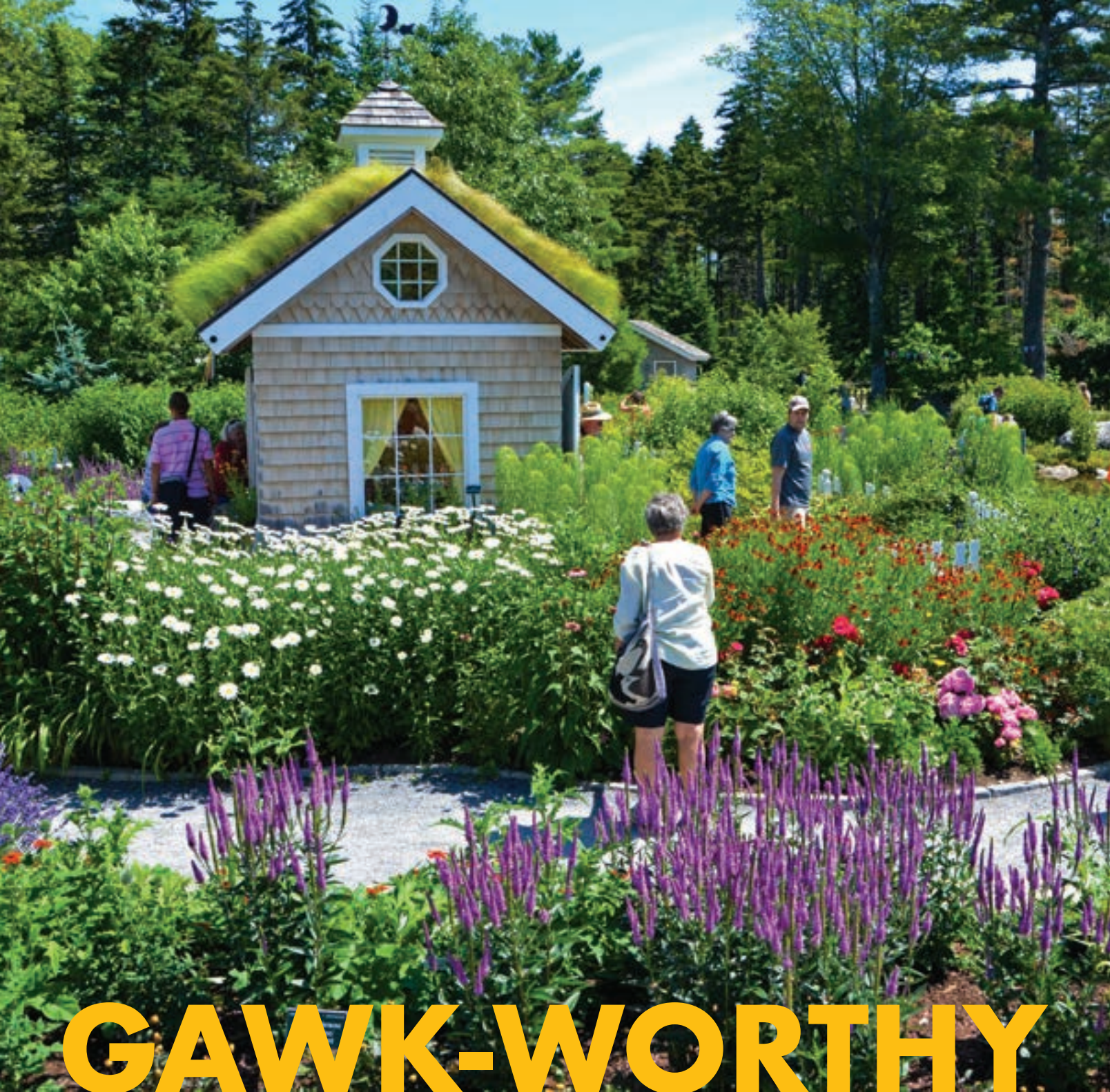
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# GAWK-WORTHY GARDENS

**A handful of gardens are open only on special days; others you can visit throughout blooming season. It's a bed of roses (and peonies, irises and lilacs).**

BY AMY PARADYSZ

Bibby and Harold Alfond Children's Garden at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens. *Courtesy photo*



Children's Garden at the University of Maine Gardens at Tidewater Farm. *Photo courtesy of Kookie McNerry*

**H**ome gardeners can satisfy their need for fresh ideas—and their voyeuristic curiosity—with annual garden tours of some of the best private gardens in the state hosted by garden clubs from Cape Elizabeth to Bar Harbor. Add these dates on your calendar, but remember, throughout spring and summer there are ongoing opportunities to visit some of Maine's most spectacular floral displays, from the June peony bloom at Gilsland Farm to New England's largest lilac collection at McLaughlin Garden (get on that one this month). Don't forget the innovative University of Maine demonstration gardens at Tidewater Farm or the state's largest gardening-related tourism attraction, Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens. With a garden season full of this many choices, you might want to clip our lists on the following pages.

