

Compliments of Kris Cawley

AMERICAN LIFESTYLE

THE MAGAZINE CELEBRATING LIFE IN AMERICA

ISSUE 89



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A TOUCH OF SOUTHERN CHARM

PAGE 36 Lauren Nicole Designs



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6 generations of glass

18 all aboard the ghost train

ISSUE 89
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American Lifestyle

magazine

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American Lifestyle is a celebration of the flavor and flair of life in the United States, and takes you on a journey of the nation's sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. This publication features articles on interior design, travel, technology, restaurants, and culture. Entertaining writing coupled with gorgeous photography makes this magazine a fun read.

I hope you will enjoy receiving this magazine periodically and that you will allow me to provide great service to you in the future. Please feel free to share this issue with friends and colleagues.

Thank you again for keeping me in mind.

Sincerely
Kris Cawley



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TAKING PERFECTION



Front of Tear Out Card 1

roasted eggplant PESTO PASTA

3 cups (1-inch) cubed unpeeled eggplant (from about 1 pound eggplant)

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon kosher salt

½ teaspoon black pepper

1 cup halved cherry tomatoes

½ cup halved pitted kalamata olives

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

¼ cup whole blanched almonds

1 tablespoon capers, drained

(continued on other side)





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Back of Tear Out Card 1



(ingredients continued)

2 teaspoons chopped fresh garlic

½ cup firmly packed fresh basil leaves, plus more for garnish

¼ cup firmly packed fresh oregano leaves

¼ cup firmly packed fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

½ tablespoon fresh lemon juice

1 (16-ounce) package rotini pasta

½ cup feta cheese, cut into cubes

1. Preheat the oven to 475°F. Toss the eggplant with the 2 tablespoons olive oil, salt, and pepper; spread on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake until the eggplant is slightly tender, about 20 minutes.

2. Add the tomatoes and olives to the baking sheet, and bake until the tomatoes begin to burst and the eggplant is tender, about 5 minutes.

3. Process the 1/2 cup olive oil, almonds, capers, and garlic in a blender until smooth. Add the basil, oregano, and parsley; process just until smooth. Stir in the lemon juice.

4. Cook the pasta in salted water according to the package directions; drain. Toss the hot cooked pasta with the roasted vegetables, pesto mixture, and feta. Sprinkle with the basil leaves and serve.

Cooking Tip: You don't have to, but I like to sweat eggplant to release extra water: Slice the eggplant and lay slices on a wire rack. Sprinkle with salt and let stand for 30 minutes. Pat dry and go to Step 1.

serves 4

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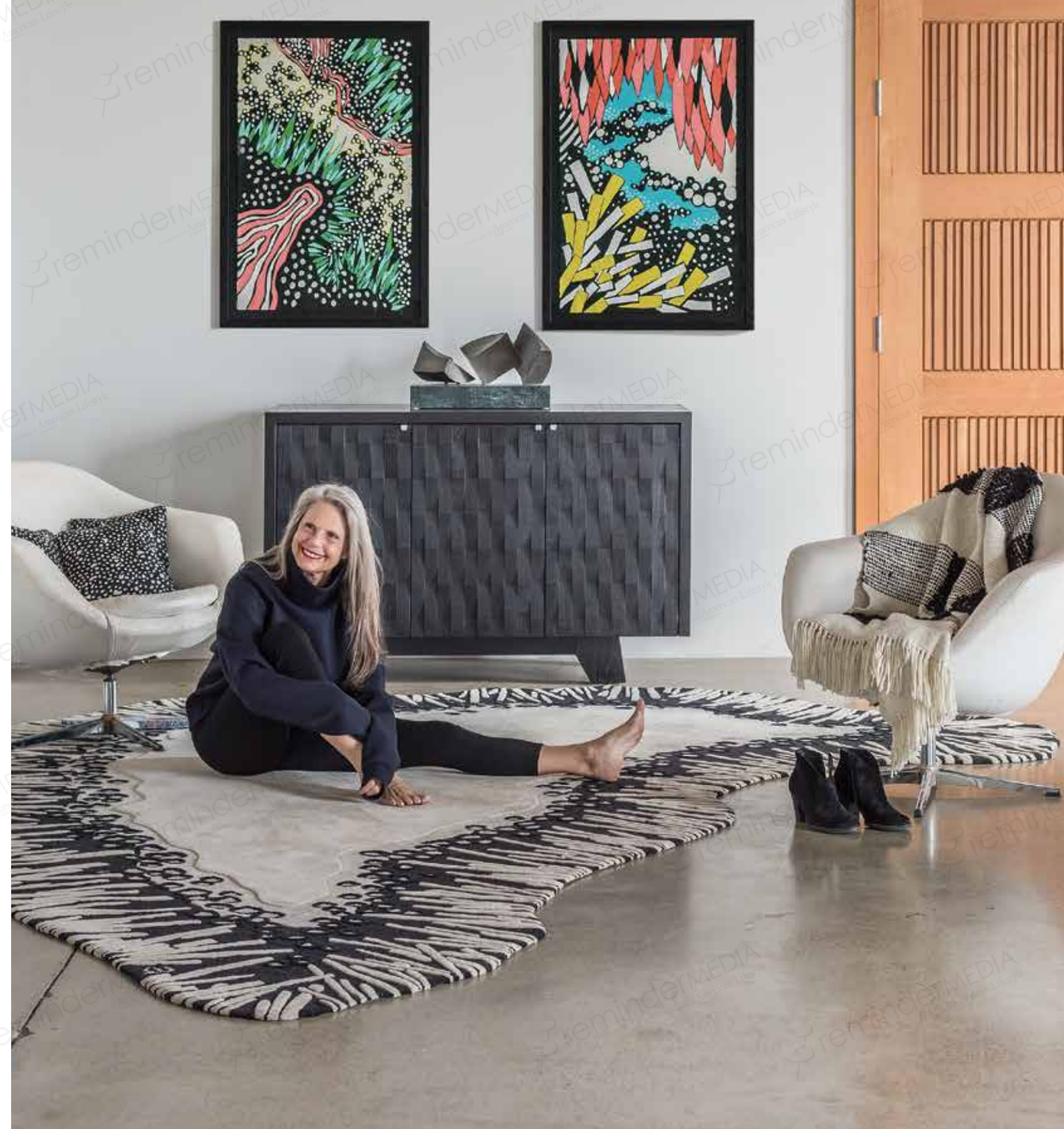


