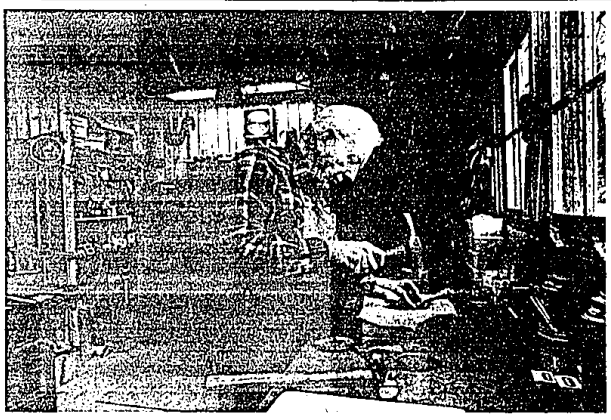

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Howard Schweppe does his tin-bashing in his workshop in Farmington Hills home of his daughter, but he is a Livonia resident. A lot of his handiwork is on display at the Apple Wreath shop, 32626 Seven Mile Road in Livonia.

Tin-basher

Colonial craft enjoys revival

By Arlene Funke
special writer

HOWARD SCHWEPPE calls himself a "tin-basher."

Schweppe is a 69-year-old Livonia resident who fell in love with tinsmithing 11 years ago after taking a class at Greenfield Village in Dearborn.

Using antique tools, Schweppe fashions colonial-style lanterns, pitchers and chandeliers from pieces of sheet metal.

"It started in New England in the late 1600s," Schweppe explained. "The old tinsmiths principally made kitchen utensils and lighting devices. Everybody relied on tin until almost the 20th century. Today's tinsmiths make gutters, downspouts and furnaces."

Schweppe, who recently retired as a consulting engineer, has crafted and sold numerous pieces to people who bring him pictures from magazines.

"THE THINGS I MAKE are copies of museum piece items," he said. "They have some historical significance."

Although Schweppe still considers his tinsmithing a hobby, he's spreading his wings a bit. Several of his pieces are for sale at the Apple Wreath, a gift shop on Seven Mile east of Farmington Road in Livonia.

According to Schweppe's research, tinsmithing was brought to the American colonies by Welsh craftsmen. Principal material was sheet iron coated with tin. The more expensive copper and brass were introduced later.

Entering his workshop, behind his daughter's house in Farmington Hills, is like stepping into the past.

LINING SHELVES AND hanging from the ceiling are tin teapots, candle molds, sconces and chandeliers in styles popular during the mid-1700s. Many lanterns have holes punched to form the popular colonial sunburst pattern. Traditionally, the holes were punched outward so wind wouldn't extinguish the candle's flame.

"The first lantern I made, it took me a whole week to punch the holes," Schweppe said. "Now it takes about three hours."

Standing in precision are tools that Schweppe has found at antique shops, flea markets and private sales. Each has a specific function, such as cutting, pressing, folding or shaping the metal. One of his oldest tools, a burring machine, was manufactured in 1825.

"You can hardly tell the difference between the appearance of tools from 150 years ago," Schweppe said. "Except the ones made now are junk. I don't want any newer equipment."

ACCORDING TO SCHWEPPE, few people today are engaged in tinsmithing.

"One of the reasons is that the equipment is so hard to come by," he said. "A lot of these things look like a ball of rust when I get them. It takes a lot of work to restore them, but it's worth it."

Interest in colonial replicas, always very popular on the East

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Plath author faced obstacles

book break
Mona Grigg

TODAY marks the 25th anniversary of Sylvia Plath's death. At age 30, in a London flat where Yeats once lived, the brilliant but troubled young writer finally succeeded in killing herself. She did it by sealing the kitchen doors and windows and resting her head in a hissing gas oven.

The troubled, often bizarre life of the gifted author of "The Bell Jar" and "Ariel" makes for good reading — her depression, her creative frenzies, her attempts to be the good wife and mother without sacrificing her all-encompassing desire to write — such good reading that readers are apt to forget how important her writings were (and are) to the literary world.