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A view of one of the six gardens on the 2019 Camden Garden Club tour. Photo courtesy of Camden Garden Club

# ANNUAL GARDEN TOURS

## OPEN DOORS OF YORK

*June 21 and 22, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

Open Doors of York invites visitors into select summer cottages in the neighborhood around Nubble Light with a home and garden tour. This year it will be more focused on homes with a view, but you'll see some June blooms. Tickets are \$35 in advance, \$40 the day of and will benefit Old York Historical Society. ([oldyork.org/open-doors-of-york](http://oldyork.org/open-doors-of-york))

## CAMDEN GARDEN CLUB HOUSE AND GARDEN TOUR

*July 19, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

Camden has the oldest garden club in the state, established in 1915. Its well-regarded annual home and garden tour draws many return visitors from all over the United States. This summer's tour includes six properties—some with just the garden on the tour and

some with both the home and garden. Tickets are \$35 in advance, \$40 on tour day. Check in at Camden Hills State Park on Route 1, north of Camden, or Maine Sport Outfitters on Route 1, south of Camden. Carpooling is encouraged as you'll need to drive from location to location. ([camdengardenclub.org](http://camdengardenclub.org))

## BAR HARBOR FINE ISLAND GARDEN TOUR

*July 20, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

The Bar Harbor Garden Club offers this annual rain-or-shine tour of the best gardens on Mount Desert Island, where ocean views and dramatic hardscaping abound. Start at the Northeast Harbor Marina (40 Harbor Drive) to pick up your ticket and maps (check out the gardening-themed vendor marketplace too). Admission gets you into six private gardens, three in Northeast Harbor and three in Southwest Harbor. Tickets are \$30 in

advance or \$35 the day of the tour. For more information, including how to buy tickets by sending a check with a self-addressed stamped envelope: [barharborgardenclub.org](http://barharborgardenclub.org).

## CAPE ELIZABETH GARDEN TOUR

*July 20, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

*Fort Williams Park, Cape Elizabeth*

With Portland Head light and wide views of Casco Bay, the Friends of Fort Williams Park have a stunning location for a self-guided tour of eight gardens. The tour starts at the Children's Garden and Cliff Walk Landscape and continues on to private gardens offering hillside ocean views, ornamental trees and shrubs, native plants, woodlands, raised beds and stonework. Tickets are \$30 in advance and \$40 the day of the tour (register at the Children's Garden). Proceeds benefit the nonprofit's work supporting the park's ecology and natural beauty. Rain or shine. ([cegardentour.com](http://cegardentour.com))



## SEASONAL GARDEN VISITS

### COASTAL MAINE BOTANICAL GARDENS

*Season runs April 15–Oct. 31*

*132 Botanical Gardens Drive, Boothbay*

Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens is the largest botanical garden in New England, including nearly a mile of saltwater frontage. Exploring on foot is the most common way to take in the nearly 20 acres of gardens and trails. But one-hour electric cart tours are available for up to five passengers, led by trained docents. The new Butterfly House (*opening June 15*) has weekly Botany of Butterflies tours at 2 p.m. any Thursday from June 20 through

Oct. 25, starting at the bridge outside the Visitor Center (no reservations needed). Art lovers are invited to Plein Air Days, May 30–June 1, when artists set up their easels around the gardens. The season runs April 15–Oct. 31 with admission \$18 for adults, \$16 for seniors, \$9 for kids. Over Memorial Day weekend, admission is free for Maine residents with ID. (207–633–8000; [mainegardens.org](http://mainegardens.org))

### GILSLAND FARM'S PEONY GARDEN

*Peaks in June*

*20 Gilsland Farm Road, Falmouth*

Maine Audubon's headquarters are at this historic farm along the Presumpscot River estuary, five minutes north of Portland. Conservationist David Moulton bought the land in 1911 and spent 40 years cultivating more than 400 species of peonies. They're spread over seven acres, but be sure to look for the large bed near the headquarters building. Maine Audubon members are invited for a Peony Day celebration on June 19, the height of peony garden perfection (nonmembers can join then, too), with live music and free ice cream. Shoppers at Maine Audubon's annual native plants sale June 15 (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) will

Peonies are the pride of Gilsland Farm.  
Photo courtesy Maine Audubon



also see the peonies in their glory. Visitors are welcome year-round to explore two miles of trails through the property's woods, meadow, orchard and salt marsh from dawn to dusk. (207-781-2330; maineaudubon.org)

### UNIVERSITY OF MAINE GARDENS AT TIDEWATER FARM

Open sunrise to sunset  
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These demonstration gardens overlooking the Presumpscot River are open to the public from sunrise to sunset with no admission fee. The property includes an All-American Selections Display Garden in collaboration with Southern Maine Community College, an



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McLaughlin Garden is a century-old Maine farmstead with massive stone walls and a big red barn, as well as New England's largest collection of lilacs. *Photo courtesy of McLaughlin Garden*

apiary managed by the Cumberland County Beekeepers Association, Harvest for Hunger plots, a pollinator garden, a children's garden, a meadow garden, an orchard and a picnic area. Visitors can walk the adjacent Portland Trails, attend a class or workshop, join a work party or just soak up gardening inspiration. ([extension.umaine.edu/cumberland](http://extension.umaine.edu/cumberland))

