

Compliments of Dan Shanner

# AMERICAN LIFESTYLE

THE MAGAZINE CELEBRATING LIFE IN AMERICA

ISSUE 73



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# American Lifestyle

magazine

Dear Bill and Judy,

There is something so captivating about hyperrealistic drawings; the attention to detail and the skill it takes to replicate reality so perfectly are beyond impressive. Artist Monica Lee wows in this issue, transitioning her career from digital imaging to graphite drawings. She, too, was mesmerized by the idea of a near-photographic likeness using only pencils. She believes in helping other artists by showing her work in phases so they can study the process.

Designer Reiko Gomez knows a thing or two about artistic processes. While living in rural India, Gomez learned the importance of coexisting with nature, leading her to the process of feng shui. Her desire to explore the concept of energy and emotion in a space guided her career path to interior design, where she now employs what she has dubbed the Three E's of Reiko Design: environment, emotion, and energy.

For Seattle baker Robin Wehl Martin, the process of becoming a business owner was much speedier than she ever expected. Local friends and business owners of Molly Moon's ice cream called one day and asked her to open a bakery. Jumping in headfirst, Martin now owns Hello Robin, a successful cookie shop in the popular neighborhood of Capitol Hill, serving up delicious creations (some in honor of native celebrities).

Whether your process takes days or years, and whether it's straight to the goal or long and winding, it's a crucial step in creating a business, finishing a project, or even realizing a dream. As always, it is a pleasure to send you this magazine.

Dan Shanner



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## Front of Tear Out Card 1

ricotta fritters  
WITH GRAPE JAM

GRAPE JAM  
2 lb. very ripe red-fleshed grapes  
Pinch of granulated sugar,  
if needed

FRITTERS  
2 qt. vegetable oil, for frying  
1½ c. all-purpose flour  
1 tbsp. baking powder  
1 tsp. kosher salt  
4 eggs, lightly beaten  
¼ c. granulated sugar  
2 tsp. grated orange zest  
Seeds from 1 vanilla bean  
2 c. ricotta  
Confectioners' sugar or  
granulated sugar, for dusting

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## Back of Tear Out Card 1

ricotta fritters  
WITH GRAPE JAM | MAKES 24

1. Make the jam: In a fine mesh strainer set over a bowl, pull open the skins of the grapes to expose the flesh. Holding the skins, press the flesh against the strainer to extract the juice, and allow it to drain into the bowl. Discard the skins and seeds. Use as is, or season the juice with a tiny pinch of sugar if needed. Refrigerate, covered, until ready to use, up to 1 day.

2. Make the fritters: In a wide medium stockpot, Dutch oven, or deep fryer, heat the oil until it registers 365°F on a deep fry thermometer.

3. Meanwhile, in a bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and kosher salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together the eggs, granulated sugar, orange zest,

vanilla seeds, and ricotta. Whisk the dry ingredients into the wet just until incorporated. (The batter can be stored, covered, in the refrigerator for several hours or up to 1 day.)

4. Working in batches of about 8, gently drop 1-tablespoon balls of the batter into the hot oil, and fry, turning them occasionally, until golden all over, about 3 minutes per batch. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the fritters to paper towels to drain. (Allow the oil to come back to temperature between batches.)

5. Sprinkle the fritters with confectioners' sugar, or coat them with granulated sugar. Serve warm with the grape jam.

Recipe excerpted from *Sunday Suppers: Recipes and Gatherings* by Karen Mordechai (Clarkson Potter, 2014).

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ONE ACT OF RANDOM KINDNESS AT A TIME

# ark project

photography ark project now  
text alex radelich



*Acts of random kindness (ARKs) can include anything from purchasing coffee for a stranger, providing meals for the homeless, or going out of your way to hold the door for someone.*

**What is ARK Project Now, and what is your mission?**

We truly believe that one act of kindness, no matter how small, has the potential to change the world. Because of this core belief, we have made it our mission to perform acts of random kindness and recruit others to do the same. Acts of random kindness (ARKs) can include anything from purchasing coffee for a stranger, to providing meals for the homeless, to going out of your way to hold the door for someone. Even something as simple as a smile has the potential to make someone's day better. After performing an act of random kindness, we encourage "ARKers" to leave behind an ARK card, which urges the recipient to pay it forward. This sets off a chain reaction and creates a cycle of kindness that impacts people we may never even meet.

**What is your life philosophy or one-sentence mantra? Had you already adopted the philosophy of acts of random kindness before starting this project?**

"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone," or "Don't waste your time on work you don't enjoy," or "When 99 percent of people doubt your idea, you're either gravely wrong or about to make history." Throughout my life, those quotes have meant the world to me. The last quote was a bit of motivation to follow my dreams, ultimately leading me to drop out of Purdue University.

**How do you think your hometown and childhood influenced you? Who introduced you to the concept of random acts of kindness?**

I grew up in South Bend, Indiana. Looking back, my childhood didn't have a major influence on my current success, per se. As a teenager, I did stupid things. But I think I matured quickly through high school and started to hone in on who I was and what I wanted out of life earlier than most people. *Evan Almighty* introduced me to the idea of acts of random kindness. I hadn't really heard of it before that. I was still doing things for strangers, but I didn't have a name for it.

**You mention that you were inspired by the movie, *Evan Almighty*. Can you talk more about that?**

I've always been passionate about helping people; the movie just led me in a direction to go. The movie gives a comedic Hollywood twist to the story of Noah's ark. There is a point in the film in which Morgan Freeman, who is playing the role of God, asks, "How do we change the world?"—to which Steve Carrell (Evan) replies, "One act of random kindness at a time." Morgan Freeman then draws the letters A-R-K on the ground with a stick. I think it spoke to me because of the life phase I was in. It wasn't my first time watching it, but I had just finished my first semester at college, and I could tell I was meant for something different.



**What do ARK cards say on them?**

“Now it’s your turn to perform one act of random kindness.” This is our third version of ARK cards. I think the fourth version will simply say, “Pay It Forward” and have the website on the bottom.

**Did you become known in your college as the Acts of Random Kindness guy?**

Not really. My really good friends knew about ARK, but it wasn’t until we were published on the front page of the university paper that people started to care about ARK at Purdue. I went back to Purdue recently, and somebody asked if I was the ARK guy. That was pretty cool.

**What was your major in college?**

Going into college, my major was radiological health-science (premedical physics) and changed into a double major in business management and marketing, with a minor in entrepreneurship.

**What is your favorite act of random kindness that you do for others?**

We like to tie two flowers together with a compliment and hand them to strangers. This way, they get to keep a flower and have the opportunity to pass a flower on. We had a lady running by accept the flowers and just broke down crying. In my mind, I think she was upset about something, decided to go for a run to clear her head, and boom—kindness happened.

**What does each team member bring to the table?**

Ted is the business-savvy one and a big-picture guy. He is indispensable and helped form this project into what it is. Dalton is the marketer and idea/follow-through guy. Jake is the writer. He has a way with words. Jesse is the artsy one and the deep thinker. These guys mean the world to me.

**Why do you think you’ve attracted this team of people?**

I’ve grown up with this team, so we’ve all been really good friends for years. We’ve had time to foster our friendships and face adversity. I feel lucky to have such a skilled team working for the same goals, but at the same time having different reasons for doing what we do.

**What is the most elaborately thought-out act of kindness you’ve done?**

We’ve had a lot of elaborate ARKs, from renting an ice cream truck for a day, to taking kids from the Boys and Girls Club to a San Francisco Giants game in some incredible seats. One of my favorite elaborate ARKs was from ARK’s first Christmas. We came across a family who lost their house to a fire just over two weeks before Christmas. We worked through the family’s friend to find out their original Christmas list and raised the funds, bought the presents, drove a couple hours down, and surprised the family on Christmas Eve.

