

savoirflair

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NEW ENGLAND'S GLBT MAGAZINE

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Cape Odd

*Provincetown's
Wonderful Eccentrics*

Paul Chaisson

*Interior Designer
Revealed*

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A PRIVATE GIRL'S SCHOOL OR PRISON **PICK ONE**

by: Henry Levine



The Children's Hour

Directed By: William Wyler
Produced by Robert Wyler
Written by: Lillian Hellman
Starring: Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine, and James Garner
Release Date: December 19, 1961

Good friends and colleagues Karen and Martha are teachers at a private school for girls in New England. Mary, a vindictive student, tells a lie and is punished. In retaliation she tells her grandmother, that Martha was "jealous" of Karen's relationship with Dr. Joe Cardin, and she heard Martha's Aunt Lily telling another party that she thought those feelings were "unnatural." Grandma believes her and takes Mary out of school. The word quickly spreads and within days Karen and Martha are faced with empty classrooms. Joe is fired from the hospital for siding with the teachers. Karen and Martha sue for slander in a case that makes national headlines.

Fortune and Men's Eyes

Directed by Harvey Hart
Produced by Lewis M. Allen, Lester Persky
Written by: John Herbert
Starring: Wendell Burton, Michael Greer and Zooey Hall
Release Date: June 15, 1971

Fortune and Men's Eyes is a 1967 play and 1971 film about a young man's experience in prison, exploring themes of homosexuality and sexual slavery. The title comes from William Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 which begins with the line When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes.

The central character, the young, naive Smitty is sent to prison for six months; Cathy, his girlfriend, watches as he disappears behind the bars and barbed wire. He's assigned a cell with a Drag Queen named Queenie, Rocky, a quiet but cocky con, and Mona, a young gay man who ministers to Rocky. Smitty watches in horror as gangs of inmates brutalize prisoners who lack protection. Mona offers poetry - Shakespeare's sonnet XXIX; Queenie and Rocky offer Smitty advice, and Rocky offers protection for a price.

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH



OUTTAKE online. com

Massachusetts is ground zero for issues affecting the GLBT community in this country. Created by 3 women in Boston, OUTTAKEonline.com provides an exciting and unique media source for both the local and global community. Check



out their 10 minute short on gay marriage "OUTTAKE", right on their site! Originally produced to educate and diffuse the gay marriage controversy, the producers are expanding it into a full-length documentary to be released in time to impact the 2008 national elections. But gay marriage isn't the only issue they're concerned about. Current issues are addressed daily on their cool, hip Blog.

Their goal is to pair innovative filmmakers and producers with equally courageous investors to showcase cutting edge shorts and documentaries. Created by Charlotte Robinson, an Emmy Award Winning Producer-Director, in collaboration with Denise Campbell, Director of Marketing and Gina Kamentsky, Web Designer, OUTTAKEonline.com went live in June, 2007.



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Cape Cod

Provincetown's Wonderful Eccentrics

by H. Levine



Aimee "the Bearded Lady" Ross pierces another happy customer.

"People in Provincetown have always danced and sung." Mary Heaton Vorse, author, activist and eccentric extraordinaire, wrote that about the place she lived in 1942. She was talking specifically about the town's Portuguese settlers, linking their Latin roots with the world famous panoply of artists, extremists and oddballs that inhabited Provincetown in her own day.

It was these fishermen, with their "gaiety and gusto," that set the stage for the unparalleled village of playwrights, poets and musicians that would follow. And likewise, the slow-moving armada of gays and lesbians that would follow them.

It was true then and it's true today. People in Provincetown still dance and sing. But now they also entertain a whole new spectrum of idiosyncratic behavior. They host karaoke shows in drag, paint women in the nude, commune with the environment, spend a lot of time with tourists and make a mockery of the U.S. government. Some will even pierce your genitals, if you are over 18 and willing.



jay critchley

Where one man might see a defunct and half-demolished motel on the side of Route 6, Jay Critchley sees socially-minded art.

When Critchley heard the funky 1950s-era Pilgrim Spring Motel was coming down to make room for a dismal set of what can only be described as aluminum utility barns, he couldn't resist getting involved. He didn't want to intervene or cause any trouble – not this time, anyway – but he wanted to dress the old motor lodge up, and take it out on the town one more time. And that's why he's encrusting the entire thing in sand while a half-dozen other artists create installations for its remaining rooms. It's an homage, Critchley says, to the shift in ecology, architecture and affordability of Cape Cod.

"It's about the aging of the universe," Critchley says, staring at the motels "guts," bleeding out of its utility room in a lion-colored stream of wires and wooden planks. Beige, the color of sand, he explains, "is the average color of the universe. It's capturing a transition between life and death."

That's kind of the way Critchley looks at stuff. Critchley's an artist, of course, but he's also a massage therapist, fund raiser and agitator who got famous in the 1990s when he put an American flag icon on a condom wrapper. That was another complicated project, one meant to criticize the government's absentia during the AIDS crisis. Critchley created the Old Glory Condom Corporation with the logo design and even filed for a trademark. The government denied him on the grounds that it was "scandalous and immoral" to associate the flag with sex, but three years later, the courts ruled in his favor. The media descended, and Critchley was set on a rabble-rousing mission to undermine, call attention to and poke fun at the litany of social, economic and environmental affronts that make the world go round.

Time was, Critchley used to collect plastic tampon applicators that washed up on the Cape shores. Eventually, he used them to create Miss Tampon Liberty, a replica of the Statue of Liberty. He also found a reuse for an old septic tank in his backyard as a performance space or "theater in the ground."

And more recently, he filed an application with the US Army Corps of Engineers, seeking permission to build "Marktucket Eyeland Resort and Casino," a theme park that would be anchored between three of the 130 wind turbines that were proposed for the Nantucket Sound.

Funny stuff, right? But what's maybe funnier is the dead-serious delivery Critchley keeps up when he's describing his work. To him, none of this is a joke.

"I'm compelled to do what I do," he says. "It's my responsibility as a citizen of the world."

ronny hazel

It was by way of a dusty, sunburned road that Ronny Hazel came to Provincetown. In the 1970s, after serving a tour in Vietnam, Hazel hit the road. He was transporting leather pocketbooks over the Mexican border. He hocked these items from his camper as he traveled around the states. During one such transaction, he hit the jackpot. "This guy told me about a little place on Cape Cod where leather was very popular," he said.

He arrived in Provincetown a few months later with \$600 to his name. And today, he's got the flagship store, Shop Therapy, several clothing lines and a global wholesale business, whereby he sells his featured products to about 300 stores – "a mini empire of cool stuff."

The term low profile would never be used in the same sentence with Ronny's name. One look at his home says it all, huge fantasy metal sculptures adorn his front yard with intricate stone work. Not to mention, Shop Therapy exterior with its elaborate tattoo styled mural painting that covers the front. Ronny's all counter culture flash in an age where most of his clientele weren't alive during the 1960's.

It's not that Ronny Hazel is a bad guy, but the tendency to speak his mind sometimes a little too loudly gets him in trouble. Although it wouldn't be accurate to say Hazel's got enemies. Just a few people who don't agree with his lifestyle.

Hazel's ongoing battles with the "drug paraphernalia" law are only one reason why he's famous in Provincetown. Shop Therapy, a Commercial Street store known for its tie-dyed apparel, counter-culture memorabilia, low-budget sex toys and, yes, pipes and bongos and hookas, is another.





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The Shop Therapy name has gotten so big, it's spread to several Third World countries, where Hazel has traveled to work directly with designers and factory leaders. It's the part of his job he's loved the most.

But for the last two years, he's been denied the pleasure. In 2005, a federal judge sentenced him to home confinement over the alleged violation of drug paraphernalia laws.

"It could have been worse. It could have been prison," Hazel says. But it wasn't, and he credits the many letters filed in court in support of his strong moral character. "We were able to explain who I was and how many people around the world I've helped," he said.

Hazel's sentence is up this year and he's looking forward, more than anything, to getting his passport back and then getting out of town. "I can't wait," he said. "The world can't wait."



shirl roccapriore

Seven years ago, Shirl Roccapriore was spending her days at a corporate design job in Wallingford, CT. She worked always more than 40 hours a week. She wasn't ever too far from her sprawling Italian family. And, at age 39, she'd recently taken baby steps toward living as an out lesbian for the first time. She liked to paint and she had an interest in exploring a more subversive side of life. There just wasn't much time.

It wasn't a bad life, but it wasn't at all like the life she has now.

These days Roccapriore is a woman about Provincetown. She spends many of the daylight hours in a studio or on the beach, wherever the light is best, painting erotic portraits of

women in some seriously sexy poses.

Plus, she's just produced and premiered her first film, *ArtSpirit*, a documentary tribute to the history of her new hometown. She also spends a lot of time cultivating her own voice as a feminist-minded erotica artist. And in the few nights of her week that she has free, Roccapriore waitresses downtown to help pay the bills.

One day back in Wallingford she realized her will to live "inside a box" came to a swift halt. She felt the tide shift inside her. She left her life in one fell swoop, found Provincetown and she's been like a rocket since.

"It's like, 'Oh Madone!'" she says in an effusive, you've-gotta-listen-to-me tone. "I let go of the shackles."

Nothing articulates that better than her painting, where woman lay prostrate, legs spread and arms reaching to the sky. They're showing their stuff and they don't care.

"Even when they look vulnerable," Roccapriore says, "they're looking that way because they want to. That's what it's all about."

dana denzel

Friday nights at Governor Bradford's are a beautiful thing. It might seem prosaic, even cliché at this point, to talk about how festive it is to watch a drag queen host karaoke at a Provincetown pub, but there is something special about what happens at this big, gritty bar smack in the middle of Commercial Street once a week.

By 10 o'clock, the place is packed and everyone is already in their cups. And everyone, in this case, means a combination of townies, tourists, middle-aged straight couples and young, hip queers — all of them with one common bond: their awe and unflagging affection for the evening's epicene emcee and starlit, Dana Denzel.



Denzel, who also answers to the name Titus Ulrich and sometimes works as a nail technician, is a drag queen. The flowing blonde wig, fake boobs, slinky skirt and full face of make-up variety, to be sure, who got her start with a lip synch contest 15 years ago at Boston's Club Cafe. She also performs as Bonnie Rait, Cindy Lauper and "little Gwen Stefani" and her philosophy is "life's a party." But as far as Denzel's concerned, it's a party to which everybody should be invited.

It's an idea she practices more often than she preaches. On a recent Friday night, a nervous young woman wanted to sing, but was too afraid to get on stage alone. A disarming Denzel queued up "Summer Nights" from the musical Grease and performed Danny Zucco's half of the song, right there in a short, plaid skirt and high-heeled boots.

