

JULY | AUGUST 2015

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COMING IN OUR SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER ISSUE:

SageArts is a group of musicians with a special purpose: to celebrate the lives and wisdom of our elders in song. This intergenerational arts project encourages social inclusion and dignity for senior citizens and has been life-changing for many elders.

Maverick at 100

It began as an artist colony in Woodstock in 1915 by Hervey White, a bit of a maverick himself. White's "music chapel" has remained an Ulster County treasure, one with rustic ambience and exquisite sound.

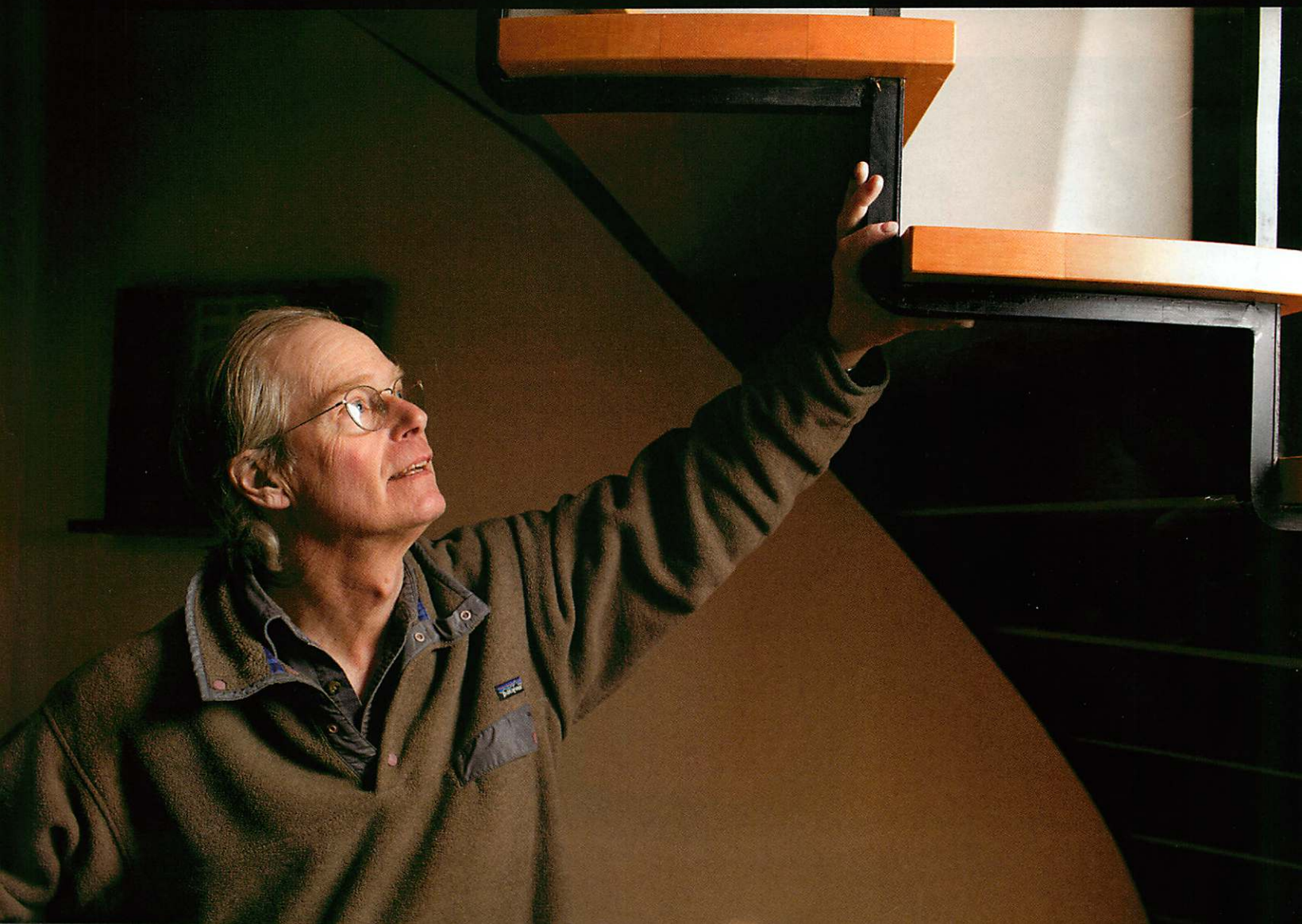
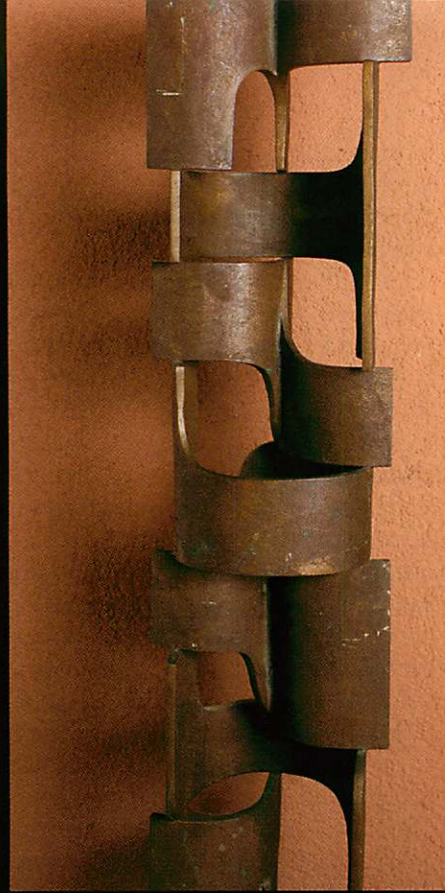
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Have questions or comments?