**What is a memorable act of kindness you’ve had done for you?**

This one happened recently. I live in Elkhart, Indiana, which happens to be the RV capital of the world. When we got back from our first summer tour, we had four days to relax until we aired on *The Today Show*. That morning, we all got together at my house and watched our segment in disbelief. We were on *The Today Show*! It was a surreal moment to watch this story that happened to be our own. For the next four hours, we were constantly checking our e-mails and social media, as we were going viral. Ted and I had a meeting that day with Jason Lippert, the head honcho in the RV industry. By the end of our meeting, Jason asked if we wanted a new RV for our travels. We didn’t go into that meeting thinking that



would happen. Jason and his team at Lippert Components have been an unexpected blessing on our project. They rallied together several RV companies to help fund our new RV.

**What act of random kindness do you think could change the world if everyone did it?**

Going out of your way to be kind. I try to keep my eyes and ears open when I’m in public because there are a lot of opportunities to impact a stranger throughout your day. As far as a specific act, I’d say lending an ear and being a source of advice for a friend or stranger rank high. Life’s not always perfect and easy, so having someone to talk to is vital.

**Name six things that make you happy:**

Late-night deep talks, stargazing in the middle of nowhere, doing something for someone else, being inspired or inspiring someone else, Chipotle, and longboarding.

**People can commit to doing one act of random kindness per day, per week, or per month on your website. What do you do with these e-mail addresses?**

One of our most successful campaigns is our “Just Do One” campaign. Right now, we’re collecting stories to release a new feature on our website to help inspire an epidemic of kindness. With the e-mail addresses, we try to send an e-mail a month with updates of stories collected and what’s going on behind the scenes. So they get the first updates.

**Who are your biggest role models? What makes them so special/influential?**

**My father** raised me to believe that people matter more than things. Anytime I have questions, he’s the first person I go to. **Will Smith** is one inspiring dude! I would love to meet him because he’s inspired my work ethic and what I sacrifice my time doing.

**Ben Stiller** is diverse in what he puts his time into. He directed and acted in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, which happens to be my favorite movie. **Bob Goff** (author) is another role model of mine. That guy has lived life and has a story to tell.

**Jon Acuff** (author) is very wise and has a unique way of writing while remaining transparent.

**Ryan Lewis** (of Macklemore) has a great work style in his productions. I met him before one of his concerts and talked with him for a half an hour; he was very down to earth, and we talked about cameras.

**Shawn Johnson** (gymnast) was the same age as me when she competed in the Olympics. To be so accomplished was inspiring to me. Meeting her was a five-year journey in the making. All it took was me committing to running a 10k women’s race in a leotard.

**What is your hope for this project?**

We’d like to be in schools worldwide and have ARK reps setting up events in their universities. We would also love to continue traveling and doing what we do—but with a film crew. And finally, we have a campaign we’ve wanted to launch since the start of the project that I’d love to start in the near future. It’s all about timing.

[For more info, visit arkprojectnow.com](http://arkprojectnow.com)



# SUNDAYS

at the table

photography karen mordechai  
text karen mordechai



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## RICOTTA FRITTERS WITH GRAPE JAM

*Warm and fluffy, these lovely fried treats are delightful. The jam can be made with other ripe fruit, such as plums, peaches, or cherries.*

### GRAPE JAM

2 pounds very ripe red-fleshed grapes  
Pinch of granulated sugar, if needed

### FRITTERS

2 quarts vegetable oil, for frying  
1½ cups all-purpose flour  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
4 eggs, lightly beaten  
¼ cup granulated sugar  
2 teaspoons grated orange zest  
Seeds from 1 vanilla bean  
2 cups ricotta  
Confectioners' sugar or granulated sugar, for dusting

1. Make the jam: In a fine mesh strainer set over a bowl, pull open the skins of the grapes to expose the flesh. Holding the skins, press the flesh against the strainer to extract the juice, and allow it to drain into the bowl. Discard the skins and seeds. Use as is, or season the juice with a tiny pinch of sugar if needed. Refrigerate, covered, until ready to use, up to 1 day.
2. Make the fritters: In a wide medium stockpot, Dutch oven, or deep fryer, heat the oil until it registers 365°F on a deep fry thermometer.
3. Meanwhile, in a bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and kosher salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together the eggs, granulated sugar, orange zest, vanilla seeds, and ricotta. Whisk the dry ingredients into the wet just until incorporated. (The batter can be stored, covered, in the refrigerator for several hours or up to 1 day.)
4. Working in batches of about 8, gently drop 1-tablespoon balls of the batter into the hot oil, and fry, turning them occasionally, until golden all over, about 3 minutes per batch. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the fritters to paper towels to drain. (Allow the oil to come back to temperature between batches.)
5. Sprinkle the fritters with confectioners' sugar, or coat them with granulated sugar. Serve warm with the grape jam.

MAKES 24





## RICE, ZUCCHINI, AND FETA FRITTATA WITH FENNEL POLLEN YOGURT

*The textures and flavors in this frittata will win you over, and it is wonderfully satisfying for a picnic. You may also experiment with any combination of cheese, greens, and starch—even leftover pasta works well.*

### FRITTATA

2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
10 baby zucchini, sliced lengthwise  
4 scallions, sliced  
1 cup cooked white rice  
½ cup chopped fresh mint  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill  
¾ teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
6 eggs  
¼ cup heavy cream  
¾ cup crumbled feta cheese

### YOGURT

1 cup plain Greek yogurt  
2 pinches fennel pollen  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
Salt and freshly ground  
black pepper to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.

2. Heat the butter and oil in a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Add the zucchini and scallions, and sauté until soft. Mix in the rice, mint, and dill, and season with half of the salt and pepper.

3. In a separate bowl, whisk the eggs, cream, and remaining salt and pepper. Pour over the rice mixture, and cook without stirring for 3 minutes. Sprinkle the crumbled feta on top.

4. Transfer the skillet to the oven, and bake for 12 to 15 minutes, until golden.

5. In a small bowl, whisk together the yogurt, fennel pollen, and olive oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover, and refrigerate for 1 hour to allow the fennel pollen to release its flavor and aroma. Yogurt will keep for 3 days in the refrigerator.

6. Serve frittata with fennel pollen yogurt.

SERVES 6





## WATERMELON SALAD WITH LEMON AND CORIANDER SEED DRESSING

*This bright salad features a great mix of fruits and vegetables and teaches us to explore possibilities beyond the leafy greens in the market.*

### DRESSING

½ teaspoon coriander seeds  
Juice of 2 lemons  
3 tablespoons sugar  
½ teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper  
¼ cup olive oil

### SALAD

1 Asian pear, cubed  
Juice of ½ lemon  
3 cups watermelon, cubed  
1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved  
1 cup mixed radishes and turnips, cubed  
2 tablespoons fresh parsley, finely chopped  
2 tablespoons fresh basil, finely chopped  
5 cups mixed salad greens

1. Combine the pear cubes with the lemon juice in a small bowl, and set aside.
2. Make the dressing: Toast the coriander seeds in a skillet set over medium heat until lightly golden. Then grind the seeds fine with a mortar and pestle. Combine the ground coriander, lemon juice, sugar, salt, and pepper in a bowl, and whisk to dissolve the sugar. Slowly whisk in the oil.
3. Drain the pear, and place the cubes in a salad bowl. Add the watermelon, cherry tomatoes, radishes and turnips, parsley, and basil. Toss to combine. Add the salad greens, toss again, and drizzle with the dressing. Serve immediately.