And then there's John. John's a fellow in his 60s who makes it to the Governor's nearly every Friday night for Denzel's show. John's originally from New Hampshire and works on the Cape now in non-profits. He likes to sing soulful interpretations of Marvin Gaye and Julio Iglesias and his set is so familiar, Denzel can sing back up if she chooses.

But sometimes she'll just take a seat in the audience, sipping drinks alongside John's wife. Either way, Denzel's happy for the company.

"We should all just go out and have a good time," she said. "And we should accept anybody for who they are."

Amiee Joy Ross

of the bearded lady piercing studio

It is a fact of life that the Bearded Lady is a little scary. This has nothing to do with the reality that she's a woman who defies tradition by proudly growing out her goatee. It matters not that she's got too many pieces of metal sticking through her ears and various parts of her face for you to count. It's not because she's a big butch who could knock you over with a subtlet of pokes.

What makes the average person quake be-

fore Bearded Lady is her razor sharp wit and her fearlessness about wielding it any time - frequently while she's got a needle in one hand and a saline-soaked Q-tip in the other.

Amiee Joy Ross is the lady in question and her shop off Commercial Street is a strange epicenter of activity in Provincetown. In the span of a single hour on a Saturday in the summer: a gay couple from Boston stopped by because one of them was hankering for a barbell through his ear. Two women from Northampton just wanted to say hello. A comedian in town for a couple nights came to plug her show. And a local man delivered Ross his 74 year-old mother, who was giddy to get a second piercing in her nose. It took about 30 seconds for Ross to start calling her "ma."

"When you're in my house, you follow my rules," Ross told her.

And as the woman quietly obliged and braced herself for the needle, Ross' balance of brainpower, curiosity and sarcasm set Ma at ease. ▼



On the Web

For more information on any of these wonderfully eccentric characters please visit their websites.

Jay Critchley: www.bigtwig.org

Ronny Hazel (Shop Therapy): www.shoptherapy.com

Shirl Roccapore: www.roccartwork.com

Amiee Ross (Bearded Lady): www.beardedlady.org

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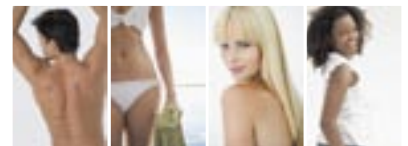
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A full-page photograph of Johnny Diaz, a man with dark hair and a smile, sitting on a large, mossy rock in a park. He is wearing a black polo shirt, blue jeans, and brown hiking boots. His hands are clasped in his lap, and he has a watch on his left wrist. The background shows a grassy field and trees with green leaves.

Johnny Diaz

Boston's
'Chico Lit'
Writer

By: Judy Van Handle
Photos by: Wendy Mimran

Winning a Pulitzer Prize would make any journalist happy. Writing a book and then seeing it published is the aim of any novelist. Watching a blog and a particular item attract attention throughout cyberspace and traditional reporting channels is the recognition that bloggers crave. But to achieve all three by the age of 34 while also creating a new genre of writing ... well, that's preposterously precocious.

That's merely the short form resume of Johnny Diaz, a literary wunderkind who not only has already left a significant mark in three areas of writing but whose creative future seems boundless.

Diaz, whose full time job is as a Living reporter for the Boston Globe, has turned heads with the publication of *Boston Boys Club*, a novel about three gay men in search of love and romance in their pursuit of happiness whose common denominator is connecting at the Club Café in the South End.

Boston Boys Club has been compared more than once to Candace Bushnell's *Sex In The City*, which follows four women's twists and turns through romantic entanglements in New York City and was the basis for the wildly popular HBO series.

"Move over Candace Bushnell, Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda, Tommy, Mikey, Rico and Kyle are on the scene," wrote

"I kept reading the same supporting roles, stereotypes we've read countless times before; the gangbangers, the macho old-school built guys, the sexy hot Latino gardeners and the over-the-top drag queens."

Lisa Alvarado of blogcritics.org in her glowing review of *Boston Boys Club*.

Others are just plain fans of the book and Diaz' writing style.

"*Boston Boys Club* is racy, funny and smart ... You're going to love this book," reported author Scott Heim.

"Make way for the boys of summer! Johnny Diaz has written a sexy beach-read romp you won't be able to put down," opined William J. Mann, whose novels include *Where the Boys Are* and *All American Boy*.

John Mitzel, the owner/proprietor of Calamus Bookstore, Boston's only strictly gay/lesbian literary store, said Diaz' book is one of his store's top sellers. Calamus hosted a reading and signing by Diaz shortly after the publication of *Boston Boys Club*.

Likewise, the real-life Club Café crowd loves Boston Boys Club; the establishment hosted a successful book release party last May. "The owners have embraced the book and so have my patrons," said Diaz. "They are my core audience."

Before he wrote *Boston Boys Club*, Diaz had a brush with television fame. One of his book's main characters strongly resembles Dan Renzi, a cast member of MTV's *The Real World Miami* 10 years ago. Diaz was Renzi's boyfriend at the time and was seen in a half-dozen episodes as their relationship began to unfold.

Though the experience later would add depth to Diaz' narrative, TV was a brief interlude in a life dominated by the written word. His debut on the bookshelves has only served to underscore the achievements of what some might call a publishing prodigy, the first effort by a promising new fiction writer. But Diaz points to his everyday work as his main source of satisfaction.

"I'm just happy writing for the Globe, sharing other people's stories and my experiences with the public," he said.

Even so, Diaz has penned a novel focusing on two subjects he feels most passionately about – the lives of gay men in general and gay Latinos specifically.

"I noticed that the gay fiction I read never included a main Latino character," he said. "I kept reading the same supporting roles, stereotypes we've read countless times before; the gangbangers, the macho old-school built guys, the sexy hot Latino gardeners and the over-the-top drag queens. I wanted to write something that spoke of our strong friendships, our family loyalty and our struggles with being accepted as gay in the Hispanic community."

In *Boston Boys Club*, Tommy is a Cuban-American reporter who has just moved to Boston to take a job with the *Boston Daily* and, in trying to fight his homesickness and to meet new friends, goes to Club Café every Thursday night. There, his life intersects with the novel's other main characters, and in particular a certain guidance counselor from Cape Cod who is the object of Tommy's affection. Diaz was an obvious model for Tommy and his experiences at the club were a direct inspiration for the book.

"I never thought I could write a novel," said Diaz, who spent six months working on *Boston Boys Club*. "When I moved to Boston, I was also going out to the most popular gay bar here, Club Café. But the more I came there, the more I noticed the carnival of characters this bar had ... So for fun one night, I wrote a short story about three friends who meet up at Club Café. It was a fun, creative release. I didn't think it could be a book."

"A week later, I found myself sitting in front of my laptop writing a second short story from



"I was surprised by the reaction of my blog entry and how it made news."

the point of view of one of the other guys. A week later, I did the same thing from the perspective of the third friend. Each story became a chapter and over the next few months, a book was born."

As was a new genre of literature. One of Diaz' major literary influences was Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez, a former Globe features reporter whose novel, "The Dirty Girls Social Club," about six Latinas who hold a reunion in Boston every year, was a groundbreaking effort in the field of "chica lit." With a Cuban-American in the forefront of his book, that led Diaz to coin the term "chico lit" to describe his book's content.

"I came up with 'chico' lit as a nod to 'chica lit' and 'chick lit,' said Diaz. "I'm a romantic and I love reading those kinds of novels, with 'chick lit' sensibilities. I wanted to read some that featured gay men and what it's like to look for Mr. Right or Mr. Right Now, with at least one main Hispanic character. Hence, 'chico lit.'"

The landscape has been barren for gay Latino characters in literature, based partly on the difficulty that Hispanic culture has had in reconciling homosexuality.

"Homosexuality has always been a taboo topic in Latino households because of the prevalent machismo culture," said Diaz "If you're gay, you're less than a man, a traditional

perception. And if you're gay, you don't talk about it, it's very hush-hush. You're expected to keep your gayness under wraps, especially around your family."

Diaz experienced that first-hand, when as a 16-year-old he told his parents he might be gay. Rather than offering support, his mother began to cry and his father refused to look at him, then wouldn't talk to his son and sent him to see a psychologist. But after the therapist told his parents they should "let him be" and instead be thankful for having such a "good kid," they began to accept their son's sexual orientation.

"And so, that was that," Diaz wrote on his blog. "My parents never brought it up again ... They backed off and let me be me and I have always loved them for that."

Now Diaz' parents, who are Cuban exiles, are among his biggest fans "Things are much better with my parents, better than I ever imagined," said Diaz. "They call me every night – it's a Cuban thing. They were the first ones at my book reading in Miami recently ... Afterward, they shook everyone's hand. Talk about support!"

From his childhood days in Miami Beach, Diaz and the art of putting pen to paper seemed to be not only a perfect match, but his true calling as well. His writing style so impressed a high school teacher that she suggested he

contribute to the school paper, which led to an internship when he was just 16 at the Miami Herald. Diaz wrote a weekly column called "Friends and Neighbors" about the people who live in Miami Beach for a suburban edition of the Herald.

After another high school stint and then a college internship at the Herald, Diaz earned a coveted summer internship at the Globe in 1995 after his junior year at Florida International University.

Upon graduation, Diaz was hired by the Herald as a news reporter and covered breaking news for five years, including the Gianni Versace murder and more mundane events such as fires, floods, plane crashes and shootings.

One Saturday morning in April 2000, Diaz was working at the newspaper's Fort Lauderdale office when federal agents took Elian Gonzalez from his family's home in Miami to be sent back to his father in Cuba. The case, which was the lead story on an almost daily basis for several months, involved the case of a 6-year-old Cuban boy and whether or not he would be allowed to stay with relatives in Florida or be returned to his father in Cuba after fleeing the country with his mother, who perished en route.

Diaz was dispatched to obtain reaction from residents of Fort Lauderdale attending week-end events, and since his quotes were used

in one of the Herald's news stories, his name was included as a contributor. A year later, that day's news coverage was awarded a Pulitzer Prize, in which Diaz shared.

"It was a big surprise and I beamed with pride for having been a part of something so big that the paper worked so hard for," said Diaz.

Shortly thereafter, the Globe came calling with a job offer, and Diaz has been part of the Living staff since, covering a multitude of topics with a recent concentration in the local TV industry.

"I loved living here for that short time (his three-month summer internship) and I always wanted to come back one day as a full-time writer," said Diaz.

