

WEST MIDWOOD NEWS

Volume 37

Number 1

March 2023



Save the Date!!!
WMCA Progressive
Garden Party

May 20, 2023
(Rain Date May 21)

Spring is coming . . . We promise!!!

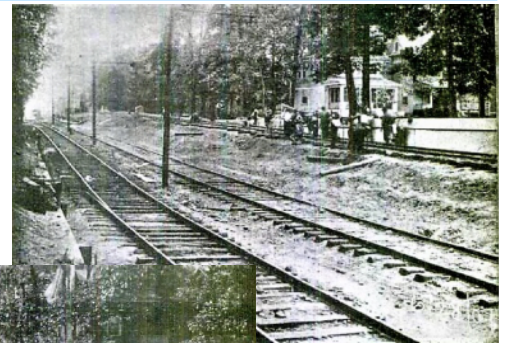


The Stories Your House Could Tell: 15 Wellington Court

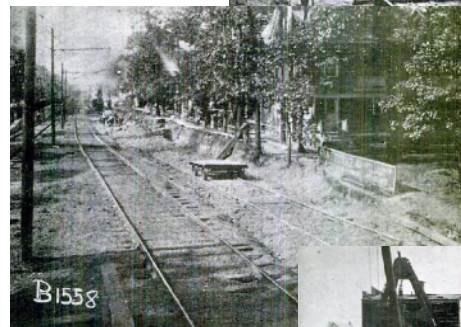
By Joe Enright

A Japanese Zelkova tree grows in front of 15 Wellington Court. Arborists describe the Zelkova as “a tough urban tree,” a phrase befitting most of the occupants of that house and its neighbors over the years. After all, home ownership in Flatbush has never been for the faint of heart. For instance, when this empty stretch was first surveyed and mapped by the City in 1903, its eastern border consisted of a two-track railroad sitting discreetly below grade in a cut, powered by overhead catenary wires. The train would descend further as it entered the Fiske Terrace stop, 200 feet away, in order to pass UNDER the Long Island Railroad bridge at the south end of the station. But by December of 1905, the Grade Crossing Elimination Commission would start to change all that, bringing the rail bed up to street level over the next two years. In the process, steam locomotives temporarily returned as the Brighton line was reconfigured in a noisy mess, widening it to four tracks powered by third rails as it passed OVER the newly suppressed LIRR.

June 1907
looking north
from Wellington
Court



July 1907 looking
north from
Avenue H



April 1907 near Foster
Ave with steam shovel
on left



December
1905
looking
north
from
Glenwood
before all
hell broke
loose

During this hubbub, the John R. Corbin Company erected many of the houses on the block. Given the sight of behemoth steam shovels, work gangs, steam engine shuttles and ongoing construction, many of the initial sales appear to have been to



Spring in West Midwood photos by Eric S. Ost (and his trusty assistant, Jojo).

President's Message Spring 2023



Spring Safety Checks:

A lot of us have seen and heard of a large increase of battery fires in New York City. A few days prior to my writing this, the head of the FDNY held a news conference to highlight the dangers of rechargeable lithium-ion batteries and their role in these fires, which have caused hundreds of building fires in NYC alone in recent years. Why are these batteries different from others, and what caused them to ignite fires?

Not all lithium-ion batteries are created equal. Many, such as those in your cellphone, are perfectly fine and have been tested and rated for years of regular consumer use. Others, such as those found in smaller and cheaper electric devices (think cheap rechargeable battery packs and other small rechargeable items) as well as lower cost eBikes, eScooters and hoverboards, are poorly designed and manufactured, and are not tested or rated. When these poorly-made batteries are charged, they are more likely to have cells that suffer from overcharging, resulting in the battery cells exploding and expelling a flaming plasma-like substance in all directions. Since so many of us plug these products and personal vehicles into outlets in our homes, the airborne plasma quickly hits other combustible materials (bedding, carpet, etc.) and ignites a fire.

What can you do to help protect yourself from these fires? You can use only well-made and lab tested devices with batteries from known manufacturers, or which wear a symbol like UL showing they are tested and rated. If you must use other devices that are likely to have lower quality batteries, you should avoid over charging them or charging them overnight, and you should charge them only while you are present and can keep an eye on the charging device.

This is also a good time to remind ourselves and our neighbors to check all smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in your home, make sure you have the proper number and that their batteries are in working order. Finally, make sure you have one or more fire extinguishers in your house that they can be easily reached, and make sure that you know how to use them.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the WMCA Spring Progressive Dinner!

— *Eric Goldberg*

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West Midwood Cooks (and Bakes!) by Allidah Muller

My cookbook shelves runneth over. So in an attempt to combat the overcrowding, I made a New Year's resolution that I would check out a cookbook from the library, read it, and cook some recipes from it before making a purchase. The first book I did this with is called *Simply Genius* by Kristen Migliore and the folks at Food52. It is a great cookbook! Everything I have made out of it has been delicious, the graphic design is excellent, there are good photos of the recipes, little "how-to" sections that relate to the recipes... I cannot recommend it enough. Once I finally return the copy I've been using to BPL, I am most likely going to purchase my own. Here are a few things I've made that have been superior, in no particular order. FYI... the idea behind the "Genius" cookbooks from Food52 is that they ask chefs and writers to submit a particularly amazing/genius recipe. So the books end up being a collection of recipes from all of these different people, some well-known, others less so.

Lofty Buttermilk Pancakes

From Dana Velden

Serves 4-6

You might be thinking, "A pancake recipe? Really?" What I love about this recipe is the little special step at the end that actually does really give the loft and fluff you want in your pancakes. Read on to see what that step is.

2½ cups all-purpose flour
2 Tbsp sugar
¾ tsp fine sea salt
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
2 large eggs, separated
2 cups buttermilk
½ cup whole milk
10 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted and cooled
1 Tbsp neutral oil

1. Set up your station: The best way to eat pancakes is fresh off the stove. But if you don't want to flip

pancakes through breakfast, heat the oven to 225°F to keep them warm as they come off the skillet. Set an ovenproof cooling rack inside a large sheet pan and stick them in the center of the oven. You want your pancakes in a single layer, with warm air circulation around them to keep them crisp, not soggy.