### **MCLAUGHLIN GARDEN**

*Season starts May 10  
97 and 103 Main St., South Paris*

This century-old Maine farmstead boasts the largest collection of lilacs in New England. The two-acre formal garden also features mature collections of hostas, daylilies, astilbes, iris, phlox, sedum, cimicifuga and sempervivums as well as a diverse collection of Maine wildflowers and ferns. Opens for the season May 10 with visitors welcome daily from dawn to dusk. The gift shop is open Tuesday through Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. with plants for sale. Special events include a Wildflower Celebration May 10–12 and Lilac Festival over Memorial Day weekend. The lilacs will be long gone by then, but there are Garden Illuminated nights on July 19 (for children)

and July 20 (for adults). (207-743-8820; [mclaughlingarden.org](http://mclaughlingarden.org))

### **ST. ANTHONY FRANCISCAN FRIARY**

*Open sunrise to sunset  
28 Beach Ave., Kennebunk*

This Franciscan monastery a short walk from the center of Kennebunkport is on 66-acres that include an English country garden, rolling lawns and a path through the woods, leading to marshes and river views. The estate is open to the public from sunrise to sunset. Walking tour brochures are available at the Franciscan Guest House front desk. ([framon.net](http://framon.net))

### **VILES ARBORETUM**

*Open dawn to dusk  
153 Hospital St., Augusta*

While the focus of any arboretum is trees, the sprawling (224-acres) Viles Arboretum is also home to extensive plant collections, the state's largest outdoor display of art and the state's second-longest wetland boardwalk (perfect for birdwatching). Six miles of trails are open to hiking, biking and horseback riding, with trail

maps available on site. The arboretum is open from dawn to dusk, and there's no admission fee. (207-626-7989; [vilesarboretum.org](http://vilesarboretum.org))

### **WADSWORTH-LONGFELLOW GARDEN**

*Season starts in May  
Maine Historical Society, 489 Congress St., Portland*

An urban oasis, Longfellow Garden is tucked behind the historic Wadsworth-Longfellow House. In 1924, the poet's niece, Anne Longfellow Pierce, relied on her memories of the garden to guide the Longfellow Garden Club in restoring the garden to its Colonial Revival-style glory. After the 2007 expansion of the Maine Historical Society, the gardens were restored to the original landscape design, including a lilac bush dating back to Pierce's time. The garden is open to visitors for free from May to October from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. *There's a garden map and plant identification guide online at [longfellowgardenclub.org](http://longfellowgardenclub.org).*

***Amy Paradysz is a writer, editor and photographer who lives in Scarborough.***

# Minding *the* **Flive**



**Let's hear it for the bees; a beekeeper advocates for keeping bees, or at least making use of local honey.**



BY MAGGIE KNOWLES

Do you want to see something cool?" Without waiting for an answer, the farmer turned on bare, callus-covered feet and led the way out of the barn. Something wet poked my hand, startling me. I looked down into the sweet eyes of a blocky-headed dog and followed him around some trees. There the goddess-farmer stood, the deep golden sun a halo around her. Her legs spread, hands on the hips. A warrior.

"Just watch," she said.

I stood a bit back, not wanting to dent her orb of light.

Watching. Waiting. What?

Then, it happened.

Along the horizon line, small beings headed for us.

"The bees," she said. "They are coming home."

Thousands of honey bees, backlit by pink twilight, buzzed past us sparkling with the energy of honey—sweet, healing and bright.

We stood there, a silent trio, until the sun sank and the last bee flew past.

That moment in 2003 on a roadside farm in Gray, when I had been drawn to stop in to buy some hand-churned butter, was when the bees chose me to become part of their world.


Since then, I have become a beekeeper, an herbalist focusing on honey-based remedies and an advocate for honey bees. I co-founded Portland Protectors with Avery Yale-Kamila and after a three-year community-led initiative to push back against the scientifically proven harm posed by pesticides and herbicides, the Portland City Council passed an organic lawn care ordinance in early 2018. It went into effect on city property last year and for private residents this year, which will be a big change for many homeowners as growing season starts. South Portland passed a similar ordinance in 2016 and many other communities are following suit.

I could wax-poetic on honey bees for hours; they're magical to me. Even if you don't care about them, your life is impacted by them every time you enter a grocery store, sniff a flower or even sip coffee.

And as you have no doubt heard, bee health is in trouble. Due to a variety of factors—from single-crop pollination practices to use of the neonicotinoids class of insecticides—pollinators are dying in record numbers. If there are no bees to pollinate the majority of the food we enjoy, what does that look like for the health of mankind?

**Maggie Knowles writes about all things kid. She and her family live in Yarmouth, where she gardens but refuses to get rid of her stilettos.**

Author Maggie Knowles with one of her happy hives. Photo courtesy of Knowles



***If I can take you under my proverbial Queen Bee wing, here are some easy and meaningful ways you can support the bees in your yard.***

1

Keep bees at some point during your life and teach your kids how to as well. I've been doing it since about 2013 and love it. The Honey Exchange in Portland offers beginner and intermediate classes plus it provides a wealth of knowledge throughout the year. I teach Healing with Honey workshops and there is a lovely community always ready to talk and share.

2

Having hives too much for you? Support bees by eating raw honey from local beekeepers. No, not the corn syrup mess in the plastic bear, but real honey from the farmer's market or neighborhood keeper. The added bonus? Eating local honey helps lessen seasonal allergies. (See recipe on next page.)

3

Plant organics that attract native pollinators. Visit local nurseries and buy flowering gems that will bring the butterflies and bees to your yard. Anise hyssop and cone flowers are two of my favorites. Ask to make sure they are not sprayed with pesticides that contain neonicotinoids.