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For advertising, contact Anthony McFarlane at 346-3016 or amcfarlane@th-record.com. Advertising deadline for our Sept./Oct. issue is July 15.

Photo by Michael Bloom



A MAKER OF THINGS

Furniture, houses – even a man-sized Weeble:
Ulster Park’s Robert Hare creates it all.

By Deborah J. Botti
Photography by Michael Bloom

For as far back as he can remember, Rob Hare of Ulster Park has always been a hands-on kind of guy, hailing from a hands-on kind of family.

In 1960, Hare’s father - a poet, painter and playwright - bought a three-acre island in Maine dotted with lobster pots and three small cabins where the family, which included four children, could enjoy a contrast to their Connecticut home.

“The main house was 15 by 30 feet,” says Hare. “And then there was the 10-by-12 honeymoon cabin. That couple brought the pieces and reassembled the cabin on their honeymoon and lived there for three years.”

Hare, who spent entire summers as an islander from the age of 10 through high school, says it would never enter their minds to call for help. Instead, they rolled up their sleeves and did what needed to be done to make their summer house a home. They cleaned, and they got creative. Driftwood became tables, for example.

“And I even rebuilt a boat, which became my boat when I was 16,” he says.

While attending High Mowing School, a Waldorf high school in Wilton, N.H. – with only 90 students and a saw mill – Hare rebuilt an antique car and was introduced to metalwork and carving. He took welding classes in graduate school and dabbled in bronze

casting. By 1974, he earned a master of fine arts in sculpture from the University of Cincinnati.

“But now I had to earn a living,” he says of his employment, first in structural steel welding with Millens Steel in Kingston, then as a carpenter. To honor his creative side, he also taught sculpture at the Wooster School in Connecticut.

The self-described “maker of things” says he scraped along for a number of years. But just like the painstakingly precise process of crafting a piece of furniture, so, too, did the maker have to pursue his path.

“I had made friends with people from the city in the ’70s who are still close friends, and they recommended me to possible clients,” he says.

So Hare got his feet wet in the early ’80s with commissions for built-ins and cabinetry in Manhattan apartments. And then he’d be referred, say, to the adjoining apartment owner.

“Jobs started coming in,” he says.

“In ’86, the entry doors of the Hotel Des Artistes were falling apart,” he says of the job that not only led to other door commissions in New York City, but caught the attention of some of its residents.

Renowned shoe designer Maud Frizon, who designed boots for Brigitte Bardot, was a close friend with a Des Artiste’s client, he says.

“After I reconstructed Frizon’s apartment, then I

◀ Rob Hare forged heart-form steel andirons, above, as a Valentine’s present for his wife, Iza Trapani. At right is a partial view of “8 Piece Totem,” an abstract sculpture that he modeled and cast as part of his graduate thesis show.



Clockwise, from top: an overhead view of the living area; a coffee table made of forged steel and tiger figure maple wood. The table pieces, steel and top fit together without fasteners to create the whole; a claro walnut armchair with leather cushions and hand-forged steel legs and support structure.



Hare designed and built the 50-foot-diameter studio/workshop in 2001; he and a friend are rebuilding the tractor.



“My hands were involved in virtually every aspect of construction. I see design and construction as a whole piece, a continuum, in New Age parlance.”

Rob Hare

did showcases for her,” Hare says.

And as the real estate market began to tank in the 1980s, demand for built-ins ebbed, but requests for furniture flowed.