2. Mix dry, mix wet: In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, salt, baking powder and baking soda. In a medium bowl, whisk the egg yolks, buttermilk, and milk. Add the melted, cooled butter and whisk until well combined.

3. Make your batter: with a silicone spatula, scrape the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and stir until barely combined - lumps are okay. Add the egg whites and stir just until no visible streaks of egg white remain, then set the batter aside for 4 minutes while you heat your pan.

4. Start frying: Heat a large cast-iron or nonstick skillet over medium heat. When hot, pour in ½ teaspoon of the neutral oil and swirl to coat the pan. When the oil shimmers but isn't yet smoking, about 30 seconds, lower the heat to medium-low and use a large soup spoon or ¼ cup measure to drop the heaping scoops of pancake batter a good 2 inches from each other and the sides of the pan.

5. Flip your pancakes: Cook until the bubbles that form on the edges of the pancakes look dry and airy, about 2½ minutes. (If the pancake burns or the oil starts smoking, lower the heat.) Slide a wide spatula (preferably not metal if you're using a nonstick skillet) gently under one side of the pancake and lift to peek underneath. If the pancake is golden brown, flip and cook on the other side until the bottom of the pancake is golden brown, another 2 to 2½ minutes.

6. Eat: With the spatula, lift each pancake from the skillet onto a plate to serve immediately, or onto the cooling rack in the oven (in a single layer) to keep warm. Wipe any stray crumbs or burnt oil out of the skillet with a clean kitchen towel or paper towel, add a little more oil, and continue to cook the remaining batter, adjusting the heat as needed. Serve hot. *Make ahead and store:* The batter can be made the night

before and stored in an airtight container in the fridge with no loss in fluffiness. Leftover pancakes keep well in a container in the fridge for up to a week (or in the freezer for a month or so) and warm up well in a toaster or on a sheet pan under a broiler, flipping to toast each side.

* *Go whole-grain:* Swap in whole-wheat flour for the all-purpose flour and make the batter the night before to let the grainier flour soften.

* *No buttermilk?* Thin yogurt with a little milk 1 1/3 cups plain yogurt with 2/3 cup milk here.

Sheet-Pan Roasted Mushrooms & Greens

From Millie Peartree

Serves 4

1/2 cup dried cranberries

1 pound cremini mushrooms (or a mix of mushroom types)

3 small shallots, sliced

4 garlic cloves, chopped

2 Tbsp olive oil, plus more as needed

1/4 tsp fine sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1/4 tsp red pepper flakes

10 ounces soft greens (spinach, arugula and/or mustard greens), washed, stemmed, and chopped, if needed

1. *Get prepped:* Heat the oven to 425°F. In a small bowl, soak the cranberries in hot water until plump, about 10 minutes, then drain. Meanwhile, wash and dry the mushrooms. On a cutting board, trim any tough, dry mushroom stems and slice creminis or other thicker mushrooms 1/4 inch thick.

2. *Roast the mushrooms:* On a 13x18-inch (33 by 45cm) sheet pan (or two smaller sheet pans), toss together the mushrooms, shallots, garlic, and olive oil with your hands. Season with the salt and a few grinds of pepper and spread in an even layer (it's okay if they're overlapping a bit). Roast until golden brown and crispy, 15 to 20 minutes, scraping and stirring once with a spatula halfway through for even browning.

3. *Wilt the greens on top:* with oven mitts, take the sheet pan out of the oven and set it on a couple of

cool burners on the stovetop. Pile the red pepper flakes and greens on top of the mushrooms and gently stir them into the mushrooms with the spatula. If you're struggling to stir, don't worry - it will get easier after it wilts in the oven a bit. With the oven mitts, return the pan to the oven to roast until wilted, about 5 minutes, stirring once after 2 minutes and drizzling with a little more olive oil if the greens or mushrooms look dry. Add the drained cranberries, taste, and tweak the seasoning as needed. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Store: The mushrooms and greens keep well in a sealed container in the refrigerator for a week.

They're delicious mixed into pastas and grains and make any eggs instantly feel all dressed up.

A Briny Boost: If you have dill pickles in the fridge, steal 2 tablespoons of their brine and add it in step 3 along with the greens, like State Bird Provisions chef Stuart Brioza does with his mushrooms. They won't taste pickly, just mysteriously brighter and more alive.

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Mousse Au Chocolate

Serves 6

From Susan Schlansky, submitted by Harriet Rhine

1 cup (6 oz. package) semi sweet chocolate pieces

5 tablespoons boiling water

4 eggs separated

2 tablespoons dark rum if want it

1. Put the chocolate pieces into the container of an electric blender and blend on high speed for 6 seconds. *Repeat this step 3 times*

2. With motor off, scrape the chocolate from the sides of the container with a knife. Add the boiling water and blend on high speed for 10 seconds.

