

IMMORE

EDITION 2023 — ISSUE 4



ORMOND GIGLI
GIRLS IN THE WINDOWS
AND OTHER STORIES



With Regard

It took me an instant to select the theme for this last issue of 2023, the last issue of my first year of this brand new magazine. Instinctually, I wanted to focus on preservation. My mind went to ending the year, reminiscing, thinking about the past, with reverie and reverence. The topic seemed just right to combine the warmth of tradition with the core of this publication: design and construction.

How do we decide what to keep and what to discard and why does it matter? Why do we care? At left is the fireplace in the front room of our home in Lenox, Massachusetts. When my husband and I embarked on rebuilding the house, we kept nearly nothing - except this beautiful handcarved mantel. The house had been built like a number of others on the street in the early part of the twentieth century by a millworker who lived in the neighborhood. We loved the chisel marks and knowing the details were unique to a time and a place. Everything around the mantel is new. With discretion, we built upon what was beautiful to create an entirely new, yet familiar space.

In this issue, I recruited a few unique voices for the conversation. I tried to avoid steering things in any one direction, and just let my collaborators flow. Ivana Rose Bramson of GLB Properties restores and preserves unique spaces across Los Angeles, Marc Heiman has his thumb on nearly every major building in Manhattan, including the landmark 92nd Street Y, and Matt Tannenbaum owns and operates his own landmark of sorts: a quintessentially New England bookstore in downtown Lenox - about a block from our home.

For me, the question of preservation comes down to the lens we apply to development in the US. So much of what is built seems to have planned obsolescence on its mind.

My opinion is strong on this: we should be building beautifully, and for permanence. And we should be questioning the rationale for any permanent development that does not require longevity for its success. What we build should be done *with regard*, with an authenticity of building material and structure that can remain, a reverie for craft, and with details that reveal time spent focusing on beauty *and* function.

I'm not suggesting any certain building type must prevail over another. I am suggesting a focus on excellence; a respect for the role buildings play in housing human activities and adding to the fabric of our culture. I don't want our culture to be defined by stucco, vinyl and flat. I want better than that. I want preservation of what's good and an attitude of building good in everything.

Is that too much to ask?



Founding Principal

EDITION 2023 Issue 4

4

41 STUDIOS

3 With Regard

6 Vegas

8 Vintage in LA

A Conversation with Ivana Rose Bramson, GLB Properties

16 Empire

A Conversation with Marc Heiman, Richter + Ratner

22 The Cozy Nook

A Conversation with Matt Tannenbaum, The Bookstore

28 Another World Entirely

41 Until Next Year...

MORE is a quarterly publication focused on design, real estate and construction, produced by 41 Studios.

41 Studios provides design and real estate advisory services for residential, corporate and commercial clients across the globe.

All details of this publication, including its design, photographic and written content, is original content, created by 41 Studios, unless credited specifically.

This issue was generated without robots or AI. My holiday gift to you.

© 2023 41 Studios, LLC. All rights reserved.



A sunny day at the Neon Museum, Las Vegas

Vegas

Las Vegas is a funny place.

Built in the middle of the desert, gleaming with modernity since its birth as a city in the early 1900's, Las Vegas is a place you either love or you hate. I've found there really is no in-between.

I am not a fan, generally. While some might tout the advancements the city has made in terms of efficiency or the limitless opportunities there are for creativity in the design of opulent mass entertainment venues, the entire place is contrived. It wouldn't exist without air conditioning, water pumped from hundreds of miles away and millions of tons of disposable parts and pieces that just get thrown in the trash.

That being said, Vegas is an important point of exploration when we talk about preservation. It's a place that is constantly reinventing itself. Buildings are imploded for the next new thing. Very little remains from even fifty years ago.

In graduate school, I read *Learning from Las Vegas*, an incredible critique of architecture, birthing the concept of the duck and the decorated shed aka the expression of form versus decoration.

What I loved most about the book was the catalogue of Las Vegas architecture and development. There are heaps of diagrams in the book noting building placement, sign placement, areas of asphalt versus undeveloped land - all along the Vegas Strip as it existed when the book was originally published in 1972.

