

Creative Living



D11E

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Getting with Gear: comfortable country

By Joan Boram
special writer

DO YOU ever look around your living room in despair at the frayed sofa, the hand-me-down overstuffed chair, the cat uses as a scratching post, the coffee table ringed by years of kaffeeklatsches?

Do you sometimes wonder if your complete collection of Bob-Lo snowballs are genuine collectibles or just kitsch? Just push the stack of shelter magazines aside, sit down and relax. Chances are you qualify as "country." Don't think "frumpy," think "patina."

And while you're at it, think of Raymond Waites, the jovial decorating wizard credited with being the "Father of American Country."

According to Waites, the mark of a decorator's skill is to make a room look lived in from day one. Scuff marks on the dining room chairs put you ahead of the game. Be proud of that philodendron in the stenciled coffee can.

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, Waites was happy and successful living in Helsinki where he was director of design for Marimekko. (If you don't recall Marimekko, think geometric Laura Ashley.)

"But there comes a day when the most important thing in the world is a Diet Coke and a hamburger, and then it's time to come home," claims the ebullient Waites.

And, in a nutshell, that's how Waites became the "Father of American Country."

Speaking at the Michigan Design Center's gala preview party recently, Waites traced his design philosophy from Southern Victorian to pared-down international to country comfortable.

"Right after coming back to the states, I bought a quilt and a piece of fine furniture, and I did a complete design turnabout. My wife and I began to haunt country fairs and pine began pushing plastic out the door."

Waites met Betty Martin, and together they decided to take her \$5,000 and his talent, and start a company to design and produce good American design. Thus, in 1978, Gear Inc. was launched.

"MY PERSONAL TASTE led to

may professional life," he said.

About that time, Waites and Mary Emmerling wrote a book describing what was happening in design. "American Country," still in print, made them the official parents of the American Country movement.

Gear Inc. was an immediate success. "The time was right — something was bubbling in the country," said Waites. "You can't make anything happen if the culture isn't ready. There was a resurgence of looking at our design heritage. Maybe it was a delayed result of the bi-centennial."

Waites passed out some advice at his appearance in the Burger gallery. He urges the special use (to you) of pieces as the foundation of a room. Just don't use too many colors.

"COLOR ALLOWS YOU to mix styles and periods," he explained. By using a limited color palette, it all flows together. For example, honey pine furniture has a yellow tone. If you mix it with off-white and gray blue, you can change the attitude of the room with very little money. Learn to build color and accessories.

"For a seasonal look in the summer, add yellow striped pillows and daffodils. Mums, a tablecloth and swags over the windows, all in rich red, will carry the room into autumn."

Waites is predicting that country will assume a more opulent, almost baroque, look.

WAITES HAS USED the same core colors in successive fabric collections to assure continuity. "Stone blue," for instance, has been around for eight years, in various patterns.

"I use my own taste as a barometer," said Waites. "Eight years ago, I designed a romantic chintz collection. Everybody predicted that it would never sell. It was our most popular collection. It's still selling well."

When asked to define country, Waites described an encounter in a Finnish farmhouse: "Once, I was traveling in Finland 200 miles above the Arctic Circle. We stopped at a farm house, and there was an old woman weaving rugs from old clothes — and plastic shopping bags! The rugs were beautiful. They were much more durable than an ordinary rag rug because of the plastic. She has created a traditional item in a traditional way, using non-traditional material."

"That's the true spirit of country. There are no rules."



RANDY DORST/staff photographer

Some of the owners of Bay View Condominiums in Grand Marais look over plans for a similar development by Bloomfield Hills residents Ira and Barbara Green in St. Ignace at a recent get-together at the home of Ron (left) and Mary Benish of Farmington. Green (third from left) explains the design to Marjorie Coxford of Canton, Ross and Laura Norberry (right) of Southfield, while Barbara Green looks on from the background.

Extended family

Love of north country bonds condo owners

By Marie McGee
staff writer

IRA and Barbara Green's commitment to Michigan's Upper Peninsula has paid off in ways they didn't expect.

They've managed to make some money on a condominium project some of their friends thought was crazy. But more rewarding has been the knowledge that they were promoting the beauty of Michigan's upper peninsula as an affordable recreational retreat.

It's also resulted in a new "extended" family — made up of the 15 or so families who bought units in the waterfront condominiums the Greens built last year at Grand Marais, on the shores of Lake Superior.

An announcement of the development came via a feature story in the Observer & Eccentric in July 1988. The story noted that the Greens, both from Bloomfield Hills, were fans of the Upper Pen-

insula — particularly the Grand Marais area.

WHAT THE STORY didn't talk about was the skepticism of friends when the Greens decided to replace rental cabins with condominiums on land they owned.

But Ira Green, who owns a dental lab in Troy, said he could understand their feelings. After all, he said, he wasn't a "builder" in the construction sense of the word. But he also knew that what he lacked in expertise, he made up in enthusiasm for Michigan's upper regions.