3. Add the egg yolks and rum, and blend for 3 seconds or until smooth.

4. Beat egg whites until stiff.

5. Fold the chocolate mixture into the stiff egg whites.

6. Spoon the dessert into individual serving dishes or a bowl and chill at least 1 hour before serving.

7. You can whip cream for a topping.

Letter from Jerusalem *by David Rosen*

Hi West Midwoodians--

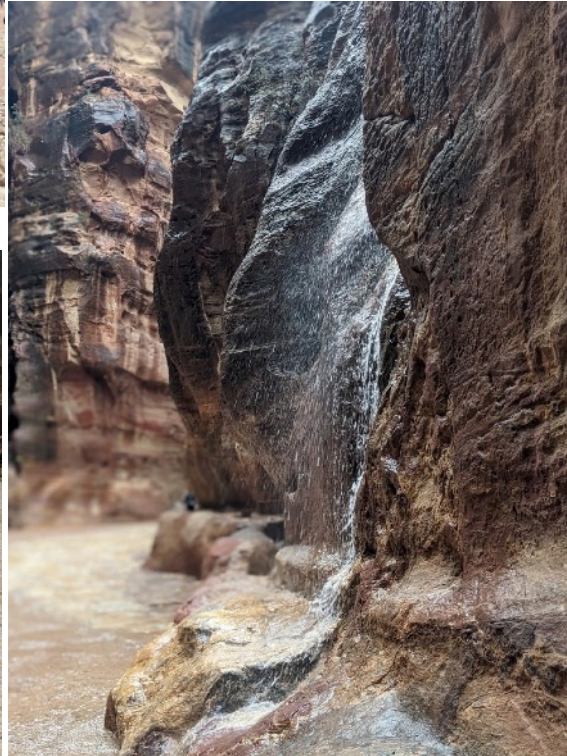
Tori, the faithful editor of the West Midwood News, and I are soon returning from our near half-year stay in Jerusalem. Those of you who are following events in the Middle East know well that it has been a period of tremendous political turmoil here in Israel, which I note, but will not otherwise discuss in our neighborhood newsletter.

Until about a month ago, it was the driest winter here in 60 years; then the winter rains began to fall non-stop. Jerusalem's elevation is high, so it has been a cold and now wet winter. Tori and I have always wanted to go to Petra in Jordan to see the capitol of the ancient civilization of the Nabateans (featured in Indiana Jones and the Raiders the Lost Ark.)

My work often brings me here in the summer, when it is much too hot to travel into the Jordanian desert. This time, we are here in the winter. What better time to visit? So off we went. We crossed the Allenby Bridge into Jordan and headed south into the high desert of Petra. Then it began to rain and rain. Everyone kept saying, "Jordan is second driest country in the world," but the deluge continued.

The evening we arrived, flash floods had driven all the tourists out of Petra. We were so close...

The next morning, we waited with bated breath to see whether Jordanian authorities would let us enter. Around nine, they gave permission, so we headed in. The problem was that even though the danger of flash floods had subsided, it was still raining. It is about a 2 kilometer walk through a canyon to the main site. That canyon was flooded with near ankle-deep water. We needed the rubber boots that the English call "Wellies," but we only had sneakers. But deciding that neither of us was sweet enough to melt, we sloshed down the



canyon like drowned rats to finally see one of the great wonders of the world.

Petra was the capital of the Nabatean Kingdom which reached its highpoint at about 100 CE, and was

very influenced by the Greeks and the Romans. It controlled much of the caravan trade between Arabia and Egypt. There were many other smaller Nabatean cities, such as Avdat in Israel. At its peak, Petra had a population of about 20,000 people living in the

middle of the high desert. This was only possible because the Nabateans developed an ingenious system of water conservation that captured the water from the winter flash floods and channeled it into gigantic cisterns.

Because it was raining, we were able to actually see how this worked. We saw the water cascading down the artificial dams and into the water channels created by the Nabateans. Because everything was wet, the colors of the rocks were intense, and it all sparkled -- much the same way a mosaic shines when covered with water. Spectacularly beautiful! We were very happy campers

and sorry to have to leave.

Since that winter adventure, the rain has stopped, spring has arrived, and the wildflowers are everywhere. Last weekend, we travelled south, which was carpeted with millions of brilliant red anemones. The Israelis call this phenomenon "Darom Adom" -- the red south.



investors. Thus, 15 Wellington's first owner-occupants did not arrive until the summer of 1907: Everett & Emma Haymaker and their three sons.

The Haymakers were Ohio natives who did not settle anywhere for long because Everett's skill as a mechanical draftsman was much in demand. They called New Hampshire, Maryland and Virginia home before Brooklyn; and Ohio, Pennsylvania and South Carolina thereafter.



1920s: The Haymakers in what is now the historic district of Charleston, SC

By 1913, the Haymakers had moved out and were succeeded by the Haggerty family. Thomas Haggerty and his wife Ellen were children of Irish Potato Famine immigrants. Born in 1870, Thomas was a successful printer, able to afford a live-in maid to assist with the Haggerty's three children. In 1920 he formed a home construction business with two other Brooklynites, but three weeks after the October 1929 stock market crash, he died suddenly, leaving his family an estate that consisted principally of their house.



Ellen's three children were strivers. Thomas Jr. formed a winning baseball team of local boys he called "The Wellingtons" that played in a sandlot league at the Parade Grounds, before he turned to teaching and clerking. Helen became a public school teacher. The third Haggerty child, Daniel, was elected President of the Kappa Tau Lambda fraternity at St. Francis College and then went to work for a maritime shipping company.

All the Haggertys were fervent supporters of FDR and his New Deal. But, alas, the family fell behind on their mortgage, and refinanced with the New Deal's Home Owner Loan Corp (HOLC), only to be foreclosed in the Spring of 1940, which forced them to relocate to a rented floor at 420 Marlborough Road. The children all married Brooklyn spouses and remained in Flatbush, with Thomas, his wife Mae and their son Martin renting a floor at 755 Westminster for more than a decade.

The next owners were Robert Drummond, an accountant, and his spouse Marian Riehl, a teacher. Robert's grandfather was a Civil War veteran and Marian was a Flatbush

resident active in the Wells Memorial Presbyterian Church at the corner of Argyle and Glenwood Roads, where the couple was married in 1934. Robert was the president of the Men's Club of the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn Heights and served on the Board of Governors of the Federal Grand Jurors Association in the old Eastern District courthouse on Adams Street. Following Robert's death, Marian sold the home to Stephen and Madeleine Appell in 1974. The Appells bought the house on the advice of the Grau family, who were then living on Rugby Road at the foot of Wellington Court. The tip was conveyed to Madi's mother, who had taught the Graus' children at PS 217.