Vegas is almost unrecognizable against the images in the book. It's fascinating as a critique in its own right: a symbol of the way America so often thinks

about building. Why construct something for permanence? When a new technology or fad comes along - whether successful in the long-run or not - let's chase it. Tear down the old. It's obsolete now.

These ideas are foreign to many cultures, not just for the waste of it all, but because buildings in other parts of the world are built to last with materials like stone and masonry and with details worth preserving. These structures remain hundreds if not thousands of years still performing the same function effectively - with maintenance, of course - while buildings in America are constructed and torn down at warp speed.

Going back to Vegas, I think about the **Neon Museum**, which is really worth a visit if you have not been. Housed within a fenced gravel yard on the outskirts of the city are the remnants of Vegas at every stage of its life; neon motel signs, diner signs, church signs - you name it. With changes in technology and in taste, these signs have been removed and replaced as the city expands in all directions.

The neon buzzes and the sun beats down and it is an extraordinary thing to behold. Ironically, there is permanence in these signs that were ripped off buildings, as they now sit on display for visitors to view as a collective history of the place - set aside, but not entirely left behind. Obsolete but not gone altogether.

This kind of reverence is very cool, but would be much cooler if it were simply a part of the way we build. What if we built, not to display vestiges in a museum, but so amazing things that last are cherished in situ, maintained so they remain?

Vintage in LA

A Conversation with Ivana Rose Bramson, GLB Properties

In a place that is defined by Hollywood, an industry of constant reinvention, GLB Properties stands quietly defiant against the machine. It is a family business that for nearly fifty years has been preserving the things that some have wanted to replace entirely.

Founded by Gene and Louise M. Bramson (GLB), daughter Ivana Rose now plays a significant role, helping increase the Los Angeles family business' presence across social media and digital platforms and expand work into other property types.

I started following GLB's work a few years ago, in the midst of the pandemic, when my husband and I were searching for some place warm to weather the storm of COVID. I stumbled upon GLB's Instagram, and was mesmerized by the collection of images showcasing dozens of 1920's and 1930's buildings the family has preserved and transformed over time.

Recently, I sat down with Ivana over sweet potato French fries at one of my favorite brunch spots in West Hollywood and we had a meeting of the minds. I don't know Ivana, but like seeing a familiar face, I feel like I know Ivana. Call us kindred spirits in our love of old beauty.

LA's history is so young. So many of the buildings Ivana and her parents have restored represent a living legacy of the film industry, having oftentimes been designed by set designers, and housing many creatives from the music and film industry. No doubt Hollywood is intertwined with every aspect of life in LA.

When it comes to preserving buildings, and architecture, once it's gone it's gone. Says Ivana, "Buildings are not reproducible. There is no carbon copy sitting in a library somewhere, able to be exhumed and re-experienced after death. Where would we be if through demolition, all we have left of the golden age of Hollywood architecture is a coffee table book?" I nod in agreement. She goes on.

"There's a difference between opening a book on architecture and going into a building, experiencing it and breathing in the history, feeling it, seeing the patina."

Photos and Illustrations by Gene and Ivana Rose Bramson









THE OLD TILE, IT
ALWAYS STAYS.
IF IT'S REALLY
CRACKED WE'LL
RESTORE IT. BUT
WE'LL NEVER RIP
IT OUT AND PUT IN
SOMETHING FROM
HOME DEPOT.

But preservation is difficult, and costly. “Many people don’t know what to do. And, honestly, it’s a lot cheaper to rip something out and put in whatever’s on sale at a big box store.” I empathize with Ivana’s observations completely. Many of my own clients call on me to reimagine existing homes or properties, which are more often than not several decades old. And it’s a tough conversation at times, determining what’s best to save and where to insert new.

GLB invests in its buildings. They do not flip. They maintain their properties, adding new assets into their portfolio as a pursuit of passion and genuine love of what they do. But there was a time when not everyone wanted to live in an old building. Not long ago, vintage had its limitations in terms of audience, especially in LA. Everyone seemed to want new.