Linda Wagner-Martin hadn't forgotten. She began researching Plath's life several years ago, when, as a creative writing instructor, she kept hearing about Sylvia Plath from her better students.

"My talented women writers were on to Sylvia Plath long before I ever really knew about her. Her work spoke to them, possibly because they found themselves in similar situations. She was the kind of person who needed to be all things to all people. She couldn't just be a writer. She couldn't just be a wife and mother. She needed to be the best at everything and the effort just burned her out," commented Wagner-Martin."

WAGNER-MARTIN, A former Detroiter and Wayne State instructor now teaching at Michigan State University, put together an outline and a couple of chapters proposing a book on Plath, focusing on her giftedness and how it affected her life and those around her.

It's been more than three years since Simon & Schuster put in the highest bid for her book, "Sylvia Plath, a Biography (hardbound, $18.95). Three long, intensely frustrating years later, with no advance publicity, no review copies or distribution of galleys, and no thanks to Plath's husband, Ted Hughes, and his sister, Olwyn, executors of Plath's estate, the book is finally being distributed. (A review appears elsewhere in this section.)

At first, Hughes and his sister seemed interested in cooperating, Wagner-Martin recalls.

"I know now why so little new has been written about Sylvia. It's because the Hugheses make it impossible," she continued. "They stayed with us long enough to see what we were doing, and, of course, nothing pleased them. They attempted to change hundreds of pages of manuscript, even to the point of making changes in material that had already been published.

"Essentially, they were trying to write my book for me, and, apparently, they'd tried it with others who had attempted the same thing. Some gave up in frustration, but I just get more stubborn. My book was about Sylvia Plath as a woman and a gifted writer. It wasn't meant to damage anyone."

Wagner-Martin said she and Simon & Schuster made as many concessions as they could without changing completely the character of the book. "We all got so many nasty and threatening letters from the Hugheses, Simon & Schuster finally turned all correspondence over their attorney who told the Hugheses there saw no reason to change anything in my book, and Simon & Schuster finally released it quietly in October, with the Hugheses still threatening lawsuits."

Wagner-Martin said the British publishers took a little longer to get over their fear of Ted Hughes, now England's poet-laureate. Seems he'd been embroiled in a splashy and very expensive lawsuit over a story the London Mail had published about the death of the women he'd left Plath for. Publication in England is now scheduled for early March, with an excerpt coming out in British Vogue this month.

"Sylvia's life and works had a great impact on a lot of people," Wagner-Martin said. "There's no question about how important she was to the poets, for instance. And what's interesting is that the best reviews of her collected poems seem to come from young males. They're just amazed by the scope of her work, by her sense of comedy and fast metaphors. She touched everybody who'd ever come in contact with her — both as a person and as writer."

SOME OF DETROIT'S best known poets and performance artists will get together on Wednesday, Feb. 24, for "Read & Feed: A benefit for the Cass Methodist Emergency Food Program and the Art Center Music School."

Gloria House, Leslie Reese, M.L. Liebler, John Sinclair, Faruq Z. Bey, Trino Sanchez and others will read and perform at the Old Miami Bar, 3930 Cass Avenue (just south of the Wayne State campus) at 7:30 p.m.

The Cass Methodist Food program feeds Cass Corridor residents, and the Art Center Music School offers its services to lower income families in the corrridor. These poets and artists are known for doing good things around Detroit. Over 250 attended a similar benefit in December. For just $3 you can feed bodies and hearts in need.

review

By Victoria Diaz
special writer

Sylvia Plath: A biography by Linda W. Wagner-Martin, Simon and Schuster, 272 pages, $18.95.

If you're not already familiar with the fascinating story of American writer, Sylvia Plath, you'll probably find Linda Wagner-Martin's "Sylvia Plath: A Biography" worthwhile reading.

For serious Plathophiles, however, constantly in search of new revelations and fresh insight into their tragic idol and her work, the book may be something of a disappointment.

Plath, the first child of highly-educated (though not affluent) parents, was born in Boston in 1932. Her father, an entomology professor at Boston University, died of complications of diabetes shortly after Sylvia's eighth birthday, and his death and her memories of him would later deeply influence both her life and her work.