SERVES 6





## WHISKEY-GLAZED RIBS

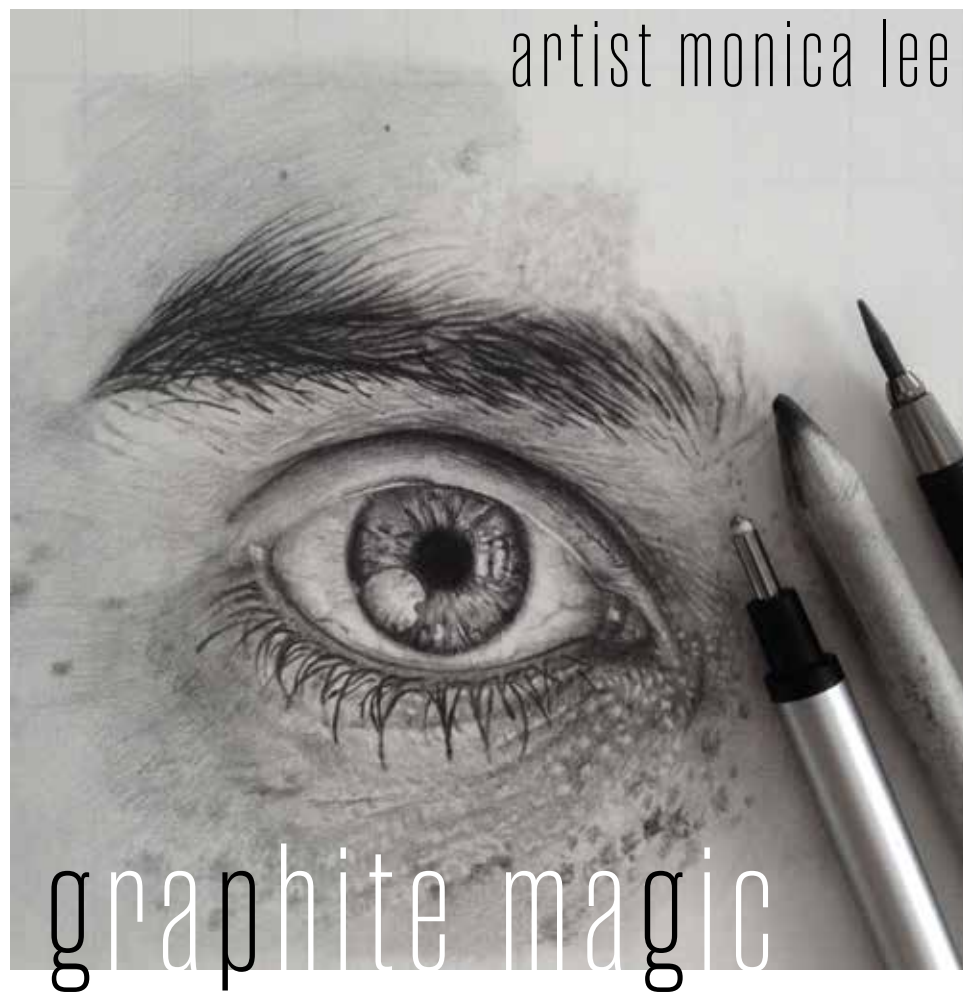
*This is a generously portioned recipe—these ribs tend to disappear quickly. Sleeves should be rolled up—use your hands, and enjoy. A good-quality whiskey goes a long way.*

4 racks baby back ribs  
1 teaspoon cumin seeds  
½ teaspoon coriander seeds  
1½ (32-ounce) cans tomato sauce  
4 cups light brown sugar  
2 cups ketchup  
2 cups cider vinegar  
2 cups whiskey  
1 cup Worcestershire sauce  
1 cup soy sauce  
4 teaspoons salt

1. Toast the cumin and coriander seeds in a dry skillet over medium heat until fragrant, about 1 minute. Transfer to a mortar and pestle, and crush together until fine.
2. In a large bowl, combine the crushed spices with the tomato sauce, brown sugar, ketchup, vinegar, whiskey, Worcestershire, soy sauce, and salt. Mix well.
3. Place the ribs in a roasting pan or on a large rimmed baking sheet. Pour the mixture over the ribs, cover with plastic wrap, and marinate in the refrigerator overnight. Remove the ribs from the refrigerator, and allow them to come to room temperature; this will take a few hours.
4. Preheat the oven to 325°F.
5. If necessary, transfer the ribs and marinade to a baking pan that is big enough so that the racks lie flat in a single layer. Cover with foil, and bake, basting occasionally, until fork-tender, about 3 hours.
6. Remove the ribs from the marinade, and set them aside. Transfer the marinade to a saucepan, and cook over medium-high heat until it becomes a glaze, about 15 minutes. Set aside.
7. Preheat the broiler or grill. Glaze the ribs with the reduced marinade. Place them on a rimmed baking sheet, and broil them in the broiler, or cook them directly on the grill, for about 5 minutes, until slightly charred.

SERVES 6





“I guess art runs in the family—my dad is a photographer, my mom is into arts and crafts, and my siblings include a pastry chef, a photographer, and a musician.”

#### What is your background in art?

I guess art runs in the family—my dad is a photographer, my mom is into arts and crafts, and my siblings include a pastry chef, a photographer, and a musician. Ever since I was a child, I have loved to draw and wanted to become an artist. I attended a local art college, and majored in three-dimensional animation. To be honest, I was really bad at still life and portrait drawing, and it was not my favorite subject back then. After college,

I worked as a digital imaging artist in my dad's advertising photography studio for twelve years.

#### Where did your love for photography come from?

I have my dad to thank for this; he is a photographer. Growing up, my sisters and I used to hang out in his studio on the weekend. He had a huge library of photography books that I enjoyed looking at.

#### Why did you leave digital imaging for hyperrealism?

Actually, I took a leave of absence from digital imaging due to health issues (I guess I spent too many long hours working on the computer). During that time, I came across some artwork on Instagram, and I was so inspired. I decided to try drawing again. I realized that I still loved drawing, and I actually have a talent for drawing. So I decided to quit my job and become a



full-time artist. Nothing beats getting your hands dirty while drawing with a pencil.

**What is it about hyperrealism that intrigues you?**

When I first came across hyperrealism, I was totally blown away by it. It's unbelievable that a person has the ability to create something so similar to a photograph, using only pencils instead of a camera. I wanted to be able to draw like that.

**How has your background in digital imaging impacted your approach to sketches?**

In digital imaging, it's all about attention to details, observation, and refined craftsmanship when creating an image. During those twelve years working as a digital imaging artist, I learned to appreciate art and photography. I think that's why I like hyperrealism and detail.

**Why are you so drawn to the details?**

I'm a bit of a perfectionist by nature. Everything has to be neatly drawn and detail oriented. I feel that my work is incomplete when there are not enough details in it.

**Do you study a photograph and recreate the image?**

Most of the time, my work is based on a photograph. I recreate what I see by exaggerating and emphasizing details in my drawings.



**What are the steps behind creating a hyperreal drawing?**

First, I come up with a theme or subject matter. Then, I will source for photo references from either the Internet or my dad's photo library, preferably a high-res image. If it's from the Internet, it's important to have the photographer's approval to use their image. Next, I place the photo in Photoshop and manually grid the paper. Now for the fun part: drawing. I think the key ingredient to drawing hyperrealism is patience.

**Talk about the benefits of working square by square. How do you determine where to start?**

Well, it definitely helps with getting accurate proportions. Sometimes, it gets intimidating when I have so much blank space to fill. So, it makes drawing easier if I just focus on one square at a time. Most of the time, I'll start off with the main focus of a drawing. For a portrait, it will be the eyes.

**What art materials do you use to create your drawings?**

The basic materials I use are graphite pencils and paper. Additional materials include blending stumps, Q-tips, and graphite powder. My favorite tool is the Tombow Mono Zero Eraser, a pencil eraser for fine lines.

**How long does a typical piece take to complete?**

A piece takes around two to three weeks to complete. It also depends on the size and complexity of the drawing itself. One piece,





MOST OF THE TIME, I'LL START OFF WITH THE MAIN FOCUS OF A DRAWING. FOR A PORTRAIT, IT WILL BE THE EYES.

entitled *Shanghai*, took six weeks to complete.

**Who are the people featured in your drawings? Is there a reason behind your preference for using people as your subject matter?**

They are people whom I approached on Instagram or people whom I know. Individuals with beards or freckles and the elderly are my favorite subjects. I like playing with textures. I find drawing humans very challenging because I am trying to capture their uniqueness in the drawing and bring it to life.

**Why do you share your drawings while they are still in the process of being completed?**

There is so much that you can learn from other artists' works in progress. That's how I learn my drawing techniques and which materials to use. I hope to help others by sharing my drawing process.