Less than a year before Boston Boys Club hit the bookshelves, Diaz unintentionally provoked a media frenzy thanks to an entry on beantowncuban.com, his blog. After attending a National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association conference in his hometown, Diaz noted on his blog that Thomas Roberts of CNN had served as a member of a panel discussing the small number of openly gay TV broadcast journalists and anchors. Diaz had so been impressed by Roberts' remarks and how he hadn't been affected by being out at CNN that he included them on his blog entry.

"Since no one had really written about Thomas Roberts being out and gay, the blog entry exploded, spreading all over cyberspace," said Diaz. "I was surprised by the reaction of my blog entry and how it made news."

Diaz' next literary effort should garner its share of attention as well. Miami Manhunt follows two Cuban-American brothers, one gay, one straight. Set mainly in Florida yet also with a splash of Boston, the setting revolves around a real bar called "Score" in South Beach. Again, Diaz is cognizant of making sure Latinos are an integral part of the book, to be published in 2008.

"I think gay Latinos have been represented in literature, just not in the US. Most gay Latino literature is rooted in Mexico, Cuba, Peru and Spain," said Diaz. "Again, I think the lack of representation in the US has to do with homosexuality being a taboo topic among Latinos. If you don't feel comfortable talking about it, then how do you write about it?"

Needless to say, Diaz feels both comfortable and engaged when writing his "chico lit," though he doesn't plan on leaving his day job any time soon. Instead, expect to keep seeing his regular newspaper byline along with advertisements trumpeting the latest book reading and signing of his newest release.

"Hopefully, I will still manage to write novels on my down time," as long as people are willing to read them," he said. "Writing is like breathing to me. I must do it but I also enjoy the process." ▼



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N O H O ~ E H O L E S B I A N V I L L E E X P A N D S

Center of Easthampton

By Judy Van Handle

The small Western Massachusetts city sits tucked away near the hills of a state reservation and a wildlife sanctuary, the natural wonders serving as a backdrop for a community that just doesn't look like its old self anymore.

Once dowdy and a little dreary, the city's downtown now is a haven for artists, who not only brought with them a vibrant cultural change but also attracted new businesses and restaurants along with a noticeable demographic – an ever-increasing and highly visible lesbian and gay male population.

Such a perfect description of Northampton, the well-known hub of all things artistic and progressive and also famous for its large lesbian community. But that also applies to another city – and it's literally right next door.

For so long, Easthampton had been used to being overlooked, especially when in comparison to flashy and trendy Northampton, nearly twice as big. But not any more. No longer a quiet community that existed in Noho's shadow while offering little in the way of entertainment or diversions, Easthampton's business district now is lined with restaurants, art galleries and studios, and a gourmet food store.

Meanwhile, Easthampton's residential area began its own transformation, with gay men and lesbians discovering a nearby alternative to Northampton and its ever-increasing real estate prices.

And if anyone needs any more proof that Easthampton has arrived on the gay and lesbian map, consider this – Easthampton is home to a New England first in Paradise One, a historic condominium project that is making it clear that GLBT residents are a priority.

The evolution of Easthampton from an old mill town to a vibrant community chock-a-block with small businesses and an increasingly visible gay and lesbian community was set in motion by two factors – artists and affordability.

“Artists saw early on they could produce their work here. It wasn't a new thing.”

Originally, the two concepts were intertwined. Though the growth of Easthampton's downtown has been ratcheted up within the last decade, the transformation actually began as long as 20 years ago, when artists were being priced out of their studios in Northampton began looking for a less-expensive alternative.

“In Northampton, the rents for businesses were exorbitant,” said Deb Robinson, the co-owner and general manager of Blue Moon Grocery, a gourmet food store on Pleasant Street in Easthampton. “Artists saw early on they could produce their work here. It wasn't a new thing.”

Now the arts community is a deeply entrenched part of Easthampton's downtown. “Art Walk Easthampton,” when musical, visual and performance artists perform around the city, is held monthly, and artists at One Cottage Street open their studios to sell a variety of arts and fine crafts twice a year.

And as was the case in Northampton, when the artists begin to settle in, other businesses are quick to follow. Not only did the areas around Main, Union and Cottage streets become artistic havens, but all of downtown Easthampton started to fill with other small businesses.

“There was a tremendous amount of growth, but it was the right kind of growth,” said Robinson, who has owned Blue Moon with her partner, Lisa Mascaro, for three years after moving to Western Massachusetts from Seattle in 1999. “These were independent retailers, not box retailers. There were artists and other small business owners. There

were unique attributes – the Chamber of Commerce was very proactive, opening up opportunities, and the old-time business owners were friendly. It was a real cooperative effort.”

The boom in business began an influx of gay men and lesbians, eager to take advantage of a less onerous real estate market and a visible artistic influence.

“I think the fact that Easthampton supports and draws the creative arts is a draw for gays and lesbians,” said Sally Masters, an Easthampton resident since 2003 who also singled out the large artistic presence one of her reasons for choosing the city as her home.

Five years ago, when Masters was in the market for an apartment, and her first – and only – choice was Northampton. “I didn’t even consider Easthampton in 2002,” she said. “I had heard some negative perceptions of Easthampton and wasn’t interested.”

But after a year of paying \$900 a month for a one-bedroom apartment, she was ready

“When I moved in, I felt sort of out of place and felt as though some of my neighbors glances were saying, ‘Oh God, here goes the neighborhood’”

to reconsider. And when she located a two-bedroom unit in Easthampton for more than \$300 less than her old rent, that sealed her decision to move. Now Masters, who has since bought a home, is an unabashed booster of her adopted city.

“I love living in Easthampton now,” said Masters, the head of the guidance department at Hampshire Regional High School and an adviser to the school’s gay-straight alliance. “Northampton definitely has a reputation for being very gay and lesbian friendly, but I know just as many gays and lesbians who live in Easthampton. There is a very nice gay and lesbian community here.”

Lisa Downing’s experience is much the same. After initially looking for an apartment in Northampton but being “priced out,” Downing turned to Easthampton and, after some initial trepidation, has fit right in.

“When I moved in, I felt sort of out of place and felt as though some of my neighbors glances were saying, ‘Oh God, here goes the neighborhood,’” said

continued on next page



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continued from page 25

Downing, who is an assistant director at Northampton's Forbes Library. "Now almost five years later, I get lots of waves and smiles when I walk down the street.

"I really enjoy Easthampton. I saw that it was a community in transition with more GLBT folks moving in every year. I was looking for a place that I could afford with a yard in a walkable neighborhood. I found what I was looking for in Easthampton."

Even the old mills that played such a vital part of the city's economy until the 1960s have proven to be a key part of Easthampton's turnaround. One was converted into Eastworks, a group of stories and artists' studios where Blue Moon Grocery is located. Another was turned into One Cottage Street, which houses dozens of artists and artisans.

But perhaps the most breathtaking development is the development of Paradise One, a condo community whose marketing pitch to GLBTs over 55 makes it a first of its kind.

"We envision Paradise One as a microcosm of the Northampton/Amherst/ Easthampton communities, a mix of gay and straight, older and younger," said developers Heather and Nancy Whitley on their website. "At its heart, Paradise One is a place that is especially gay-friendly, because as GLBT people, there are so few welcoming housing options for us as we age. However, Paradise One will be very inclusive and we welcome everyone who shares our vision."

The Whitleys expect the 86-unit building, a former dyeworks mills on Cottage Street, to be ready for occupancy this fall. The couple originally planned a similar project for Northampton four years ago but could not find a site.

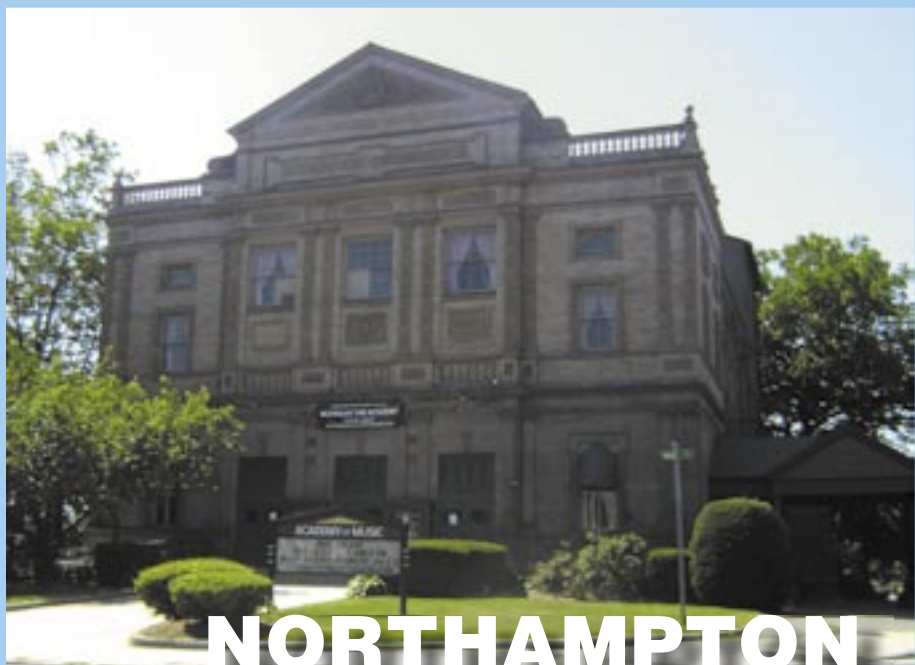
"There are tons of advantages to the location in Easthampton," Nancy Whitley told the Daily Hampshire Gazette, a local newspaper. "The economic development that's happening here is just amazing ... There's so much happening - it's very exciting to be here."

"There are lots of great neighborhoods, natural resources, Eastworks ..." said Downing. "Why wouldn't you want to move here?"

For more information on Blue Moon and Paradise One please visit their websites:

www.bluemoongrocery.com

www.paradise-one.com ▼



NORTHAMPTON

Northampton's reputation as one of the best communities for gay men and lesbians to live in is no secret throughout the country. Not as well-known, however, is that the small Western Massachusetts city also is a premier vacation spot for gay and lesbian travelers – and that's something the business community has begun to change.

The Northampton Chamber of Commerce has launched an initiative to make gay and lesbian vacationers aware that the city and the surrounding area has much to offer tourists in a setting that is at once hospitable, beautiful and highly affordable.

"Northampton is a great destination for the gay and lesbian traveler," said Suzanne Beck, the Chamber's executive director. "Gay men and lesbians are part of the city and society; we live it every day. Looking from the outside, Northampton is a special place." Which is what the Chamber is trying to drive home with its campaign that is stressing the attractions that make Northampton unique.