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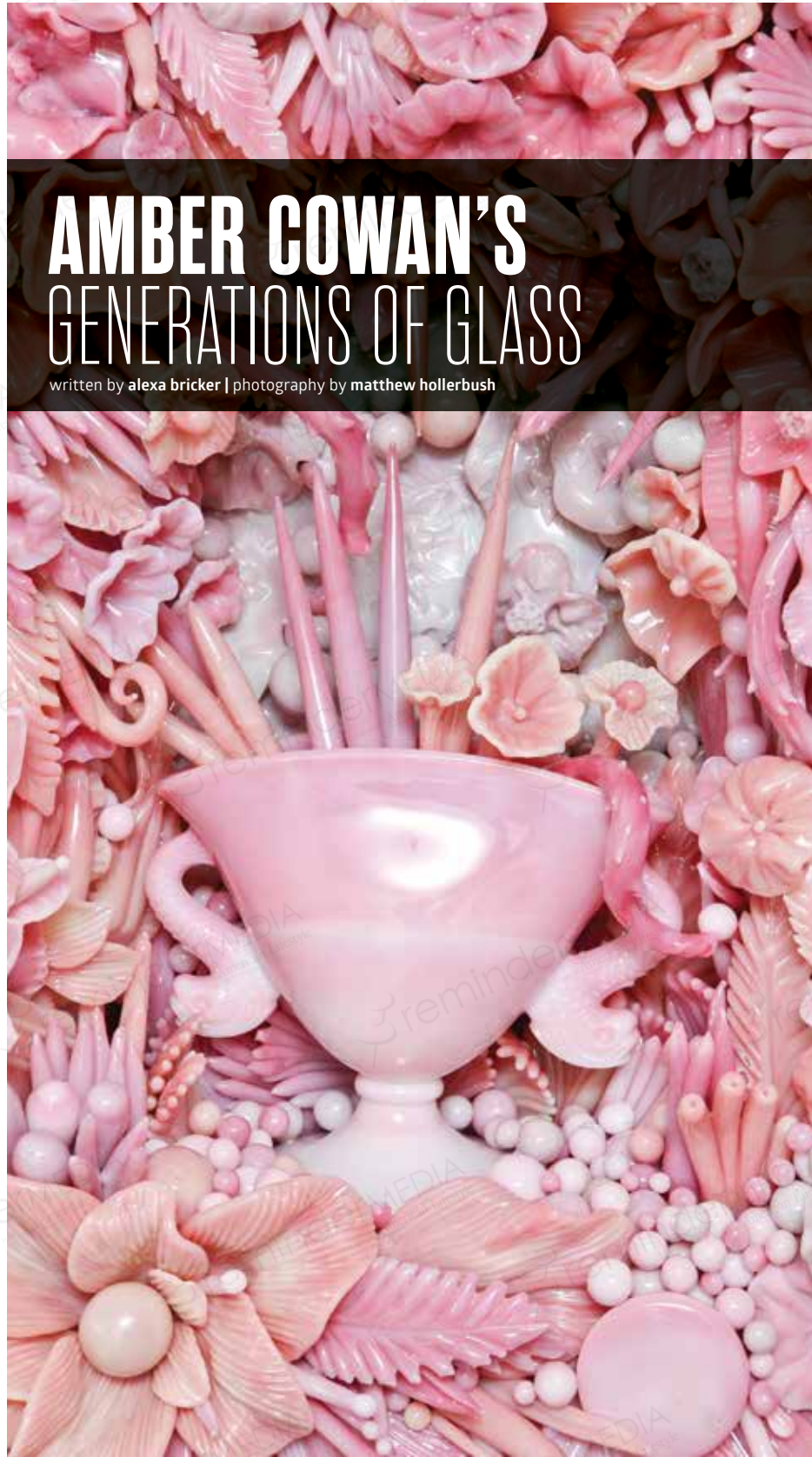
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HANDCRAFTED MODERN HOME FURNISHINGS



AMBER COWAN'S GENERATIONS OF GLASS

written by alexa bricker | photography by matthew hollerbush



Antique gravy boats, candy dishes, vases—they all have a story to tell. Objects like these are passed along from generation to generation, and, though their origins might be a distant, foggy memory, the importance of these items in the timelines of families is unquestioned. Some will eventually end up in antique shops and flea markets, to be found by collectors—knowing that these items were once a part of someone's life. Perhaps they followed them from their childhood home to their first home, to their children's first home, and beyond.

Amber Cowan has always been fascinated by the nostalgia and splendor of glassmaking. She fondly remembers gifting glass to her mother on special occasions. Her love for the intricacy of the craft and passion behind the art started young, and, though she didn't know it at the time, this affection would eventually transform into a career.

After graduating with a degree in 3-D design from Salisbury University in Maryland, Cowan began work with a number of mentors in New York City, who helped her



develop her own style and methods and who would shape her business practices as an artist. "I worked for a woman named Michiko Sakano—helping her in the studio, charging the furnace and assisting her in the hot shop," she explains. "She's really one of the glass bosses of New York, and she taught me not only a lot about technique but also about being a professional artist."

In her fifteen years as a glass artist, Cowan has studied at a number of schools across the country, including the famous Corning Museum of Glass and Pilchuck Glass School, and, most recently, has taught at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University, where

she also received her master's in glass and ceramics. She has learned from a crop of the best glass artists in the world, and she also has taught the upcoming class of artisans who will continue to evolve the art form. One of the most important aspects of glass artistry has always been education. Because glass production in America began in the factories before transitioning to the artist's studio—and because it's a relatively new art form in this country—instruction and experimentation are key.

Cowan's technique is a combination of the ancient style of soft Venetian glass sculpting, mixed with flameworking practices she

“*Artist Amber Cowan has always been fascinated by the nostalgia and splendor of glass-making. She fondly remembers gifting glass to her mother on special occasions. Her love for the intricacy of the craft and passion behind the art started young, and, though she didn't know it at the time, this affection would eventually transform into a career.*”

has picked up from mentors and those she developed herself. "I've always been attracted to work that has a lot of detail, as well as pieces that you can get lost in and see different things in all the time," Cowan says. "I think that comes from books, art, and other things that have influenced me throughout my life—the ones that leave me constantly searching."

Her most recent works are awesome, large-scale pieces full of intricate detail, and, true to form, include found objects that she has hunted for herself or were sent to her by other people intrigued by her art. And, though Cowan has always had a personal interest in found glass, it wasn't something she used in her work until an experience in the studio at Tyler.

Behind the large furnaces, she discovered a barrel of broken-up, light-pink-colored glass that no other students were using. She decided to melt the glass down and attempt to work with it the same way she had been with other glass. Much to her surprise, the glass fired the same way. "I discovered later that the barrel was from an old pressed glass factory in West Virginia that produced tableware," she reveals. "When I dumped it out, I noticed that the pieces were actually from twentieth-century Easter candy dishes." After doing some research, Cowan found that the type of glass she discovered, called cullet, was the same as that used by early studio artists during the 1960s—when production first began moving out of the factories.



She has continued to use found glass in her work ever since and divulges that the process of collecting these items and receiving them from others has turned into one of the most exciting parts of her career. "A woman in Michigan once sent me a package that contained two antique pieces from the 1800s," Cowan says. "Her great-grandfather had won them at a state fair, and he gave one of the items to her great-grandmother as an engagement present. A lot of times, the people who send me glass

feel bad throwing it away even though it may be broken. Sometimes they just don't want it anymore, but it's a family heirloom or it has some sort of sentimental value, so they send it to me so that it may continue living through my work."

One of Cowan's favorite pieces, *Creamer and Sugar, Swans in Sky*—debuted in 2016 at the Heller Gallery during Art Miami but moved to an exhibition titled *Amber Cowan: Re/Collection* at the Fuller Craft Museum

in Massachusetts in June 2017. The piece features a number of found glass animals and objects that add depth and history to it. In a sea of blue, viewers can spend hours finding new elements in the piece, like an antique swan creamer set, buried in a sea of bubbles, shells, and swirls.

Although glassmaking is a uniquely personal experience for each artist, it is also a difficult craft to master without the inspiration and assistance of other artisans. Cowan

reiterates, "It's hard to be a glassmaker on your own, so the glass community is very connected," she says. "I work on a block in Philadelphia that has twenty-two other flameworkers. They all make very different work, but it's great to be around that energy where people are working hard and creating all of the time."

This synergy and emotional connection is what continues to drive Cowan's work. Cowan says she has yet to come across

a medium that is as conducive to her vision quite like glass. As she digs into the history of American pressed glass with each new project, experimenting with repurposed materials and telling the stories of the people who once treasured these objects, she taps into an era of American craftsmanship once forgotten, but now preserved, eternally.

For more info, visit www.hellergallery.com/amber-cowan or www.ambercowan.com.

valerie's home cooking

recipes by valerie bertinelli | photography by time inc. books



Bacon-Wrapped Jalapeño Shrimp with Cherry Cola BBQ Sauce

BACK WHEN WE HAD A HOUSE IN PARK CITY, UTAH, we frequented an Italian restaurant so often they put a sign above our regular table that said, “Wolfie’s Booth.” The reason we were at the restaurant so often? Their bacon-wrapped jalapeño shrimp. Sadly, the restaurant closed before I was able to get their recipe, so I developed this particular one on my own. The sauce is sweet with a hint of Cherry Coke, and once it connects with the jalapeño, it sits on the tongue with an exciting contrast of hot and sweet and savory. These will disappear quickly.

CHERRY COLA BBQ SAUCE

- 1½ tablespoons bacon drippings
- ½ large red onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon dry mustard
- 2 cups cherry cola soft drink
- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- 1 cup ketchup

SHRIMP

- 16 extra-large shrimp, peeled, deveined, and tails removed (about 12 ounces)
- 1 jalapeño chile, stem removed, seeded, and cut lengthwise into 16 thin strips
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 8 bacon slices, halved crosswise

1. Make the BBQ Sauce: Heat the bacon drippings in a small saucepan over medium-high. Add the onion, and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the chopped garlic, and cook, stirring often, for 1 minute. Stir in the salt, garlic powder, and dry mustard, and cook, stirring often, until the spices are toasted and fragrant and the onions are a deep maroon color, about 2 minutes. Whisk in the cherry cola and vinegar, and cook, stirring often, about 2 minutes. Stir in the ketchup.

