

# Banjo

Continued from Page C1

## Beginnings

Pool, 26, is a two-time national champion old-time banjo player who grew up making instruments with his dad, Scott Pool, at the family music store in Mountain View, Arkansas. Forman, 25, is from Massachusetts. She won a national Scottish fiddling title while still a teenager. They met at Berklee College of Music.

"We met in Old-Time Ensemble," Forman said.

They hatched their banjo-making plans while still in school. Pool graduated while Forman had a few classes to finish. He took off for Arkansas to work with his dad, refining his techniques and plans. She told him to come back to Boston when she finished school and she'd be waiting for him. He drove back north a few months later.

"My car was just full to the top with saws and hand tools," he said.

The pair came to Maine from Boston this past spring, finding an apartment in Portland and shop space just off Route 1 in Saco.

"It wasn't happening in Massachusetts," she said.

"There's just not enough space," he said. "It's very pricey."

"So, we came up here and got ourselves a shop and just kind of dove into the deep end and went full time," she said.

"It was kind of scary," he said. "But we did it."

Although Pool enjoys performing and teaching banjo, it doesn't compare to the satisfaction of having something to show for his hard work.

With music itself, he said, "you play it and it dies. It just kind of fades off unless you record it. It's a lot of fun and I love playing music, but I really missed being hands on and having a workshop."

## How it's done

"You start with a piece of wood," Edén Forman said, stating the obvious with a



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN  
Edén Forman works on sanding part of a banjo pot while Lukas Pool glues a fretboard to an unshaped neck at The Ozark Banjo Company workshop in Saco in October.

laugh. "We go to the store and pick out a piece of wood."

They buy one 5-foot slab of mahogany, maple or walnut to make one whole banjo. The wood depends on what the buyer wants. Fingerboards are made of ebony or rosewood. All of their banjos are custom made from scratch. The buyer gets to decide almost everything, from wood choice to inlays to pot size to neck profile to headstock design.

Pool said Forman has a great eye for picking out the wood. "Then we rip it up and we clean it up," he said. It's a team effort.

Forman glues together three layers of 12 angled blocks of wood, forming a rough circle that will become the pot — the distinctively round part of a banjo. Later, it will be turned smooth with a lathe and a router table. It's a bit of a newfangled idea. The traditional method calls for steam-bending strips of wood around a mold and laminating them together with glue.

"We like them both but they sound a little different," Pool said.

Their method allows for more glue to be squeezed out of the seams, making a pot with a greater wood-to-glue ratio than the laminate style.

"If you tap them once they're done, they actually ring a little longer," he said. "They have a really bell-like sound. I like them."

While Forman sands and glues the pots, Pool sketches out the shape of the neck and headstock. Once it's roughed-out, he glues a fretboard on top and cuts the slots for the wire frets. Then, using a vertical drum sander, he shapes elegant neck curves to fit comfortably into the crook of a banjo player's hand.

Forman also handles the delicate inlays that will adorn almost all their banjo's necks. She works with buyers via email, sketching designs and translating ideas into shapes that will work as inlays. Then she makes patterns, gluing them to thin pieces of abalone.

"Then I plunk down and start working on it," she said.

Using a tiny saw and blade, she cuts them out wearing a mask with a vacuum strapped to the bench to protect her from the toxic dust. It's precise work.

The partners can't remember how many instruments they've made since coming to Maine. I watched them make four banjos in late October and early November.

"I mean, we spend more time in the shop than we do at home. So we're there all day and sometimes all night

— pretty much every day," Forman said.

"It's a labor of love," Pool said.

"There's a lot of standing there, scratching our heads, going, 'What are we going to do with this one?'" she said, laughing.

"That, too," he said.

## Staying for a while

I asked them if people sometimes wonder why instruments from the Ozark Banjo Company are made in Maine, of all places. Yes, they told me, pretty much every day. They explain it's in homage to Pool's home state of Arkansas and his father, who got them started. It makes perfect sense to them.

"Well, that's where we learned," he said.

"That's where you're from," she added.

But they see themselves staying in Portland.

"This was a good move for us," she said.

"I like to say it's the Arkansas of the north because it's just really relaxed here," he said. "The people are really friendly and talkative. We like it here."

"Yeah," she said.

"I just want to keep diving further into the process and building, because it's really changed everything about my life and the people I've met," he said, looking at Forman.

# Art

Continued from Page C1

"I started working in Washington in 2009 when I was 16," Pelto said. "I was able to do that because my father, Mauri Pelto, got his Ph.D. at UMaine, and when he was a doctoral student here he started a research project in Washington that he's still doing now. The purpose [of the project] was to create a continuous glacial monitoring program where every year he would survey the glaciers to figure out how the size was changing."

Mauri Pelto, a professor of environmental science at Nichols College in Massachusetts and glaciologist, started the North Cascade Glacier Climate Project in 1984 and has studied glaciers and the rapid changes they have undergone for over 25 years.

As Jill Pelto says, she is "following in his footsteps."

Jill Pelto, an artist and scientist, recently completed a project as part of her honors thesis exploring issues of human-induced climate change she has studied with her father over many years.

"I call it environmental art," she said. "The way I use it is specifically to communicate particular issues."

Increasing forest fire activity, salmon population decline and a decrease in glacier mass balance are three of the many issues Jill Pelto addresses in her artwork — things she observed firsthand when working in Washington.

Jill Pelto returned to Washington again in 2015, but the scene she observed was much different from what she saw on her very first trip.

"Because of the drought out there, there was so little snowfall. The changes to the whole area from the drought and lack of snow was unlike anything I had ever seen," Jill Pelto said. "It was scary and sad for me because I had been going for so many years."