**What is your biggest challenge when creating your art?**

I'm not as productive as I would like to be. As most of my works are quite detailed, it's very time-consuming and tedious work. I wish there were more hours in a day.

**Do you keep a strict schedule in place for working on your artwork?**

I spend most of my time drawing at home. I don't go out much. Usually, I'll start my day by going to the gym. I'll start on my art after lunch and work until dinnertime. After dinner, I'll continue drawing until it is time for bed. Basically, that's my daily routine, but weekends are more flexible (I've been told I lead a very boring life). I don't consider it a strict work schedule; because I enjoy drawing, it doesn't really feel like I'm working.

**How did you become involved with the Mandala Fine Art Studio?**

After wide exposure from social media, Mandala Fine Art Studio contacted me through Facebook about representing me in

Singapore. Being a newbie in the art scene, to be represented by a gallery is a good opportunity for me to grow as an artist.

**How has social media helped you gather and communicate with an international audience?**

Without a doubt, I wouldn't be here right now if not for social media and others promoting my art on their blogs and websites. The response is amazing. I've gotten a lot of support from the public through their feedback and encouragement.

**What has been your favorite aspect of your journey as an artist thus far?**

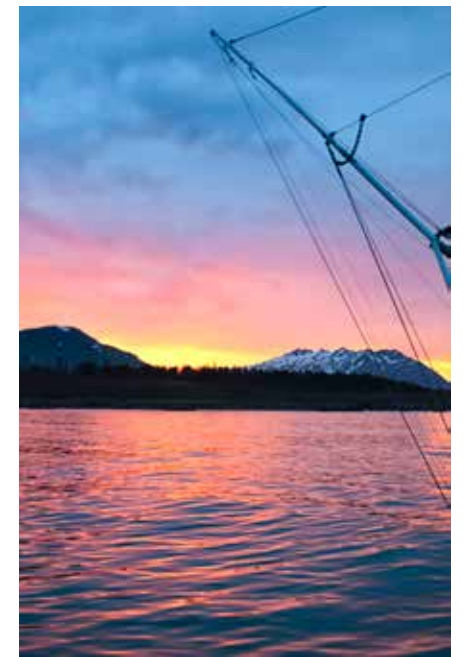
Knowing that there are people who appreciate and enjoy my work is very rewarding.

[For more info, visit facebook.com/monicaleeart](https://www.facebook.com/monicaleeart)



# THE MYSTERIOUS PULL OF sitka, alaska

photography joel brady-power  
text sierra golden



Though at 4,811 square miles, it's the largest incorporated city by area in the US, Sitka isn't an easy place to get to. The residential area of eight or nine thousand is on the coastal edge of Baranof Island—one of the largest islands of Alaska's panhandle. The area is only accessible by boat or plane, and both ABC News and CNN have ranked the Sitka Rocky Gutierrez Airport as one of the most thrilling (read dangerous) in the United States.

Yet, despite the difficult and sometimes frightening travel it takes to get to Sitka, the town is spectacularly beautiful, charming, and deeply connected to a culturally rich past. In fact, I often daydream of visiting Sitka while I sit at a dusty, frumpy nonprofit desk. Over ten years, I've made many return trips—and none has ever disappointed. More than almost any other place, Sitka is a destination I recommend to fellow travelers; hardships and all, it's worth the journey. Here's why:

## THE SETTING

From the air, one can see pulsing waves from the Gulf of Alaska roll into Sitka



Sound. They crash around black piles of rock and send clumps of white foam swirling back into dark teal water. Tiny wooded islands dot the sound like freckles, and when I peer carefully into the trees, I can often spot a precariously perched cabin looking west toward the sunset. Wood smoke from the chimney indicates that someone is home.

The pilots of Alaskan Airlines, the only commercial carrier with service in Sitka, seem to be quite accustomed to the tiny runway with a big reputation. Its close proximity to crashing waves means that sometimes it's strewn with boulders and driftwood, but I've never experienced more than the expected bump upon landing.

Getting downtown from the airport is an easy, five-minute taxi ride and provides another reminder of Sitka's stunning setting. I love crossing the O'Connell Bridge that connects Japonski Island, where the airport is located, to the much larger Baranof Island. From the top of the arched cable-stayed bridge, I have a 360-degree view. Directly in front of me is downtown Sitka. The two main streets bustle with tourists, locals, and fishermen alike, and the chanterelle-colored Sitka Pioneer Home—a state-run assisted living facility—makes an impressive welcome.

Gazing past town, my eyes lock on Mount Verstovia, a rocky, arrowhead-shaped peak

TINY WOODED ISLANDS DOT THE SOUND LIKE FRECKLES, AND WHEN I PEER CAREFULLY INTO THE TREES, I CAN OFTEN SPOT A PRECARIOUSLY PERCHED CABIN LOOKING WEST TOWARD THE SUNSET.



that seems more like the caricature of a mountain than a real mountain. If I were to spin a full circle, I would see the Pyramid Mountain to my right, with handfuls of evergreen islands scattered in the water below it; the open expanse of Sitka Sound behind me; and far to my left, the rounded bald dome of Mount Edgecumbe, a 3,200-foot stratovolcano whose snow-striped flanks always remind me of the famous Japanese print series, 36 Views of Mount Fuji.

Besides just letting your eyes soak up this beauty, the best way to experience Sitka's natural splendor is to get dirty in it. Options for this abound. My personal favorite is to hike the Verstovia Trail. The trail starts a couple miles from town and climbs through alder and salmonberry shrubs, then hemlock and spruce forest, before finally cresting the ridge on the west shoulder

of Verstovia, where the mighty evergreen trees give way to expanses of low scrubby plants and, depending on the season, a snowfield or two. Climb even higher, and these subalpine meadows give way to the twisted, bonsai-like plants characteristic of an alpine setting.

A steep, five-mile round-trip trek, this hike isn't for everyone, but the eagle-eyed view of town, a close-up of Mount Verstovia, and the chance to see wildlife, such as brown bears, black-tailed deer, and mountain goats, are well worth a pair of burning thighs! Friend, writer, and local fisherman Brendan Jones has played host to me many times in Sitka. He explains, "It's so rare to get those views without driving ten hours or knocking into ten thousand people along the way." The last time I did the hike, I was able to enjoy the panoramic views in near solitude—I saw only a handful of people the whole day.

For those less altitude-inclined, the Sitka National Historical Park is a pleasant alternative. The 112-acre park features two miles of mostly flat, gravel walking paths that meander through giant Sitka spruce trees, along rocky beaches, and up a salmon creek. Come at the right time of year, and you'll see thousands of salmon making their way back to the very spot where they hatched! The park, known to most locals as Totem Park, is also home to an excellent visitor center and a large collection of totem poles. Native groups built the originals in the early 1900s. Today, new, refurbished, and old poles alike





decorate the park and surprise visitors with their stately beauty.

I'd be remiss not to mention Sitka's many water activities. With a little research into the right outfit, anyone can have the adventure of a lifetime: Whale watch in kayaks, but if you're downwind of the animals, watch out! It's easy to get covered with slime and fish breath when the whales spout. Sport fish with pros who know all the local honey holes for rockfish, halibut, and salmon. Or go for a guided cruise with Sitka Harbor Tours, and keep an eye out for the ever adorable sea otters.

THE HISTORY

The Tlingit people originally settled Sitka more than 10,000 years ago. Rich natural resources in a moderate climate made for a relatively easy life of hunting and gathering, so by the time Europeans made first contact in 1741, they found a highly developed culture. Tlingits are renowned for their oratory arts, basket weaving, chilkat blankets (woven from cedar bark and mountain goat fur), and dugout canoes, among many other arts and crafts.

Unrest between the colonizing Russians and the native Tlingit people led to battles over



land. The Russians eventually turned Sitka into a very successful fur-trading outpost; throughout the 1800s, the town was known to many as the "Paris of the Pacific." The home of fur trader Alexander Baranov boasted a grand piano, museum, ballroom, and other fineries that would still seem luxurious today.