Steve, a graduate of Cornell University and Rutgers Law School, specialized in labor and employment law with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) while also serving as president of Local 29 and national executive vice-president of the NLRB Union. He was also a partner in, and of counsel to law firms representing unions, workers, and benefit funds. Madi was an art teacher at FDR High School for many years before becoming a principal. She and Steve are proud of their sons Sanford, Bradley, and Andrew, who have blessed them with four grandchildren.

Steve and Madi recall "good memories of our children growing up on the block, enjoying watching the trains pass by at street level, and playing ball with their friends for endless hours — back then there was very little traffic or parking on the street."

Now retired from their successful careers, they keep busy with volunteer work and pursuing their many interests. For Madi, that would be as a renowned quilt artist, and for Steve teaching at Brooklyn College's Lifelong Learning program, volunteering at Sean Casey Animal Rescue and helping out at the East Midwood Jewish Center (EMJC) in every way imaginable.

A few years ago, Steve was honored at the EMJC for his decades of service. A rabbi there described Steve and Madi this way: "They are well respected for their service to their family and our community. They work hard and are not afraid to take on a challenge. When given the choice, they choose to step up and make a difference. They do it because they can and we are all the



Circa 1980 - Steve & Madi Holding Sanford

PUZZLE

By *The West Midwood Puzzler*

This puzzle is suitable for readers of all ages. It calls for creating a list of animals (mammals, fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects, etc.) whose names all have exactly three letters. Shortened names, generic names, gender-specific names, and age-specific names are allowed. Your list may not include names of items that are derived from animals—such as ham and lox. The answers to this puzzle may be found on page 13 of this issue.

RANK: 10=good; 20=excellent; 30=genius



On the Turntable — The Essential Latino - NYC Edition

By *Rosalia Aconite*

“Music happens to be an art form that transcends language.”

• **Herbie Hancock**

Hello, neighbors, and welcome back to “On the turntable.” To begin with this column’s topic, let me first start with a word of explanation. Some musical genres deserve to be approached with a respect that borders on reverence. The music of the Spanish speaking world is one such. Made up of multiple genres, each one specific to a region, and often a specific moment in time, it is extremely difficult to quantify Latin music into a lump sum. Rhythms as diverse as Argentinian tangos, Colombian cumbias and Mexican corridos have made their way north and influenced what we listen and dance to.

With that bow of respect, I am going to zero in on three specific albums that a novice New York listener can use to begin an exploration of Latin American music. The essential Latino, NYC edition, is a musical snapshot of some of the musical traditions that have informed the music of some of our city’s Spanish communities.

The first recommendation has been around since 1997 but harkens back to much older times. *BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB* was the brainchild of a World Circuit executive and producer Ry Cooder, who went to Cuba and connected with some of the last remaining practitioners of traditional Cuban musical forms. These veteran musicians, at the time in their 70’s, 80’s and, in one case, 90’s, reintroduced the world to the Cuban dance forms of *son* (an Afro-Cuban genre employing a call and response style and lyrics often laced humorous double entendres), *danzón* (a very old dance form derived from French court dances) and *bolero* (the romantic ballads popular during the mid twentieth century). Their combined efforts put together an album that took the world by storm, won a Grammy, spurred a world tour and an Academy Award nominated documentary. The work of these musical seniors, now mostly deceased, remains fresh and joyous almost thirty years after it was recorded.

Moving closer to home, the second recommendation explores the roots of salsa, a genre most closely identified with the Puerto Rican community. The reality is that though *salsa* is

mostly identified with Puerto Rico, it did not really originate on the island but instead was born right here in New York City during the 60’s. New York based Latino musicians experimented by melding Cuban Buena Vista type traditions with Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena* rhythms (two native Puerto Rican genres that employ call and response arrangements and lyrics that relate community stories) and American jazz into a novel form that eventually became salsa (sauce). *PASAPORTE* by Orquesta Broadway came out in 1960, and with its iconic album cover, was an instant hit among the city’s Spanish speaking community. Featuring a blend of Nuyorican stories, Cuban dance rhythms and American jazz band stylings, it captures the moment when these three start to mix and become a new and uniquely New York sauce.

The last recommendation focuses on the musical forms introduced by the city’s Dominican community. Juan Luis Guerra is considered a national treasure by his countrymen and his first hit album, *BACHATA ROSA*, out in 1990, took traditional Dominican *merengue* (a musical form characterized by the combination of a European accordion, the tambora, a two headed African drum and the güira, a metallic rasp instrument of Native American origin) and *bachata* (a type of Dominican love ballad) and brought them into modern times. Guerra and his band joined the traditional rhythms of his homeland to lyrics that echo the poetry of Pablo Neruda and themes that reflect the realities of modern Dominicans both at home and abroad without ever losing the joy and dance-ability typical of Dominican music. With this album, if you don’t speak Spanish, it is definitely worth your while to look up translations of the lyrics. Just keep in mind that what works in one language may not work in another. One song, “Burbujas de Amor,” was voted by *People en Español* magazine one of the 10 most beautiful love songs ever written *in* Spanish. I will simply warn you, the English translation is hilarious.

Which brings me to the final point of this column. Dear neighbors, don’t just listen to these albums. Enjoy them the way Latin music lovers everywhere enjoy them. Get off the couch and dance!

If you have any topics or suggestions you would like to see me cover in this column, feel free to email me or even stop by and chat.

West Midwood Bookshelf — *Joan Greenberg, librarian*



**Read any good books lately? Have a book recommendation for your neighbors?
Please send them to Joan Greenberg at joandaveyg@gmail.com.**

Recommended by Jeff Ewing:

The Future Is History by Masha Gessen.

A hefty but fascinating recent history of Russia seen through the lives of “four people born at what promised to be the dawn of democracy.”

Recommended by Andrea Freshman:

Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver

A modern version of David Copperfield. It is set in southern Appalachia filled with colorful characters, drama, humor and, of course, sadness.