2. Bring the sauce to a boil, and cook until reduced to about 2 cups and the mixture coats the back of a spoon, 12 to 15 minutes.

3. Make the Shrimp: Heat a cast-iron skillet or grill pan over medium. Cut a long ¼-inch-deep slit in the inner curve of each shrimp; insert 1 jalapeño strip. Sprinkle with the salt and pepper. Wrap each shrimp tightly with 1 bacon piece. Set on a plate, seam sides down.

4. Place the bacon-wrapped shrimp, seam sides down, in the hot skillet, and cook, turning occasionally, until the bacon is crisp and the shrimp are just cooked through, 5 to 6 minutes. Serve the shrimp with the BBQ sauce.

Make Ahead: The BBQ sauce will hold up to 2 weeks in the fridge. If you’re prepping for a party, the shrimp can be wrapped ahead of time and cooked later.

Trick Technique: If you’re someone who loves their bacon in the morning, start saving the drippings in a jar for uses like this one!

SERVES 16



Bloody Mary Tea Sandwiches

WHO DOESN'T LOVE A GOOD TEA SANDWICH? I was in London the first time I encountered formal tea sandwiches. They were presented on a multitiered tower with small china plates. The serving was exquisite, and the sandwiches were beyond: smoked salmon, herbed butter and cucumber, egg salad and watercress. With Cajun-flavored cream cheese, fresh tomatoes, and arugula in tender white bread, this recipe is a fun twist on the tomato and cheese sandwich—and the pickled okra is a secret favorite of mine that provides a smile-inducing zest.

1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
¼ cup pimiento-stuffed green olives, drained and finely chopped
¼ cup finely chopped celery (about 1 stalk)
½ tablespoon Cajun seasoning
½ teaspoon anchovy paste
½ teaspoon lemon zest
10 white sandwich bread slices
10 whole-wheat sandwich bread slices
40 (1/8-inch-thick) plum tomato slices (4 to 5 medium plum tomatoes)
2 cups loosely packed baby arugula
Pickled okra or pickled jalapeños (optional)

1. Stir together the cream cheese, olives, celery, Cajun seasoning, anchovy paste, and lemon zest in a medium bowl until well blended.
2. Place the white bread slices on a work surface, and spread about 2 tablespoons of the cream cheese mixture on each slice. Place the wheat bread slices on the work surface; top each with 4 of the tomato slices in a single layer, and add a few arugula leaves. Place 1 white bread slice, cream cheese-side down, on each prepared wheat bread slice.
3. Using a serrated knife, remove the crusts from the sandwiches with a gentle sawing motion, and cut into 40 triangular tea sandwiches.
4. Cover with plastic wrap, and chill until ready to serve. Garnish each tea sandwich with a piece of pickled okra or a pickled jalapeño, if desired.

Variation: Make it a bloody bull tea sammie by adding a thin slice of roast beef.

SERVES 10



Roasted Eggplant Pesto Pasta

I'M A FAN OF EGGPLANT, WHICH I WAS SURPRISED MANY YEARS AGO TO LEARN IS ACTUALLY A FRUIT. However, it's near and dear to my heart for its sculptured beauty, regal purple color, and gratifying meatiness—or perhaps chewiness—that I periodically crave. When that craving strikes, it's for this roasted eggplant and pesto pasta. There is a medley of strong flavors here: the tomatoes, the salty and briny olives, and the eggplant itself. The pesto you make by processing the olive oil, almonds, capers, and garlic is causing my mouth to water right now.

3 cups (1-inch) cubed unpeeled eggplant
(from about 1 pound eggplant)
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon black pepper
1 cup halved cherry tomatoes
½ cup halved pitted kalamata olives
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
¼ cup whole blanched almonds
1 tablespoon capers, drained
2 teaspoons chopped fresh garlic
½ cup firmly packed fresh basil leaves,
plus more for garnish
¼ cup firmly packed fresh oregano leaves
¼ cup firmly packed fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves
½ tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 (16-ounce) package rotini pasta
½ cup feta cheese, cut into cubes

1. Preheat the oven to 475°F. Toss the eggplant with the 2 tablespoons olive oil, salt, and pepper; spread on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake until the eggplant is slightly tender, about 20 minutes.
2. Add the tomatoes and olives to the baking sheet, and bake until the tomatoes begin to burst and the eggplant is tender, about 5 minutes.
3. Process the ½ cup olive oil, almonds, capers, and garlic in a blender until smooth. Add the basil, oregano, and parsley; process just until smooth. Stir in the lemon juice.
4. Cook the pasta in salted water according to the package directions; drain. Toss the hot cooked pasta with the roasted vegetables, pesto mixture, and feta. Sprinkle with the basil leaves and serve.

Cooking Tip: You don't have to, but I like to sweat eggplant to release extra water: Slice the eggplant and lay slices on a wire rack. Sprinkle with salt and let stand for 30 minutes. Pat dry and go to Step 1.

SERVES 4



Lemon-Raspberry Panna Cotta

PANNA COTTA SOUNDS AND TASTES SO DECADENT, and in the sense that it is an intensely thick, sweetened, and flavored cream, it is indulgent—but in the best possible way. Even better, you won't believe how simple this is to make or how it will melt in your mouth. Since panna cotta must chill and set for at least 8 hours, you can prepare it a day or two ahead and save yourself time, as you'll need to top it only with fresh fruit. I make this in the summer when the fruit is at its peak ripeness and plentiful.

2 cups heavy cream
1 cup whole milk
½ cup granulated sugar
3 (3-inch) lemon peel strips
1 (¼-ounce) envelope unflavored gelatin
2 tablespoons cold water
1 cup small fresh raspberries

1. Combine the cream, milk, sugar, and lemon peel strips in a medium saucepan; bring just to a simmer over medium-high, stirring occasionally to dissolve the sugar. Remove from the heat, and let steep for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Meanwhile, sprinkle the gelatin over the cold water in a small saucepan; let stand for 2 minutes. Cook over low just until the gelatin dissolves, about 2 minutes. Remove from the heat.
3. Stir the gelatin mixture into the cream mixture. Remove and discard the lemon peel strips. Divide the mixture among 8 (6-ounce) ramekins or custard cups. Cover and chill until set, at least 8 hours.
4. Dip the ramekins into a bowl of very hot water for about 5 seconds; run a thin knife or offset spatula around the outside of the custards, and invert onto serving plates. Top with the raspberries.

Variation: For variety, you can make this as a simple vanilla panna cotta, going heavier with the vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste instead of the lemon. You could also take advantage of seasonal fruit, such as peaches or nectarines, and add a few slices to the side of the plate as a garnish.

SERVES 8

As you step aboard the old locomotive on a bright summer day here in Ely, Nevada, it's easy to be smitten. Big, black Engine 93 shines in the sun next to the historical stone depot. Under a brilliant blue desert sky, the steam engine chugs in neutral as the engineer busies himself in the cab and a conductor assists passengers up the steps for this afternoon's excursion.

Soon, the whistle blows, the big wheels start to turn, black smoke pours out of the stack, and we're off! But the chance to spend a memorable day riding a historic railroad is a small part of what the Ghost Train is all about. The Nevada Northern Railway, as this place is officially known, is an entire railroad operation run almost exclusively by volunteers.

Walking into the railyard is like stepping into a time capsule from 1938. The Nevada Northern's engine house, where locomotives were once maintained, stands virtually deserted and quiet, towering over the once bustling railyard. As you step across the silent railroad tracks and into the cavernous building, it's as if the mechanics, welders, and others who kept the trains running here have just stepped out for lunch, where vintage machinery, cranes, workbenches, and tools fill this airplane-hanger-sized room. There are shelves well stocked with large and heavy nuts, bolts, and a variety of other equipment, along with the socket wrenches, screwdrivers, and assorted tools of the railroad trade. It's arguably the best-preserved historic railroad in the US.