By the late 1850s, however, Russia faced economic and political turmoil. Fearing that they might lose control of Alaska, Russia simply sold their territory to the US. This act has often been called "Seward's Folly," but all of resource-rich Alaska was purchased for \$7.2 million (roughly 2 cents per acre)—which doesn't seem like folly to me!

Today, Sitka retains an abundance of historical sites that exemplify this diverse history. When I'm in Sitka, I always visit Castle Hill—this prominent rocky lookout was home to Tlingit long houses and Baranov's "castle." Then, in 1867, Castle Hill became the site where Russian Alaska was formally transferred to the US. None of those buildings stand today, but Castle Hill has been converted into a small park with lovely views of O'Connell Bridge.

Also prominent on Sitka's skyline is the Cathedral of Saint Michael, which was completed in 1848. Though the original church burnt to the ground in 1966, members risked their lives to save many of the icons inside. The church today has been

restored to its original appearance and sits in the middle of downtown—in fact, the main road forks to go around the church! Tours are available here and at the Russian Bishop's House (built in 1842) a few blocks down the road.

If you're interested in Native American history, Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi Tribal Community House hosts dance performances in full traditional dress and storytelling events, and features a shop with authentic Native American artwork and crafts. The Sheldon Jackson Museum also offers an impressive collection of thousands of objects, such as spruce root baskets, engraved silver objects, and elaborate beadwork. A smattering of stone



“... go for a guided cruise with Sitka Harbor Tours, and keep an eye out for the ever adorable sea otters.

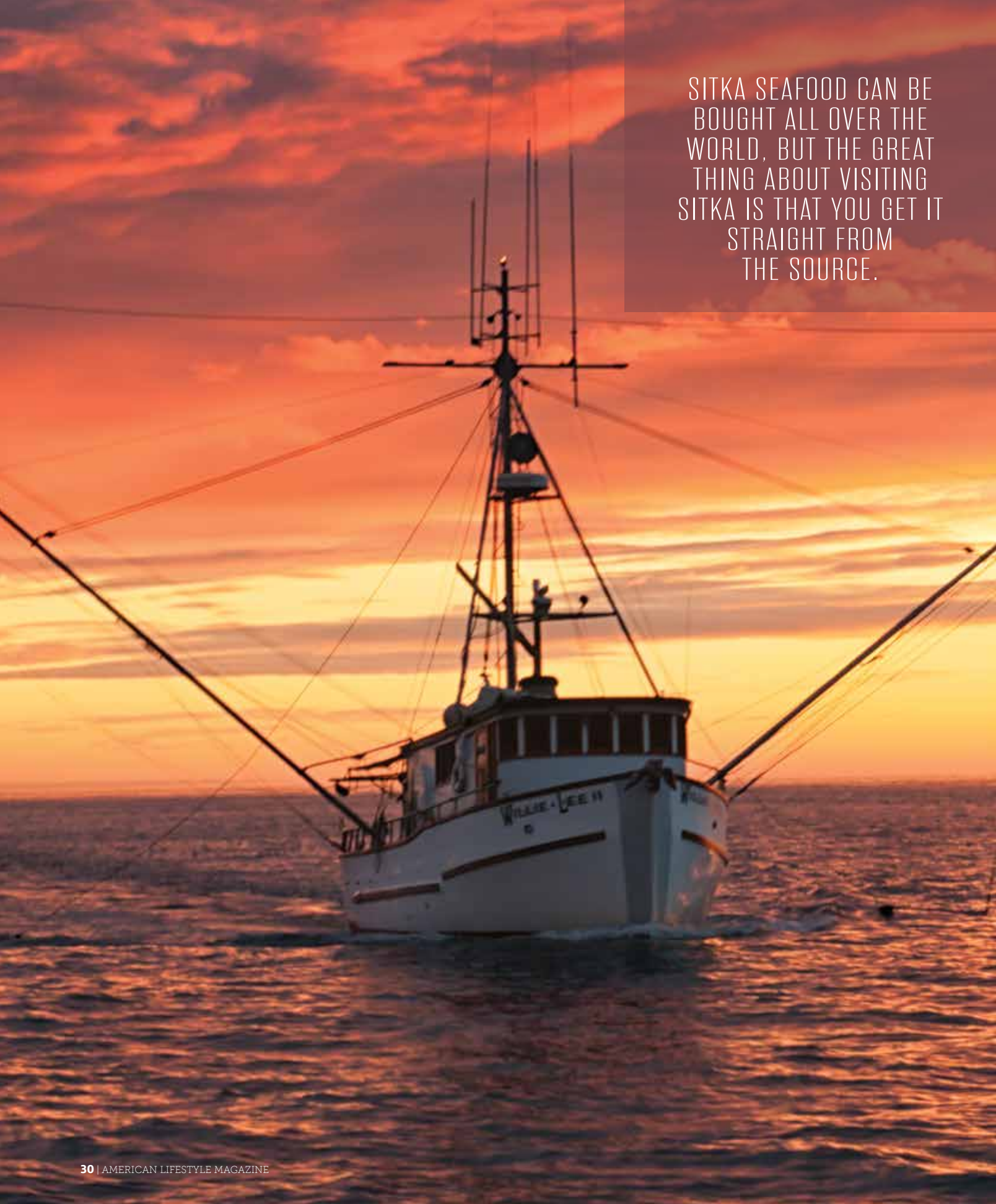


tools, fishing and hunting equipment, and clothing items also give an inside look at the daily life of Native Americans in the 1800s.

THE ARTS

Sitka's history might be rough and tumble, but it has paved the way for an impressive arts scene that draws heavily on its Native American and Russian roots. A myriad of downtown galleries have collections of Russian art and icons, and my favorite galleries, like Sitka Rose and Fishermen's Eye, feature work from a variety of Alaskan artists—potters, printmakers, silversmiths, wood-carvers, and more—who expertly





SITKA SEAFOOD CAN BE  
BOUGHT ALL OVER THE  
WORLD, BUT THE GREAT  
THING ABOUT VISITING  
SITKA IS THAT YOU GET IT  
STRAIGHT FROM  
THE SOURCE.



capture the beauty and history of Alaska in their one-of-a-kind products. Unlike many Alaskan tourist towns, it seems that Sitka strives to support local artists. Locals rally behind events like the Grind, a monthly, wintertime community talent show, and the Sitka Summer Music Festival, a world-class gathering for chamber music.

#### THE FOOD

In the 1800s, Sitka's economy relied heavily on the fur trade. Today, the same can be said for its fisheries. According to the Sitka Economic Development Association, Sitka is the ninth most productive seafood port in the US. In 2013, the town sold \$84 million worth of seafood! This includes salmon, herring, halibut, and more exotic species, like sea cucumber and black cod. Sitka seafood can be bought all over the world, but the great thing about visiting Sitka is that you get it straight from the source. Sitka restaurants save the best and freshest seafood for themselves!

For brunch, lunch, or dinner, I like to visit Larkspur Cafe, a homey restaurant where Sitkans often meet for a quick bite or an evening of live music. Located downstairs from the local radio station, it's easy to feel

like you belong. The menu changes often, but Larkspur always has a soup of the day, local fish tacos, and a surprising special, like Vietnamese banh mi sandwiches or blackened halibut.

For a special occasion, Ludvig's is the best choice. My friend Brendan describes it as an "oasis of peace and good cheer," and he's right—the tiny, Mediterranean-themed restaurant is warm and welcoming from the moment one walks in the door. Tapestries hang from the ceiling, the smell of home-baked bread wafts from the kitchen, and just the right amount of hustle and bustle makes the restaurant feel lively without being overwhelming.

Ludvig's menu connects Sitka's fisheries with Spanish-themed dishes, and the results are stunning. Paella—a Spanish rice dish—blends the seafood flavors of prawns, scallops, salmon, rockfish, and calamari with saffron and chorizo. The rich, broth-soaked rice is perfect after a long hike or a rainy day on the water. Another favorite, the Katlian Special, pairs a thick, white slab of local halibut with oyster mushrooms, truffle oil, and risotto. Featured in The New York Times, Sunset, and Everyday with Rachel Ray, Ludvig's is commonly referred to as the best restaurant in Southeast Alaska. It might just be my favorite restaurant ever.

