



JONATHAN LAURENCE  
Jonathan Laurence during a nine-day journey on board the Icelandic cargo ship Selfoss in February 2015.

## Maine artists take to high seas

'A bunch of Vikings' their inspiration

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

Earlier this winter, midcoast artists Jonathan Laurence and Anneli Skaar were given free rein of the Icelandic container ship Selfoss as it made a nine-day crossing over icy seas from Portland, Maine, to Reykjavik, Iceland.

They saw sights that were amazing, such as green northern lights rippling over the black water of the North Atlantic, and things that were strange, such as the time they spotted people hunting for puffins wearing black ski masks and carrying guns. And they were able to make their once-in-a-lifetime journey for free as artists-in-residence aboard the ship.

"The experience of being at sea is a classic setting for artists," Skaar said.

Laurence agreed. "Every day, looking out at the ocean, you kept seeing it differently," he said. "At sunset, everything was sherbet orange. It was really beautiful."

Skaar, 46, is a designer and artist of Norwegian heritage who has lived in the Camden area for about a decade and who is known for her oil paintings. Laurence, 34, a photographer and multimedia artist, grew up in Rockport and works as the creative director at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockland.

The idea for their northern adventure came about months ago, when the longtime friends met up over drinks and had the kind of "wouldn't it be cool" conversation that usually doesn't linger in the mind past last call. Wouldn't it be cool, they wondered, if they could somehow combine their interests in container ships and the Arctic in a way that would let them travel and make art?

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## Rare woolly pigs come to a Maine farm near you



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Two new Mangalitsa pigs at the Ireland Hill Farms in Swanville recently. The pigs were delivered by the Baker family, who raise the animals at Bakers Green Acres farm in Marion, Michigan. Mangalitsa pigs are prized for the quality of their meat.

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

The two fleecy pigs turned heads even before they were unloaded from the trailer that had brought them to the rich Swanville farmland where they'll make their new home.

"They're so cute!" exclaimed Aana Ireland, the 2½-year-old daughter of farmers Jerry and Emily Ireland of Ireland Hill Farms, as she peeked in on the two woolly Mangalitsa pigs that had come all the way from Michigan.

Watch the video  
bangordailynews.com

Their thick coats of curly blond fleece, similar to that of a sheep, certainly make the pigs stand out. But that's not the only reason why this Hungarian heritage breed is appealing to more and more Maine farmers, who are deciding it's worth their while to bring the pigs from the Michigan breeders.

"There's been an explosion recently of Mangalitsas in Maine," Deborah Evans of Bagaduce Farm in Brooksville said. "They are fabulous. And they grow up to make fabulous meat."

The story of the Mangalitsas, which also are called Mangalicas, nearly went in a very different direction. The breed was bred for lard in the 1830s by Archduke Joseph and was in high demand when lard was the preferred fat for cooking and baking. According to D'Artagnan, a New Jersey-based purveyor of fine meats, the Mangalitsa is one of the fattiest pigs in the world, with fat making up an average of 65 to 70 percent of its body weight.

But herds shrank with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I, according to The New York Times, and they dwindled even more when less expensive vegetable oils became popular after World War II. By 1991, when Hungarian animal geneticist Peter Toth went looking for purebred Mangalitsas to keep



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Four-year-old Frank Baker watches his father, Mark Baker, slice a piece of prosciutto for him during a delivery stop at Ireland Hill Farm in Swanville. Mark said he prepared the prosciutto in a traditional way.

the strain alive, he found fewer than 200 in the country.

"Sometimes, I would rescue the pigs right from the slaughterhouse," Toth told The New York Times in 2009.

But Toth persevered, and the woolly, fatty pig has gone from being all but forgotten to being highly sought after by chefs, who love the marbled, flavorful meat. Today, there are more than 50,000 of the pigs available each year, according to D'Artagnan, and a few American farmers are dedicated to raising the specialized breed.

Enter Mark and Jill Baker of Bakers Green Acres in Marion, Michigan. The family has been raising Mangalitsas since the pigs came to the United States in 2009 and said that the breed is well-suited to Maine's harsh climate. The Bakers were in Maine to make their Mangalitsa deliveries to farmers here.

"We're trying to get them established

in different parts of the country as best we can ... Maine's probably the biggest [market] for us," Mark Baker said. "Chefs really like them because this breed is what they call a lard-type breed. The meat is not the other white meat."