GLB has always catered to creative types and considering location, creative types certainly abound. But when COVID hit, suddenly everyone seemed to be moving out. Ivana estimates they experienced more than a dozen lease termination notices within just a couple months. That’s when she got serious about showcasing the buildings through photography, and using social media to draw a much larger audience. Around the same time, Ivana launched ABODE LA, a project that documents the tie between spaces and the artists who inhabit them through photography, video tours and collaborations. There is an editorial quality about the photos – part portraiture, part architectural photography. Ironically, the new (i.e. social media) has helped save the old.

We talked about the challenges GLB faces. “It’s a lot of time. It’s a lot of patience. It’s expensive and it’s getting more and more expensive. We create a memorable, rich experience not available in contemporary structures.”

“If we’re renovating just one unit, it’s a lot. It’s a lot of people, specialists in cabinetry, wood finishing, older plumbing, all kinds of restoration. I mean, everyone we work with is a specialist in their field. And that

comes at a cost. And it takes time. We work with artists. We do not just rip things out, stick something back in. Sometimes details are painstakingly rebuilt or replaced in the original manner. It’s really a labor of love. How do we decide what stays and what goes? It’s really intuitive. It’s what speaks to you and what will create an emotional connection with a future renter.”

Many of GLB’s listings prominently feature the original kitchens and baths of each unit. I remark on how gorgeous the color combinations and tile details often are. “The old tile, it always stays. If it’s really cracked, we’ll restore it. But we will never rip it out and put in something from Home Depot.”

I ask Ivana what drew her parents to restore properties from such a specific time period – the 1920’s and 1930’s. “The buildings are more glamorous, more exciting. When my mom and dad started buying buildings, midcentury modern was boring and dated. Of course, now there is an appreciation for that style, but at the time not as much.”

Ivana and her parents grew up close to where they now invest. Gene is a second generation Los Angeles native, although Louise is originally from Memphis, Tennessee. They’ve had their office building, built in 1929, in its same location since 1980. It’s clear LA is their town and it’s in their blood. (Speaking of blood – ask Ivana about her parents’ role in the original slasher flick *Halloween!*)

Reflecting on restoration as an art, I had to understand whether any mistakes have been made along the way. “Well, you can only really do things once and restoration is as much art as it is anything. We did a project from the 1920’s and I was really inspired by San Miguel de Allende – a town in Mexico. We pulled this inspiration into the building, riffing on the building’s original Spanish style. Things I picked out initially were great but by the end of the job I had already evolved and could see designing certain aspects of the space differently. But that is just how it goes in a creative field”.

“You can’t go wrong as long as you’re having fun. We really don’t have many regrets.”

LA’s construction climate is becoming more challenging. Permitting is taking much longer, costs are going up constantly, and local preservation groups are scrutinizing details like they never had before. Ivana remarks that she is seeing more attention being paid to the preservation of buildings in LA, in general.

