

The Journal News

Home & Design

May 2004

Inside out
Creating a swanky patio

Gentle gardening
Banking on bonsai

A glass act
Making an old craft new

Functional beauty

Eric David Laxman,
custom-furniture creator

HOME DESIGN SHOPPING FURNISHINGS GARDENING INDOOR SPACES COLLECTING ETCETERA

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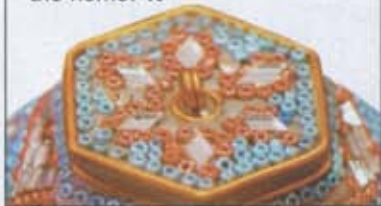
Where form meets function

Eric David Laxman's stone and steel creations grace homes, work spaces and at least one Manhattan restaurant. **8**



The Coop

Peekskill store features casually chic and unique items for the home. **46**



Bonsai

Miniature trees need maximum care for a long life. **25**

On the cutting edge



Hastings glass artisans add contemporary stylings to an ancient art. **20**

The Journal News

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Departments

The Designer
Eric Laxman **8**
Glass Artisans **20**

The Gardener
Bonsai **25**
Vintage Seeds **30**

Water Garden **32**

The Collector
Fan Fanatics **39**

Etcetera **42**
In Brief **44**

The Shopper
The Coop **46**

Outdoor Spaces
Steel Roofs **48**
Patio Furniture **50**
Sunrooms **54**

Indoor Spaces
Murals **60**
Quirky Layout **62**

Furnishings
Oriental Rugs **65**
Weavers **68**

The
Designer

ROCKLAND ARTIST

CREATES WORKS

THAT WELD FUNCTION

WITH ART

Forging ahead

BY MARY SHUSTACK

Eric David Laxman is a realist.

The Rockland County sculptor — long known for his powerful pieces of stone and steel — never wanted to be the proverbial

starving artist.

“I decided a long time ago I really didn’t want that life,” Laxman says. “I wanted to forge my talents, creativity into a profession.”

So he found a day job that allows for creativity and flexibility.

A single step into Laxman’s cozy yellow-and-white Valley Cottage home reveals just how much a part of his life that job is.

Continued on page 12

The Sogoni side table,
created by Eric
David Laxman.

At right, the artist, Eric
David Laxman.







Above, Laxman poses on a staircase in his home, surrounded by his creations in stone and steel.

This dramatic gazelle stair railing in steel, right, is a centerpiece of the Sugar Bar restaurant in Manhattan.

See his work

Among the places to see Eric David Laxman's work: Sugar Bar, 254 W. 72nd St., Manhattan. 212-579-0222.

Firefly Farm Gallery, 85 S. Broadway, Nyack. 845-353-3517.

Continued from page 8

Laxman creates custom metal furniture, and the home he shares with his wife, Marta Siberio, and their 4-year-old daughter, Sofia, serves as a bit of a showcase. There's the beautifully crafted steel stair railing, which adds a note of drama to the living room. Steel legs curve under glass tops on the tables that dot an adjacent space, also filled with his sculpture, drawings and collages.

"I look at the furniture as really the bread and butter — and sometimes the gravy — of my business," Laxman says. "It's much harder to have a predictable income with the artwork ... (People are) more likely to buy a unique table or customized design than a sculpture."

Laxman works with private and commercial clients, creating everything from staircase railings and tables to chairs and vases. The pieces range from \$1,500 to \$20,000.

Laxman delights in helping clients who have exhausted other options, as he did in designing a glass-and-steel cocktail table for Rockland County Legislator Ellen Jaffee, D-Suffern.

"I was starting to redecorate my home and frankly could not find a table that I was happy with," Jaffee says.

So she came to Laxman, whose art

"That's an interesting part of the challenge. You want it to look beautiful, but it has to be functional...

That's to me what design is: elegant problem-solving."

Eric David Laxman
on creating custom furniture



career she had long followed.

"We had the opportunity to really talk about what I had envisioned for that space," she says. "What I loved about it is I really feel like he listened."

Laxman prefers to work closely with clients, drawing inspiration from detailed conversations that he interprets into sketches.

"The finished product was precisely what I wanted," Jaffee says. "It's an art piece, actually, in the middle of my liv-

ing room."

And that's all Laxman could ask for. "My goal: My piece that I create for you looks like it was always there," he says. "It's going to fit, and it feels like it belongs in that environment."

Laxman, 39, was not originally headed toward a career in the arts. He graduated with a bachelor of science degree in chemistry from Tufts University, but plans for medical school

Continued on page 14



Above, Laxman at work in his Valley Cottage studio.