4

Once you've created a bee safe yard, let your neighbors know with a Pollinator Safe yard sign. This can spark conversations to educate and hopefully stop any accidental spraying of your yard by lawn care companies, which happens more than you would think. Hire landscape companies that offer eco-friendly methods or take a permaculture class through the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (there's an office in Falmouth). Healthy soil and healthy bees are connected.

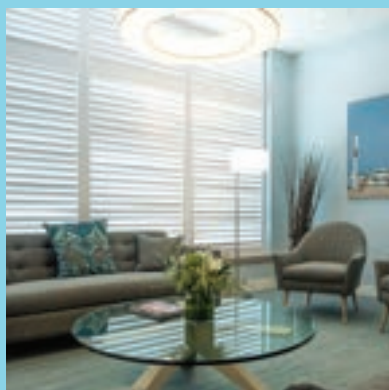
5

Watch documentaries such as *More than Honey* or Netflix's *Rotten: Lawyers, Guns & Honey* with your kids. As a family, you can commit to helping others understand how important it is to protect honey bees. Plus, it is so cool to see the inner-working of the hive.

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*Honey has been used for thousands of years as medicine due to its anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-viral and anti-inflammatory aspects. It is a delicious and powerful home remedy. (But remember, babies under one-year cannot eat honey due to a risk of botulism.) Here are two of my most popular recipes featuring honey.*



## COCOA HONEY

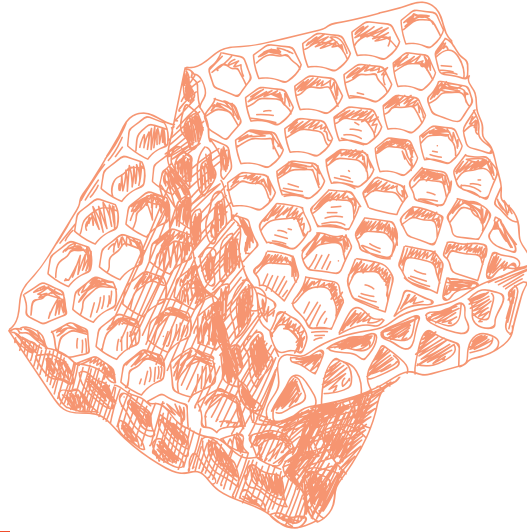
*This spread is like healthy Nutella. Eat daily on bread, apples or by the spoonful throughout cold and flu season to boost immunity.*

1 cup virgin coconut oil  
3/4 cup raw honey  
3 teaspoons cinnamon  
2 teaspoons cacao (*Health boost tip: Substitute chocolate protein powder for the cacao.*)  
1/4 teaspoon sea salt.

Whisk by hand or mix just until blended in food processor. Store in a Mason jar in a cool place or fridge for up to two weeks.







# HONEY-SUGAR SCRUB

*May 12 is Mother's Day so consider giving your mother a pot of this. But keep it on hand for yourself too; I believe all of us need some self-love. Make a batch of this to buff away dry, dull skin and soothe your face, hands and feet. Avoid the eye area and keep in mind, oil can make the shower slippery so be careful.*

In a glass bowl, whisk:

1 tablespoon raw honey

1 teaspoon raw coconut oil

1/3 cup brown sugar

10 drops Lavender or Rose essential oil (optional)

Store in a small Mason jar. Gently rub on wet skin in circular motions for about 30 seconds. Rinse with lukewarm water.



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# SWITCHING UP THE SEASONS

*It's spring wardrobe time. But first, put the winter woolies away—the right way. Our columnist accumulated a lot of cashmere while working in retail, along with the know-how to take care of it.*

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY AMANDA WHITEGIVER

In the nearly 15 years I spent working in retail, I sold a lot of cashmere sweaters and also bought a lot of them with my discount. So soft to the touch that it is a physical pleasure to wear, cashmere is addictive. For me, it's the deep, dark, 85 percent chocolate of sweaters.

But over those years, I noticed a lot of people who hadn't learned how to care properly for their clothes, including that soft cashmere. If you've made a laundering mistake, chances are I've come across it before. The whites that went for a spin cycle with reds and are now pink. The delicate lace that looks roughed up because it should have been protected by mesh laundry bag in the washing machine. And all those items that were supposed to be dry cleaned or hand washed and instead went into the machine and are now two sizes smaller. After observing people trying to return sweaters they'd ruined through bad laundering—and wrecking a few myself—I decided to become a laundering expert.

Did you know that trace amounts of body oils, deodorant or even small food particles can make your favorite sweater more attractive to the moth larvae? Even if you've only worn a sweater a few times over a season, moth holes become a risk. So are permanent stains if a sweater is not properly laundered before being put away. It's no fun to take out your favorite sweater in the fall only to find it has some pupae cases and several holes marking its once pristine surface.

What to do? If you take only the tag into account, many brands recommend dry cleaning. If you have absolutely no time and your option is to dry clean or not clean, opt for dry cleaning. However, there are better, less chemical-laden (and cheaper) options. Your first instinct might be to just throw it in the washer on gentle cycle with your normal detergent. While that method will sort of do the job, it's still not the best for your sweaters. Fibers like cashmere, camel, yak and wool are classified as hair, and just like your hair, they have a few special needs.