The last place I'll recommend is about the only place in town that doesn't serve seafood, but that doesn't mean it's not part of the seafood experience—the Pioneer Bar is a great place to meet the fishermen who caught your dinner. Affectionately called the P Bar, the place is long, low, and dark. Seafoam green booths line one wall, and bar stools hover over a black-and-white linoleum floor. The bartenders are gruff, the walls are covered in photos of sunken boats, and the drink of choice is whiskey.

A large bell hangs over the bar—ring it, and you've bought the house a round. This tradition runs so deep that the bartenders actually hand out special P Bar chips—like poker chips—that are good for one free drink when the bell rings. If you're lucky, you'll hit the P Bar on a night when a few fishermen roll in. They're always good for a story—and if they've had a good catch, one or more might ring the bell. If you're hungry, they'll tell you to order a takeout bento box into the bar from Kenny's Wok and Teriyaki next door. Brendan recommends "ordering an Alaskan Amber at the bar and waiting for your fried cream cheese wontons to show up. It's just awesome."

If you have only one day to spend in Sitka, climb Mount Verstovia, visit the Sheldon Jackson Museum, drink a cold beer at the Pioneer Bar, and top the night off with a superb seafood dinner at Ludvig's. You'll experience the natural beauty, history, art, and food of Alaska, and if you're anything like me, that'll be enough to keep you coming back for years!

For more info, visit [sitka.org](http://sitka.org)



# in tune with faux paz

photography james levin  
text brandon schatt



*We caught up with Copresident Brandon Schatt of Faux Paz, University of Maryland's premier coed a cappella group, founded in 1993. Their creative arrangements and passionate performance style won them the title of 2015 Mid-Atlantic semifinal champions at the competitive International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella.*

“There was something really inspiring about the music they were making, and I knew that this was the only group I wanted to be in.”

## Talk about the audition process for Faux Paz:

Auditions are held every fall semester and sometimes in the spring as well. The initial audition includes a brief solo performance of any song you want, singing a few scales, a pitch matching exercise, and demonstrating vocal percussion skills. At callbacks, those auditioning must sing another solo, learn part of a song with the group, and then perform it with some current members.

I actually auditioned twice before getting into the group. My first auditions were pretty scary; it's hard not to be nervous, but Faux Paz is really welcoming during the process. For every person who walks into the room, we jump, cheer, and try our best to be engaged and friendly throughout the audition. I sang “If I Ain't Got You” by Alicia Keys and “Love On Top” by Beyoncé. After my first audition, I was rejected from Faux Paz and accepted into another a cappella group on campus, but I decided to decline and wait to audition again for Faux. There was something really inspiring about the music they were making, and I knew that this was the only group I wanted to be in. So I spent a year involved in some other student groups before returning the next year. My second time around, auditions were a lot less nerve-racking. I knew what to expect, and was able to relax and enjoy interacting with the group members and the others auditioning. I sang “You Found Me” by The Fray and “Stay” by Sara Bareilles. This time around, I was fortunate enough to be accepted.

It's not uncommon to audition more than once. Five members of our current group auditioned twice before getting in. Sometimes, it comes down to having space for someone's voice type. Typically, we look for someone who brings something unique and can really contribute to our sound as a group. Someone can be an amazing soloist, but not blend very well or know how to control their voice. You might also find someone who has a lot of potential, and the group knows that with a little help and support, they can really grow. When it comes down to it, a new member only gets in by unanimous vote, so everyone has to agree that they can't envision the group without this new member.

## How much time do you spend with other members of Faux Paz?

We spend an absurd amount of time together. We meet two nights a week for two and a half hours for regular rehearsal, but as soon as we need to prepare for a competition or big performance, it can get a little insane. At the end of our winter break, before ICCA season, we meet for three or four days of intensive rehearsal so that we can start off the semester with most of the set learned. Then in the weeks leading up to the ICCA, we try to schedule as much extra practice time as the group can handle; sometimes, we'll meet five or six days out of the week, even if it's just an hour to drill choreography or fix musical details.

Outside of rehearsal, we're also a tight group of friends. Our love of singing and music





brings us together initially, but we often find that we have many other overlapping hobbies and interests. Many members maintain strong friendships with each other and with alumni even after graduating.

### What are the ICCAs?

The International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella is a competition that is held annually. It features hundreds of groups mainly from the United States, but also from several other countries. The competition is divided into three rounds across seven regions, culminating in the finals.

Each group performs a set that is judged on both musical and visual presentation (singing and choreography). There are no restrictions on the number or style of songs performed by a group, but the set must be no longer than twelve minutes, and family-friendly music/choreography is encouraged.

### Does Faux Paz tour? Record?

Faux Paz doesn't usually go on an official tour, but we enjoy performing as a guest group at invitationals with other groups

whenever we can. We have recorded studio albums and are planning an eighth album soon. We love recording because it allows us to make a permanent record of our favorite songs and memories, and it's awesome to share our music with friends, family, and fans. It's pretty cool to be able to shuffle through your iPod and hear your own arrangements being sung by people you know and love. Our most recent album, *Chaos*, was also recently nominated for 3 CARAs (Contemporary A Cappella Recording Awards), which is very exciting for us.

### How does the group change and evolve? How do you make decisions on songs and solos?

We change by taking risks and being open to new ideas. We never want to plateau and settle for being a decent group while groups around us continue to grow and improve. So we have to make decisions every year as a group about what it is we want to accomplish and how we want to get there. For example, this year, we completely changed our approach to the ICCAs. In the past, we've created our set by drawing from the best songs that we had already in our repertoire, but that can be limiting because the songs didn't always compliment

each other. So we tried something new, had the whole group vote for the soloists they thought should sing, and then picked an almost entirely new set of music. It was difficult because we had to arrange, learn, and perfect all of this music very quickly, but it ended up paying off when we placed first in our quarterfinal round.

Sometimes we disagree about a song choice or even small details, like the dynamics of a particular piece, but we don't have any huge disagreements. We pick songs by taking suggestions from group members and then narrowing them down. Soloists audition for new songs, and then we vote as a group to decide. As for musical direction and details, members can make any suggestions and give ideas, but the final decisions ultimately are up to the discretion of the music director.

### How has a cappella evolved?

A cappella has come a long way in the past few years. *Pitch Perfect*, *The Sing-Off*, and *Glee* have sparked a new wave of interest in a cappella and put modern groups and the competitive scene in the spotlight. I think what's changed the most is the type and quality of music you can discover at an a cappella performance. Nowadays, you see a lot of groups who take their music seriously. They might do a fun, well-known song, but with altered chords, rhythms, and other interesting ways to take a song to another level. Groups also do darker music that might be more emotionally moving, and develop techniques to bring sounds from genres like electronic dance music into a cappella.

### How accurate is *Pitch Perfect*?

*Pitch Perfect* is accurate in the sense that each group truly puts on a show for the judges and audience. One thing the movie doesn't accurately portray is the difficulty and hard work that goes into making an award-winning set. I don't think the majority of groups are capable of coming up with an arrangement on the spot for any random

song, like in the riff-off scene. And most groups don't drastically change their set between rounds of the competition because it takes time to create arrangements.