Recommended by Harriet Rhine:

The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse

by Louise Erdrich

The novel tells the story of Agnes DeWitt, a former nun and farm woman, who assumes the identity of Damien, the reverend who becomes part of the reservation.

Women Talking by Miriam Toews

The women of an isolated religious colony reveal a shocking secret about the colony’s men. For years, the men have occasionally drugged and raped the women. The truth comes out.

Recommended by Jan Castro:

Horse by Geraldine Brooks

“A discarded painting in a junk pile, a skeleton in an attic, and the greatest racehorse in American history: from these strands, a Pulitzer Prize winner braids a sweeping story of spirit, obsession, and injustice across American history” (Goodreads review)

Victory City, Salman Rushdie

Fiction based on a 14th century South Indian kingdom ruled by two brothers. Here, it is created by Pampa Kampana, a girl given god-like attributes who lives 259 years. The reader witnesses medieval life and Pampa’s efforts to turn wars into peace.



School News—PS 217 *by Eric S. Ost*

With 2022 in the rear-view mirror and barely a flurry to show for it, the kids of NYC are forging ahead toward spring. The public school news headline is that the emergency vaccination mandates have lifted, which means there are more opportunities to bring family and community programming back into the buildings.

At PS 217, March is going to feel like a throwback year. Principal Robert Bonilla is rolling out 1st and 2nd Fridays again, inviting all parents to join activities in their children's classrooms every month for the rest of the year. The Parents Association will host the first family Movie Night since 2019 in the newly redone 500 seat auditorium, and will hold their General Meeting in-person for the first time since 2020.

Another first: PS 217 was recognized in January as a Lighthouse Certified School, in recognition of PS 217s work in cultivating young leaders who will shine and be a beacon for others in the years to come.

Finally, I am hesitant to be optimistic, but the School Construction Authority has said we are a few short weeks from removing all construction equipment and scaffolding from the playground. And even if the SCA can't keep their word, they can't stop the newly formed PS 217 Garden Committee from beginning the cleaning and revitalization of the gardens in front of the school. Punxsutawney Phil thinks we have six more weeks of winter, you say?? We say, “hogwash!” Happy almost-spring from PS 217!

West Midwood Architecture

By Nate Rogers

Here we are, most of the way through winter, with spring on the horizon. As promised in the last column, I will continue the winter-season theme of tempering the interior environment, this time delving into wall assemblies. I will save discussion of mechanical systems for the next column.

Our own exterior renovation of 725 Argyle, completed about a year ago, was a good laboratory for understanding the nuances of the original construction of these West Midwood houses. Generally speaking, the structure of our houses is what's called "balloon frame," meaning they were built with wood 2" x 4" studs typically spaced 16" on-center, with the exterior wall studs spanning multiple stories from the stone foundation wall up to the wood rafters. The first and second floor assemblies would be framed into these exterior walls, while interior stud bearing walls break down the interior plan into rooms of more manageable dimensions for wood joists to span.

The balloon frame system was developed in the nineteenth century and achieved widespread popularity quickly due to its lower material costs and faster assembly. The system preceding this lightweight framing construction was the heavy timber frame (post and beam) construction that typified colonial-era structures. While balloon framing transformed the house-building industry, its major disadvantage is how quickly fire can spread in the continuous vertical wall cavities. This led to the widespread adoption of its successor approach by the 1930s: platform framing, where each floor is framed separately. Incidentally, if you embark on renovations that expose the intersection of the exterior wall with the first or second story floor assemblies, you should install fire blocking to help mitigate the risk of fire spread.

As you look at the original interior plans of West Midwood houses, it's interesting to note how the interior bearing walls don't always stack from one floor to the next, and the spanning direction of the joists can also change depending on the dimensions and orientation of a given room. That's the

beauty of wood framing: flexible and forgiving.

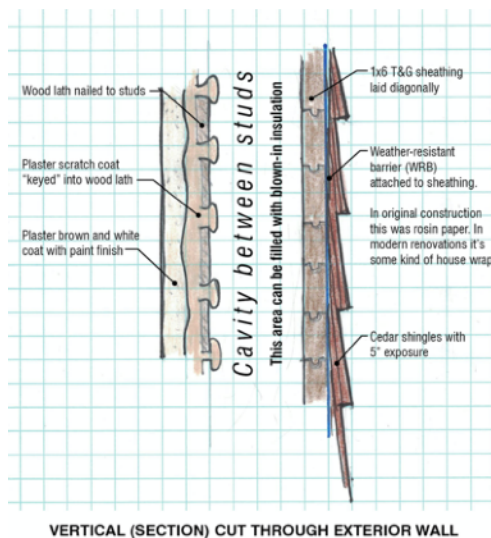
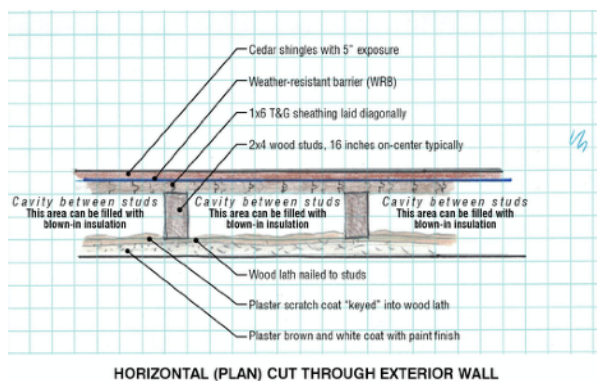
Exterior Wall Assemblies

But back to the exterior. The typical wall assembly starts with those 2x4 wood studs, which unlike lumber today, actually measured a full 2" by 4". However, this framing alone was not a complete structure. Imagine in your head a scale model of house framing made with matchsticks. Wouldn't the wind blow it over? That's where the bracing comes in. Outboard of the studs, 1x6 broad wood planks, often with tongue and groove edges, were laid in a diagonal pattern and fastened to the studs with heavy nails. This was sheathing in the era before plywood, and besides offering a surface to attach the final exterior materials,

the diagonal pattern gave the structure much of its lateral stiffness.