In 1953, already the recipient of numerous prestigious writing awards, and with fiction and poetry

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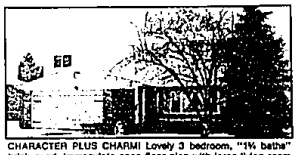
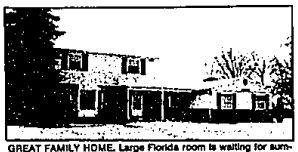
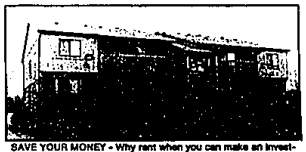


CHARACTER PLUS CHARM! Lovely 3 bedroom, "1½ baths" brick quad. Immaculate open floor plan with large living room and dining areas, family room with natural fireplace, French doors and deck. Scenic back yard. Immediate Occupancy. $125,500. 477-1111.



GREAT FAMILY HOME. Large Florida room is waiting for summer. Meanwhile enjoy the fireplace and garden window in dinette. Main floor bedroom plus three more made for flexibility. $149,900. 851-1900. (BER)



SAVE YOUR MONEY - Why rent when you can make an investment in your own Condo. Lower level one bedroom overlooking the commons in a Yuppie area of Farmington Hills. Washer and dryer hook-ups in the unit. $51,000. 851-1900. (TWE)

3 BEDROOM BRICK RANCH with lots of charm and personality located on a corner lot. Hardwood floors thru-out. 2 car attached garage. $99,000. 559-2300.

YUPPIES PARADISE. Contemporary condominium with 2 bedrooms, 2 baths in lovely Ramblewood Manor. Lower level unit with attached garage and carport. Many upgrades throughout. Kitchen appliances and vertical blinds included. $122,900. 477-1111.

SPANISH BRICK RANCH IN MEADOWBROOK HILLS has 3 bedrooms, 3 full baths including master bath. Natural fireplace in family room, basement with bar. Large nicely landscaped yard with circular drive. Privacy. $139,900. 477-1111.

OPEN SUNDAY 2 TO 5 P.M.

BIRMINGHAM	
100 Shirley $205,000	646-1800
1418 Washington, $124,500	646-1800
5095 Woodland Pass, $165,900	646-1800
BLOOMFIELD	
2254 Maple W., $269,000	646-1800
BLOOMFIELD HILLS	
1770 Woodgrove Lane, $259,000	646-1800
2567 Pendleton, $119,900	644-4700
FARMINGTON	
34021 Grand River, $105,000	477-1111
FARMINGTON HILLS	
35384 Muer Cove, $189,900	851-1900
25058 Pimlico, $76,900	851-1900
33756 Cadillac, $89,900	851-1900
32643 Oakview, $139,900	477-1111
20837 Halstead, $139,900	477-1111
30039 Richmond Hill, $157,900	477-1111
28404 Seven Oaks, $124,900	477-1111
21728 Colgate, $85,900	477-1111
38662 Carla Ct., $297,900	477-1111
37642 Eight Mile Rd., $159,000	477-1111
23256 Tuck Rd., $72,000	477-1111
35246 Farmington Rd., $149,900	477-1111
33632 Oak Pointe, $162,500	477-1111
31420 Oak Pointe, $171,900	477-1111
33470 Longwood, $86,900	477-1111
23031 Purdue, $89,900	477-1111
25636 Briar Hill, $149,500	646-1800
21825 Parklane Ct., $161,000	661-5700
FRANKLIN	
31250 Inkster, $179,000	644-4700
ORCHARD LAKE	
5813 Cermer Ct., West, $459,900	661-5700
ROCHESTER HILLS	
3113 Salem, $197,000	652-6600
1910 Chelsea Ct., $212,000	652-6600
725 Wilwood, $117,000	652-6600
663 Snowmass, $232,500	652-6600
SOUTHFIELD	
21245 Van Buren, $50,900	477-1111
WATERFORD	
5104 Cohoctah, $89,900	661-5700
5118 Cohoctah, $78,500	661-5700
WEST BLOOMFIELD	
4206 Strathdale, $578,000	661-5700
4079 Winterset, $299,000	661-5700
6327 Terrwilne, $139,900	661-5700
2112 Hidden Lake, $154,900	661-5700
5840 E. Commerce, $104,900	646-1800
5842 Hobnail Circle, $159,900	646-1800
2018 Bayou, $236,000	644-4700
CONDOMINIUMS	
BLOOMFIELD HILLS	
Willowby Place Condos from $225,000 to $245,000	644-4700
4062 Golf Ridge, $219,000	644-4700
FARMINGTON HILLS	
34900 Dartmoor Dr., $122,900	477-1111
TROY	
1446 Brentwood Dr., $98,000	646-1800
WEST BLOOMFIELD	
5123 Rock Run., $139,900	644-4700