One of the most important ingredients in your wash is lanolin. That lovely, waxy substance whose role in nature is to protect wool and skin from climate and the environment does the very same for your sweaters. Of the washes with lanolin, Kookaburra Wash, Nikwax, The Laundress Wool and Cashmere Shampoo, and Eucalan are the easiest



Whether handwashing or very carefully machine washing, putting away your cashmere sweaters freshly laundered is one of the keys to keeping them beautiful.

please!), you can go back to daydreaming of days spent by the water, camping, hiking and barbecuing. With spring finally arriving in Maine; I am so ready to change my sweaters to lightweight merino and linen and to trade my insulated L.L.Bean boots for my favorite woven loafers and mules. Good day, sunshine.

***Amanda Whitegiver is a co-founder of East Coast Inspired, a fashion and lifestyle blog. A lifestyle family photographer who finds beauty in the mundane, she adores dark chocolate and singing with her two daughters.***

to find. I opt for Eucalan. Not only is it biodegradable and available in several essential oil-based fragrances as well as an unscented option, it doesn't have to be rinsed out of the material after washing. If you have sensitive skin, I recommend erring on the safe side and giving it a rinse anyway, but when I wash my sweaters with bare hands I've had no reaction. It is also the least expensive of the bunch at \$13 for a 16.9 ounce bottle. I got mine at the Mother of Purl Yarn Shop in Freeport, where they also stock sample sizes of every scent for 99 cents.

For me, May in Maine can still be a little too chilly to put away all my sweaters for the season, but I put away the thicker ones, freshly washed. When washing only one or two, I use a basin, but when washing several at a time, I keep like colors together and use the soak cycle on my washing machine. Fill with enough water to cover your sweaters and use 1 teaspoon of Eucalan per gallon of water. Soak for 30 minutes, then spin out and lay flat to dry. With this soap, you can stay away from agitation cycles entirely, but if you are using one that requires a rinse, be sure to place your sweaters in individual mesh laundry bags and choose a delicate cycle.

If you choose to hand wash in a basin, lift them out and lay the wet sweaters flat on a towel, roll like a sleeping bag to remove excess moisture, then open the towel and spread both towel and sweater on a rack or non-porous flat surface to dry. Unless you wish to hand down your beloved sweater to a small child, don't throw it in the dryer. You might get lucky one time, but chances are it will never fit again.

Whether you've had moth problems in the past or not, storing your sweaters in a breathable cotton or linen bag is the best way to keep them fresh and safe when not in use for months at a time, as the larvae of *Tineola bisselliella* don't eat those plant-based fibers. You can easily find bags on Amazon for individual storage (I found some 14x18-inch organic cotton bags by searching for XL cotton bags). Or you can use zippered fabric bins for storing several in one place. I prefer the individual bags because they have the added benefit of being machine washable. Before I reuse them each year, I wash them to make sure no moth eggs are tucked inside.

Once your sweaters are clean and packed away until fall (late fall,



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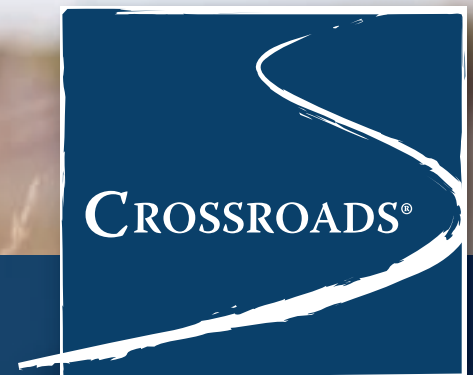
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AMATEUR HOUR



## BARREL-AGED MANHATTAN FOR-EV-VER

*Who is afraid of tackling a three-month long aging process for a cocktail? Our columnist says these Manhattans were worth the wait.*

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY JESSIE LACEY

**L**ate last fall, Shawn McLaughlin from Stroudwater Distillery gifted me with a 10-liter oak barrel, pre-charred on the inside for maximum agedness I think. It was glorious. But what was I supposed to do with it? It seemed I was destined to make a cocktail. (Thanks for the gift of a chore, my friend.) This turned out to be an ambitious and long process for an impatient person like me, although because of the internet, not impossible. I am able to do anything as long as there is a corresponding Wiki or YouTube video.

I wanted to work with a classic, a concoction that I will drink often based on the sheer amount I was afraid I was going to end up with (maybe even 10 liters). My cocktail also had to have a low sugar content—mold and bacteria \*love\* sugar because who doesn't? That meant juices were out, since they are full of sugar. I'd only be using spirits. I settled on a Manhattan, allowing me to skimp on really pricey liquors. While I got a couple bottles of Stroudwater bourbon and rye from McLaughlin, I needed much more. I opted to use Evan Williams bourbon to supplement the rest.

A Manhattan cocktail calls for 3/4th parts sweet vermouth to 2 parts rye whiskey as well

as a maraschino cherry and angostura bitters. Doing the math, that is 3/4ths to 8/4ths. (Is this how you math?) Ok, so 10 liters equates to about 13 750mL bottles. Now I knew how many bottles of each product I needed to buy. Thank God chemistry isn't an exact science. Wait, it is? I purchased seven additional bottles of whiskey. Next up, two bottles of Cocchi Americano, a sweet wine that is a lot like sweet vermouth but with less sugar. It comes in Rosa and Bianco versions and I used one of each.