“I built a bed in ’72, which was really terrible. It’s amazing that it stood up,” he says.

Another of his early pieces was an oak bench, which he still has, that features a slab of wood.

Neither reflects what he has become known for: a piece of furniture that is also a work of art. Today, most are a mix of metal and wood, although early on it was mostly wood. And he’s in the midst of a spec piece with no wood at all - just a glass tabletop supported by sculptural metal legs.

“If I’m going to call it furniture, it must function. Then we can talk sculpture,” says Hare, who nevertheless admits to seeing a connection to his roots as a sculptor.

Along with durability and aesthetics, another unique feature is that the pieces come apart.

“The furniture is designed to knock down,” says Hare. “I started in New York, working with small freight elevators, or a 36-inch door that’s hard to fit through. ... So you can unbolt the legs, take the back off or lift up the table ... There’s a video that gives instructions on how to re-assemble.”

Furniture-making, then, evolved to become as natural a fit as custom-made boots, and one that he soon came to prefer to art. Not only was his creative side nourished, but he got to meet people, especially after 23 years of participation in a trade show.

Hare was first juried into the Philadelphia Furniture Show, now known as the Philadelphia Invitational Furniture Show, in 1994. In mid-April, he rented the maximum-size booth to showcase four large pieces this year, including an 8-foot dining room table and 7-foot sideboard. Representations such as these frequently pique interest and prompt inquiry into what

might be customized.

He recalls clients he met at a show who were interested in a large bed. As he was writing up the order, they disappeared. The following year, he sent them an invitation to the show and a photo of the bed he made with them in mind.

They didn’t come.

But two weeks later, they ordered the bed and then later, bedside tables.

Hare understands.

People are not just buying a piece of furniture; they are creating their family’s history. And oftentimes, a decision such as that cannot be rushed.

Hare reflects on his grandmother’s table, which is now in his kitchen.

“Yes, it’s funky,” he says. “My dad had it on his porch ... it’s beautiful, and there is a visceral connection to the piece. ... Even the damage becomes part of the family memories.”

So when Hare sells a table, he encourages

that it be used, not covered.

"It will stand the abuse," he says. "And if need be, it's thick enough so that it can be refinished."

But he's hoping that the dings and dents might come to be looked upon with fondness – not as damage to the piece but as a testament to the life that happened around it.

And tables barely scratch the surface of the furniture he has created.

He recalls a secretary with a drop-front desk and steel accents that contemporized the traditional piece. One of his repeat clients was visiting him at that show in Philadelphia, with no intention of buying.

"He told me he heard his wife suck in air when she saw this piece – and he knew he was done for," Hare says.

Sure, that kind of compliment makes him smile, but it's not just about the sale, he says.

Hare is committed to his work for the long haul.

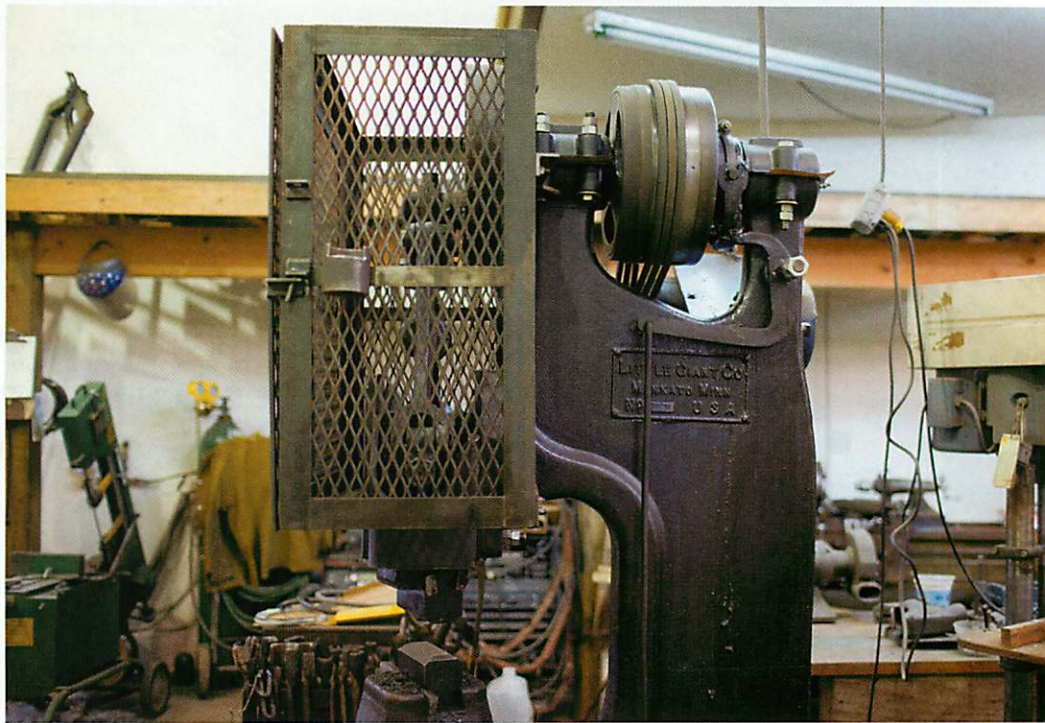
One client experienced a house fire. And although the furniture was not damaged, it had to be moved to another part of the house. Hare's son was nearby, in college. Hare asked his son to go help them, at no charge.