While it may be eerily quiet here at times, the Nevada Northern is actually alive and well. Its century-old steam engines, Engine 93 and Engine 40, plus a pair of vintage diesels, make regular passenger excursion runs out of the Ely depot during the summer and on special occasions. And a small crew of full-time mechanics still works inside the big engine shop, where they keep the old



all aboard the ghost train

written by [mark bedor](#) | photography by [mark bedor](#)

It is an eye-opening experience to sit up front in the engine cab with the engineer and the fireman and see what it takes to run a coal-fired steam engine. It's hot, hard, dirty, physical work—especially for the fireman, who spends a round trip of just fifteen miles shoveling a ton and a half of coal into the scorching-hot firebox, the blazing furnace that heats the water to create the steam that makes the engine go.



locomotives operating as good as new. "It's probably in better shape than when they used it all the time," says welder Gary North of Engine 40. "It has a lot better oils and lubes now."

When it rolled out of Philadelphia's Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1910, Engine 40 was the space shuttle of its day. North appreciates the expertise with which it was crafted. "It's real interesting," he says of the antique workmanship. "When you tear into them and find out how they built them, their measurements were right on."

With gold decals that stand out against its black paint, the steam engine has the look of a well-restored classic car. But it takes a lot

of work to keep it going. About three hours of maintenance is required for every hour the engine chugs down the track—and not because of its advanced age. "That's just how it was built," reveals head mechanic Hank Stewart. "The technology is very primitive compared to today."

Primitive but still effective—and appreciated by those who work on it today. "It's enduring technology," smiles retired United Airlines pilot and train engineer Dale Olsen, as he oils up Engine 93 in preparation for its afternoon run. "It still works very well."

Olsen is among the many volunteers the Nevada Northern relies upon to keep this so-called "operating museum" up and

running. He drives six hours to this remote desert community, located about 250 miles north of Las Vegas, and stays in a hotel to run the train. "Just for the enjoyment of it," he explains, with a look of satisfaction. "Not everybody gets to do this. I'm old enough to remember the last of the steam trains. I never dreamed that I would even get to ride on a steam engine, let alone be able to run one," he laughs.

If you've ever dreamed of sitting in the driver's seat of an old-time steam engine, this is the rare place that can make your dream come true. While there is a small paid staff, dozens of volunteers like Olsen do everything it takes to make the trains go, from selling tickets to serving as conductor,

brakeman, fireman, and, yes, even engineer. "People who are interested in our heritage and our history can actually come out and volunteer here at the railroad, work their way up, and be one of our steam engineers," says executive director Mark Bassett.

But becoming an engineer doesn't happen overnight. "At the minimum," Bassett clarifies, "We're looking at a thousand hours." You can shortcut that process through the Nevada Northern's Be the Engineer Program. Simply put, if you meet the requirements, you can pay to run a steam engine, a diesel, or both. There are a number of different opportunities, with prices ranging from about \$700 to \$3,500.

It is an eye-opening experience to sit up front in the engine cab with the engineer and the fireman and see what it takes to run a coal-fired steam engine. It's hot, hard, dirty, physical work—especially for the fireman, who spends a round trip of just fifteen miles shoveling a ton and a half of coal into the scorching-hot firebox, the blazing furnace that heats the water to create the steam that makes the engine go. It's essentially a giant boiler on wheels.

Both the engineer and the fireman spend a lot of time before and after the trip lugging around a big, old-fashioned oilcan, lubricating some two hundred oil and grease points on the engine. And when the train is rolling down the track, they have to be on their toes. The crew keeps a sharp eye on gauges, cranking on knobs and blowing the warning whistle, all while making sure the coal fire keeps the water pressure at the right level to keep the train chugging down the track.

It's a challenge Olsen enjoys. "There's a science and an art to it," he explains. "Every trip's a little bit different." Angie

Cracraft was doing the heavy lifting as the firewoman, shoveling all that coal on the run I took with Dale. One of the few full-time staffers at the railroad, the young woman enjoys her work, concurring with Olsen. "Never the same thing," she says of her job.

That's because the staff here wears so many different hats. John Henry McDonnell, who first came to the Nevada Northern as a sixteen-year-old high-school intern, is a good example of this. Just six years later, he can handle almost any job here, and he's still learning. "I work in the shop. I do track work. I do train service," the cheerful young man says. "I'm an engineer, a fireman, a brakeman ... I'm certified to run both the diesel and steam locomotives."

It's fascinating to walk with him through the old buildings around the railyard. The huge structures contain a variety of historic equipment and vintage rail cars. There's a giant, century-old snowplow to clear the tracks, a mail car, a passenger car dating from the 1870s, and Caboose Number 3. "We bring that out a couple times a year," McDonnell says of the caboose. "That's pretty cool, 'cause there's old orders from when it was it still running for the railroad." We climb up into the bright yellow caboose, and he pulls an aging clipboard off a hook that contains a switch list from when this caboose was still running for Northern Nevada.

Tracks were first built in 1905 by railroad pioneer and mine owner Mark Requa to haul ore from what would become the giant Kennecott Copper Mine. During its heyday, thirty-two passenger trains, sixty ore trains, and a couple of freight trains left the Ely Depot—now on the National Register of Historic Places—every day. "Hundreds of people worked here. Thousands of people took the trains. This was the steam-powered



Internet of its day," says Bassett. "Now it's pretty quiet. We run maybe one train a day. We're essentially a ghost of our past." Hence how the steam train came to be known as the Ghost Train.

But the director firmly believes this well-preserved operation, with its complete depot, railyard, shops, tools, and tracks, is much more than just a tourist attraction. "I think the railroad tells the story of America that we're losing: the story of can-do-ism," he shares. "Mark Requa had a dream: to build the railroad and develop the copper mine—and he did it! This is what we're losing as a society. We're not going out and doing things, building things, conquering things."

That is not the case inside that big engine house, where McDonnell and his coworkers

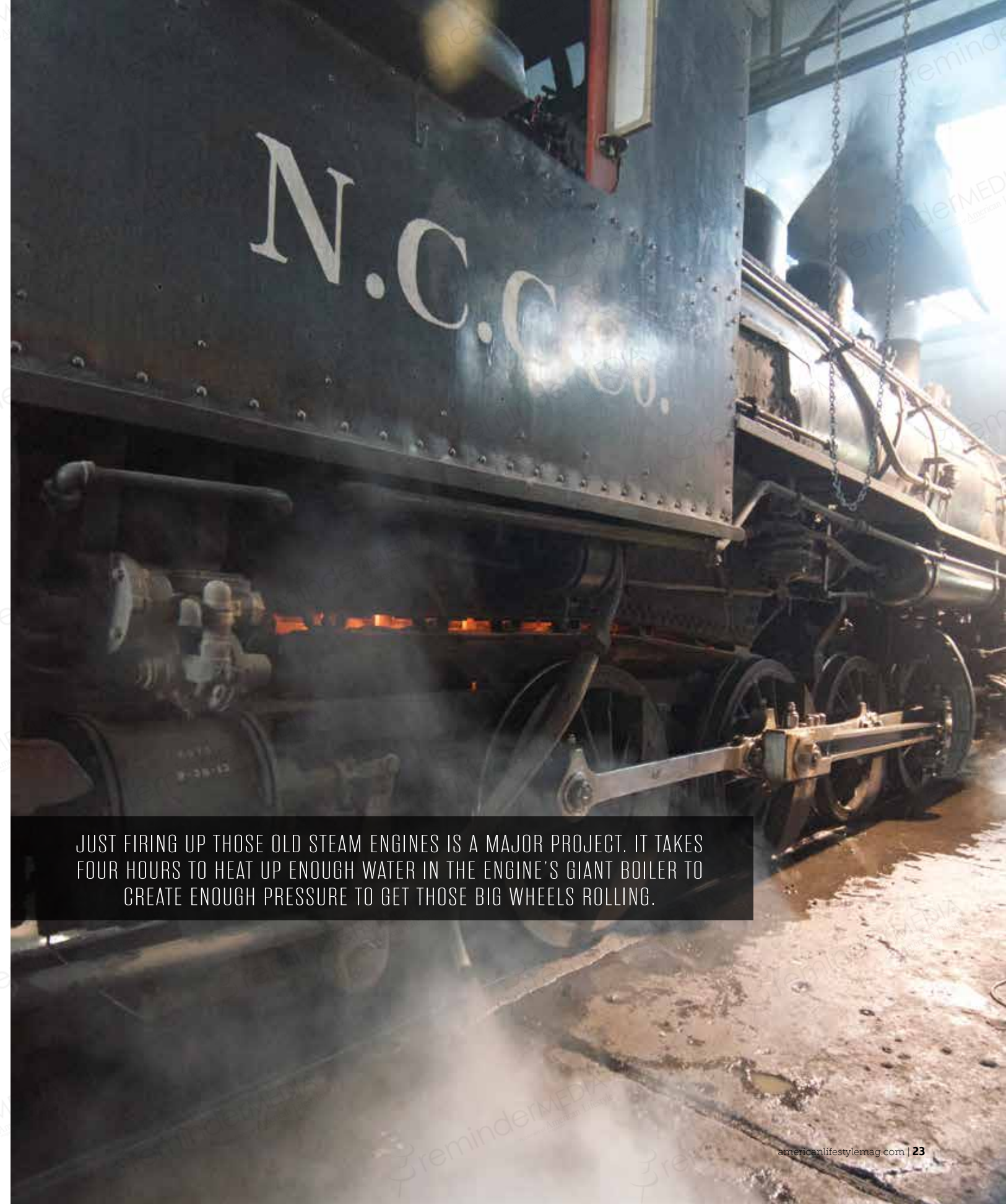
do what it takes every day to keep the trains running. Just firing up those old steam engines is a major project. It takes four hours to heat up enough water in the engine's giant boiler to create enough pressure to get those big wheels rolling. But there's no place this young man would rather be. "I got pretty lucky," he grins. "There aren't too many places that run steam locomotives. And there are even fewer that will pay you to do it."