The Northampton area is best-known for its many colleges, progressive politics, and beautiful natural habitat, which includes gorgeous foliage viewing in the fall. But the Chamber and local merchants also want to stress shopping opportunities and the many popular and well-known restaurants in Northampton, the opportunities for outdoor activities such as biking, hiking and canoeing, and the easy access to New York City and Boston. "We're big on value," said Beck.

"The gay community wants more than just Ogunquit and Provincetown and Key West," said Mark Carmien, the owner of Pride & Joy bookstore, one of Northampton's most prominent gay businesses.

"We're looking forward to seeing what the campaign can produce," said Ted Jarrett, who runs a guest house in nearby Hatfield and is a member of the committee that has been planning the marketing push. "There's so much that people should know about the Northampton area." ▼



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Who is the
interior
designer

Paul Chaisson?



by: H. Levine

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

My Partner James, our dog Logan and I just moved to Douglas MA. I grew up just outside Boston in Watertown. I am from a very large Italian/French Family. I have 3 brothers and 4 sisters. My Mom still resides in Watertown.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

Professionally I started working in the design field in 1994 when I started to build my first home. I've been playing around with design since about the age of 4 when before starting kindergarten I wanted my room rearranged. As I got older more and more people would have me to their homes to pick colors and rearrange their furniture. From 1997 until 2004 I worked for a few show rooms and in 2004 I started Interiors by Paul Chaisson.



WHEN DID YOU KNOW THIS FIELD WAS RIGHT FOR YOU?

I have always known that Interior design is something I am passionate about. In 2004 I was presented with an opportunity to start my own business and I know I made the right choice in choosing interior design.

WHAT EXACTLY DOES AN INTERIOR DESIGNER DO?

The first thing a designer should do is listen, then listen some more. I interview all my clients to determine their needs, budget, style, and intended use of the space being designed. Once I know what the client's likes and dislikes are I suggest the best layout of the room, the furniture placement, the color palettes, flooring, fixtures, art work, lighting, and window treatments. Basically, an interior designer pulls the entire interior space together so then it has both the form and function the client desires. In addition to the interior design it is important that the interior and exterior of a home or commercial building work well together. I work closely with the architects and building contractors to ensure the whole project is a success.

WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH WHEN LOOKING AT A ROOM OR HOUSE TO BE REWORKED ON?

I am fortunate enough to be able to visualize a room's potential when I walk into it. Its almost like I'm in fast forward mode. I take that visualization with the client's taste in mind and start with the colors and furniture placement. Then I progress to all the other design elements that pull the room together.



The previous bathroom was about 20 years old. It had a vinyl surround in shower. We needed to increase the size visually so we gutted the bath completely. We put in all new wall, ceramic tiled flooring, new toilet, sink & vanity. We got rid of the old vinyl surround in the shower and installed Subway tile with a custom glass door to increase the space and make the small run down bathroom feel fresh and spacious.



WHEN PEOPLE FIND OUT WHAT YOU DO WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THEY SAY?

'I wish I could afford you' is usually the first thing people say. That is the biggest misconception. A great designer is affordable. They are supposed to bring ideas and save money. Not bankrupt a family for a sofa or window treatments. Usually when I attend a large gathering with new people I am inundated with questions once everyone knows what I do. Then the evening is spent giving color consults to 50 or so housewives.

This combo carriage/guest house got a new roof, garage door, siding, lighting, windows, and landscaping. Added a new exterior color for siding and a complimenting door and trim color.



WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOUR BIGGEST SUCCESS?

I consider all of my projects big successes. I have no regrets with any complete job. All of my clients are quite pleased, and refer me to friends and family on a regular basis. If I had to pick one project that was a big success it would be a 9,500 Sq. ft. ocean front property in Narragansett, RI. It took over two years for the remodel and renovation. The home is incredible. The clients fall in love with their home every time they walk through the front door.

IS THIS ONE OF THE GAYEST PROFESSIONS?

There are a lot of gay people in the Design field. You could say the same about hairdressers, the hospitality industry, or advertising. We are in every field.

WHAT IS THE AVERAGE HOME LACKING?

The average home, in my opinion is lacking color and character. Most people are so overwhelmed with moving in and getting settled, that they decide to paint everything some version of white or they choose colors that do not compliment each other. Choosing color for multiple rooms is not as easy as going down to the paint store and choosing the colors you like, buying the paint and painting. The rooms should all flow together but each should have it's own distinct personality. The addition of even one well-designed room in a home can change the entire feel of the living space.



Original kitchen was from 1911 and needed some major updates so we completely remodeled this one. New wall, floors, windows, high end stainless steel appliances, granite and ceramic counter tops, bar, wine storage custom cherry wood cabinets. We also added about 400 sq. feet to increase it size to 600 sq. feet.

IS THERE ANY HOME DESIGN STYLE OR ITEM YOU WOULD NEVER RECOMMEND AND WHY?

Transparent acrylic furniture, milk crates, mini blinds and futons are not likely to make it into any of the interiors I design, but you have no idea what the clients needs are until you meet with them and see their home. I tend to stay away from ultra modern. I think it can look amazing if it's done right but my design typically reflects a casual elegance and is geared towards entertaining.

DID YOU EVER MEET ANYONE WITH NO TASTE? WHAT DID THEIR HOUSE LOOK LIKE?

Absolutely!!! I have met a few interior design challenged individuals. A house filled with acrylic furniture, milk crates, mini blinds and futons comes to mind. Clients with little or no design abilities are actually some of the most rewarding clients to work with.

ARE THERE DIFFICULT CLIENTS?

Of course there are difficult clients. Mostly because they have been burned in the past with a designer that was trying to push something they didn't want or need. I think there can be some people that are difficult to please as well, but I enjoy the challenge. In the beginning it can take a while for clients to warm up. Once we start the process and they see how much fun it can be and how much I am saving them even the most difficult to please client is easy to work with. I remove the overwhelmed feeling they have had and restore their confidence so that they can be part of the project. I love my job.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE STARTING IN THE FIELD?

I would say don't lose the passion you have for design. Listen, listen and listen! It's the client's home not yours. Design with them in mind. Prevent them from making design mistakes. Don't be so concerned with the money aspect...billing for time...hourly rates etc. Focus on the finished product: a well designed functional living space.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO ADD?

I would like to add that I feel like one of the luckiest people. I change people's lives. I get to work with some amazing people: my clients, the builders, craftsman, and architects. I transform spaces. The work that I do allows people to live, relax, and entertain more comfortably. Our living space should be a reflection of who we are whether a client lives in a 10, 000 sq ft mansion or an 600 sq ft condo the space should reflect their personality. I'm lucky I get to work with people and help them through the design process. I was born with a talent that I take seriously. I am passionate about everything I do and I take pride in every project I work on. My tag line has always been: "Love where you Live" -Paul Chaisson ▼

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Learning from Each Other About Marriage

by Laurie Israel, Esq.

I don't generally find myself agreeing with President Bush, but when he said in 2006 that marriage is the most enduring and important human institution, I couldn't have agreed with him more. Although I found his conclusion wrong – that gays and lesbians should not be permitted to marry and partake of this vital human institution – I thought his assessment of the importance of marriage absolutely on the right track.

I am one of the people who married in Massachusetts after the ban on same-sex marriage here was lifted. I married Elaine after 17 years of “engagement.”

The Final Frontier

Prior to our marriage, Elaine and I had completely lost hope that we would ever have a legal, full-fledged marriage during our lifetimes. We were in our late 50s at the time of Goodridge, and had lived through many liberation movements, including gay liberation. But the idea that a legislature or a court would come to the conclusion that we had the right to be legally married seemed so far-fetched, especially given the angry climate toward same-sex marriage on the part of many religious groups. Gay marriage would then be the final frontier, one that would only take place after our deaths.

We also had decided, unlike some of our gay and lesbian colleagues, that we would marry only if we could in our home state (Massachusetts), and only if we were able to enter into a full-fledged legal marriage, with no difference from an opposite-sex marriage. We would not settle for running to Canada to marry, or to Vermont for a “civil union,” which is an entirely separate set of laws than marriage in that state. We would no longer run and hide. We were not willing to be second-class citizens any longer. Better to not marry with pride than to accept anything less than our neighbors next door had – full-fledged marriage, without ifs, ands, or buts. To commemorate our long domestic partnership, we had rings for each other, made from pieces of a mother's and grandmother's jewelry

Goodridge Brings Good News

Eight months later, in November, 2003, the Goodridge decision came out. It was a surprise to everyone. We were shocked and overjoyed. The feeling during the days after Goodridge in the gay and lesbian community (and among our straight allies) was unbelievable. Then Goodridge II came out in February, 2004. That was the case which answered the question whether the rights of gays and lesbians to be married would be legally satisfied by a separate system of civil unions for gays and lesbians and “marriage” for straight people. The answer of the court was a terse “no,” followed by beautifully articulated reasoning. The court said that a separate but equal system was inherently unequal, and that gays and lesbians should be able to marry on the exact same basis and with the exact same rules as straight people. It was another joyful day. That was when gay and lesbian people in Massachusetts started making wedding plans in earnest.

Redefining Relationships

Gays and lesbians who were in coupled relationships had to really think about what marriage meant, and whether they wanted to marry. The psychology and culture of gays and lesbians has generally been (with exceptions) that relationships are conducted in serial monogamy and discarded when the inevitable difficulties in long-term relationships arise. Because same-sex couples did not have all the cultural expectations and family support of legal marriage, often when the going got tough, the relationship would come to an end.

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Because of the instability in relationships, same-sex couples usually maintained personal financial independence to a much greater extent than married couples. Gay and lesbian couples usually had separate bank accounts and financial assets, while striving to equally share expenses. Both parties generally worked outside the home. It was a very rare relationship where one of the parties maintained the household and the other party was the breadwinner.

Legal Ramifications

Because the chances of having a lifetime relationship in a same-sex couple were so slim, everyone wanted to be protected when the relationship fell apart, but many did not plan properly. As a practicing attorney, I had first-hand experience with many horror cases. For instance, there was the terminated relationship of someone in a 20- or 25-year relationship with no money of his/her own, and nothing titled in his or her own name. When this takes place in the context of no firm law (such as divorce laws) to determine what will happen financially, the results are devastating. The litigation on these issues is always complex, indeterminate, and costly in all ways. Sometimes same-sex partners transferred or held property in joint names prior to the break-up. Litigation on the issue of who had what rights to this property and in what amounts was fierce. And I saw many instances of surviving partners in same-sex relationships of many years duration impoverished and with no legal rights when his or her partner died.