Hare, too, has been known to disassemble and reassemble his pieces to assist with a move.

Because just as his father allowed the fishermen to continue to fish off the island in Maine that he purchased, so, too, does Hare regard his clients as more than customers. Many have become friends.

And the "maker of things" isn't just building furniture. He makes door handles, pot racks, candlesticks, shaving cream bowls – and even a human-sized Weeble, made with hundreds of pounds of molten lead, cast aluminum, ski boots, memory foam and a plastic elephant's circus ball. Yes, the performer-client, after being carefully contained in the Weeble, can wobble

Top: Hare designed and built this winding staircase in his home. The staircase was a challenge, he says, because he wanted the steps to stand out individually. "I understood the math but the interaction of wood and metal was a trick." **Center:** Hare's power hammer, a 100-pound "Little Giant" manufactured in 1914. **Bottom:** The bedroom features a queen-sized sleigh bed with eight drawers that is designed to rest against walls as well as in the middle of the room.



but won't fall down.

Oh, and he and his wife, Iza Trapani Hare, who publishes children's books under the name of Iza Trapani, designed and helped build the Tuscan farmhouse-style home that they have enjoyed since April 2000.

"My hands were involved in virtually every aspect of construction," Hare says. "I see design and construction as a whole piece, a continuum, in New Age parlance. The stairs stand out and took a lot of thought. The kitchen cabinets were designed to fit the feel of the house."

He had planned on making those cabinets; however, a badly broken wrist dictated that he pass the design/construction drawings along to a friend.

"There are many aspects of the house that reflect my aesthetic," he says. "The doors, the hardware, the stairs, the interior construction, window details, stone details."

And, of course, the furnishings.

That same attention to detail and authenticity also can be found, albeit on a smaller scale, on the family island in Maine, which Hare has now taken over.

"I've replaced most of the windows and doors ... and re-sided with cedar shingles,

Furniture facts

Claro walnut can cost \$10,000 a plank.

And when he can, Rob Hare will buy a whole log – not necessarily of claro walnut but perhaps something indigenous to the Hudson Valley that a Hyde Park tree surgeon might recommend for repurposing. That gives Hare flexibility. He can make the table that's commissioned today and have the same wood a year or two down the line to craft the accompanying chairs or sideboard.

Because of his 30 or so repeat customers, most will purchase six or seven pieces over the years, he says.

Communication is critical. How many people do you want to be able to sit around the Thanksgiving table? How many pieces do you ultimately envision in your bedroom? A series of proposals and architectural drawings will ensure that Hare and his clients are on the same page.

Next comes patience. A dining room table can take a couple of months to complete; likewise, for a dresser. Couches and chairs take time, too,

and require upholstery pieces as well.

"The cushions are included, but the covering is not," says Hare of work that he subcontracts. "Some fabric can be four times the price of leather (and either is provided at cost)."

In his expansive warehouse with multiple stations, including a 100-year-old hammer machine, Hare fabricates just about everything else.

"I'm making my own plywood from scratch. I make the pulls, the hinges. I make the drawer slides. I never think to go to the hardware store," Hare says. "And it's not necessarily size – but complexity – that influences price."

Dining room chairs start at \$1,700, and a dining room table with four drawers at about \$25,000. An armchair averages about \$16,000. Along with complexity of the piece, the hardwood and fabric selected also will affect the price.

For more information, visit robhare-furniture-maker.com.

the same as what was there when we got there," he says. "I installed a solar-power system 30-plus years ago that is invisible from the water."

And just like Hare, his son, too, heeds the

island's call each summer.

Because this is what the "maker of all things" does: honors the past by present actions so as to engage generations to come. ■



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"For many potential buyers,
a solar lease is a liability
rather than an asset.
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what they're signing."

-Bloomberg Business News
(June 24, 2014)

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