Without young people like McDonnell and Cracraft willing to work hard and get their hands dirty, this most unique part of the past wouldn't have much of a future. "The biggest challenge we have as a museum is that if we don't pass the knowledge down to the next generation, this stuff won't run again," points out Bassett. "We're teaching

our kids that everything is done with the click of a mouse. And that's not true. Someone has to get their hands dirty. And they have to be taught."

That mission goes on at the Nevada Northern. The internship program that recruited McDonnell continues to this day. Hopefully, his generation will continue to be intrigued by the old steam engine technology that was cutting edge a century ago and keep the Ghost Train, and all that it represents, chugging down the tracks on bright summer days for years to come.

For more info, visit www.nnry.com



JUST FIRING UP THOSE OLD STEAM ENGINES IS A MAJOR PROJECT. IT TAKES FOUR HOURS TO HEAT UP ENOUGH WATER IN THE ENGINE'S GIANT BOILER TO CREATE ENOUGH PRESSURE TO GET THOSE BIG WHEELS ROLLING.



I Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans

written by **shelley goldstein**
photography by **shelley rose photography**

We sat on brightly colored wooden stools scooted up to a corrugated aluminum bar at Dat Dog, a New Orleans institution. Patrons at the horseshoe-shaped counter gobbled up crawfish-etouffee-topped kielbasa chased with chili cheese fries. The place buzzed with an electricity and a flavor that belong only to New Orleans.

Suddenly, the sounds of brass swept in through the open doors, and I grabbed my camera to investigate what was transpiring outside in the humid night air. A marching band had set up camp on the corner of Frenchmen Street, playing rousing tunes while a thin and muscular man wearing light-up Rollerblades swerved and breakdanced in the intersection. Flipped upside down, his neon-clad feet bobbed up and down rhythmically against the nighttime sky. A crowd quickly formed around the impromptu performance, which I would later learn was an audition of sorts for a Coca-Cola commercial.

This spontaneous creativity, it turns out, is an everyday affair in the Big Easy, where musicians and artists have found a home that supports their talents. Frenchmen Street, located at the edge of the French Quarter, is considered the main drag for audiophiles and tourists seeking jazz, with at least fifteen live music clubs. One such club, the Spotted Cat, packs a lot of punch into a minimal space. In the sweltering summers, it's an air-conditioned oasis, with a stage, a bar, and a tiny sliver of dance floor just big enough to squeeze two couples, or, on especially crowded nights, some listeners who are willing to grab a seat on the floor to get up close and personal with the musicians.



I ENJOY THE GROUP DYNAMICS OF NEW ORLEANS JAZZ—TWO OR THREE HORNS PLAYING AT THE SAME TIME, FILLING IN FOR EACH OTHER.

Shotgun Jazz Band, led by Marla Dixon and her husband, John, light up this space weekly with revival jazz—a style of jazz popular in the late 1940s and early 1960s. Charlie Halloran, trombonist and official member of Shotgun Jazz Band, explains, “These were the musicians that had come up playing in the 1920s and 1930s who were brought out of retirement from being deckhands, barbers, or tailors. It’s a romping, stomping, no-frills, straightforward style of traditional jazz.” Halloran plays in several bands, a common occurrence in the New Orleans music scene. He jokes, “There are almost as many bands as there are musicians.”

All the bands in New Orleans are incredibly open to musicians sitting in. When he first moved to New Orleans, Halloran bought the albums of the bands he liked, learned the repertoire, and showed up to their performances to create an opportunity to sit in. “Eventually, someone goes on vacation or someone moves away, and you are asked to sub in,” he reveals. Halloran still speaks like a starstruck teenager when reflecting on the musicians he admired growing up, who are now his friends—people like trumpet player Wendell Brunious and jazz singer Banu Gibson.

On Friday night, a music club down the street called d.b.a. featured the band Tuba Skinny. Compared to the Spotted Cat, d.b.a. is a sprawling venue—made up of two rooms with a two-sided bar in the middle. One side contains a stage and a wonderfully worn wooden dance floor, the latter of which was already filled with local swing dancers—some channeling 1920s and 1930s fashion.

Halloran was sitting in as a horn, though he’s not a touring member. Says Halloran, “I enjoy the group dynamics of New Orleans jazz—two or three horns playing at the same time, filling in for each other. I can fill in with a low note, or I can take the melody and someone else can play some ornamental notes around it. It’s the collective that makes New Orleans music so special.”

One of Halloran’s favorite places to play is the renowned Preservation Hall, a very cozy, acoustic-only music hall. He explains, “Everyone is there to listen to the music. There is no bar there. You can’t have your phone out during the performance. People are practically sitting in each other’s laps because it’s so tiny. It’s wood, and it sounds really good. And everyone is there for the same reason—to appreciate some really amazing music.”

And no trip to New Orleans would be complete without a serenade by Kermit Ruffins, trumpet player extraordinaire. After leaving the Rebirth Brass Band, a group he cofounded when he was still in high school, Ruffins went solo and is now backed by the Barbecue Swingers. Ruffins was cracking jokes from the stage and riffing off the crowd at the Blue Nile.

Halloran is here in New Orleans for the long haul, moving from the East Coast after completing his graduate degree in jazz trombone. He and his wife bought a house on the West Bank, close to the levy, where they live with their dogs. Between the Shotgun Jazz Band, Palmetto Bug Stompers,



SHOTGUN JAZZ BAND, LED BY MARLA DIXON AND HER HUSBAND JOHN, LIGHT UP THIS SPACE WEEKLY WITH REVIVAL JAZZ—A STYLE OF JAZZ POPULAR IN THE LATE 1940S AND EARLY 1960S.



Meschiya Lake and the Little Big Horns, and the Panorama Jazz Band, Halloran is playing almost every night. It's not an easy feat to make a living solely as a musician, but New Orleans is the place to do it. For Halloran, living in New Orleans is a dream come true. The New Orleans-style jazz has been his first love since the beginning days of his musical career—the role of the trombones is so significant. Though he learned to be okay with more modern styles of jazz, he fell in love with the melodies and collective improvisation of traditional jazz.

This Louisiana hub also nurtures its artists and artisans, with paintings and photographs everywhere you turn—art galleries, boutiques, and eateries, like Fair Grinds Coffeehouse in Mid-City, are

filled with the works of local talent. At the open-air French Market, crafters and artists congregate to sell their goods, like fresh cotton-scented candles and endless wares shaped like the fleur-de-lis. The market is also packed to the gills with food vendors selling everything from local plums to alligator jerky. Meals From the Heart Café is famous for its crab cake sandwiches, and rightly so. Served with coleslaw and orange slices while you wait, this sandwich was so dreamy it enjoyed an encore performance the next day.

There is an intangible buzz that reaches into all the nooks and crannies of this bayou and infuses its inhabitants—tourists and residents alike—with creative electricity. The air is thick and hot, and the sounds of

makeshift tap shoes, throaty vocals, and horns blowing their breathy notes fill the city. Without a doubt, New Orleans is a place that continues to lure musicians, artists, craftsmen, dancers, and all creators to share space, connect, and express.