Continued from page 12

were soon scrapped. Instead, Laxman decided to pursue his art and went on to graduate in 1989 from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

From there, he exhibited and taught art, with his complementary career in furniture emerging about eight years later.

"I was making very elaborate bases

for the sculptures in metal," he says. A friend asked him to create a metal bed frame, which started him thinking about the field of furniture design. His direction became clear during a 1997 trip to Manhattan to attend the International Contemporary Furniture Fair.

"I was literally blown away," Laxman says. "I really felt there was a market for me."



These steel decorative window shutters, top right, were created by Laxman for the Sugar Bar in Manhattan. A stone vessel, below right, was created of stainless steel, marble and granite.

So he began to create furniture.

"I actually found it to be a really interesting complement to my sculpture," he says. "I found it really informing my artwork. It gave me more command with my metal."

He continued to cultivate his sources for materials, with an increased need for stainless steel and a new need for copper, bronze and glass. All his work is done in his studio, a converted garage across the road from his home.

His furniture, he says, cannot be strictly defined.

"I sort of categorize it as a combination of contemporary and modern, more modern than contemporary," he says. "I'm influenced by modern art ...

Brancusi, Noguchi."

It can work in many environments, Laxman says.

"It's not traditional, but it has a traditional feel," he says. "It can go with traditional."

It's also highly adaptable.

The friend who asked Laxman to design that bed was John Penotti, a college buddy who's now the president of GreeneStreet Films. The company's offices sport Laxman-designed furnishings, which he's contributed since the late 1990s.

"His design is the basis for the design of our office," says Penotti, who describes a fluid work environment where desks are on wheels in a classic 1909 Tribeca building.

"The mix of the wood and wrought iron is a kind of complement to the building," he says.

Penotti got just what he wanted, too.

* "The discussions are always this very great mix of aesthetics and functionality," he says.

Penotti says it's no surprise that Laxman has designed such a fitting career. He always had a sharp mind, he says. He recalls a time from their days at Tufts when everyone was sweating out finals. Penotti spotted Laxman outside a window.

"You'd look, and he'd be out there sunbathing," he says with a laugh.

Laxman is well-connected in the community. He continues to teach at the Rockland Center for the Arts in West Nyack (right now, it's stone-carving), where he curates the outdoor sculpture collection. He also continues to exhibit, most recently with the joint exhibition "Combining Forces," with Paul Tappenden. It ran through early April at The Arts Alliance of Haverstraw.

Laxman doesn't want potential clients to be shy about approaching him, though.

"They think of me as a sculptor, so they might call Joe Ironworks for a railing," he says. "Some people think they might be offending me if they're not asking me to do a piece of artwork. I'm trying to let people know that I'm willing to do almost anything."

At the moment he's creating a mural-like backsplash for a client's kitchen.

Laxman thrives on such a challenge. In 1995, he was commissioned to do

work for Sugar Bar, the Manhattan restaurant owned by R&B singers Ashford & Simpson. His work has included a copper-steel-and-brass sculptural awning, steel window shutters, a bar top, a glass rack and corner shelves.

"I needed something to look very authentic, very African, and he was very

inspirational," Nick Ashford says.

Ashford remains enthralled with the steel stair railing. Its dramatic interpretation of a gazelle is the centerpiece of the restaurant.

"That, that, is a work of art," Ashford says.

Ashford, who has a piece of Laxman's sculpture in his Manhattan brownstone, has tapped the artist for another project this spring.

"I'm changing the front of the restaurant, and I didn't know exactly what I wanted, but what he came up with was perfect," he says.

Laxman has created a new facade, in which dark windows will be replaced by clear glass encased in movable metal pieces. The new pieces, which should be in place later this month, will allow Sugar Bar to extend its interior design to the street, for outdoor dining.

Laxman says there's no reason that his commercial projects can't coexist with his art.

"What's wrong with creating something if it's going to complete an environment? I mean, where's the sellout?" he says.

Laxman's just happy to be a working artist, one who works on what he wants, when he wants.

"I'm in my studio. I'm my own boss and I'm making my own thing, whether it's a railing or a sculpture," he says. "I'm really very lucky. It's a gift." ■

Above, "Combining Forces" is a mixed media collaboration between Laxman and Paul Tappenden. The two artists held a joint exhibition earlier this year at The Arts Alliance of Haverstraw. Left, Laxman's creations include this circle table, a creation in steel and glass.

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