Diagonal plank sheathing would be unheard of in new construction today. Since the mid-century, engineered wood products such as plywood or oriented strand board (OSB) are used as sheathing, although there are some interesting developments in the last few decades such as the Zip system, which combines sheathing, insulation, and vapor control into one product.

Outboard of the original diagonally-laid wood sheathing, the original builders would tack on a layer of rosin paper. This was the precursor to tar paper and later Tyvek, and while it helped a little with the wind whistling through the sheathing, it did little to control water vapor movement. If you happen to come across an exterior renovation in the neighborhood, this is the brittle pinkish-tan paper that is revealed when original clapboards or shingles are removed. It crumbles to the touch. Outboard of the rosin paper, builders attached the material that everyone sees: wood shingles, wood clapboards, and exterior trim, which back then was typically stained, but these days is usually painted.



West Midwood Architecture — *continued*

Some neighbors have mentioned discovering horse hair insulation during various renovations. This may be similar to what we found on our house during demolition: a thin layer of loose horse hair laid between the original shingles and the rosin paper behind them. Given that it was much too thin a layer to add any insulative value, I have a theory that it was not intended as insulation – instead, it helped break an undesired bond between the paper and shingles if water was present, allowing moisture to wick away and evaporate or drain out of the assembly. There is a modern equivalent today: builders sometimes include a mesh drainage mat behind shingles, especially in seacoast home projects.

In modern exterior renovations with original materials like the one we engaged in, we removed all the exterior finishes down to the sheathing. The sheathing was generally in good repair because, like much of the wood typically used in the construction of our houses, it was milled from hardy old-growth timber. We had to replace rotten sheathing in places where our long-failing Yankee gutters and very poor condition downspouts had misdirected rainwater for some years.

Installing New Materials Over Old Ones

The exterior finishes we removed consisted of, on the second and third stories, army green asphalt shingles installed over the original brown stained wood shingles, and on the first story, the original stained clapboard covered over by large-format asbestos-cement shingles. All the original wood cladding (shingles and clapboards) that we revealed in the process was in poor condition and couldn't be saved. For the asbestos-cement shingles, we went by-the-book through the abatement process with a licensed abatement contractor, which is a saga for another day.

Asbestos-cement shingles are on many West Midwood home exterior walls; the giveaways are their large-format size, smooth or vertically-striated surface,

and occasionally a deliberately wavy edge. Sold as a modern, maintenance-free material in the mid-century, asbestos-cement shingles are generally not a hazard if kept in decent repair. They can be abated (removed) if desired, or painted or encapsulated behind new cladding materials. However, you should avoid breaking tiles or cleaning with pressure washing systems, which can send asbestos fibers into the air. And this may seem obvious, but you should NOT dispose of asbestos containing materials (ACMs) with household trash.

But back to the now exposed sheathing. A typical practice is to cover the sheathing with Tyvek or other housewraps, which come in loose rolls and must be stapled to the substrate. This is like Gore-Tex for your home – it is vapor permeable, letting moisture out before humidity builds up, but keeps the rain from getting in. We used a product called Blueskin VP100 manufactured by the Henry Company, which I liked because it was self-adhering and formed a tight silhouette on the house, meaning it should block the wind a little better than typical housewrap.

Outboard of the Blueskin (with its telltale blue color) goes the exterior cladding itself – in our case, pre-

stained eastern white cedar shingle from Maibec Siding on the second and third stories, and vertical-grain shingle clapboards at the first floor that we painted in-place. The advantage of using pre-stained shingles is that they are factory stained on all six sides, which increases the longevity of the wood and the finish. Maibec has a set of stock colors but can also match custom paint colors.

Exterior Walls and Insulation

I want to conclude with some discussion of insulation. Over the past hundred-odd years since our homes were built, various owners have each struggled with the desire to gain more thermal comfort and control over these drafty old houses.



The front gable of 725 Argyle during demolition, with the following layers visible: non-original green asphalt shingles, stained wood original shingles, pink rosin paper,

West Midwood Architecture — continued

For instance, when we took possession of our home, the second and third floor windows had already been replaced with vinyl units, and there was a decent layer of loose-fill mineral wool insulation laid over the third floor ceiling in the upper attic. But use of a thermal imaging camera revealed the clear absence of any insulating materials in the air cavities between the exterior wood studs. When you consider the volume of this air space, 4" deep and practically 80-90% of the exterior wall area (given that the 2" wide studs are set 16" on-center), it's a key place to look for envelope upgrades.

If, like us, your interior plaster on wood lath is generally intact and in decent condition, it would be a major decision to remove all these interior finishes just to expose the stud cavities and insulate. (If you are gutting a room of the house anyway, like a kitchen or bathroom, then it's another matter for that specific zone.) If you want to keep your interior plaster or drywall AND your exterior sheathing in place, then options are generally limited to loose-fill materials that can be blown into the cavities.

I introduced this topic in my last column, but these options are loose-fill cellulose (recycled newspaper treated with fire retardant), loose-fill fiberglass (formaldehyde-free), and loose-fill mineral wool (sometimes called Rockwool). Some outfits are advertising the use of low-expanding polyurethane spray foam insulation inside constrained cavities without the need to remove one of the sides. I haven't looked deeply into this, but the expansive properties of spray foam are not to be underestimated, so I will advise that this option should be considered with care and the vendor vetted for experience with old homes like ours.

Another option is continuous insulation, typically foam board, on the outside of the sheathing and under the cladding. The advantage of a continuous insulation layer outside the sheathing is that you avoid the thermal bridging across the studs every 16 inches that comes with insulating at the stud cavity. However, introducing insulation into the exterior wall assembly outside the sheathing makes the overall wall thicker, moving the cladding further outboard and changing how the cladding interfaces with other exterior elements like door and window trim. This can create some unintended aesthetic consequences and for that reason we chose not to go in this direction.