What about the maraschino cherry? They are sugar bombs, and would once again, lead to that pesky oxidation problem. Not wanting to brew up a barrel of bacteria, I used a bottle of Cherry Heering Liqueur to evoke a bit of the maraschino flavor. I used it sparingly, about a third of the bottle, in order not to make the cocktail too sweet. To fill the barrel completely—recommended by every site I visited—I needed to borrow more whiskey from my home bar.

I filled the barrel on Dec. 1 and on March 1, I de-bunged it. (That's barrel talk for unsealing.) I don't want to toot my own horn, but my method of bumbling through was surprisingly effective. This project was a lot of work (thanks to Michael Leonard for helping with the heavy lifting, the



wax melting and buying supplies) but it yielded truly the best Manhattans I have ever tasted. With plenty to spare. What are you waiting for?

*Jessie Lacey resides at the heart of downtown Portland with her border collie puppy Josie, making cocktails and trouble.*



## AN AMATEUR'S GUIDE TO BARREL-AGING, OR THINGS I LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

*Start small, I did not. Buying a few gallons worth of whiskey gets expensive. Luckily, you can use the cheap stuff when you plan to barrel-aged cocktail. I have a lot of this cocktail now, over three gallons to be precise (MATH!), and my friends will be forced to drink it with me until the end of days.*

**RESEARCH** the process for the cocktail you will want to age. For example, some ingredients might need to be substituted due to the aging process or omitted completely, like the bitters for the Manhattan cocktail, which should be added after the aging process.

**PREP** the barrel. You will need to fill it with distilled water and let that sit for a few days, as that will expand the wood and seal cracks. The trick is to not let the barrel dry out, so after dumping out the water, fill it with your cocktail ingredients sooner rather than later. Always keep the barrel full of water between batches. The water will need to be changed every two to three weeks. As it rests for two days, you can taste the water to see what the inside of the barrel tastes like.

**CONSIDER** future uses. A barrel can be used a few more times, keeping in mind that with each use, the barrel retains more and more of the previous cocktail flavorings. My advice is to either stick to the same cocktail, or stay within the cocktail family. For example, my next cocktail will be a Barrel-Aged Boulevardier; essentially a whiskey Negroni.

**BUY** some wax. Because I am a hoarder of craft supplies, I had an ample amount of beeswax pellets on hand. The wax is to seal small seams on your barrel. (Ideally, I'd have dipped the whole thing in wax, because my barrel regularly sweated sweet, sweet Manhattan reduction all over my counter.)



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# GREEN CLEANING FOR THE WIN

*DIY spring cleaning solutions*

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED  
BY SARAH HOLMAN

I've been buying natural, non-toxic cleaning products for years, but I also know labels can be misleading. And I have plastic-guilt every time I toss a bottle. This spring, I decided it was time for DIY cleaning products and reusable containers, so I turned to some local experts.

Claire Weinberg and her daughter Carly own Dulse & Rugosa, a "sea to skin" and "farm to face" skin care company based in Gouldsboro. She is committed to natural products not just for her skin, but throughout her home. "The ingredients you use in your house make a difference," Weinberg says. "Even when ingredients are tested we can't always know the long-term effects."

According to a report by the Environmental Working Group, the U.S. government doesn't regulate most cleaning products, and the Environmental Protection Agency only tests the safety of cleaners that include registered pesticides. And yet, the EPA identifies "products for household cleaning" as one of seven main causes of indoor air pollution. Pollutants can hang around in the air or on surfaces for long periods of time, and some have immediate negative health effects (Ever felt light-headed, allergic or asthmatic after cleaning? Like that.) These reactions subside, but the EPA also warns that the long-term effects of exposure can be severe, including respiratory illness, heart disease and cancer. Beyond the possible toll on our bodies, there's the environment to consider. The EPA says Volatile



About as environmentally friendly as possible, this spray works well and leaves a good scent, courtesy of whatever citrus peels you've got on hand. Mix and match and make your own scent.

Organic Compounds (VOCs) are the worst environmental hazards in household cleaners, and they're extremely common.

Here's the good news: Most of what you need for a spic-and-span, non-toxic house is probably already in your cabinet. "My go-to cleaners are literally what's in my kitchen cupboards," Weinberg says.

Pam Jones, a professional cleaner for over 40 years who has owned Bath-based Green Maids of Maine for nearly two decades, agrees.

Jones makes all of her own cleaners and believes they work better than commercial products. Even many natural products sold commercially don't do their job, she says. Cleaners made specifically for floors, for example, often strip the finish and leave a dull film. Her solution: "I use little organic dish soap with water in a spray bottle. It works for maintaining most surfaces."

Jones uses other well-known natural dirt-busters like baking soda, vinegar, hydro-



## SPRING SPRITZ

### *DIY Citrus Vinegar All-Purpose Spray*

1. Fill a mason jar with citrus peels.
2. Cover peels with white vinegar.
3. Let it steep in a dark, cool place for a few weeks.
4. Strain and return vinegar to the jar.
5. In a spray bottle, make a 50-50 mix of water and vinegar.