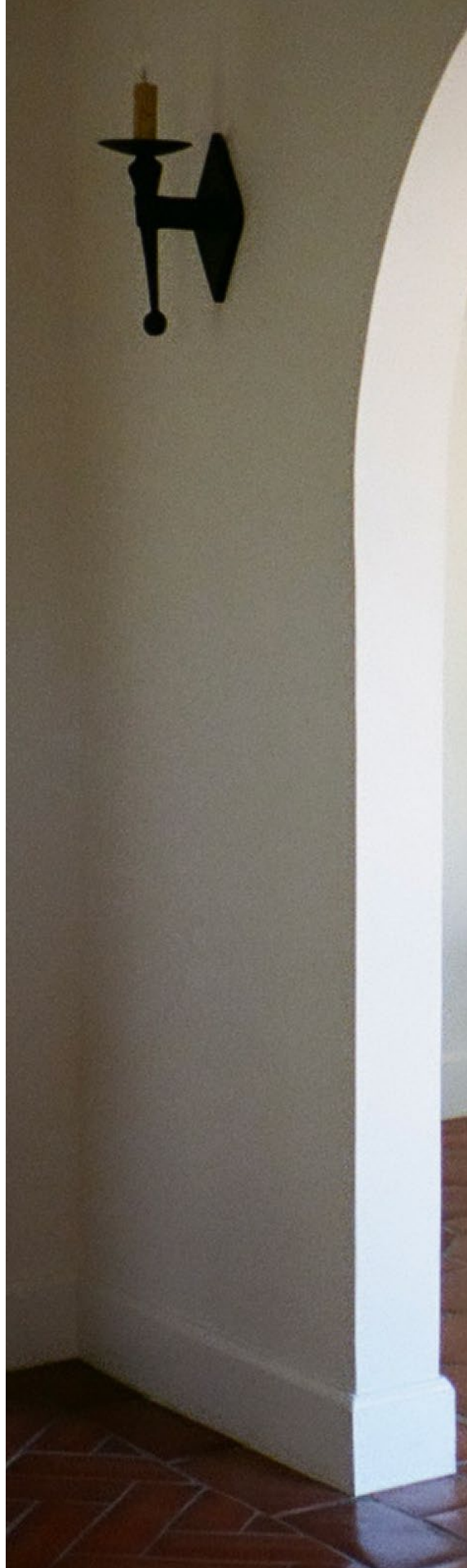
GLB’s buildings have appeared in many films and they welcome filming now. Their building on Rossmore is very close to Paramount. Set designers, costume designers lived there. Mae West and Marilyn Monroe at one time lived across the street. But GLB honors their tenant’s privacy. The company is almost discreet, flying under the radar of the flashier, modern development companies, and this adds another layer of discernment onto the work that they do. It’s understated. GLB reveals the old glamour without being flashy.

“We love what we do. We put a lot of passion and heart into it. We keep it exciting and we hope to always be able to do that.”

I asked Ivana her thoughts on development that appears to be knocking down buildings left and right in LA, especially the areas they focus on, like Hancock Park and West Hollywood where GLB’s office stands.

“It’s literally altering the landscape of the city. You drive down what used to be quaint streets full of these cute Spanish bungalows and one by one they are being ripped apart to make way for giant McMansions with vinyl windows and luxury wood vinyl pattern floors. It’s already too late. You can’t go back, you know?”

The sense of urgency in her tone strikes me. That passion is so needed, now more than ever. I never thought I would say I appreciate a monopoly, but I kind of hope GLB buys a few city blocks and just keeps going. They know what they’re doing and I am here for that.





Empire

A Conversation with Marc Heiman, Richter + Ratner

In 1853, George Washington's majestic home in Mount Vernon was falling apart. After Congress refused to take steps to save the mansion, a group of women took up the cause and founded the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. They raised \$200,000, purchased the 1799 mansion (and 200 acres), and began what is widely considered one of the first historic preservation efforts in America.

It took more than one hundred years for the preservation movement to catch on, but catch on it did. In 1961, New York City Mayor Wagner formed the Mayor's Committee for the Preservation of Structures of Historic and Esthetic Importance, the precursor to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) which was founded in 1962. In 1965, the New York City Landmarks Law was enacted "to protect historic landmarks and neighborhoods from precipitate decisions to destroy or fundamentally alter their character." As of February 1, 2022, Landmarks, as the agency is known, has designated more than 37,800 properties throughout New York City's five boroughs landmark properties, meaning that Landmarks has a say in how they exist, from granting permission to wash the façade to what color to paint the door.

"I love to build, so it doesn't matter where I show up," says Marc Heiman, president and CEO of Richter & Ratner Builders (R&R), in NYC since 1911. "I love the smell of construction and watching things come together piece by piece. New York is not an easy

place to build. If there were no regulations, and it was just about money, you wouldn't walk down Fifth Avenue and see St. Patrick's Cathedral, because dollars would dictate that it comes down and a high rise goes up. The city would not look the same without people to protect it."