For more info, visit www.charliehalloran.com

“ And no trip to New Orleans would be complete without a serenade by Kermit Ruffins, trumpet player extraordinaire. After leaving the Rebirth Brass Band, a group he cofounded when he was still in high school, Ruffins went solo and is now backed by the Barbecue Swingers.



You can't make a Hollywood blockbuster, a TV episode, or a video game without the Foley team, which creates the many subtle sound effects such as footsteps. With over 850 credits between them, Skywalker Sound's Archives Foley team—artists John Roesch and Shelley Roden, and mixer Scott Curtis—is one of the world's leading producers of this cinematic craft.

pictured
Foley artist Shelley Roden demonstrates the materials and strategy for producing the sounds of the suspended metal library in Marvel's *Doctor Strange*.

movie magic

THE FOLEY TEAM OF SKYWALKER SOUND

interview with **john roesch, shelley roden, and scott curtis**
written by **matthew brady**
photography by **shelley rose photography**



How did you get started in the entertainment industry?

JOHN: I made a film at New York University, which opened doors to the American Film Institute. Serendipitously, somebody there asked for my help with Foley sounds. I kept getting asked to do more Foley, and here I am, thirty-nine years later.

SCOTT: I have a music background. I went to San Francisco State for broadcasting and moved to LA after graduation. I eventually found myself on a Foley stage, and I realized that my recording experience could apply to sound effects, so I started mixing and editing.

SHELLEY: I was a cinema-and-photography major at Ithaca College. Through its LA program, I secured an internship at an independent postproduction sound house in Hollywood. When I began performing Foley for several student film projects, a sound supervisor friend encouraged me to pursue it as a career.

Since you knew one another from a previous company, did the team gel quickly?

SCOTT: Foley can be very subjective. So there was a bit of a process in the beginning trying to figure out each other's sensibilities.

JOHN: My methodology previous to Scott was a little different, so he and I needed to fit together. In fact, I like his methodology even more than what I had been doing!

SHELLEY: We had worked with one another at different facilities; however, this was the first time we were a team. We quickly established a trust and a means

of communication. Over time, our shared respect and focus evolved into a creative and fun environment of exploration and discovery.

What makes your custom Foley stage special?

JOHN: I designed it with the help of some key people: a partner from many years ago, people at Skywalker, and Foley artist friends. As far as I know, it is probably one of the better stages in the world. It contains some elements that hadn't been previously engineered together on another stage because Foley artists designed it. For example, the water tank area is set up so we have a large tank, a smaller one, and then a ramp off of that that allows us to dam up the water so we can go from a little bit to a splashy area.

SHELLEY: Multiple room mics give Scott options based on where John and I are working in the room. We can also open up a large elephant door to the outside so we can bring in vehicles or, as we did for *Dunkirk*, bring in an aluminum boat to dunk into the large water tank.

What is your process for starting a project?

JOHN: We try to collectively watch either the first reel or the entire show, hopefully with the supervising sound editor. Then cue sheets—the road maps from point A to point B—are created and broken down into groups: footsteps, props, and, potentially, separate movements.

Shelley and I will look at the footstep cue sheets to determine sounds. For example, for *Doctor Strange*, Shelley and I each tested two sets of boots for Doctor Strange and then decided which boots we'd use. Once we decided this for each character, we divvied them up.

For props, Shelley will typically decide what she's going to do and what I'll do. If there's a

below
Foley artist John Roesch explains how he used a feather duster and a piece of leather to create a sound effect for Becky in *Finding Dory*.



below
Sound mixer Scott Curtis works in the booth to incorporate the sounds recorded from the Foley stage on the other side of the glass.



“When you see a sword swinging, or “jinging,” as we call it, it’s usually a machete because machetes have a sound that people associate with swords. If someone breaks a bone, we might use a snap pea, a piece of celery, or a lasagna noodle. Also, when we do horses galloping, we don’t use coconuts; we use plungers without the wooden dowel.”

unique movement, such as Doctor Strange’s cape, there will be a separate channel just for that. We tend to play to our strengths, but it changes project by project. Ultimately, we want to give Scott the ability to have discretion for what he wants to do sonically.

What is more important: getting the perfect sound effect or the perfect timing?

JOHN: Sound effect. With good sound effect, the timing will be perfect. Vis-à-vis, if I do something and it is two frames early or late but is the perfect sound, Scott can easily nudge it. But if the sound is just OK, that is the way it is going to stay.

SCOTT: They often want me to do one more take to get the sync better. But I’ll stop

them because I know that the performance was perfect.

What are some interesting props you use to create sounds?

JOHN: When you see a sword swinging, or “jinging,” as we call it, it’s usually a machete because machetes have a sound that people associate with swords. If someone breaks a bone, we might use a snap pea, a piece of celery, or a lasagna noodle. Also, when we do horses galloping, we don’t use coconuts; we use plungers without the wooden dowel.

SHELLEY: For *Kong: Skull Island*, there’s a moment when Kong uproots a pine tree and runs his free hand down the trunk, tearing all the branches off. To achieve that texture, I used a rake and a pinecone. Scott

simultaneously manipulated that source material as I was performing it to help make it sound gigantic.

Scott, are any particular effects more difficult to pick up on the mic than the others?

SCOTT: It really depends. Based on how I am hearing the sounds through the mic, I will give direction notes. In that *Kong* scene, I needed to hear more of the rake versus the pinecone. So I give those directions to John and Shelley, they adjust accordingly, and we try it again. We’ll keep tweaking it until we’re all happy.

You do work on movies, television, commercials, and video games. Are there differences in those mediums?

SCOTT: With video games, we’re covering the cut scenes, which are like mini movies: animated scenes that take place between the game action itself. We have to add everything but the production dialogue. Creating assets for the in-game material, such as combat boots on cement, is unique to video games as well. We have to do the movements—brisk walking, running, jumping, pivots, and so on. They get added to their in-game audio engine, so when you are walking around in the game, the engine triggers them to approximate your walking sounds.



IF I DO SOMETHING AND IT IS TWO FRAMES EARLY OR LATE BUT IS THE PERFECT SOUND, SCOTT CAN EASILY NUDDGE IT. BUT IF THE SOUND IS JUST OK, THAT IS THE WAY IT IS GOING TO STAY.

SHELLEY: We usually have more time to dig deep into the story, the characters, and the action on movies than we do on television shows. Television shows demand precision and quick decisions. Films allow us to add subtle nuances or sweeteners and experiment with new ideas. Video games can be cinematic, and they can also be physically demanding, which can be fun for us athletic types.

How has Foley changed over the years?

JOHN: The biggest change is obviously technology. Besides that, in the early days, you would generally divide the film into sections, so there wasn't the continuity you have today. But the actual creation of

sounds and recording them has not changed at all.

The nature of what needs to be captured has changed, though, because digital technology allows the supervisor sound editors to do things that we might not be able to do on the Foley stage. For example, in the '80s, we would Foley everything, from soup to nuts. *Back to the Future* is one example of that. The film's entire opening sequence—the motors, the Rube Goldberg machine, the dog food can—was Foley, except for the ticktocks in the background. This might be done differently today.

SHELLEY: Soundtracks are becoming denser, so we have to keep in mind what part of the sonic spectrum is available in any given

moment. A Foley sound effect that appears to be perfect when played solo may lose its intended effect when you add dialogue, hard effects, and music. We are also seeing more and more visual effects than ever, and any world that is animated needs accompanying sounds to make it come alive—so that is more work for us, which is great.

Were any projects especially challenging?

JOHN: *The Abyss* was extremely difficult because it took place mostly underwater. Also, *John Carter* had various tribes with different armors and trying to get the sounds in shared scenes was very difficult because they were all in the same frequency. Lastly, *Schindler's List* was one of the most



difficult films I have ever worked on because of the actual content. It is an amazing picture, and I am very proud to have worked on it.

SHELLEY: The first film we worked on together was *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. This was also the first time human footsteps had ever been done on our new Foley stage. It was a challenge because we did not yet know the sweet spots in the room, how our shoes would play, or the level of grit we needed for each surface. Navigating our way through that experience together helped us to bond as a team.

This job requires a good ear. How important is the sense of touch?

JOHN: It is vital, certainly from a performance standpoint for the props and then, by extension, through the feet. By far, the hardest thing to do correctly in a film is footsteps, and that is all touch.