Because we knew we were about to embark on the full exterior cladding renovation, we chose to install blown-in loose-fill fiberglass from the exterior; the poor-condition siding wasn't going to be saved anyway, so drilling through it wasn't an issue. A two-inch hole was drilled in each stud cavity, and loose fiberglass blown in to the point of refusal. Where we couldn't access a stud cavity from the exterior, the contractor drilled a hole from the interior, which we then plugged, taped, spackled and painted. Since we insulated the walls and added the Blueskin outside the sheathing, plaster finishes on the exterior walls are much warmer to the touch in the winter, cooler in the summer, and we've noticed fewer drafts around trim and baseboards.

Continuing our 40th Season with a
Woodwind Quintet and Piano Concert

THE OMNI ENSEMBLE

Darius Milhaud - *Le Cheminée du Roi René*
Richard Strauss - *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*
Francis Poulenc - *Sextet*
David Wechsler - *Divertimento*

DAVID WECHSLER flute
JOHN CHEEK piano
JEFF REINHARDT oboe
JEFF ADLER clarinet
ATSUKO SATO bassoon
AUDREY FLORES horn

Friday, March 10, 2023 at 8:00 pm
Brooklyn Conservatory of Music 58 Seventh Ave., Brooklyn, NY

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In person & advance tickets are \$25, \$15 students & seniors,
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www.theomniensemble.org

MARKS AND KEY REQUIRED, NOT RECOMMENDED FOR THE ADMISSION TO THIS CONCERT

NEW YORK State Council on the Arts NYC Cultural Affairs Brooklyn Conservatory of Music

This concert is supported in part with funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and Con Edison

Who You Gonna Call?

When you need help, it's important to call the right number. Here's a list of useful phone numbers with an explanation of when to call which number. It's not a bad idea to cut out this list and stick in on your refrigerator or by your phone.

911—The number to call for emergencies, such as fire, medical emergencies, accidents of any type, a crime in progress, violent behavior, or a person in trouble. Remember to stay on the line until the operator tells you it is okay to hang up. The operator will also ask you your location, so note the nearest house number and street address.

311 — Call this number for non-emergencies such as noise complaints, animal control, air quality, blocked driveway, dangerous tree situation, or to find out where to get other information. For a complete list, see www.nyc.gov/311.

988 — Call this number for mental health crises or suicide prevention. For more information about this service, here is a link: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/07/15/1111316589/988-suicide-hotline-number>

If you're unsure, call 911. The operator will either take your information or redirect you to 311. Remember to get a complaint number and write it down.

Neighborhood Coordination Officers (NCOs):

P.O. Viodelys Brathwaite (917-864-7912)

Viodelys.Brathwaite@nypd.org

P.O. Roshael Layne (929-270-7068)

Roshael.layne@nypd.org

The NCOs are usually on duty Tuesdays to Saturdays from noon to 6:30 p.m. (Sometimes they are unavailable because they have been pulled for training or special duty.) Former West Midwood president Linda Howell reports that she relies on the NCOs for quality-of-life issues, especially situations “where I do not have complete details, only secondhand reports of events. I feel comfortable giving them as much information as I can and asking them to check into the potential problem.” Examples include gatherings at the dead ends, abandoned cars, chronic parking violations, and patterns of package theft from porches. You can also contact them if you feel a 911 or 311 call was not handled correctly. Note that while they will make every effort to assist, they may also be handling other more time-critical issues.

Community Board 14 (CB14), 718-859-6357

info@cb14brooklyn.com

This office and its staff are a valuable resource that can be contacted for a myriad of situations. Call them to find out the status of a 311 complaint, why your recycling wasn't picked up, how you can get a tree planted in front of your home or a dead one removed, or what's going on with construction (or lack of it) at a specific location. They can also help you get in touch with the local representative for a specific city agency. This is by no means a complete list. If you're unsure of how to handle an issue, call them and ask. They are there to help.

Artist's Notebook:

Florence Manglani



We know there are many talented artists in our neighborhood. Would you like to have your work featured in this newsletter? Let us know!

Editor. WestMidwoodNews@gmail.com

Unexplored Areas in Brooklyn

By Linda Howell

Brooklyn's Yellow Submarine

Brooklyn's waterfront has become more accessible as the Parks Department has reclaimed abandoned areas. Some are well known and visited by many, such as Brooklyn Bridge Park. Others are tucked away, mainly enjoyed by nearby residents. Calvert Vaux Park, formerly known as Dreier Offermann Park, is one such park.

Located off Shore Parkway, the Belt Parkway's service road, between Bay Parkway and Cropsey Avenue, the park, less than an acre, has a 'nature' trail that starts at the parking lot and meanders next to Coney Island Creek until reaching Gravesend Bay, spotting the Verrazano Bridge (the debris from this construction helped form the park) and then looping back past the ball fields to the parking lot.

Along the way you'll certainly see geese, lots of them, some gulls and swans, occasional ducks and maybe an egret or two—reasons this park is known to Brooklyn birders. There's also the fishermen, drawn by the sea bass, flounder and others that have returned as the creek has become cleaner.

You can spot the remains of old docks for the marina long forgotten and shipwrecks. You might notice, across the creek, two small parks in Coney Island proper, Coney Island Creek Park and Kaiser Park.

But what will draw your eye is a spot of yellow in the middle of the creek. Use your zoom on your phone or camera and it will become apparent that this is the cap of a small submarine. It's the Quester 1, built by a Brooklyn shipyard worker, Jerry Bianco, who hoped to use it to explore the remains of the Andrea Doria, an ocean liner sunk off Nantucket in the 50's.

Unfortunately, Jerry's plan didn't work. At launch, the submarine tipped sideways and became stuck. Depending on what story is to be believed, some say the sub was unstuck and sailed up and down the creek before becoming stuck again in the muck of the creek where it has remained for over 50 years.