New lakes were forming at the bottom of glaciers. The melting masses revealed debris. Fires were ravaging the area. Fortunately, she wasn't near any of them, but some days the wind blew smoke from the fires toward her.

"It's really hard because I

have these specific memories. Sometimes the changes happen slowly, but this year it was like, 'Wow, everything is different,'" Jill Pelto said.

According to the studies done by the Peltos, human impact was taking its toll.

Jill Pelto made it her mission to show others the facts through watercolors and screenprints that illustrate the effects of climate change by integrating scientific data with her own unique artwork.

"I incorporated a graph with data points and used some sort of illustration to give a narrative about what the piece was about," Pelto said. "A lot of scientists don't know how to communicate their research. ... Since I'm involved in both the science world and the art world, I think I have a unique ability to bridge those."

Her watercolors and screenprints depict scenes both intriguing and heart-breaking: a steady incline of a graph that mixes with blazing reds and oranges of a forest fire; a steep descending graph integrated with the an image of shrinking glaciers to illustrate changes in glacier mass balance; and many others, including graphs depicting declining salmon populations, ocean acidification and habitat degradation.

In addition to her trips to Washington for the past seven years, Jill Pelto has visited the Antarctic Dry Valleys and the Falkland Islands.

The purpose behind her artwork is simple: awareness.

"A lot of the information out there isn't that accessible," Jill Pelto said. "I can use some of what [scientists are] saying — the broad points and their data — and put it into an art piece that a broader audience is going to understand."

"We've been able to make environmentally positive changes in the past and I think we can do that now," Jill Pelto said. "The more people who know and are more informed, the better."

Jill Pelto's work is currently featured at the University of Maine art department's senior studio art exhibit, "The Ghosts of Carnegie Hall," where it will be on display until Jan. 22, 2016, in Lord Hall on the University of Maine campus.

# Books

Continued from Page C1

year" to this December challenge: "Create a holiday gift-wrap pattern that suits you and your feelings about the season." A grid of four empty boxes allows whatever artistic form seems best — for example, pen, crayons, watercolor, collage. From the "Q&A a Day" series, this one targets visual creativity but promises to be appropriate for all skill levels. It hopes that over the four years, the doodles will offer some type of perspective. (Crown Publishing Group, \$16.95)

## For a new hobby

"Hand-Lettering for Everyone: A Creative Workbook" aims to recapture the care around cursive. Designer and illustrator Cristina Vanko, the book's author, explains how hand-lettering is different from typography, handwriting and calligraphy. Its opening request: "Draw a hand-lettered portrait of yourself." If that seems intimidating, the

cheerleading in the introduction includes this bit of wisdom: "Everyone doubts their creativity every once in a while, but remember this: you are creative. The truth is that some people choose to exercise their creativity more than others. The ability is in you, and we're going to find it!" Vanko takes clear and contagious delight in explaining minutiae, like shape names for letter forms, from ampersand to descender. Step by step, with types and a chance to try them, it plants the seed of excitement around lettering, from monograms to a name on your coffee cup. (Perigee, \$15.95)

## For gratitude

"Instant Happy Journal: 365 Days of Inspiration, Gratitude, and Joy" by Karen Salmansohn offers prompts to inspire a daily dose of gratitude. Whether a scientific fact, question or quote, the goal is to realize more joyful moments in daily life. Hopefully, you begin the day with a positive intention and end the day with grateful reflection. Prompts range from "Reframe a story from your day so that failure = wis-

dom" to "What does the weekend of a successful person look like?" Salmansohn uses the same prompts with her family, she writes, like a poster reading, "Something awesome is going to happen today. I can't wait to see what it will be." Dates are blank, so you can toss them in at your leisure. (Ten Speed Press, \$16.99)

## For inspiration

The new year can be a time to search for inspiration, and Robie Rogge and Dian G. Smith hope to feed that spark with their book, "Do One Thing Every Day That Inspires You: A Creativity Journal." The authors want readers to allow space for epiphanies. The daily wisdom comes from sources as varied as artists, architects and actors. It starts with a quote from Henri Matisse: "Creativity takes courage." They intend to push journalers to the edge or even outside of a creative comfort zone, with suggestions like making a cubist drawing of something in a bag or writing a myth of a constellation. (Crown Publishing Group, \$12.95)

# MCLAUGHLIN'S AT THE MARINA

## New Year's Eve Dinner

Seatings from 4:00 pm – 9:00 pm

100 Marina Rd, Hampden, ME  
207.990.1111 📞 207.974.9228

## Menu

### Beginning Selections:

- Jumbo Shrimp Cocktail
- Crabcake Appetizer
- Haddock Chowder
- Spinach Salad

### Entrees:

- Beef Wellington
  - Cranberry Pecan Encrusted Chicken Breast with Herb Pesto
  - Maine Lobster Dinner
- Served traditional or lazy style.*

Baked Seafood Stuffed Haddock  
*Served with oven roasted potatoes and winter butternut squash.*

### Desserts:

- Cheesecake with Fresh Seasonal Berries
  - Espresso Creme Bruleé
  - Ghirardelli Brownie with Walnuts, Vanilla Ice Cream, and Ghirardelli Caramel Drizzle
- \$60 per person plus tax and gratuity.**

Join us for our 2015 New Year's Eve celebration.

Wishing you a healthy and prosperous new year.  
~Reid and Kimberly McLaughlin



## The Year to Sparkle

Radiant .86 carat yellow diamond complemented by .37 carat brilliant white diamonds hand set in 18 karat white gold \$7,950

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