—*Courtesy of Dulse & Rugosa*

#### STICKING TO THE STORE-BOUGHT?

Check out the Environmental Working Group's guide for searching the health and environmental safety scores of over 2500 cleaning products ([ewg.org/guides/cleaners](http://ewg.org/guides/cleaners)).



gen peroxide and Borax to make her sprays and powers. Because some of her customers don't like those smells, Jones infuses her cleaning products with botanically-derived extracts like citrus (for the kitchen) and lavender (for the bedroom).

Asked if there are any stains natural cleaners just can't handle, Jones says, "Rust. It cannot be cleaned without a terrible chemical." Mold is tough, too. "You have to keep on top of mold," she says. "If it gets really bad, bleach is the only way to kill it."

The real key, Jones says, is maintenance. "My mom used to say, clean your bathroom every day for five minutes instead of waiting a week and taking an hour." Manage the bathroom and kitchen by keeping a natural scrubber by the sink and tub with a bottle of all-purpose spray, and do a quick wipe daily.

Weinberg believes cleaning tools should be as environmentally-friendly as the cleaners themselves. She suggests cutting up old t-shirts for rags, opting for plant-based scrubbers and using Swedish dishcloths, which can be laundered and composted when they wear out. Cleaning, she says, is an area of our lives where we can easily make choices to live more sustainably.

***Sarah Holman is a writer living in Portland. She is enthusiastic about cheese plates, thrift shop treasures and old houses in need of saving. Find her online at [storiesandsidebars.com](http://storiesandsidebars.com).***

## MAINE WOMEN MAGAZINE'S FEATURED AGENTS



### MOTHER-DAUGHTER REAL ESTATE DUO COMES FULL CIRCLE IN THE KENNEBUNKS

“We have seven minutes. We can be doing something!”

Karen Schlegel's exclamation has been engraved in her daughter Valerie's mind since she was a kid. This energetic RE/MAX Realty One duo never stops moving, and now that they have joined forces, Schlegel & Schlegel is a prime resource for the real estate market in the Kennebunks and York County.

Karen grew up in the Boston area, spending her summers on Goose Rocks Beach in Kennebunkport. She moved to Kennebunkport in 1982 and raised her two daughters as a single mom. After working as

a paralegal on local zoning and planning codes, she worked a corporate job for Hannaford.

By the time Karen made real estate her career priority, she had learned everything about the Kennebunks' special culture, topography, and housing market. An acknowledged expert, she has more than 30 years in the real estate industry.

“Karen knows the Kennebunks” is an axiom. She loves sharing her knowledge, experience and outgoing personality with home-buyers and sellers, and guiding them through the process.

Valerie Schlegel, a “true” i.e. lifelong native of Kennebunkport, grew up observing her mother's diligent work ethic and countless hours of volunteering in their community. She never expected to follow in Karen's footsteps, but knew her career path would involve working closely with people.

Valerie worked for 11 years at Hurricane, a popular restaurant in Kennebunkport, where she developed her sharp memory and skill at building relationships. “Fourteen orders for one table is my highest claim to fame when it comes to my memory,” Valerie says. “I learned time management skills, and developed an intuition about what makes people happy.”

After realizing that her skills were transferable to real estate—“organization and efficiency are qualities I strive for”—she obtained her license and went to work with Karen at RE/MAX Realty One. There, they both work with buyers and sellers, sometimes co-listing properties.

“Mom is my role model as a professional,” says Valerie. “People trust her because her reputation is built on hard work and integrity.”

Says Karen, “Our emphasis is on serving our clients, not selling. We work with many repeat clients and personal referrals, and we are honored to do so.”

When the Schlegels aren't helping people with buying or selling homes, they love to

travel together. Their curiosity has taken them to South Africa for a Mother's Day safari, and to Australia, New Zealand, Dubai and other countries.

Everywhere they go, they visit a local RE/MAX office. They make global connections, learn about the wide variety of housing markets, and share their love for Kennebunkport with the world.

And they never forget to do a “Schlegel cartwheel” in front of the RE/MAX sign. For this mother-daughter team, the wheels keep on turning.



## KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE

HARBOR VIEWS and proximity to restaurants, shops and “the pier” are among the highlights of this beautifully updated home in Cape Porpoise. The property at 32 Pier Road, Kennebunkport, is listed at \$825,000 by Karen A. Schlegel of RE/MAX Realty One in Kennebunk.

---

*Please contact Karen or Valerie:  
Karen 207-229-8927; or  
Karen@KarenSchlegel.com  
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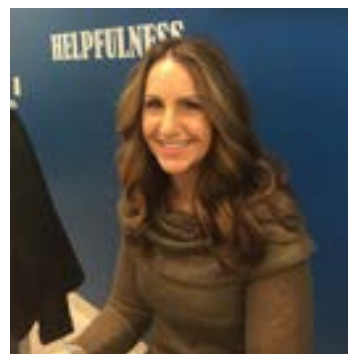
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I'D RATHER BE READING



## AT THIS BOOK CLUB, IT'S ABOUT SISTERHOOD.

*They wrapped up Michelle Obama's *Becoming* and moved on to a novel that's been compared to *The Handmaid's Tale**

BY MARY POLS

**O**n a recent Sunday afternoon, women encircled a table in the center of the sunny upstairs room at Moderation Brewing Company in Brunswick, most with a hardback copy of Michelle Obama's memoir *Becoming* in front of them. The weather was foul, the roads treacherous, but the fourth meeting of the Brunswick Feminist Book Club included about a dozen women, most in their 20s and 30s, a few in middle age and a couple of retirees.