SHELLEY: As with any instrument, there are various sounds you can create with any object and with your feet. Over time, a Foley artist develops a sense of how to manipulate the selected shoe, surface texture, prop tools, and resonance. This involves both sensitivity with touch and critical listening.

What is the most satisfying part of your job?

JOHN: Playing back a finished reel for others is very satisfying, as is going to the screening after everything is completed. To see how everything fits together is a wonderful experience because we are a very small part of a very large puzzle. This is indeed the best job in the world.

SHELLEY: Every day, we are tasked with hundreds of opportunities to create effective sonic moments within the context of a story. Selecting the right prop or shoe and performing in such a way to make the sounds fit seamlessly into the rest of the soundtrack is very satisfying.

SCOTT: For me, it is the process of building the tracks: of envisioning how I know this thing ultimately is going to sound and actually building those pieces. When it works and we can build on it, I am happy.

As a Foley team, what does your art add to your projects?

JOHN: It brings a reality that helps push a storyline forward and upholds the believability of what you are seeing. We don't want to do anything that takes you out of the moment or is not truthful. If we've

done our job right, you don't know we've done it. In a sense, we are the unsung artists in sound.

SCOTT: The purpose of Foley is to fill in gaps with realistic sound effects so there aren't lulls in the production track. That way, the audience can focus on the dialogue and the story while still following the action. We help keep things real.

SHELLEY: Foley not only completes the soundtrack by adding complex detail, such as the various notes of debris dancing over a car as it crashes, but also can emphasize a comical moment or add a subtle feeling of texture to a dramatic moment.

JOHN: It's a unique role, that's for sure. There are more astronauts in the world than there are professional Foley artists.

SCOTT: And there are half as many Foley mixers as there are Foley artists. So we are really rare.

SHELLEY: And having a crew of people who can count on each other and laugh at each other, as we can, is the best part of being on this Foley team.

For more info, visit www.skysound.com

a touch of SOUTHERN CHARM

LAUREN NICOLE DESIGNS

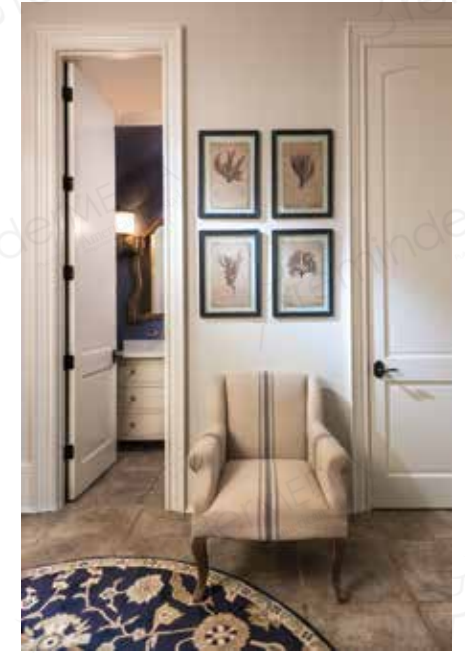
interview with lauren clement
written by alexa bricker
photography by d. randolph foulds photography



Growing up, Lauren Clement watched her mother, an interior designer, transform people's homes and lives—taking personal care to ensure that her work reflected the personality and wishes of her clients. Now a designer herself, Clement has found her own passion in decorating, forming the Charlotte, North Carolina-based company Lauren Nicole Designs.

How did your mother's work as a designer influence you? Is this something that pushed you toward the field?

My mom had been a designer from the time I was two years old. I was brought up in that lifestyle, but I never really thought that it was what I was going to do. I actually went to college for clinical psychology but had a change of heart and decided to make the switch to design. My mom really took charge of my training, and then she helped me start my company when I was twenty-three.



Did growing up in the South play a role in the way you design and your own personal style?

I think you can see a lot of the updated traditional southern style in my work, from where we live in North Carolina and growing up in a home that reflected my mother's personal tastes—it was always very colorful but well put together. And I think my work lends itself to that type of design.

I also grew up riding horses and being in the outdoors, so that rustic style of wood, varying textures, and incorporating a lot of natural elements are some things you will often see in my work.

What is the first thing you like to do when beginning a new project?

Typically, I do a big walk-through with my clients, and that's a time for me to get inside of their heads. I like to learn everything—from what they like to wear to what colors they hate. And, with social media, clients now normally come prepared with a look-book or images they've seen from other

designers that they want to emulate. This first step is really like a fact-finding mission.

Some of the jobs you take on are very large—like the Northshore Estate, for instance. Were the clients looking to redesign their whole home, or did the undertaking grow as time went on?

At the time that the family moved in, the Northshore Estate was not very old. This was a blended family, so the husband and wife were bringing multiple children on both sides. There were a lot of functional needs that needed to be met. But when they worked with the builder, they ended up with a lot of cabinet colors, fixtures, and other elements that were just not "them." Upon my initial visit, we hadn't planned to change anything major, but we ended up changing just about everything.

When all was said and done, the wife came home and said, "Lauren, I feel like can breathe now." That just made me melt.

What are some of the big changes that you made to this space that weren't originally anticipated?

We changed out all of the lighting fixtures and painted every room, including the molding. We refurnished nearly every room and reworked the outdoor area as well. The outside pool area is a very big space, but we broke it up into separate areas, and each section has a purpose.

Speaking of the lighting fixtures in this house, they are very different from room to room, and they're very ornate. What made you choose such unique pieces?

I decided to bring in all new fixtures, because, to me, lighting is like jewelry. It can make such a huge difference in a space. It not only illuminates and serves a functional purpose but also can add to the overall feeling and style.

I like to point out the statistic that 80 percent of homes are 20 percent underlit. When builders install lighting, most of the

time it's too small. I think bigger is often better, in this case. You can go bigger and bolder with lighting. This is always the last element I add to a room, but it's so important.

This home has the outdoorsy feel that you mentioned your designs lean toward, but it doesn't feel overwhelmed by rustic elements. How do you achieve this balance?

The house is situated on a lake, so that indoor/outdoor feel was easy to achieve and definitely something the clients were looking for. The father and sons are big outdoorsmen, so being able to bring a little bit of the outside in was essential.

There seems to be a lot of symmetry from room to room as well—especially in the foyer and family room. What do you like to do to maintain balance in a space without the design looking too monotonous?

In a space that large, it's important to maintain proportion, like you said, and keep the flow between rooms. But it's also important for each room to speak for itself and have its own personality. I like to develop a color scheme, and then, playing off of that, maybe include different shades and tones that keep a common thread throughout the space.

You seem to have a fairly large group of people on your team. How do they supplement the vision that you have for each project?

It truly takes a village. I was about three or four years into my business when I brought on my first employee to help, and that just became a staple position because if I'm not in the office, I'm designing. But sometimes you need to be in both places at once. Now I have help on the design side, too.



“ I like to develop a color scheme, and then, playing off of that, maybe include different shades and tones that keep a common thread throughout the space.

Our business is so full of details, and I do have a hand in all of them, but being a mom of two young girls and wanting to be as present in their lives as I can, I would be lost without the support that I have. It's also great to have help from people who share my vision. I'm respectful of the fact that I'm not the be-all end-all on every decision. It's so beneficial to have someone's fresh eyes, and it's a benefit to my clients as well.

You mentioned that social media has become a big part of the design business in recent years. Has this changed the way you work with clients or the way you think about design?

It's definitely changing the process a little bit. Instagram and Houzz, for sure, are making people much more knowledgeable about different trends and styles that

are out there. It's also allowing people to branch out a little and try things that they maybe haven't tried before. That's great for me because I can provide some examples to them visually. In a business that is as personal as design, social media is able to play a nice supporting role.

For more info, visit www.laurennicoleinc.com

Step Afrika!: JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND STEPS

interview with c. brian williams | written by shelley goldstein | photography as noted



© Sekou Luke

The brainchild of C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the first professional dance company in the world dedicated to stepping, a percussive dance form that uses steps and hand claps to produce rhythms and sounds. Before Step Afrika!, stepping could only be found on college campuses as a part of African American Greek life. Today, the company uses the art form as an educational tool to encourage young people to pursue a college education and performs to great acclaim worldwide.

What is your personal background in stepping?