The Benefits of Risk

So gays and lesbians usually strove for financial independence in their relationships. An interesting result of this independence is that I believe it actually further weakened the relationships. As a lawyer dealing with married couples in many contexts, I have come to the conclusion that financial necessity and financial interdependence is one of the important "glues" which holds a marriage together. (See my article, "How to Save Your Marriage" on my website, www.laurieisrael.com)

But financial interdependence rather than self-protecting independence can only happen in the context of the helpful laws (statutory and judge-made) that comprise the laws of marriage and divorce. In addition, I believe in order for marriage to flourish, there has to be some risk taken in the marital enterprise. A contract, even if it contained the thousands of laws and court decisions of the common law (which would be impossible), would not do as much for the relationship as the simple words, "We are married." "We are married" is really shorthand for the thousands of concepts (not just laws), developed by human history, societies, literature, psychology, and culture, that comprise marriage. These clearly cannot be fully obtained by entering into a written civil contract.

New Choices

So, after Goodridge, gay and lesbian people in relationships started thinking about getting married. This was a complex process for all of us, with many experiencing a great deal of pressure. People in difficult and uncertain relationships were being asked, "So when are you getting married?" People in very short relationships were under pressure to get married. Everyone had to decide whether they now wanted to stay with their partners for the rest of their lives. People in long relationships like me and Elaine were put in the position of having to decide whether to ratify their relationship. The relationship of anyone who chose not to marry was deemed suspect or questionable.

Gays and lesbians in Massachusetts started thinking carefully about the implications of marriage. Elaine and I were in the 17th year of our relationship. We had been through much in those 17 years. We were not at the beginning of our relationship, and although we knew that we wanted to be in our relationship for a lifetime, what would "marriage" bring? It was like stepping into a new world. We didn't know if, or how, anything would change if we got married. We both thought about it seriously (for a couple of days) and decided to marry. We wanted to be in our relationship, warts and all, for the long-term. I also thought (as it turned out wrongly) that marriage would not change anything.

A Very Special Day

So, after much intricate planning (where were our mothers when we needed them?) we had a wonderful, large wedding in September, 2004. We had a rabbi perform the ceremony, because we wanted to show people that we could get civilly married and religiously married – just like other folk. Everyone wept at the ceremony. We all felt that we had come to a very special day. Elaine and I felt very supported by our friends, relatives, and colleagues.

At the wedding dinner, a lesbian friend, who had recently married under Goodridge, gave a toast. She and her partner had also been together 17 years prior to their marriage a few months earlier. Our friend said that after their marriage, they were surprised how much everything changed. "Our love has burst over and overflowed," she said. She said their relationship had really changed and deepened after finally being allowed to marry. At the time I thought I wouldn't feel that way – that marriage wouldn't deepen the commitment Elaine and I already felt. But I was wrong.

Unexpected Changes

After the wedding, at first I felt unchanged. (I am not saying "we," because Elaine tells me that she immediately felt different.) The wedding was wonderful, but we were still the same people in a long-term relationship.

But then, gradually, we both started tuning

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into all the references to marriage and married people and married life in the media – on TV, in newspapers, in the books we were reading. It all now actually applied to us. It made a huge difference. Day by day, I started feeling “married,” and Elaine was feeling “more married.” We began to connect to all the references and allusions we saw in the media and in daily life to us and our marriage. It felt like we were stepping into big shoes and starting to walk in them.

By tapping into the cultural understandings of what marriage is, we were building our own marriage. Our feelings toward each other were growing, as predicted by our friend at the wedding. Our way of treating each other on a daily basis improved. We were totally committed to each other. After all, we were now married. And yes, being married really changed things for the better. We were re-patterning our behavior and expectations. The well-trained impulse to see our relationship as non-permanent and somehow less respectable than straight relationships started to disappear.

As we experienced being married, we realized that previously we had felt a deep sense of inferiority about our relationship. Now we were actually married and our relationship had the same status as everyone else's. We had more respect for ourselves, each other, our relationship, and our place in society. Elaine started putting out the American flag on July 4th and on Memorial Day. We really felt like Americans for the first time, and not outsiders. Marriage truly made a difference.

As we continued to experience marriage, we started really understanding the harshness of not being able to be married. President Bush is right – marriage is the most important and enduring human institution. We finally were allowed to be fully human. It was wonderful.

Closing a Door

A straight neighbor (in a successful second marriage) articulated one of the wonderful things about marriage better than anyone I've ever heard. After he congratulated us on our marriage, he said that when you get married, “the back door closes.” He described how good that feeling was. No more wondering if this is the relationship you should or shouldn't be in. No more wondering whether or not it's permanent. No more looking for other people or another life. That decision has been made. You have made the ultimate commitment to another person. Now it's time to relax and delve into whatever the marital relationship offers.

Now, after almost three years of marriage, Elaine and I continue to process what it means to be “married.” We had no direct social history of gays and lesbians being legally married (although we know there have been many devoted, committed couples in the past, such as

Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas). We felt like pioneers. Now we simply feel, well, married. And it feels very good.

Settling on Terminology

Our understanding of "marriage" increases month by month and we start to absorb it into our lives. It has strengthened our relationship and our relationship with others. We are no longer "partners" (such a cold word!) or cohabitants, or "significant others" – we are "married," with all the comfort and complexity that word designates. Although we made the rabbi conducting our wedding ceremony say "spouse" or "spouses" when referring to us in our new status, very shortly after the marriage, we started referring to each other as "my wife." And men who got married started calling each other "husband." This change in terminology among gay and lesbian people came about naturally, and is almost now universal. It was actually a surprise to all of us. We feel we have reclaimed for ourselves the warmth and affection of the words "wife" and "husband." They are, indeed, wonderful terms, full of so much meaning.

Revitalizing an Institution

In this and in other ways, we believe we are helping to redefine and revitalize marriage as a more positive institution. After all, we have chosen and fought for marriage. It was not imposed on us by cultural or family expectations. We cherish the opportunity for personal growth, community ties, and security that long-term marriage offers. Because it was denied to us for so long, we value it in a way that perhaps many straight people do not. We hope that more straight people (and even those who are now of the opinion that we shouldn't be permitted to be married) come to the realization (as many already have) that our marriages have the potential to invigorate and strengthen the institution of marriage as no historic event has ever had.

As a lawyer practicing in the area of divorce, I have clearly seen how marriages break up for little or no good reason. In my practice I have personally dealt with the results of marriages entered into lightly, and discarded easily. You can imagine how hurtful this scenario is to lesbian and gay people who cannot get married. I have seen marriages of many years' duration where the parties clearly (and often for no good reason) cannot abide each other.

I have seen and heard about all the ugly things married people can say and do to each other. I know about all the bad events and disappointments that married life brings that sometimes kill a marriage. I can see how marriages can become fragile when the daily work of commitment, communication, and cherishing is not done. I can generally tell within several

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minutes of meeting with a couple (in a non-divorce matter) whether their marriage is likely to survive or fail.

I also see that marriage has great value. It creates personal and financial security, interest in life, someone to talk with on a daily basis and with whom to experience the flow of human events. Marriage is a process that I believe can be worked out by almost every married couple if they really want to.

I view lifelong marriages, even if not perfect, as a good thing, and an old age together as a reward for work well-done in the marriage. I see the value in all our imperfect marriages. In short, even before Goodridge, but more strongly afterward (now that I have a personal stake in it), I have become a marriage "booster." I have begun to work with couples in the mediation part of my practice to try to assist them in staying married if they wish to.

A New Professional Perspective

My practice of law has also blossomed since Goodridge. Because I am now really married, I no longer feel like a "sham" when I counsel married couples and help divorcing clients. Now I can wholeheartedly work as a legal professional working in the context of marriages as

it comes up in divorce law, estate planning, or other issues my married clients are experiencing. And, since Goodridge, I have more strongly focused my practice in the areas of marriage, divorce, post-nuptial mediation and pre- and post-nuptial legal counseling. It is where I feel most driven to practice. These are the areas I love to work in and where I feel totally comfortable and effective. And I feel my skills in counseling others have grown as a result of my own real, legal, bona fide marriage.

Learning from Each Other

So what can straight people teach gays and lesbians about marriage? That it is a strong, complex, culturally-based institution that promotes personal growth, family connections, psychological health, and financial security. Know that every marriage strengthens society and that marriage has a myriad of implications and a great history. That even if your marriage is not perfect and you may sometimes have great conflict with your spouse, it is ultimately worthwhile and the day will come when you will adore him or her again. We learn that lifetime relationships with no end until death are extremely valuable, even if achieved at some hard costs.

And what can gays and lesbians teach straight people about marriage? That mar-

riage is precious, and is a great opportunity for personal growth. That marriage should be cherished, savored, and protected—not thrown away. That marriage should be nourished and treated with great care. Don't marry lightly, but once you do, make the ultimate commitment. And always appreciate the fact that you have the opportunity to be married—it is the most precious thing life has to offer.

Together we can all step into those big shoes and forge a stronger and more enduring institution.

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Laurie Israel is a lawyer practicing in Brookline, Massachusetts. Laurie helps clients resolve their disputes with the highest level of dignity, integrity and creativity as possible. Laurie works in the areas of collaborative divorce, marital mediation, divorce mediation, and prenuptial agreements. She also helps people who wish to stay married through providing mediation to stay married (a/k/a marital mediation) and negotiation of postnuptial agreements. You can find out more about her work and read her articles on her websites: www.laurieisrael.com and www.mediationto-staymarried.com. Laurie's email address is lisrael@socialaw.com. ▼

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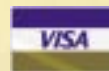
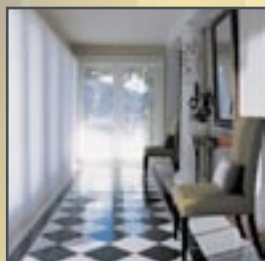
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THE ROAD TO RECOVERY ISN'T ALWAYS A STRAIGHT ONE

A GLBT Perspective at Paradise Recovery

by: William J. Heran, PhD
CEO and Co-Founder Paradise Recovery, LLC

A gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered (GLBT) individual often presents with unique personal, social, familial and spiritual concerns when entering treatment for recovery from alcohol, drugs, or any process addiction (e.g. sex/love, gambling, internet, disordered eating). As a gay man and a mental health professional, I am intimately aware of the too often pitfalls in rehab programs that attempt to provide quality, yet culturally sensitive treatment for GLBT individuals and their family, friends and colleagues. **Addiction fails to discriminate.**

A homeless person and your surgeon may be equally susceptible to addictions and the ravages of the disease. Also, addictions do not specifically target the GLBT communities as many stereotypes may want you to believe. However, as mentioned, there are specific concerns while treating GLBT clients. Some of those concerns are: a gay-affirming milieu, promoting

the elimination of internalized shame and hatred towards self, loneliness, healthy intimate relationship building and trauma/grief work. Aftercare and monitoring are critical to the sustained recovery. Knowing the resources available in a client's home community is a requirement in extending the progress made while in residential treatment.