That protection takes time and money. In 1998, a devastating fire destroyed the interior space of Central Synagogue in midtown Manhattan. During the two-and-a-half-year renovation, Heiman flew to England to find the exact tiles that were used in the original construction. "They wanted to bring back the fabric of the structure," he recalls. "We had to find wood trusses and framing for the roof that matched the original. We put everything back the way it was when it was built in 1870, before the fire."

South Street Seaport in lower Manhattan, a fishing port in the 1800s, is largely Landmarks protected and an example of how history prevailed over high rents. "You don't want to rip that down and start throwing up high rises," Heiman acknowledges. "There is only one Seaport, one fish market built like that. It brings a lot of character to that area."

Character or not, he's seen how the combination of limited space and LPC restrictions cause developers to get their creative on, especially in Times Square, where a number of Landmarks designated buildings sit in a very busy retail area. Heiman explains how the

New York is not an
easy place to build.
If... it was just about
money, you wouldn't
walk down Fifth
Avenue and see
St. Patrick's Cathedral...
The city would not
look the same without
people to protect it.

LPC would not allow the historic 1913 Palace Theater at 47th Street and 7th Avenue to be demolished but did allow the 5-million-pound building to be jacked up 30 feet while a retail complex was built below, and a hotel above . . . R&R was not involved, but I doubt there is a builder in the world not impressed by this one, resulting in a massive 46-story multi-use complex—TSX Broadway—that is due to open in early 2024.

If creativity was key in preserving the Palace Theater, renovation was the focus when building the Toys “R” Us flagship store, also in Times Square. In 2001, Heiman and his former company gutted the 160,000 square foot former movie theater complex (not Landmarks designated), to create a shopping experience that included a life-size Barbie dreamhouse, a 34-foot animatronic T-Rex, and a 60-foot-tall indoor Ferris wheel. “We had to straighten the slanted theater floors,” he says. “It was fun, different, scary, and almost impossible.”

In 2015, when Toys “R” Us closed its doors Heiman, now with R&R, put structure back in at least half of the building to create retail spaces and restaurants. Barbie and Ken couldn’t convince Landmarks to protect the Dreamhouse, although I hear they rebuilt in Malibu, big, pink, and, as of last summer, on Airbnb.

Being in the business for as long as he has, Heiman has put back jobs that he’s taken apart and has taken apart jobs that he’s put together. “That’s the great thing about what we do,” he says. “It’s so visible and tangible. Everywhere you go you see something that you did or were involved with.

“Preservation is one of the sectors. I have faster paced, complicated, challenging work in my blood. I like to mix it up. If a project has restoration on it, we’ll work around it. If it’s Landmark, we will meet their standards and specifications. Depending on the level of restoration, we work with architects who have some knowledge of the building, or with historic consultants. Restoration architects often work on local, public projects, scaffolding buildings and checking façades

for missing grout or bricks. Preservationists will peel 40 layers of paint to see what the original was or go back to the archives and discover that a chain link fence used to be cast iron. So, you put back the cast iron. It’s a tedious process.”

What is Heiman’s personal style? “It depends on what area I’m in,” he says after a moment. “Billionaires Row (ultra luxury residential skyscrapers at the southern end of Central Park) were regular brownstones 15 years ago. Some are obnoxious, but some fit, and you get used to it. I’m a builder and want to preserve what we build.”

Heiman acknowledges that without historical buildings, New York would be a different place. Today, the city’s various enclaves have an old-school vibe, which appeals to tourists and residents alike, and LPC’s criteria—a building being at least 30 years old and having historical or aesthetic interest as part of the heritage or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation—is a big reason why.

“Restoration is a totally different passion,” he says again. “It’s tedious and slow going—hiding heating ducts with a soffit in a plastered ceiling; finding windows that exactly match the original; building an ADA ramp of wood in a challenging location.”

At the end of the day, Marc is a builder and restoration is part of what R&R does. Being in NYC, it has to be. Would he like to build only new? It depends. Does he appreciate everything about the Landmarks system? Probably not, but that depends too. Construction is a game of dependencies.