I am originally from Houston, Texas, but I am a product of historically black colleges and universities. Both my parents went to black colleges and universities, my grandparents on both sides did, and even my great-grandparents are graduates of historically black colleges and universities in America. I went to Howard University in Washington, DC, and it was there that I was first introduced to the tradition of stepping. I saw it on campus performed by members of different sororities and fraternities on the yard, and I was fascinated the first time I saw it.

Did stepping only exist on college campuses? Was it not something taught to children?

That is what is so special about the tradition of stepping. College kids do a lot of cool things, but creating new dance forms that become traditions is not usually one of them. Stepping, however, is the exception. This is an art form truly born out of the African American fraternity and sorority system. Prior to Spike Lee's 1988 film *School Daze*, which introduced stepping to the mainstream, the only way to see or access the art form was through the fraternity and sorority systems on college campuses.



© Edward C. Jones



© William Perrigen

Can you pinpoint which college started it?

A good friend of mine, Dr. Elizabeth Fine, wrote a book called *Soulstepping*. It was one of the first scholarly books published on the tradition of stepping, but it is inconclusive. Sadly, we don't know which fraternity or sorority first started stepping on what campus and at what period of time, but the book does talk about the first hints of stepping seen on the Howard University campus in the early 1900s.

Can you give a brief history of the evolution of black fraternities and sororities and stepping?

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated was created in 1906 at Cornell University, and it was the beginning of black Greek life. The other eight developed from there,

mostly between 1906 and 1922 (with the last one in 1963). Five of these fraternities and sororities, which are part of what is now called the Divine 9, were created on Howard University's campus. It was like an awakening of African American cultural life. They didn't create the fraternities to step. They created the fraternities for brotherhood, community service, and community uplift, and stepping was an artistic byproduct of African American Greek life.

So stepping didn't originate in Africa?

Because stepping is so under-researched, even some steppers will say that stepping comes from Africa. But what they are really saying is that African Americans owe a lot to the continent of Africa in terms of culture,

food, and rhythm. There isn't concrete evidence that stepping made the journey to the Americas during slavery. So stepping is really an African response to American life.

We found there are some art forms in Africa that have a striking resemblance to stepping, like the South African gumboot dance. The gumboot dance is a contemporary dance form, created over one hundred years ago by men who worked in the mines of South Africa. They were issued Wellingtons, rubber shoes that protect your feet, and they'd make music with them. That happened around the late 1800s or early 1900s, around the same time that African Americans were creating the fraternities and sororities here in the United States and beginning to step. It's fascinating that these two art forms grew up with each other

through African people in different parts of the world, and yet their response is similar.

What inspired you to move to Africa?

My first job was a fellowship to go live and work in southern Africa, where I taught small business skills at a community center. And that is where I first became exposed to the South African gumboot dance. I started doing mini exchanges with my students: I would teach them the stepping that I learned at our university, and they would teach me their steps of the gumboot dance. I became very excited by the power of the arts to bring different people together. It was like a light went on. I knew I needed to connect the two art forms. And that is how Step Afrika!, as an idea, was born.

How old were you when you founded Step Afrika!?

I was twenty-five years old, though I had the idea when I was twenty-one.

When you formed this company, how did you find the dancers? How did this first season begin?

The very first artists of Step Afrika! were my fraternity brothers from Howard University. I always give tremendous credit to my brothers at Alpha Phi Alpha. When I had the idea, I came to them and said, "Look, guys, we're going to take stepping to the continent of Africa. Who wants to go?" These weren't dance majors—they were political science majors, business majors, and biology majors who also learned this art form of stepping in their spare time and wanted to share it.

How did Step Afrika! become a tangible thing?

I was working in Washington, DC, from about 1990 to 1994, when my company sent me to South Africa on assignment. I ended up meeting some dancers at the Soweto Theatre, a wonderful dance company based in South Africa. I told them my idea for Step Afrika!, and they were completely engaged and excited, and they wanted to hold a festival in Soweto, a town on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

How did Step Afrika! transition from a festival in Soweto to a dance company in DC?

It took some years. We thought we'd do the festival in Soweto as a one-time thing, but it was so amazing and everyone was so happy that we had to do it again. It was all

Whenever we teach or talk about the tradition of stepping, we always want to emphasize its origins. Stepping is a highly energetic, percussive, rhythmic art form created by African American college students who became members of African American fraternities.



© Step Afrika!



© Step Afrika!

volunteers at the time. We had to raise funds and figure out how to cover our expenses. After the third time, we started thinking there was more to this than just a festival and wanted to start teaching stepping to children in the States. We also wanted to use stepping as an educational and motivational tool. We held our first workshop in South Carolina after a magazine article came out about Step Afrika! in 1996.

At what point did you transition Step Afrika! into a performing company?

From 1997 to 1998, we started exploring the performance side of things and putting shows together. We brought in girls to step with us, which was unheard of

because guys and girls did not step together historically. That helped us evolve from a ten-minute show to a twenty-minute show. By 2000, we had a thirty-minute show. But the Kennedy Center wanted an hour-long performance, so we raised funds to bring the Soweto Dance Theatre out to Washington, DC, to perform with us. We had eight sold-out shows at the Kennedy Center, and that was the beginning of our recognition as a professional dance company.

Who was part of your first company? Did you hold auditions to fill spots?

It was all fraternity brothers at first, and later the women from the sorority joined the company.

Talk about the programs you do with the students:

Whenever we teach or talk about the tradition of stepping, we always want to emphasize its origins. Stepping is a highly energetic, percussive, rhythmic art form created by African American college students who became members of African American fraternities. That is our way of acknowledging its roots on college campuses, and it's also a reason why our programs always direct children toward the possibilities of college. We want to introduce the idea of college at a young age and plant that idea as an option for them.

Summer Steps with Step Afrika! is our flagship summer education program. We

started that in 2006. The camp is subsidized by donors in order to lower tuition fees, and we also provide twenty needs-based scholarships to students who cannot afford to attend.

Whenever we are on tour, we are also doing community outreach. All the artists are teachers as well, and we really stress that in the artists that we hire. They are great on stage, but they are equally as great in the classroom.

Do you hold auditions now?

We started holding auditions around 2004. There are no original members still in the company, myself included. We all got old. One question I ask of auditioning dancers is, "Do you really love the stage? Because if you do, this will be an amazing place for you." When you are a performer, you have to consistently put yourself out there night after night. We are getting ready to see a generational shift in the company when we will have more young artists than ever before. Figuring out how to survive year to year and replace those dancers that you thought were indispensable is a great creative challenge.

What are some of the company's biggest accomplishments?

We stepped in the White House in 2016 with President Barack Obama and the First Lady. I have always wanted to step in the East Wing and make those chandeliers shake. Around that time, we were also asked to create an exhibit for the National African American History Cultural Museum. I can now say that Step Afrika! is performing and teaching stepping every four minutes of the day because of this interactive exhibit in the museum. Sharing this tradition with different people and cultures at all is a dream come true for me.


For more info, visit www.stepafrika.org

Front of Tear Out Card 2

lemon raspberry
PANNA COTTA

2 cups heavy cream
1 cup whole milk
½ cup granulated sugar
3 (3-inch) lemon peel strips
1 (¼-ounce) envelope unflavored gelatin
2 tablespoons cold water
1 cup small fresh raspberries



American Lifestyle
magazine




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Back of Tear Out Card 2



1. Combine the cream, milk, sugar, and lemon peel strips in a medium saucepan; bring just to a simmer over medium-high, stirring occasionally to dissolve the sugar. Remove from the heat, and let steep for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Meanwhile, sprinkle the gelatin over the cold water in a small saucepan; let stand for 2 minutes. Cook over low just until the gelatin dissolves, about 2 minutes. Remove from the heat.
3. Stir the gelatin mixture into the cream mixture. Remove and discard the lemon peel strips. Divide the mixture among 8 (6-ounce) ramekins or custard cups. Cover and chill until set, at least 8 hours.
4. Dip the ramekins into a bowl of very hot water for about 5 seconds; run a thin knife or offset spatula around the outside of the custards, and invert onto serving plates. Top with the raspberries.

Variation: For variety, you can make this as a simple vanilla panna cotta, going heavier with the vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste instead of the lemon. You could also take advantage of seasonal fruit, such as peaches or nectarines, and add a few slices to the side of the plate as a garnish.

serves 8

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eight

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