



Thorndike craftsman devoted to sustainability

Kenneth Copp has always loved creating things by hand, but it might have been his boyhood self in Virginia to hear he'd one day be a full-time furniture maker in Maine, using machines powered entirely by horses.

Copp is a man who feels driven to discover the truest path to right living and to responsibly use Earth's natural resources. It's also led him on an odyssey through the spiritual spectrum.

When Copp was in his teens he left his mother's Lutheran reli-



ROBIN CLIFFORD WOOD
CONVERSATIONS WITH MAINE

gious tradition to join the Mennonites, attracted by their simple lifestyle and closeness to the natural world. He later gravitated toward the Amish, whose principles deeply resonated with him for several decades. During those years, Copp mastered the art

of fine, handcrafted woodwork, in keeping with Amish ideals. He and his family lived in several Amish communities around the United States, ending up in Thorndike, Maine.

Copp is a voracious learner with a deep-seated inclination to seek and to question. Those questions — about religion, God and the Earth's history — eventually led to his decision to leave his Amish faith behind. His admiration for Amish traditions and lifestyle, however, remains largely unabated. Copp still wears Amish clothing for its practicality. He is an avid believer in reducing consumption of fossil fuels. He believes in shared community support, travels by horse and buggy almost exclusively and hopes to teach students at nearby Unity College about horse care and how to drive a horse and buggy.

"I'd like to see more people that have one to two acres keep a horse and buggy for local travel," he said. "I think more people could do it if they wanted to."

Copp ran his home-based business, Locust Grove Woodworks, exclusively by horse power for more than 17 years. Horses harnessed to a central hub inside his barn walk in a circle, turning gears connected to a line shaft that powers Copp's woodworking machines in an adjoining room. In keeping with his disinclination to complacency, however, he hopes to transition to more sustainable and efficient sources of power — a horse treadmill, solar panels, and stored power. Though he still uses his horse power machine to operate some of his machinery, he currently uses grid electricity for the rest. Under strict Amish rules, he would not have been allowed to make that compromise, even in transition.

Part of his goal is to become more efficient by moving his machines from a distant barn into the same building that houses his showroom full of furniture. "I was planning to put in a horse treadmill because it takes up less room," Copp said, "but the treadmill doesn't have as much turning power."

Then someone suggested that he use his four workhorses to feed a generator or alternator. That way he can store electricity in a battery bank.

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Jim Cornish and Sophie Lapointe work on her tiny house at the Stone Soup Institute in Harpswell recently. Lapointe, a Hampshire College student, is finishing up a year's study with Cornish in the varied skills associated with homesteading.

Eat well, live well

Homestead school in Harpswell teaches different kind of culture

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

While some juniors in college opt to spend a year abroad in England, France or Italy, Sophie Lapointe moved to Maine last September to fell and haul trees with the raw power of Belgian draft horses. Over the course of a year, the 21-year-old milled them into lumber to build a tiny house.

Instead of steeping in old-world culture in museums and cafes, the Hampshire College student is immersed in a new world culture, harkening back to the foundational roots of America. Like early settlers, Lapointe, a Vermont native, learned to can, farm, make wine and build things at Stone Soup Institute.

"It looks like a step backward, but it's a choice," said Jim Cornish, co-founder of the homesteading school tucked into the woods of Harpswell.

It's not your typical curriculum. Classes start whenever you wake up. The weather dictates the day's lessons.

For 10 years the bearded and burly Cornish, 60, has taught people from as far away as Vietnam and Croatia time-honored agrarian and life skills. The goal: become self-sufficient through the abundance of nature. His homesteading school is far from flashy, as the overgrown weeds and hogs outback attest, but it's helping people, like Lapointe, "become human again."

"The land and the people are the only things that feel real anymore," said Cornish, who grew up on a farm in Bowdoin and is a carpenter and logger by trade. "I teach people to reconnect to the ground and soil."

Different from a farm apprenticeship, which are abundant in Maine, homesteading instruction is "a deeper immersion using a broader range of skills and practices," said Cornish, who teaches everything from blacksmithing to ham curing to logging on a hodgepodge spread not far from the ocean.

A year ago, Lapointe, the only



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Sophie Lapointe, a Hampshire College student from Vermont, carries an armload of tomatoes back to Jim Cornish's house in Harpswell recently.

student this semester, enrolled in Stone Soup in exchange for school credit. Throughout this intimate skills transfer, Cornish taught her everything from slaughtering pigs to harnessing a team of horses to building a tiny house, which she will live in when she returns to Massachusetts this month. Because the work is so intense, he can take on at most four students at a time.