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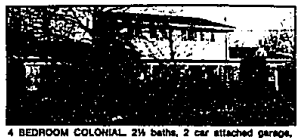
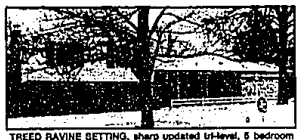


4 BEDROOM COLONIAL. 2½ baths, 2 car attached garage, lovely brick fireplace in living room. Convenient location: close to shopping center, doctor-lawyers offices, Oakland Community College and I-696 expressway. $129,500. 644-4700.

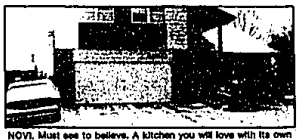
NORTHVILLE. Popular Highland Lakes Condo. 3 bedrooms, 1½ baths. Family room with fireplace. $87,777. 348-6430.

EXECUTIVE'S HIDEAWAY. Stunning quality built home in the woods. Formal living-dining rooms, comfortable family room. Extras too numerous to list. New construction on beautiful wooded lot. $219,900. 477-1111.

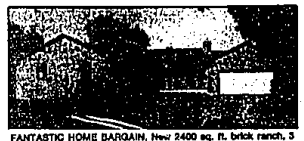


TREED RAVINE SETTING, sharp updated tri-level, 5 bedroom or 4 bedrooms and den. Full wall fireplace in 25x13 family room, formal dining room, all colors neutral and easy to live with. Lot overlooks pond and stream. Call for appointment today. Priced to sell, owners new home ready. $127,500. 851-1900.

UPDATED FAMILY RANCH. Spacious 3 bedroom ranch in great condition. Most everything new, inside and out. Cozy family room with natural fireplace. Formal dining room, Florida room and more. Large lot. Don't wait! $47,900. 559-2300.



NOVI. Must see to believe. A kitchen you will love with its own private patio. Gas fireplace in master bedroom. Family room with natural fireplace. Hardwood floors. $125,900. 348-6430.



FANTASTIC HOME BARGAIN. New 2400 sq. ft. brick ranch, 3 bedrooms, 2½ baths, 1st floor laundry, formal dining room, large basement, attached 2 car garage. On 7/10 acre. $139,900. 477-1111.

CUTE AND COZY RANCH Immaculate 2 bedroom home nestled among trees on a cul-de-sac, features fireplace in great room with attached garage and Florida room. $76,900. 851-1900. (PIM)

LOOK AT THE WORLD FROM KITCHEN. Very clean 3 bedroom ranch in Southfield school district. Large kitchen with eating space looking out at nice back yard with 2 big maple trees. $53,900. 559-2300.

PINE LAKE PRIVILEGES - Wonderful 4 bedroom Colonial. Library, family room, recreation room, fantastic yard and MORE. Desirable lake privileges, ideal W. Bloomfield neighborhood. $149,900. 661-5700.

COMMERCIAL 353-4400 LATHRUP VILLAGE 559-2300 WESTLAND 326-2000 FARMINGTON 477-1111 FARMINGTON HILLS 851-1900 LIVONIA 261-6700 PLYMOUTH/CANTON 455-7000 NORTHVILLE 348-6430