Continued on page 48



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Continued from page 47

When seeking a recovery program, the GLBT individual should make sure the facility is comfortable reaching out to your partner, ex-partners, friends, etc. Oftentimes, your partner needs support (and maybe even treatment) since addiction is a "system" disease, not only an individual illness. I always recommend my client's partners to AlaNon meetings, Co-dependency Workshops, and/or therapy for their issues. A "system" needs to change in order to have a sustained recovery. Therefore, the most important people in your life needs to know how to support the alcoholic or addict post-treatment, without "hovering" or anticipating a relapse.

GLBT individuals should choose a program that addresses all their common and unique addiction concerns with intentionality and attainable goals towards recovery and health for the individual's personal, social or career networks. Like other clients in treatment, the GLBT client will need to develop sober leisure activities, intimacy skills, mood concerns and trauma resolution work that promotes a sustained recovery and a life that is "fully alive!" This can more likely be realized through an affirming, inclusive environment with effective, best-practice interventions. ▼

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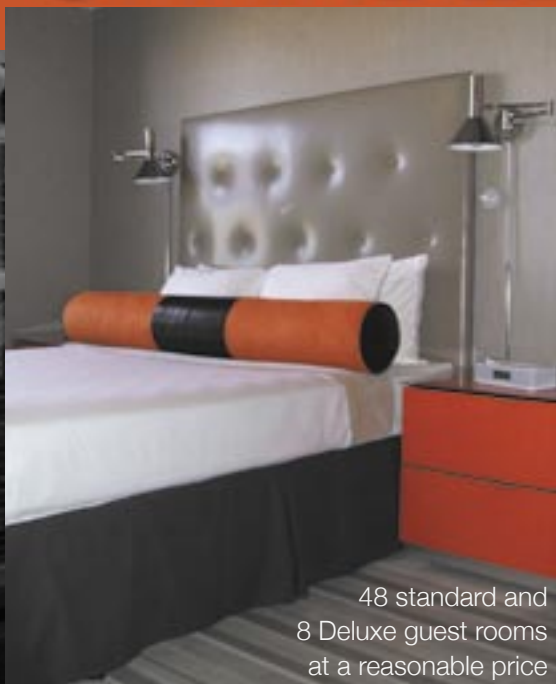
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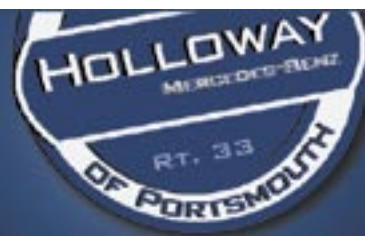
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Rodney's Rhode Island

A MAN OF FAITH

By K. Ceccarossi

Strange but true; gays and lesbians in Rhode Island owe a debt of gratitude to Jehovah's Witnesses. Fifteen years ago, Rodney Davis was an ordained minister and on a sure trajectory to a lifetime of leadership with the strict Christian sect.

Then he came out as a gay man and church jettisoned him from their ranks.

But if it hadn't happened, GLBTs in New England's smallest state never would have landed the leader that's helped transform them from a skinny, scattered bunch to one of the most dynamic and diverse communities in the country.

Strange but true, sometimes you have to be completely derailed from the road you've been traveling to find the path you're supposed to be on. "My whole universe, the one I thought I'd be spending literally forever with, it all crumbled," Davis said. "I knew I had to create a new community for myself in order to survive." But like Moses leading people to the promised land, Davis has created a new community for thousands of others in the process.





& A MAN OF PRIDE



Rodney Davis outside of Providence city hall.

Over the last decade Davis has held nearly every title in Rhode Island Pride, including co-chairman this year, and likewise with Rhode Island Alliance. He's also headed up work with InterPride, an international association of GLBT organizers. And he played a crucial role in passage of an anti-discrimination law, protecting GLBTs in Rhode Island.

He's seen Rhode Island's Pride celebration grow from a dozen people protesting on the State house steps to the month-long party in Providence, the same city that now boasts an openly gay mayor. "We've had a lot of success here," he says, "but there is still work to be done. And it's just as relevant as it was when I first got involved."

Davis joined the Jehovah's Witnesses when he was just a boy and by the time he finished high school he was immersed in the organization. As a young man, he was conscious of his sexuality, but too scared of being ostracized, and worse, of being condemned, to do anything about it. "I figured I'd just wait for Armageddon and Jehovah would help me," he said.

In his 20s, Davis was spending nearly every night in the Kingdom Hall. But when he'd leave, he'd head over to a local gay bar. He says he didn't even talk to anyone there. Just hung in the back and wondered how he'd reconcile who he was with who he really was. Eventually, who he really was trumped fear.

When he finally decided to come out, he came out in a big way. It was 1993 and church elders were displeased with Davis' public connection to the gay community – he was volunteering with Rhode Island Pride for the first time. Eventually, elders voted to disfellowship Davis from



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continued from page 53

his congregation, as well as the entire Watchtower Society, the church's international umbrella organization.

Davis was given one week to appeal the decision, or make amends. But he didn't bother trying. Instead, he granted a local TV news station in Providence an interview, as a gay man promoting Pride. He didn't want to be outed in a shameful way by the church. He wanted to out himself. "I came out boldly but cautiously," he says, and he credits the discipline and contemplation his faith cultivated for that. "I knew if I did it any other way, I would have lost my balance."

His faith has also shaped his approach to GLBT leadership. Despite all the jokes and the controversy surrounding Jehovah's Witnesses, Davis says the training they gave him has been invaluable to his work in the gay community.

And although he doesn't go to church anymore, he does still read his Bible, for comfort and for guidance. He's a true scholar about it, you can tell. In one conversation, he's apt to make four or five adept and apropos references to scripture. And it's clear he still thinks about everything in broad, enduring terms, even as he sagely speaks about the importance of brotherhood. That may explain why people who don't know about his past ask him if he's a minister.

In a way, he is, but these days, Davis says, his ministry is more direct. What he took from his painful split from the church was an understanding of the need for inclusion. And so his goal with Rhode Island Pride has been to give the whole spectrum of GLBTs a stake, and to foster a real level of engagement, community-wide. "We can be our own worst enemy in a way. There's a lot of apathy in the community," he says. "And we're really lacking hospitality toward each other."

"Sometimes I think we've been so beaten up by our real enemies, that we don't trust each other," he said. "And some of us, our feet are sore and, our backs are tired because we've been carrying so much weight." But Davis knows how a sense of support and of belonging can evaporate in an instant, and so, he proffers, "we can't slow down." ▼

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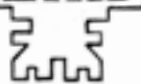
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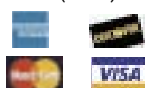
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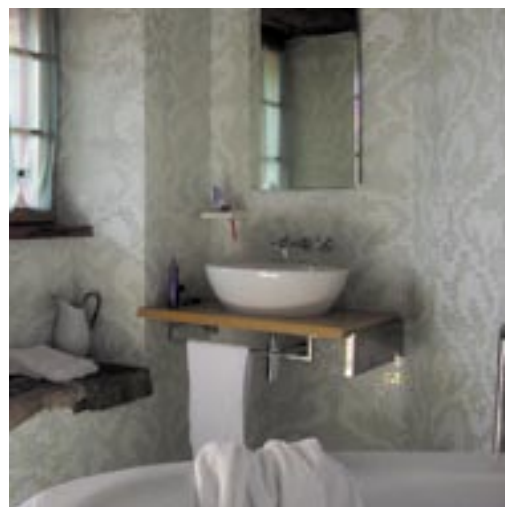
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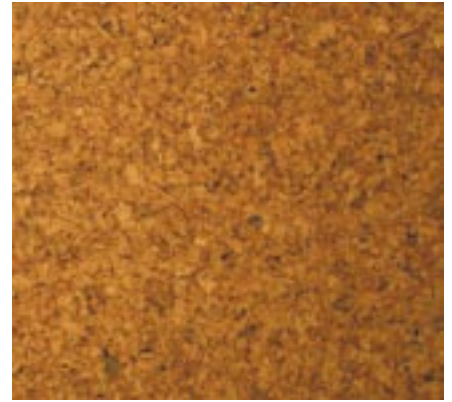
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The background of the page features a stack of architectural blueprints. The top blueprint shows a detailed floor plan with various rooms, corridors, and structural elements like stairs and walls. The blueprints are slightly offset, creating a sense of depth. The lines are dark blue on a light background.

HOW TO

Hire A Contractor You'll Love

by Debby Young

Watching the love-hate relationship between a contractor and a homeowner unfold on a TV sitcom might be hilarious. But if it happens in your own living room, suddenly it's not so funny anymore. To keep your dream project from becoming a nightmare, we've got some practical advice. Before you decide which contractor to hire for your home improvement project ask lots of questions.

Contractors looking to do business with our community often advertise their services in GLBT publications. If you're in the market for a community-friendly contractor, check the ads in the Pink Pages book, or www.linkpink.com and the GLBT newspapers in your area. As a courtesy, let contractors know you saw their listings in one of these publications so they can know that their ads are reaching their target market. Just a cautionary note, however. Just because the owner of the company seeks business from our community doesn't guarantee that the people they employ are of a like mind. Should you encounter any bigotry from a contractor's employees or subcontractors, confront the individual directly (after all, he or she is in your home). But also let the owner know that this individual's attitude is unacceptable and will affect your recommendation of this contractor's services to others in the GLBT community.

Is This Contractor Right for You? Quality workmanship is certainly critical in hiring a contractor. But there are a number of other attributes a contractor should possess to ensure your home improvement project goes

Are they a GLBT Friendly Contractor?
Be clear as to who's responsible for what.
Put everything in writing.
Always check references.

smoothly. How do you know if a contractor has what it takes to do the job to your satisfaction? Several years ago, Technocopia and the McNally Corporation published a suggested list of questions you should ask a contractor before deciding whether or not to engage his/her services. How a contractor responds to these pointed questions will tell you a lot about how they work and how communicative they are likely to be during a project.

How Experienced Are You?