### With members leaving every year, how do you keep up your musical quality?

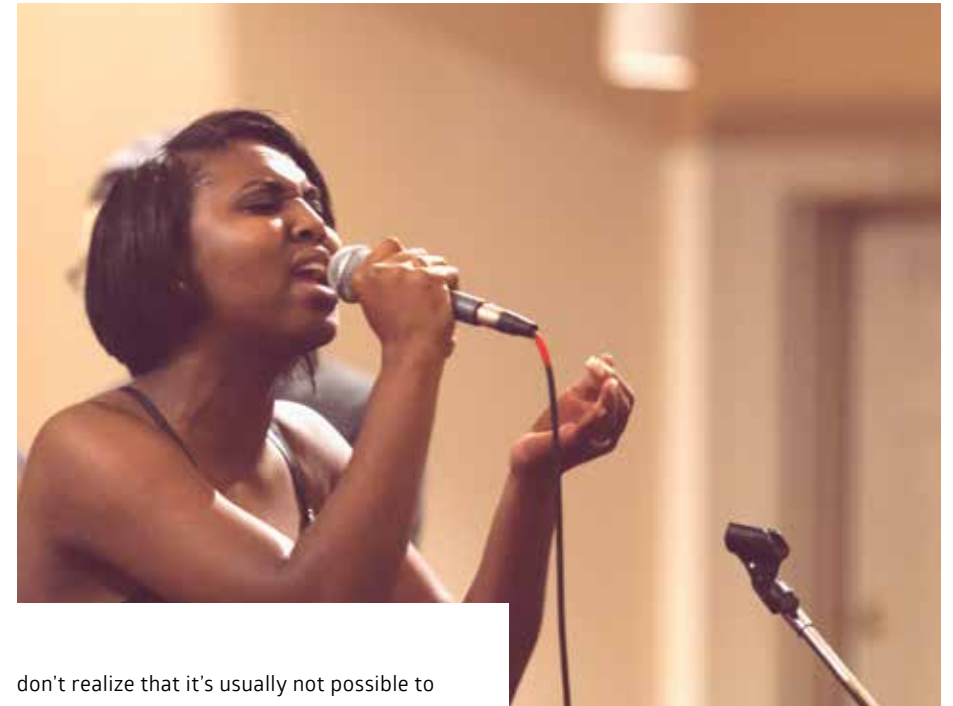
We don't look at new members as replacements for the alumni who have recently left because each member brings something different to the table. So when the group fluctuates in size, voice type, and levels of experience, it's up to us to adapt and maximize our strengths, while working to overcome weaknesses.

### What do you feel in your body when you are in perfect harmony with the rest of your group?

It's a great feeling when we are in sync with one another both musically and personally on a song. Everyone knows and can feel when we're clicking, and you can tell because we can't help but smile and look around like, "Yep, this is right." I think being musically great also amplifies the emotion of a piece. If it's really happy or upbeat, it's hard not to bop to the music and smile; if it's a darker song, you can even get a little overwhelmed by the emotion you start to feel. I've cried a handful of times while singing with Faux Paz, and I think that says something powerful about what we're capable of as a group.

### What is something people would find surprising about being in an a cappella group?

I think most people would be surprised at how long it takes to make a good arrangement. Sometimes it can take hours and several long sessions of trial and error to produce something we're proud of—and even then, we'll tweak it in some way almost every time we sing it. Sometimes, we will get a performance request last minute, and they'll want a particular song that we don't already have in our repertoire. People



don't realize that it's usually not possible to pull that off. I wish we could be like *Glee* or *Pitch Perfect* and spontaneously burst into a perfectly in-tune rendition of any song at will, but alas, it doesn't work like that.

### What is your major?

My major is French. Our group covers a variety of majors and minors, including math, business, journalism, vocal performance, music education, community health, economics, astronomy, physics, psychology, and more.

### Do you have any pre- or postconcert rituals?

Before any big performance, Faux Paz revs (it's a pump-up exercise where we get in a circle and do a call-and-response chant led by the president or copresidents). Sometimes we write it down ahead of time, but usually, I just make it up on the spot because it's more fun. We start slow and then go faster and faster and say all sorts of nonsense, but I love it. It's a cute little tradition that gets us excited to get on stage together. We also usually give some kind of pep talk to remind each other about what we want to accomplish and what we need to do. Postconcert, we usually get food and

enjoy each other's company, knowing that the pressure is off momentarily.

### How do you expect these experiences to benefit you after you graduate?

I think my experiences as both a member and leader of the group will benefit me immensely. Managing an entirely peer-operated group is possibly the biggest challenge I've ever faced, and I've already used this experience in job interviews and have been able to apply what I've learned in other situations. Even if singing a cappella has nothing to do with my career, what I've learned about leadership, organization, team dynamics, etc. is applicable in any field.

For more info, visit [umd.orgsync.com/org/fauxpaz](http://umd.orgsync.com/org/fauxpaz)





### Where did you begin your career, and how did that lead to creating your own firm?

I began this career the way many of us do—at an ashram in India. Haha! Seriously, I was living in rural India many years ago, offering my service with a charity that provided health services to the villagers in the area. There were plans to build a much-needed health clinic in the town, but before starting construction, the village elders asked that we arrange a special ground breaking ceremony. They explained that it was important to ask for permission from the land before building.

Having grown up in the freeway-strewn suburbs of Los Angeles, this awareness of the power of nature and the desire to coexist with the land truly amazed me. I had never before thought of such a thing. But once I heard it, I knew it was the right thing to do.

This created a desire in me to learn more about working in harmony with the surrounding environment. My search led me to the science of feng shui, a set of principles for building that dates back over 2,500 years. I returned to the United States and studied with a Chinese feng shui master. I learned the most authentic (and as it turns

## designing harmony

photography yorgos efthymiadis  
text reiko gomez





out, rigorous) version of the science, one that depends a great deal on number calculations and precise compass readings.

**What exactly is feng shui design, and how do you achieve that within the interiors you work on?**

Feng shui design is the result of reading a home's energy, and then creating a design that uses key colors, materials, and natural elements in a specific way so that the house becomes strong for health, wealth, romance, and overall well-being.

I do that through a three-part process I call the Three E's of Reiko Design: environment, emotion, and energy. Blending and balancing the design requirements of the space (environmental), the internal tendencies of the client (emotional), and the unique energy of the site (energetic) results in a Reiko Design.

**Can you elaborate on each of the three parts?**

When I deal with environmental design, I make absolutely certain that the space follows the principles of logic and is arranged to fulfill the practical needs of the occupants. While this may sound obvious, it is often overlooked. This is a basic function of good design and the starting point of Reiko Design.

As for emotional design, the space should evoke a positive response from the occupants. Quantum physics suggests emotions are not just silly feelings to be dismissed, but electrochemical signals that affect the chemistry and electricity of every cell in the body. This electricity radiates out like a magnet, attracting people, events, and situations of a similar electrical current. It's crucial to me that a client's home or office is evoking these positive feelings for them on a continual basis.

Finally, there's energetic design. The space should work in harmony with the energetic







forces of the land in order to protect, support, and nurture the occupants in all areas of their lives.

#### Have you always been drawn to this design sensibility?

Unlike other designers, I didn't set out to enter this profession. I set out to learn about how to live in harmony with the environment. From that desire, I was drawn to feng shui. And from feng shui, I was drawn to design school, so I could further help my clients create spaces that felt as good as they looked.

My personal style is a bit eclectic; it's a blend of modern, exotic, rustic, and beachy elements. However, I like working with clients with different tastes because I get to

push the boundaries of my own style and, in a sense, live vicariously through them.

#### When beginning the design process, how do you go about achieving a balance between your design vision and the clients' wishes?

I always lead from balance and harmony. I explain to my clients what will create the most harmony in the space, and show them my vision for how to achieve that. My clients usually go for it. Of course, I greatly respect my clients' wishes and always ensure that my design ultimately meets their needs. If someone is not comfortable in their own home, it is not good feng shui (or good design), no matter how technically correct it might be.

#### What spaces pose bigger challenges when it comes to finding harmony and balance?

Law firms! I have found designing law offices challenging. I think it's because the nature of the work done in a law office can be stressful. However, it is a great feeling to design a law office and see the expression on a corporate lawyer's face when he or she walks in and says, "Wow, I feel so good here! It's so calm and relaxing."

#### Do you have a go-to style element that you try to incorporate?

I try to incorporate some playful items into every design. I think that seeing something playful in a space is a signal to the more childlike side of ourselves, that we are free



*I think that seeing something playful in a space is a signal to the more childlike side of ourselves that we can strip off the facade of maturity every so often and have a little fun.*





to strip off the facade of maturity every so often and have a little fun. I don't think many people give themselves permission to play. But play is where the magic is.