While LPC works to preserve the character of a building, the feel of a neighborhood, builders, like Heiman and R&R, play an important role in both preserving history and building to the needs of an evolving economy and the society it supports. Neither is easy, and the city will never look the same to me again.







SERVICES TIMES
SUNDAY 10.30am
MONDAY 8.00am
TUESDAY 8.00am
WEDNESDAY 8.00am
THURSDAY 8.00am
FRIDAY 8.00am
SATURDAY 8.00am



DECEMBER
S M T W T F S S
1 2
3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10 11 12 13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20 21 22 23
24 25 26 27 28 29 30
31

Calendar by
The Quince
Studio
Shelburne, VT



HELLO
BOOKSTORE

Included in *Woman's*
10 Best Finds of 2012

of FORTY

Widely praised and much recommended, it takes on
the conventional wisdom of all that are directed
through another life. — *Christa Wolf*

The New York Times

A volume in the line of reading with the pleasure of a
securely locked bookcase. "Unconventional" reading for
the most in a wonderful way to learn. — *Lee Rosen*

How Reading on Apple and Pear
More on the bookcase

The Cozy Nook

A Conversation with Matt Tannenbaum, The Bookstore

What does Matt Tannenbaum, owner of The Bookstore in Lenox, Massachusetts since 1976, think about preservation? Really? Just walk into his store and you'll know. No, just stand on the street and LOOK at his store and you'll know. But you're here and he's there and so I will tell you...rather, he will tell you. Because in addition to books and reading, he preserves the art of storytelling. So read between the lines...his thoughts on preservation are everywhere.

In the beginning, when Tannenbaum was 25, he walked into a NYC bookstore where a conversation led him to Gotham Book Mart (1920-2007), the legendary midtown Manhattan bookstore and cultural landmark. He fell in love with the place, and it's where he got his start as a "bookman," later writing *My Years at The Gotham Book Mart*, another story for another time.

This bookman is full of stories . . . he worked the Gotham table at the 92nd Street Y for readings by the likes of Anne Sexton and Alan Ginsberg . . . he bought The Bookstore from David Silverstein who started selling books from his Stockbridge home in the 60s. . . he created The Bookstore's Get Lit wine bar in 2010, in honor of his friend, WW II Czech POW, and, I get the feeling, drinking buddy . . . he tried in 2019 to save Lenox's Cozy Nook, a "summer cottage" built in 1862, where he lived when he first came to the Berkshires (his hand made wooden sign--The Cozy Nook—now sits in The Bookstore) . . . he played a

king in Shakespeare & Company's *Henry the Fifth* . . . he is the subject of the 2021 film *Hello, Bookstore* that premiered at BIFF (Berkshire International Film Festival), in Manhattan, LA, Boston, Washington, Cleveland, Detroit, England, AND on Virgin Atlantic international flights.

None of it would have happened without Tannenbaum's fierce dedication to preservation—of himself, of his business, of the written word.

"Books have been around for about 600 years," he begins. "That's all. But it's longer than our current lifespan. It's our history. Before there were books, there were storytellers. Today's storytellers put their life, their approach, their vision into books."

"Reading is the goal," he continues. "Reading is the activity that we are preserving. What I'm preserving in The Bookstore is the experience of having a book. People walk in and say that it smells like books. When Powell's Books in Oregon put out a book scent, I tried it, but it didn't work." (Maybe because The Bookstore already smelled like books!?)

According to this bookstore owner, new ways of reading—audiobooks and Kindle—are not the same as reading a book. Full disclosure, I love audiobooks...they make long commutes and walks easier. But I get it. You're not holding it in your hand, there is little sense of the end of a chapter or of the book, and there is no book smell.

“We’ve grown up with books,” says Tannenbaum. “We’ve had a sense of books from the beginning. It’s a visceral thing. A lot of people are looking to experience that while doing other things. I can’t do that. Driving is my downtime.”