Most women who have been in a book club know that even with a scintillating read, by the time the *Chicken Marbella* and first two bottles of wine have been consumed, discussions devolve (or evolve) from the plots of the books to the plots of the participants' lives. Often these include topics that dovetail with feminism. But at this book club, there is no *Chicken Marbella*, instead of wine there is beer, brewed downstairs, and the conversation goes straight to feminism.

Choices, choices. Before ending the session discussing Michelle Obama's memoir, the club debated the next selection. *Photo by Mary Pols*



*Becoming* covers Michelle Obama's modest but loving childhood in Chicago, her years at racially-divided Princeton University and her early career back in Chicago, where she fostered dreams of having that "hat-tossing, independent-career-woman zest of Mary Tyler Moore." Then Barack Obama enters her life, and together they embark on a journey from parenthood to politics that leads all the way to the White House. (As she mentions in the dedication, he always promised her, their journey would be "interesting.")

Not surprisingly, the book was a hit, and not just in terms of narrative—everyone seemed to enjoy the pillow talk scene where then Michelle Robinson notices Barack Obama lying awake, asks him what he's thinking about and he tells her "income inequality"—but because of the former First Lady's ability to advocate for herself, especially around gender issues in the workplace. Like the time she went for a job interview with newborn Sasha and told a potential boss how essential flex time would be for her. "I knew I'd at least done something good for myself in speaking up about my needs," Obama writes.

For book club member Sara McGrath, this was familiar territory. McGrath doesn't have children yet, but she's been watching friends with them negotiate the work-life balance. She knows how hard it is to coordinate flex time and part-time with employer expectations, especially without ending up working full time for less pay. "The scene where she kind of took control," McGrath said. "When she said, 'When I need to leave, I will leave.' It just struck me as an incredibly powerful moment."

"But how do you get to that?" asked Kira Bennett Hamilton, the founder of the group, opening up a discussion of issues from trying to interview for a job while breast-feeding, to being open to what Obama calls life's "swerves" in *Becoming* or following a partner for a job.

Bennett Hamilton, 32, moved to Maine about 18 months ago from Worcester, Massachusetts after her husband took a job at Bowdoin College. She has two small sons and kept her job, working remotely for the Carrot Project, a nonprofit which coordinates loans and business advising to farms. As she settled in, she found she missed the feminist book club she'd gone to in Boston, and before that, one she'd been in Berkeley, California. She called the group the Brunswick Feminist Book Club for Facebook group purposes only; anyone can come.

"It's a really nice way to meet like-minded people," Bennett Hamilton says. "The books are an important part of it, but it often just sparks conversations about women's lives." She connected with Brunswick politician Mattie Daughtry, co-owner and co-founder of Moderation Brewing Company and a voice for women's issues in Augusta, representing the 49th district in the state House of Representatives. Daughtry offered the brewery as the group's base. Bennett Hamilton was happy to see some older feminists at the March meeting. "It had been predominantly people of around my age and my demographic," she says. "I'm excited to have some people from other generations." And experiences, she adds. "It is too bad when feminism comes across as monolithic."

As they wrapped up the conversation about *Becoming* Bennett Hamilton put a stack of books on the table and asked for consensus on what they should tackle next. They picked Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, which Barack Obama, among others, had deemed one of the best books of 2017. (It's science fiction, set during a future where women can generate electricity from their hands and the matriarchy has overtaken the patriarchy.) The club doesn't always read books, Bennett Hamilton says. They read a lengthy Baffler article by Laurie Penny about "false idols of neoliberal self-care" one month and listened to a podcast about vocal fry and uptalk another month. "The more important thing is really that connection around feminist issues," she says. "Rather than just discussing the texts themselves."

*Mary Pols is the editor of Maine Women Magazine.*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

about the May book, check out the group's Facebook page, **Brunswick Feminist Book Club.**

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Photo by Susan Teare, Yarmouth native

### **The Transplant**

*By Marilyn Meadows, Springvale*

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Suffer from lack of sun  
Their leaves grow gray  
And dusky  
And their roots  
Do not advance.

At the old house, surely  
The lilac bushes push at  
The windows and the  
Foundation.  
For days greedily counted  
Their scent divine.  
The morning glories  
Still,  
In their turn,  
Climb, spread  
Open their faces to the sun.  
Inhale it whole.

Back in the woods  
The pine trees and maple  
Make strong sentries.  
Doom the sun thirsty  
The Poorly chosen  
And the guiltless.

# Being A Mom is What Gives Me My Drive To Succeed



But my family comes first and I need a flexible schedule. Lee has given me the flexibility I need to have a career while still being there for my wife and our four-year-old twins. And because my schedule works for us, I can work harder for my customers.

## **Stacy Tavares**

Salesperson & Vehicle Exchange Specialist

Lee Honda, Auburn

## **Lee Auto Malls**

Work-life balance for everyone in Sales, Service, Parts, Collision & Finance.



# **LEE**isfor**Me.**

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF COFFEE BY DESIGN



# HARVEST



For 25 years, Coffee By Design has gathered people together to connect over a cup of coffee. Thank you to the artists, dreamers, parents, students, business owners and civic leaders who have supported us!

**CELEBRATE WITH US ON SUNDAY, JUNE 30!**  
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