Drafting and constructing the house design together, Lapointe and Cornish worked on the dwelling with cathedral and Gothic-like arches for months. Made with barn board from Topsham, pine and spruce from their own fields and held together with dovetailed joints and oak pegs, "this house is a sculpture at this point," said Lapointe, who has handled every piece of wood in her 8-by-20-foot abode. "It's a self portrait, a meditation on this time in my life."

Lapointe — with a power drill, tape measure and hammer hanging from her belt — is proud of her new home on wheels, which

will be on display at The Common Ground Fair at the end of the month. As classes came to an end last week, she harbored no illusion that her workload was easy.

Surviving the harshest Maine winter and turning 21 alone without her peers, tested her will, as much as animal husbandry tested her mettle. She turned toward homesteading "out of necessity," Lapointe said, taking a break from her tiny house construction last week. "There is not much going for people our age. And I am not willing to settle."

Unlike the corporate working world, where few have time to look up from their digital devices to notice the weather, much less the sweet nuances of the change of season (celebrated here with a peeper party), Stone Soup Institute provides a needed balance.

"People of my generation are interested in preserving this old, old culture and learning one on one with people who've lived it," Lapointe said.

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Compost FAQ: Am I doing this right?

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

In Maine, where 38 percent of what we throw away can be composted, University of Maine Cooperative Extension Professor Mark Hutchinson is helping people do a better job composting yard waste and chicken scraps. He thinks composting can be fun as well as important, and he knows what he's talking about. In the last 15 years, he has composted "everything from chickens to whales." Here are some of his pointers.

Every summer, I throw yard waste and kitchen scraps into a pile in a corner of the yard and hope for the best, but I'm not sure this is the most efficient method of composting. What's the best way to get started?

You want to have somewhere around a pile that's 4 feet by 4 feet by 4 feet. That creates a thermal mass to keep the heat in place. If your pile is too small, you'll lose the heat — that's one of those "aha" moments I often get when teaching about composting. We get piles to 160 to 165 degrees without much effort in a commercial setting. Homeowners typically get temperatures as high as 110 degrees.

Wow, that's really hot. Is that heat a sign the pile is decomposing? If that's the case, I think mine is just sitting there.

You've got to think of the compost pile as feeding an organism. You want to feed the microbes. They're the decomposers in the compost. They're the ones that are doing the majority of the work.

How long does it take them to get the job done?

A commercial operation can make finished compost in three to four months. A home composter can probably make compost in six to eight months, depending on how active they are with it. My compost is usually 18 months before it's ready to go into my garden.

What do you want in the pile?

You can put anything from vegetable scraps to plants you might be weeding out or taking out, as long as they haven't gone to seed. You can put in leaves. You can put in weeds. In a home composting situation, think about how much green nitrogen source you actually have, versus a brown or carbon source. In the fall you're going to have a lot of carbon rather than a lot of nitrogen. Sources of carbon are dead leaves, wood shavings and horse bedding. Sources of nitrogen are food residuals coming out of the kitchen, any type of dairy or chicken manure. In the pile here at my house, if you cut up a melon, you put in the rind. Coffee grounds. Eggshells. Lobster bodies, if you eat lobster. Paper towels. Those things are all acceptable in a home compost pile.

What don't you want in there?

Do not put diseased plants in the compost pile. The reality is it's difficult for homeowners to get the temperature high enough to kill plant diseases.

Any other no-nos?

If you're in town next to someone else's house, you probably don't want any meats and bones in the pile. Meat fats draw critters you don't want, such as rats, cats and dogs.

Is the location of the compost pile important?

The rule of thumb is high and dry. Find the spot in your yard where water does not accumulate. The pile does not need to be covered from rain, snow or sun.

ABOUT A HOUSE

An off-the-grid haven on the coast of Maine

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

When Judy Berk and David Foley moved home to Maine nearly 30 years ago, after a stint in California, the best piece of land they could afford was an old chicken farm on Beech Hill in Northport. "We called it fixer-upper land," Foley said. "But the place had a lot of potential."

"There were a lot of old junk cars, washing machines, sofas," Berk recalled. "Even an underground oil storage tank."

That was then. After decades of diligent care, construction, planning, planting and, most of all, hard work, the fixer-upper now

called Ocean Glimpse Farm has been transformed into a fruitful, tranquil homestead. The 12-acre property includes 6 acres of field and 6 of forest. In addition to Berk and Foley, it's home to two Katahdin sheep, a flock of chickens, a massive cooperative garden, an apple orchard and several buildings built mostly by the hands of Foley, a designer and partner in an architectural firm. At the heart of the property is their home, a New England-style shingled farmhouse with deep gables and a clean look that seems perfectly placed in the landscape.

But constructing the house was not as straightforward as going to a bank and borrowing money for a building loan. Early

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Judy Berk and David Foley moved to their property in Northport nearly 30 years ago and built the house and other buildings almost paycheck to paycheck. In the first years, they added windows to the house as they had money.