Tannenbaum’s favorite book is *Little Big* by John Crowley. The author lived around the corner, and the two men chatted regularly during its development. The story, a fantasy novel about a family with access to the world of fairies and elves, is fascinating, he says, but the writing is what does it, and starts quoting, “Far down the hole Sophie dreamed there was a tiny door, opened with her elbow, opened a crack through which the wind blew, blowing on her heart.”

He named his daughter Sophie after that character.

“Let’s talk context,” he says abruptly. “Context gives you deeper meaning. Words in a book, in a story, send you down a rabbit hole, where you find a memory. Books do that.

“Many people walk around the store and say to me (now bite your tongue), ‘How cute is this?’ or ‘How quaint you are,’ which is only two degrees better. But what they mean is, this is something old, something I never imagined I could experience. This is real. It’s their connection to preservation. This is why I love to work here. I am involved with transmitting stories from writers who are people, to people who are readers. A book is not finished until the reader gets it. Emerson said, ‘Tis a good reader who makes a good book.’”

Preserving reading for nearly 50 years is not easy he admits. “I was in debt from the moment I bought the business, but I was doing what I love. We would not have survived COVID without GoFundMe. We asked for \$60,000 to keep The Bookstore going and got it in 23 hours. And then we doubled it.”

As the recipient of such generosity, Tannenbaum donated \$1,000 to the renovation of The Triplex Cinema in the neighboring town of Great Barrington, which was in danger of demolition. Preservation

begets preservation.

When asked about preservation in the town of Lenox, he showed me an 1819 quote about the town. *Lenox is a town of uncommon beauty. A gem among the mountains.* “But,” he goes on, “it’s under attack by developers who have a utilitarian vision. There are new buildings in town built on the footprint of older buildings, but they are false. They say they are paying homage, but they’re not.

“There are people in the Historic Society and on the Historical Commission who are interested in preservation, and there are rules. New store owners are asked about the color of their doors and awnings and told that neon signs are not allowed, grandfather laws notwithstanding (sometimes). So, there are squabbles.”

What there is no squabbling about is the future of The Bookstore. Tannenbaum, who is quick to say that he’s still a young man, explains that his daughter, Shawnee, is poised to take over. She lives in Lenox and works in the store part time. “She doesn’t have my 50 years’ worth of book knowledge,” he points out, “She has her *own* knowledge and her *own* schmoozing ability. She’s going to be fine.”

“Remember the *Whole Earth Catalog?*” he says suddenly as the thought enters. “*CoEvolution Quarterly* (1974-1984) was a journal created by the *Whole Earth Catalog*’s founder, Stewart Brand. We carried it here. There was a story in it about an old school in England with a timber lot on the property. New owners asked around to see why the oak trees stood near the school. An old guy who worked in the cafeteria told them-- to replace the beams in the dining hall.

“The preservation was built in. That’s what you want to do. You want to build in for the future, like raising my daughters here in the store.”

There you have it. Preserve what you love, in a place that you love, with people that you love, and don’t give up. Lots of legacies in progress.

WHAT I'M
PRESERVING
IN THE
BOOKSTORE
IS THE
EXPERIENCE
OF HAVING
A BOOK.





classicimage

MOLESKINE MOLESKINE

SH
The Art of War
The Art of War
The Art of War

SWEET WILLIAM

MOLESKINE

MOLESKINE

volant

MOLESKINE

MOLESKINE



MOLESKINE

MOLESKINE

MOLESKINE

MOLESKINE

MOLESKINE



Another World Entirely

In 2021, I was in the midst of a research project regarding an old gas station in my town. The property was sold and the building is being redeveloped from a towing and service center to a convenience store. The property is blighted, to say the least, with roof elements damaged and falling off, and junk piled up around all sides of the nondescript mechanic shop. Every time I walk by, I just shake my head. This little dilapidated property is on a corner of the bustling and historic downtown Village of Lenox, founded in the early 1700's and full of charm.

The town has such a storied past; so many people of note flocked to Lenox to build homes and settle in to the rustic beauty of the Berkshires. The industrialist Andrew Carnegie died at his estate in Lenox. Edith Wharton wrote most of her books at her home in town - The Mount.