To demonstrate what he means, the farmer used a knife to cut a few thin slices off a leg of prosciutto that had been curing for a year and five months. The salt-cured meat was succulent, nearly melting on the tongue, and it was a rich red color — very different in flavor and appearance from the pale pink sheets of prosciutto that often can be found in Maine supermarkets.

"The pig is part of the equation," Mark Baker said. "But the method it's raised is another part. These pigs need to be out on pasture or in the woods to reach their full potential. They're the happiest when

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## Meet Maine's tomato whisperer

'Greenhouses are my passion,' says owner of Backyard Farms

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

Spring is starting to announce itself in Somerset County. Trees are budding out, crocuses and daffodils pop from lawns, heavy coats are shed with abandon. But inside Backyard Farms in rural Madison it's a sunny, hot July day.

Standing in sprawling greenhouses that would cover 32 football fields, head grower Arie van der Giessen reaches over and plucks a ripe cocktail tomato from the vine.

"We only pick them when they are red. That's the peak of flavor," he said, handing over a ruby red dollop, urging me to take a bite.

As the acidic, sweet, juice bursts forth, I understand how he got his nickname. Whatever the polite, jovial Dutchman is whispering to the endless harvest of red orbs that seem to fall from the sky in this Willy Wonka-like factory, it works. Everywhere you look tomatoes in all states of ripeness twinkle from lush, thick green stems like exotic flowers.

It's red and green as far as the eye can see. This flowering, surreal horizon is his canvas.

Wearing a baby blue smock that matches his eyes, van der Giessen is the crucial backbone behind New England's largest year-round tomato producer. If you're familiar with the produce aisle at Hannaford, Shaw's, Market Basket or Whole Foods, you know his artistry.

"Each one has a little bit of Arie," director of marketing Jim Darroch said.

To grow 25 to 30 million tomatoes per year, delivered across New England and as far south as New Jersey, the company has simulated an ecosystem, complete with honeybees and pests. Van der Giessen sees to it that each beefsteak, cocktail and cluster tomato plant grows a foot per week, producing 500,000 pounds of tomatoes every seven days.

"Every time I check the greenhouse, it changes all the time. It's alive," he said, surveying a cluster of tomatoes in shades of green, yellow, pink and red. As their main caretaker, he keeps a vigilant watch on weather, sunlight,

humidity, condensation and the clock. "Greenhouses are my passion."

It's no surprise to discover that the region of southern Holland where he grew up is known as Glass City. In Maasland, greenhouse agriculture is everywhere. Van der Giessen's youth was shaped by hothouse vegetables.

"I grew up with tomatoes. My whole life I've loved tomatoes, and I really like to eat them fresh," he said with a wink.

In his family, the tomato doesn't fall too far from the vine.

His father and his grandfather were tomato growers. Though enamored with fresh vegetables and the colorful tulips of The Netherlands, he started out on a different path. "I was more into electronics and technology. When I was a kid, I never thought I'd be in the tomato business," he said. At 16, something shifted.

Van der Giessen enrolled in night school to learn the trade, worked part time in a greenhouse and received a diploma. His training as a certified electrician was

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## Tips for better tomatoes this season

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

When Backyard Farms head grower Arie van der Giessen is not working, he plants vegetables in his backyard. "It's fun and relaxing."

Although greenhouse growing is his passion, he shared these tips for killer tomatoes in your backyard:



BONNIE PLANTS | MCT

- Get a head start. Buy tomato plants with flowers that are almost open.
- Plant in mid-May, when threat of frost has subsided.
- Develop a green thumb by observing plants and seeing how they act. Every year you are going to learn something new.
- Pick the right spot in your yard: an area that has a lot of sun, doesn't get much wind and where the soil is well-drained.
- Don't plant in the same place every year.
- Don't overwater. Tomato roots go deep into the ground or flower bed. Excess water makes them weaker. Also, the fruit will split.
- Jot down notes. This will help you develop a longterm grow and water strategy.
- Cut shoots often to give plants enough light. Start at the bottom and prune six to eight leaves. This increases air flow. If the leaves look healthy leave them alone.
- Feed your plants. Give them enough to eat such as nitrates, fertilizer and organic potting soil.
- Smile. You need to be happy around plants in order for them to grow.