A contractor who is just starting out in the industry will have a lot of learning to do and will inevitably make mistakes. Unless you're willing to foot the bill for his/her on-the-job training, choose a seasoned professional. Make sure your contractor is experienced in all facets of the project he/she is undertaking. Can this person handle framing? Dry wall? Tiling? Custom cabinetry? Etc.

Are You Licensed?

That last thing you want is an amateur handyman working on a major renovation. Licensed contractors are professionally trained and experienced. But don't take their word for it. Ask to see the license and make a copy for your records. Remember to check the expiration date. If a contractor can't produce a valid license, don't hire him/her!

Do You Have Your Own Crew?

Ask if the contractor has an established crew and regular subcontractors (plumbers, electricians, drywall experts, etc.) with which he/she works. Having to hire cold on every phase of the project can cause untold delays in completing the job.

How Many Projects Are You Running Now?

Be suspicious if the number is too high or too low to sound right for the size of the company. If the contractor is operating from a small home office, handling a couple of jobs concurrently is reasonable. If yours is the only project on the books, however, it could mean this contractor has a less-than-stellar reputation. A high number of jobs could mean the contractor is going after work helter-skelter and spreading himself/herself too thin to do justice at any work site.

Do You Carry General Liability Insurance?

Don't get stuck paying for a contractor's or crew's carelessness. Make sure your contractor carries general liability insurance. This type of insurance protects your property in case of damage caused by contractors and/or their employees. Their insurance company will pay for the cost of replacing and/or repairing any damage that occurs. Have the contractor give you a certificate of insurance naming you as the certificate holder.

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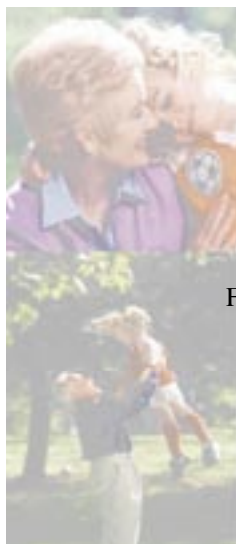
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Do You Carry Workers' Compensation Insurance?

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Will You Provide Me with a Written Lien Waiver?

Once you've paid the contractor for your domicile facelift, you don't want a supplier or subcontractor coming back later asking for money. To protect yourself, get a lien waver from the contractor when you hand over the last payment. This is a legal document that says you, the homeowner, have paid the contractor in full for services rendered and the contractor waives his right to place a mechanic's lien on your property. If, during the course of a major construction project, you receive any notice to owner documents from material suppliers or subcontractors, it would be smart to ask the contractor for a final release of lien from each person or company prior to paying the contractor his/her final installment. This protects you in case the contractor doesn't pay the material suppliers or subcontractors after you have paid him/her in full. It may not apply on smaller less complex jobs. But it's essential on major remodeling undertakings. So make sure the contractor gives you with a written lien waiver at the end of the job.

Are You A Member of a Professional Association?

Professional building industry associations generally attract conscientious contractors interested in bettering the industry and in weeding out unprofessional contractors. Ask a contractor if he/she belongs to a professional building industry association like NARI (National Association of the Remodeling Industry), NAHB (National Association of Home Builders), CEDIA (Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association) or HAA (Home Automation Association).

Another plus of hiring NARI, NAHB, CEDIA or HAA contractors is that they are already rigorously prescreened for you.

Will You Pull All the Required Building Permits?

It's very important to make sure your contractor pulls all the required permits. When they do, you'll know things will be done to code. Many homeowners' insurance policies require pulling a permit on major remodeling to keep your home properly covered. If a contractor asks you to get the permits, be wary. Maybe they aren't able to pull the permits themselves because they're unlicensed, or the scope of the work is outside their license. A reputable contractor will pull permits for every job where a permit is required.

Do You Guarantee Your Work?

Sometimes problems don't crop up until months after the renovation work is completed. Your contractor should guarantee the work in writing for a least one year from the date of completion. If the contractor doesn't bring up the issue of a guarantee, it could be because he/she can't offer one, or won't. Don't do business with someone who won't guarantee that his/her work will stand up over time.

Who Will Be in Charge of the Job?

Always know whom you can call whenever you have a question or concern about your project. Make sure the contractor or their appointed "lead" person is on the job most of the time when work is being performed.

Will You Provide Me with References?

A good contractor will happily provide you with references. Look for well-established contractors who can give you several client references from the last six months to one year. Ask for vendor references, too. You want to make sure that the people you hire has a good relationship with their supply chain. Otherwise you may experience long delays waiting for construction materials to arrive.

And don't be shy about checking out those references thoroughly. In the construction industry, contractors may come and go overnight. You want to be sure to hire someone with stability and a good reputation. Recent clients are a wonderful source of information. Ask them to tell you about their experience with the contractor you're considering.

You should raise these questions to former customers:

Were they satisfied with the finished product?

Was the quality what they expected? Why?

Were there any cost overruns that they were unexpectedly responsible for?

Were the contract and specifications completed in full? ▼



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It's Good To Be Me: Ryan Landry

An interview with Boston Theater Maven
interview and photos by: Joe Gallo

Ryan Landry, Boston-based actor and playwright, is a rare bird; intellectual, playwright, actor, vaudeville drag queen. He's an original phenomenon whose roots could only have come from growing up gay in America. He is the vocal partner of The Gold Dust Orphans, the most successful "drag theater troupe" in the world. In conversation Landry proved to be as witty and pithy as the plays he's written and performed in.

SF: BECAUSE WE'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR FORMATIVE YEARS LET'S START OFF WHERE YOU LITERALLY CAME IN...

RL: I was born in Norwalk, California. When I was 7 months old my mother left us for a man who promised her a career in the movies. My father, a severe alcoholic, couldn't cut the muster as a parent, and he put the four of us kids in separate foster homes. Eventually me and my brother wound up being raised by my Aunt who lived in a converted chicken coop in central Connecticut. That's where I learned how to fall completely into fantasy, avoiding at all costs the unpleasant odor of reality.

SF: DID YOU ACTUALLY GROW UP AROUND CHICKENS?

RL: Thousands of them! They lived across the street in a huge barn. Naturally, we grew accustomed to the powerful scent but never really the sound. The sound of ten thousand chickens crying to get out before the axe came slashing down!

Late afternoons, I would run in the fields outside my Aunt's house, pretending to be a chicken. Yelling, screaming, pleading for my life to be spared from the axe. After reaching the point of losing my voice I would suddenly plop down in the grass and quietly pretend I was now the host of my very own television show where I would decide the fate of the other chickens depending on their sex appeal. That's the kind of kid I was. Nuts.

SF: HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE YOURSELF AS A TEENAGER?

RL: Gay. The other kids were listening to Rock and Roll and I only listened to the "Captain and Tennielle". While most teenagers were having sex I was drawing cartoon panda bears, looking melancholy and holding daisies. This all changed however once I discovered acid.

SF: IN HIGH SCHOOL YOU WERE MOST LIKELY TO... ?

RL: Have the shit beat out of me. Every day.

SF: HOW WOULD FORMER CLASSMATES REACT TO YOUR STAGE SHOWS?

RL: I don't think they would really "get" my theatrical stuff. They weren't exactly the most "cultured" bunch. Then again they'd probably love it now that they're older.

SF: WHEN DID DRAG BECOME A PART OF YOUR LIFE? AND IS IT PART OF YOUR LIFE OUTSIDE THE THEATER?

RL: Drag has been around me always. It is around all of us always. As long as people continue to focus on the differences between boys and girls and not the similarities between human beings, drag will always have a place in my political closet because, for me, drag is just a way to confuse the enemy.

SF: AND THE ENEMY IS...

RL: Settling for mediocrity and the pursuit of formulas that are "safe" and "normal." Now, to answer the second part of your question, Do I dress up "Just for fun"? The answer is No. Drag for me is a stage device.

SF: DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR FIRST DRESS?

RL: I remember my mother's only dress. It was what the Queens like to call a "twirler" because when you spin around fast it flows out from the waist like a toy top. These are especially fun when the lady is wearing no underwear, my mother excluded.

"I would decide the fate
of the other chickens
depending on their
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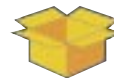
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SF: MEN IN DRESSES HAVE A LONG HISTORY IN ENTERTAINMENT. MILTON BERLE, FLIP WILSON, RU PAUL, EVEN BUGS BUNNY ... JUST TO NAME A FEW. WHAT IS IT THAT KEEPS THE GOLD DUST ORPHANS OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM?

RL: Well, we always do exactly what we want to do and answer to no one. Ever. This means, of course, that we will never be “mainstream”. But I don’t think we really want to be. It’s funny but whenever I make statements like this in interviews, some Queen suddenly gets all indignant and feels the need to jump on a website and call me “tired” or “bitter” as if it’s impossible for them to conceive that anyone in show business would actually reject national “fame”; especially someone gay!

SF: WHAT WAS THE INITIAL ATTRACTION TO PERFORMING IN DRAG? OR IN THE NUDE?

RL: The first time I performed in drag I looked much the way I do now. Stupid! Everyone laughed! Immediately I knew that I had finally done something right! The first time I performed in the nude everyone laughed. My second triumph! My intention is never really to get totally nude. But if they’re not laughing it’s a great way to break the ice! I would never take my clothes off in public as a boy. I’m too self-conscious and insecure for that! But when I’m in drag

nothing matters but the audience. If the clown suit doesn’t work I pull out the birthday suit.

SF: DO YOU FIND THE GAY ARTS AND SOCIAL SCENE TO BE AS CREATIVE AS IT WAS, SAY, A DECADE OR TWO AGO?

RL: Absolutely not! (Quick cut to some insulted Queen leaping onto her computer and furiously beginning to type!) There is no “gay arts scene” today. The gays are just as boring as the straights these days and seemingly happy to be so. Call me bitter but it’s the bitter truth and everyone knows it. However, what matters is what we are all doing to change that truth. I try but it is disheartening to watch so many of the younger set drooling over today’s D.J.’s like they’re the great painters and sculptors of some shiny, new cultural Renaissance.

SF: WHAT WAS THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS THING YOU’VE HEARD ABOUT YOURSELF?

RL: Oh, God! I’ve heard everything from someone swearing me and Margaret (Cho) were lovers to receiving news over the radio that I had just died in Amsterdam of an overdose.

SF: WHAT’S THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION PEOPLE HAVE ABOUT YOUR LIFE OFF-STAGE?

RL: That I live some sort of unhappy “drag” existence. The truth is that I actually love my life just the way it is. I mean,

Continued on page 73

“The first time I performed in the nude everyone laughed”





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Continued from page 71

I have to be the luckiest Queen alive! I've written over 30 financially successful and critically acclaimed plays, I've been in the same relationship for 13 years, I own my house outright and I can't even begin to count all the good, true friends who have stood beside me through the years no matter what. It may sound gross, but I don't care... I've truly been blessed.