A significant period for Lenox was The Cottage Era, a time between the late 1800's and early 1900's, when wealthy residents who came to settle in town were referred to as Cottagers. Books have been written on the architectural significance of the homes, deemed The Great Estates and which are now protected under town by-laws. Like so many others, the town and its architectural features have been transformed over many, many years. And I've had a fascination with every part of that history.

In my research on the gas station, I tried to find its original identity, thinking perhaps the building could be transformed back into one of the quirky designs from the 1950's or 60's. I enlisted the help of the Lenox Library and they introduced me to a fabulous website of old photos of the town. As I flipped through the nearly 1500 images, I came across many I hadn't even seen in the books I've read. And so, on the following pages are just a handful of images harkening to an entirely other time in Lenox.

Photos Courtesy of the Lenox Library Association



Coldbrook. The estate changed hands many times since it's construction, at once becoming a Jesuit seminary. The buildings now house Miraval, a destination spa and hotel.



The hall at Blantyre, an estate built in 1910 and modeled after Scottish hunting lodges. A previous estate was demolished to make way for the home at the turn of the twentieth century. It is now a Relais & Chateaux property.



Butternut Cottage, a diminutive home built downtown.



Elm Court, currently under restoration. This cottage is the largest Shingle style home in America. It was designed by Peabody and Sterns with grounds by Frederick Law Olmstead. Recently acquired by new owners, there are plans to preserve the property, reimagining it as a luxury resort and spa similar to the Lenox outposts of Canyon Ranch and Miraval.



The front approach to Spring Lawn. This estate was recently scheduled to be subdivided into condos. It sits vacant, time erasing its beauty with each passing day.



A covered porch at Erskine Park. Sadly, while many of the Great Estates have been maintained, this original estate was demolished and reinvented over the years. The site now houses a condo development.



A rear porch at Spring Lawn, overlooking the mountains in the distance.



A grand room at Elm Court. Having had a chance to tour the site a few years ago, the room still looks like this. Although there is an entire wing vacant and left in ruin, many of the homes interior rooms have been preserved.



A lawn at Shadowbrook, Andrew Carnegie's 'cottage', built in 1893. The original cottage was the largest home in America until the Biltmore, in Asheville, North Carolina, was built. The home burned to the ground in the 1950's. In its place sits an international yoga retreat - Kripalu. The original foundation is still visible on the grounds.



The front approach to Ventfort Hall. The estate was built for members of J.P. Morgan's family in 1893. This estate was used in several feature films, including *The Cider House Rules*, and is now open to the public as a museum.



The main staircase at Ventfort Hall. It looks pretty much the same today, although the furnishings have long since been removed.



The John Thompson
SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKS FOR PIANO

Until Next Year...

The images at left and right are of our home in Lenox. Everything you see is new, except the wood floor, my husband, and my design assistant Maggie. The home has been a decade long journey for us, beginning with massive renovations in 2013 and continuing with an addition to the house in 2021.

As my test lab, the design priority for this house was to create a seamless flow of living spaces, such that every space looked like it could have been there all along - modern, but very much timeless. The original house had a beautiful heart pine floor - 2 1/2" wide planks in the living areas, and 4" planks in the kitchen buried beneath 3 layers of tile we tore off during our first rounds of demolition.

I searched high and low for the right source of wood to match what would remain original. All of our 'new' wood floors were salvaged from shipyards in Hingham, Massachusetts. Where we could we pieced in old floor with floor we removed from other areas. In the second floor primary suite, we had a unique blend of over 10 different hardwoods. I was able to source salvaged pieces to match the unique patterning in the guest suite we added on that same floor, providing just the right character so no part of the house looked truly new.


Preserving what's good is an art. The same can be said about developing a new site so that it honors its setting: taking cues from the best features of the landscape, the neighborhood.

I hope this issue allowed you to reminisce, reflect and consider opportunities of preservation in everything you do. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and stay tuned for my next issue in 2024!

Much love and hugs.



41 Studios, LLC
41studiosdesign.com

 @41studiosdesign