Underlining that enthusiasm was a commitment to preserve the beauty and integrity of the region. To make sure he didn't compromise either, he sought advice from others who felt as he did. High on his list was the Department of Natural Resources.

He was most familiar with Grand Marais because he and Barbara had vacationed there for many years. In fact, he had camped in the area as a youth.

THE PROJECT was a labor of love, so to speak — a belief that, if given the chance, others would probably come to love the area, too.

Almost from the announcement of the development, the response was overwhelming, Green said.

"Not only did all 18 units sell almost immediately, but a majority of the people were from this area," said Green.

The result is a strong association that has become "almost like a family."

The camaraderie is so strong that the group often gets together "down here" long after summer ends for what the group technically calls "association meetings." Plymouth, for instance, is a favorite meeting place — probably because the association treasurer and her husband live in Canton.

ANOTHER UNEXPECTED benefit came from a friendship Green formed with one of the association members who happens

to own a market research firm. The two men often commuted from the Bloomfield area to Grand Marais on weekends.

"In fact, we have gotten to be such good friends, that he has helped me make decisions about our next project," said Green with a grin.

Oh yes, there's another project on the drawing board.

The Greens are in the midst of developing a similar waterfront development — this one in St. Ignace.

"It will be basically the same design as the development in Grand Marais, but the units will be slightly larger," said Green. One- and two-bedroom units will be offered in a price range of \$65,000-\$75,000.

The Greens — like a lot of other folks in the state including Governor James Blanchard — happen to believe that St. Ignace is the gateway to the north. The Greens see their latest venture as a way to oil the hinges a bit.

organizing
Dorothy
Lehmkuhl

Spotlighting right-brainers

Last week's column described the attributes of people who are left brain dominant and how that affects their organizational abilities. Right brain thinking will be discussed today.

While everyone switches back and forth between the two hemispheres of the brain, about 10 percent of people depend almost entirely on the right side.

People who think predominantly with their right brain might be characterized as artists, or creative people. They tend to think in metaphors, images, spatial concepts and intuitive leaps of insight. They are concerned with the immediate experience of patterns, moods, feelings and atmosphere. Right brain people tend to be inspirational, attuned to music, movement and touch. They can be inner directed (unconcerned with other's opinions), impractical, spontaneous, lacking in discipline, irrational, hostile and sensual. They are non-sequential, (as in not time oriented) and often drag their heels and run late.

"Right Brainers" acquire their information kinesthetically (through touch and feelings) and process it in feelings-action-thought order. That is, they experience a feeling, act upon it and only then consider the consequences. They often want things Right Now! These people are good at looking at a whole concept, while ignoring the details. When asked to describe a room, for instance, they might say it is "bright, sunny, spacious and makes me feel good."

Right brain activities include making love, dancing, impulse buying and overeating. Because they are not conscious of details or objects and tend to think horizontally, they may leave things laying around, save things and allow possessions to become disorganized. Their homes may have a "lived in" look.

Although right brain people may be impractical, they may also be extremely talented in ways left brain dominance would never allow. If they have jobs that demand left brain thinking, they may revert to right brain dominance even more dramatically at home.

"The Odd Couple Syndrome — Resolving the Neat/Sloppy Dilemma," a book by Selwyn Mills, Ph.D., and Max Weisser, ACSW, points out that opposites attract and life can be difficult when two opposites live or work together. The often amusing book states that when Neat and Sloppy meet, "sloppy prevails." Acceptance of the other person's traits is a key to harmony. Also, anyone can learn to use both brain hemispheres, but it is more difficult for a predominantly one-sided person.

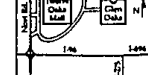
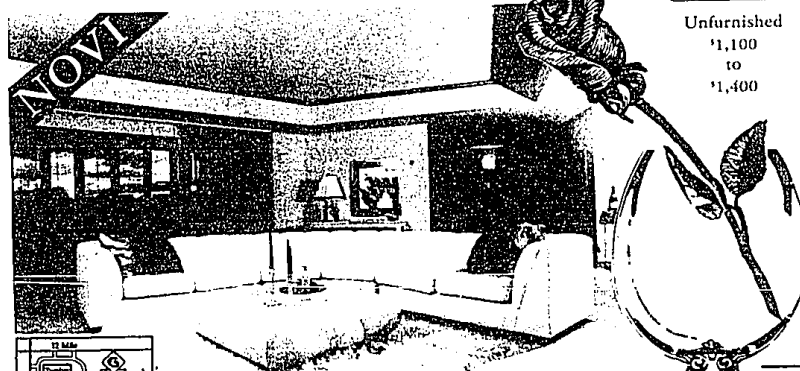
Author Mills emphasized to me that brain dominance is "beyond value judgment" and should never be construed as "right" or "wrong," but merely different. This is only an outline sketch of their insightful book, which can be obtained by sending \$14.95 (plus \$1.50 postage) check or money order to Jamelson Publishing Co., 90 Schenck Ave., Suite 114, Great Neck, NY 11021.

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