SF: THAT'S A WEIRD NAME, THE GOLD DUST ORPHANS. HOW'D THAT COME ABOUT?

RL: It came from the graphics on a box of soap powder from the '30s. It was called "Gold Dust" and it featured two identical black children scrubbing "the white folks" laundry with a tag line underneath the title that read, "Let the twins do the work!" I was insulted and at the same time fascinated by this. I believe there is a power in being the underdog. There is honor in being the one that no one thinks is worthy. Those twins seemed to be saying, "Sure you can dismiss us because of the way we look but you have no idea who we really are. And that makes us far more powerful than you will ever be willing to admit!"

SF: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS?

RL: The scripts are merely homages to all the great works that they are based on. I don't pretend to be Tennessee Williams or Eugene O'Neill. I only try and understand them and then proceed to present my version of their works to others. Sure, my plays are completely different than the originals in concept, execution and sometimes intention, but the foundations of my little "homages" are always very true to their original source.

SF: AND YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

RL: I suppose I will eventually begin a career in creative hairdressing if this theater thing doesn't work out. Onward and upward with the arts!!! ▼

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There are lots of ways to go “green,” from participating in recycling programs to turning down the air conditioning and buying organically grown food. Now, ecologically-minded consumers are embracing a hot new trend: organic home furnishings – sofas, chairs, mattresses and more made with sustainably-harvested, organic and chemical free ingredients.

One reason for its growing popularity is that materials used to make conventional furniture and mattresses contain a lot of chemicals. Common ingredients like formaldehyde, fire retardant chemicals and urethane foam have been linked to a variety of health problems ranging from allergies and asthma to a condition known as MCS, or Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). Some flame retardant chemicals used in mattresses belong to a class of chemicals known as persistent toxic chemicals, which have been shown to impair memory, learning and behavior in laboratory animals. These synthetic materials and chemicals may out-gas vapors for many years.

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Concerned about their health and the impact on the environment, consumers are demanding chemical-free alternatives. Eliminating exposure in furniture and bedding – two places that offer the potential for hours of intimate contact – is a great place to start.

A leading source for organic home furnishings is Boston-based Furnature. Furnature is widely credited for pioneering the organic home furnishings category. The idea was born in the mid-1990s when a woman suffering from Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS) called master furniture-makers Barry and Fred Shapiro and asked if they could create a chemical-free sofa for her. Nothing like that existed at the time, but concerned about the woman's plight, they agreed to take on the challenge so that she could have what she said she wanted most – a comfortable sofa where she could "curl up, watch TV or fall asleep, and feel normal."

After analyzing every ingredient needed to make the piece and scouring the world for resources, the Shapiros – who are cousins – delivered the sofa, and an entirely new category in home furnishings was born.

Not only are the ingredients used in these pieces good for the environment – they also offer many other benefits. For example, natural rubber molds to the body and is extremely comfortable, durable and resilient. Wool is a natural dust mite repellent, and it also regulates body temperature. ▼

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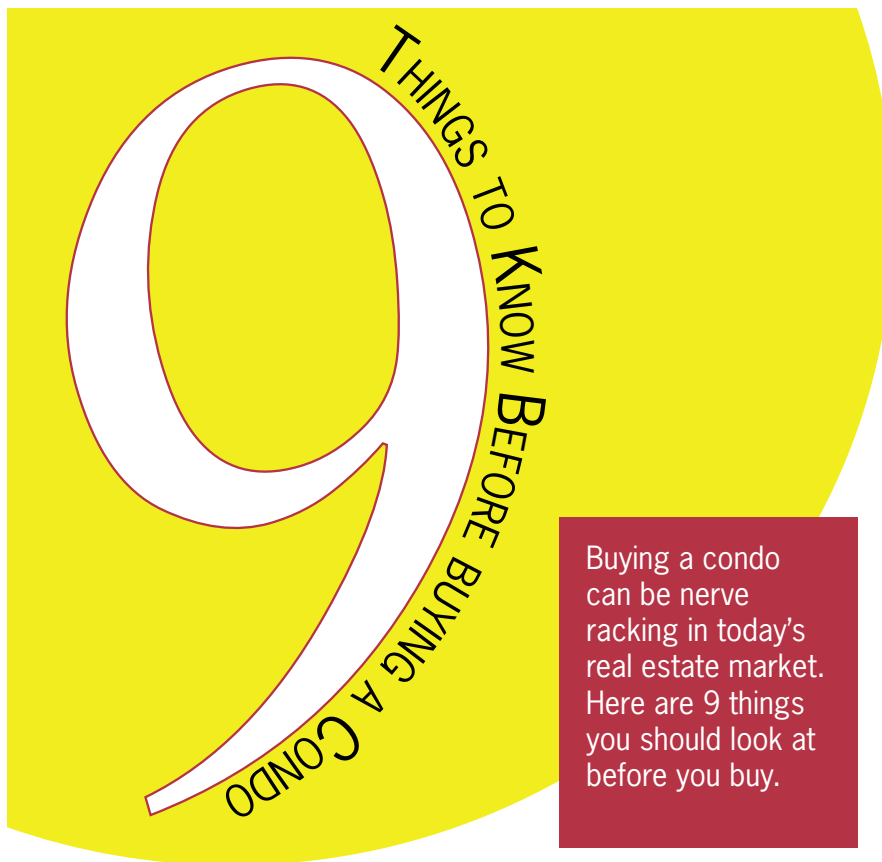
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1 Ask your real estate agent if there are any other gay people living in the complex. Then see if you can speak with them to find out how welcoming the complex is.

2 Look at the minutes of the annual condo meeting and see what the other owners have concerns about. If there are a lot of the same complaints from one meeting to the next there may be a management problem. You can also read the minutes of the meetings to see what kind of projects are underway and what they are planning for the future.

3 Find out if there is a high condo rate delinquency among owners. If so, it could indicate that people are either unhappy with the way their dues are appropriated or that they are too high.

4 Ask about the repair fund. The fund set aside from the fees owners pay to offset the cost of major repairs. Beware of associations that don't charge a normal condo fee amount because if something happens there may not be enough money to repair the problem and the place will begin to fall into disrepair or owners will be asked for additional monies.

5 Get a copy of the certificate of insurance. Its a summary of the condo association's policy. First of all see if the cost of replacing the property is an accurate estimate. Second check if there is an ordinance clause. An ordinance clause is part of the insurance policy that would have the insurance foot the bill if it needs any work to bring the building up to code. Lastly make sure you are very clear what the condo associations policy covers and what you may have to pay for. Regardless of the policy you should look into getting your own insurance to insure your personal items within the condo.

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6 Look into the bylaws of the association. See if they are carefully crafted to the specific need of the complex, often times bylaws are used from other associations and not always appropriate for every condo community.

7 Some people buy condos as real estate investments. If you are interested in doing this find out what the renter percentage is. If it is high enough there may be services that will help you rent it out. But you might get a place that doesn't like renters and will make it very difficult for you to rent it out.

8 Be aware of who manages the complex. If it is owner managed you may run into problems. If it is professionally managed you should see the manager directly and ask him about condo you are looking to buy.

9 Finally, and most important, ask the people who live there what they think. They know better than anyone about the problems that could arise or the ease at which things are run.

Last But Not Least

There are a lot of tests that anyone can perform on a condo or house or any kind of real estate to see if there are any obvious major problems.

You should check all the appliances. Check the stove, garbage disposal, refrigerator, and anything else that comes with the property.

Turn the thermostat up above room temperature to see if it comes on and works properly. If there is central air check that too. Go around to all the ducts in the house and feel if the air is being distributed evenly throughout.

Examine the ceiling and walls for spots that might indicate leaks. You can also look at the basement floor for signs of flooding.

Make sure that the cabinets and doors are easily opened and closed. Sometimes things shift due to settling.

Look at the insulation in the attic, if there is one, and see if it covers the whole floor.

If there is a fireplace, burn a piece of paper in it to see if there is good airflow through the chimney.

Ultimately you should have a professional home inspector look at the property before purchasing. Only a trained professional can make a proper assessment. ▼

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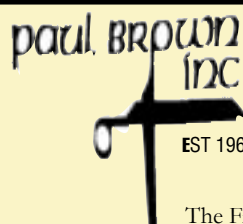
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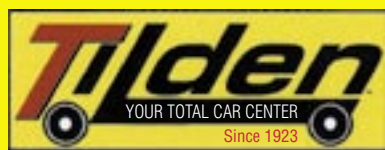
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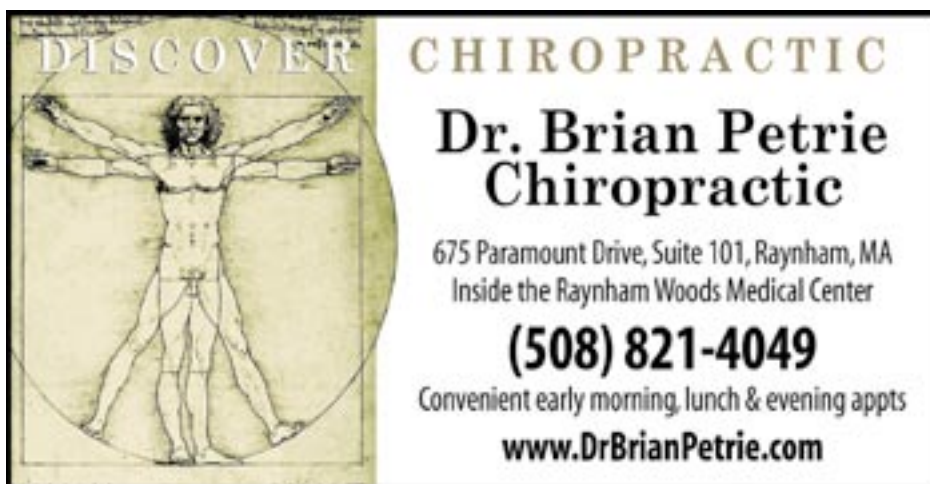
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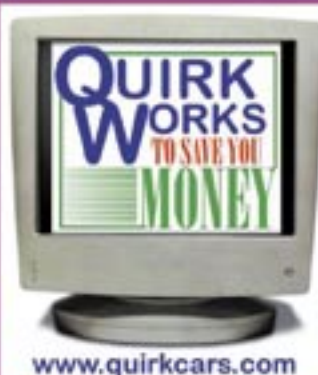
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