So, if you're so inclined, check out this park one day and get your own view of Brooklyn's Yellow Submarine.

Answers to puzzle from page 8.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive.

ant, ape, asp, ass, auk, bat, bee, boa, bug, cat, cod, cow, cub, cur, dab, doe, eel, elk, emu, ewe, fly, fox, gar, gnu, hen, hog, jay, kea, kid, koi, man, olm, owl, pig, pug, pup, ram, rat, ray, sow, tit, tom, tot, yak



Sign Spotting



What Is West Midwood Online?

Want to ask folks in the neighborhood whether they have any recommendations for a plumber or roofer or such? Or maybe what local eateries or merchants they like? Perhaps you'd like to be in the know about issues affecting our area? Then join the West Midwood Online email discussion group, aka The Lstserv.

Send an email to joe@enright.com with your street address, name, and the email address that you want to use to post and receive messages. He will add you to the group and send you the simple instructions. There are presently over 200 email subscribers representing about 125 households.

To join you must be a permanent resident of West Midwood and agree not to post messages of a religious, political, or spam nature. Insulting or crude language can also lead to revocation of the ability to post. Finally, new and existing members can also request a daily recap containing all of the activity within the previous 24 hours, rather than receive messages as they occur.

Coffee Mob To Open New Bar on Newkirk in March

West Midwood's Buck Berk is adding another reason to get out of the house just as Daylight Savings Time kicks in. It's the Coffee Mob Bar & Roastery at the southeast corner of Newkirk and East 16th Street, right across the street from where Coffee Mob has been caffeinating us for the past decade. Buck will be serving beer and wine only, with a food menu not yet set as we go to press. A big roaster in the back will supply the mother ship across the way. See y'all there at Happy Hour!

Neighbors' Businesses and Services

To add, cancel, or update a listing,
contact [Tori Rosen at editor.WestMidwoodNews@gmail.com](mailto:Tori.Rosen@WestMidwoodNews@gmail.com)

Education and Lessons

Danielle Buonaiuto *Private voice lessons* for high-school age and adult students in classical, musical theatre, and pop styles. Master of Music from Peabody Conservatory, and 10+ years' teaching experience.
danielle.buonaiuto@gmail.com.

Rob Garcia *Drum lessons*. I've been teaching private lessons to students of all ages for the past 25 years and have a well-equipped teaching studio at my home. More info www.robgarciamusic.com; Contact: robjgarcia@hotmail.com; 917-273-7875

Udi Hazan *Private table tennis and archery lessons*. Certified coach—level 1 in ping pong and level 2 in recurve bow archery. 718-859-8432.

Laura Campbell-Lui *Literacy Tutor* ELA help for reading strategies . Phonics/decoding help for kindergarten-grade 4. Spelling help with common rules and word root hints. Grammar help with punctuation, capitalization and conjugating. Writing help with sentence construction. New York State-certified Reading Specialist and Elementary School Teacher. Licensed in Reading, Common Branches and Early Childhood Education. 30 Years of teaching experience. Email Laura at literacytutor@aol.com

Florence Manglani Semi-retired *bilingual school psychologist* Still teaching at Brooklyn College, is available for consultations. 718-434-2134; florence@imagineblue.com.

David Picton *Music Lessons in Drums, Piano, and Composition*. 35 years teaching experience. Graduate of Mannes College of Music. All ages, beginner to advanced. 718-859-6313; davidpictonmusic@gmail.com.

Julian Rhine *Guitar lessons; SAT, SHSAT, and Regents tutoring*. BA in music and English from Vanderbilt University. 917-981-0675; julian.m.rhine@gmail.com

Amy Rowe *Tutoring* in math, reading, writing, other academic subjects, test prep. Advising on Medicare enrollment and basic nutrition. Meet on Zoom, by phone, or outdoors. Expert educator, researcher, writer, and editor makes complex topics clear. amyrowe.nyc@gmail.com, 917-723-0348

Melissa Scott *Yoga* for Every Body! Currently offering private or small class instruction. 718-781-6509; kettleandkame@gmail.com.

Jeannine Umrigar *Collectiv3 Fashion Portfolio Lab*. Individual mentorships for students to build fashion and art portfolios for college entrance and beyond. For more information see our website: www.collectiv3.nyc.



David Wechsler *Flute lessons*. Many years of teaching at all levels from beginner to professional. Long-time member of Brooklyn Philharmonic and many other groups in the NYC area, including Broadway, recordings, symphony, opera, ballet orchestras, and chamber music. 347-528-6318; davewechs@earthlink.net.

Health and Mental Health

Laura Campbell-Lui Shaklee Distributor household cleaning products; nutritional skin care; nutritional supplement products; appointments available. 917-767-3579; laurachui@yahoo.com.

Jan Castro. De-stress with Swedish massage or Thai body work. Safe, clean, open space. I've had 3 vaccine shots. Credentials & references on request. 60–120 minute sessions, reasonable rates. Phone 314-323-9060.

Andrea Freshman, LCSW Specialty: trauma healing with emphasis on integrating the mind-body connection 718-434-6873.

Sara Hochman *Nutritionist*, MS, RD, CDN. Registered Dietitian specializing in chronic disease management and weight loss, nutrition therapy for all ages. Reasonable rates, in-person or televisit appointments. Sarahoch780@gmail.com

Pet Sitting

Nell Mendlinger and Lauren Sullivan, Owners, Abby on Argyle Pet Sitting & Dog Walking, LLC. Available 365 days a year for your pets. We have been in the neighborhood for 10+ years. Bonded and insured. Member of PetSitters International and an eco-friendly company. www.AbbyOnArgyle.com.

Real Estate

Miriam Hurwitz Associate real estate broker with Douglas Elliman on Cortelyou Road. 917-589-6717.

Ester Sciallo Brooklyn residential real estate. Office: 718-676-1755; cell: 646-389-6248; es@brres.com.

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