**If one were to look through your portfolio, describe to us what they would see:**

You would not see one style, but hopefully you would feel one thing: delight. I like places that feel happy.

**Tell us about this Rockport beach house project. What were the clients looking for when they approached you?**

This is a summer home for a couple who grew up in this town and later moved to New York City. They wanted their children to grow up knowing about this lovely place. However, they wanted to gently buck the trend of the traditional New England home by infusing some urban edge and youthful hits of color to create a space that reflects who they are now.

**Talk about the house in general terms. What was the space like prior to you working on it?**

It's a beach house in a charming New England seaside town. The house is about 3,800 square feet with three levels. There are four bedrooms and three baths. As to how it looked prior to working on it? This was as *gut* as a renovation gets, without building an entirely new house. As it was, we added on a whole new section, and there's virtually nothing recognizable from the original.

**Tell us about some of the design details in each of the main rooms, notably the upholstered coffee table and mix of interesting chairs:**

My clients love color, so I found the fabric for the upholstered coffee table and used it as a springboard for the other colors in the room. The aqua sofa and hot pink swivel



chair are a couple of examples. The goal was to choose furniture in a traditional vein, in keeping with the style of the house while creating a more fun, modern spirit with color and pattern.

**Were there any challenges or hiccups while designing and arranging this space?**

There are always surprises that pop up while doing a renovation of this scale. For example, there is a large, turquoise, beaded chandelier that I wanted to hang in the stairwell. The chandelier is very heavy, and figuring out how to install it over the stairs was really difficult for my electricians. There was a team of four great electricians working hard on that for several hours. When they finally finished, we all high-fived each other, then stepped back to look at the chandelier, and noticed there was a problem: it wasn't centered! It really didn't look right. So we had to start over from scratch, take down the chandelier, create a new hole, wire it, and hang it all over again (I bought them all a nice lunch after that!).



I SET OUT TO LEARN ABOUT HOW TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH THE ENVIRONMENT. FROM THAT DESIRE, I WAS DRAWN TO FENG SHUI. AND FROM FENG SHUI, I WAS DRAWN TO DESIGN SCHOOL SO I COULD FURTHER HELP MY CLIENTS CREATE SPACES THAT FELT AS GOOD AS THEY LOOKED.

**What do you find to be inspiring at the moment?**

Quantum physics. I've never had much interest in science, but it is an amazing new world of research that refers to concepts I have seen in feng shui for many years.

In terms of design, I am currently in love with the combination of gold and black, painted concrete tiles, and sleek white appliances. I feel that stainless steel kitchens are on their way out, as well as chrome hardware and bath fixtures. I'm all about gold and brass.

**Tell us about your life outside of interior design:**

I live in the Hamptons, a beach area at the end of Long Island, New York. I love living at the beach. My husband works with me, coordinating the architecture and construction aspects of our projects. When we are not working, we are usually surfing in the ocean down at the end of our street. And when winter comes, we head to the tropics. Feng shui means *wind and water*, and I am grateful to live a life full of good feng shui!

For more info, visit [reikodesign.com](http://reikodesign.com)



# HELLO, COOKIES

photography shelley rose photography  
text robin ryan



It takes a lot of forethought to turn a hobby you're passionate about into a full-time business; it takes some serious bravery and tenacity to dive right into that transition with very little notice. But that is precisely what Robin Wehl Martin and her husband did when their close friends, Molly Moon and Zach Reinig, proposed the idea of opening up a bakery in the Capitol Hill section of Seattle.

"It actually started with a text message. Zach asked me if I could do them a favor; and, of course, I said sure. I thought he wanted me to make his wife a birthday cake," Robin recounts. "He said—and I quote—'There is a small space left in the new building on 19th. I need you to open a bakery there. Agreed?' Without even thinking twice, I agreed. I told my husband, Clay, and he panicked, saying, 'What if they're serious?' Well, it turns out they were serious, and here we are."

The Martins quickly found themselves taking an act-now-think-later approach to starting up a small business; but as spontaneous and carefree as Robin relays

“He said—and I quote—‘There is a small space left in the new building on 19th. I need you to open a bakery there. Agreed?’”

their story, she and Clay had been toying with the idea of opening up some sort of shop for quite some time. "Clay and I had been talking about different retail food concepts for years, but had been pretty caught up in child rearing for the past ten years," explains the mother of three. "Whenever we would travel, we would always try to seek out the most significant restaurants, coffee shops, and bakeries in any city we visited. Then we would critique with each other the decor, the menu, the details of execution, what they got right, and what should have been done differently. But it was just between us because we had absolutely no credibility in this area. We'd never worked in retail food. It's just that food, design, and community spaces were hugely interesting to us, and we sort of dreamed of one day having something of our own."

The entrepreneurial stars aligned with Zach and Molly's nudge, and the four friends set out to get the ball rolling. "Molly was a great help here in executing the concept. She told Clay, since he's the numbers guy, that he needed to write a business plan, crunch some numbers, and see if the idea penciled out," Robin details. "Once we started down the path, we were really happy to realize we had so many of the key relationships already in place. We have a few restaurateur friends, who were incredibly supportive and gave us great advice and references."

"It also really helped to have Molly Moon's name associated with us. Even though we're separate businesses, just the fact that

she was associated with us gave us instant credibility and opened a lot of doors," adds Robin. "Molly Moon has seven ice cream shops in Seattle, is very well respected, and is very protective of her brand. So I think people thought if she's willing to lend her name as a partner to what we're doing, we must have something going on—although I'm still not sure why she was willing to place so much faith in us, since we really had never done this sort of thing before!"

Of course, it also doesn't hurt that Robin is a born baker. Despite not having a background in the industry, she's certainly proven herself in the kitchen and has a number of awards to prove it. "I have a master's degree in education and spent a significant part of my career working in Jewish education. After my kids were born, I became an obsessive baker. They'd nap, and I'd bake," describes Robin.

When narrowing down the direction for the retail shop, focusing only on cookies was an obvious fit for Robin, who was drawn to the baked good for its simplicity and timelessness. "Cookies are my favorite baked good to eat, so I gravitated toward baking them. They also aren't complicated," says the entrepreneur. "We just wanted to do one thing and do it very, very well and be known as the best at that one thing. And cookies were an obvious choice. Everyone understands cookies. They're served at the Four Seasons and at the preschool around the corner. Your great-grandmother was making them one hundred years ago, and your great-grandkids will be making them one hundred years from now."







With two years of success now under her belt, Robin is standing proof that it is not just who you know that equates to a successful business venture, but what you know and how you execute—and clearly, she knows a thing or two about implementing the necessary details to fuel her dream bakery.

“I think the idea of retail cookie shops has been tainted by some key national players who participated in that great race to the bottom in terms of price and quality,” Robin continues. “But there’s also a lot you can do creatively within the context of a cookie. Have you tried our orange, habanero, chocolate chip cookie?”

The entrepreneur infuses her passion for quality, ingenuity, and hospitality into every inch of her bakery, turning a building that was once a hole in the ground into a neighborhood hotspot. “Clay and I are big on hosting meals at our house. In fact, our kids think it’s odd when it’s only the five of us for dinner. We have a pretty good-size kitchen with a big island where guests sit while I cook. We envisioned recreating our kitchen into a commercial bakery. And basically, that’s what we’ve done at Hello Robin,” Robin details. “There’s a big island



that customers sit around, and on the other side, I do all my baking. I feel like I’m hosting the whole neighborhood every day. And that’s my element.”

And host the neighborhood she does! Regulars flock to her shop to indulge in their favorite baked delights. Robin speaks to this, saying that she’s gained so many new friends because of her shop. “It’s the people in the neighborhood who come in daily for their coffee or cookie, and they sit at the counter and tell me their stories,” she describes. “For example, it’s Gary, the computer programmer, who gets two whole wheat chocolate chip cookies; or Lisa, Keiko, Melissa, and Stacia who come in every Wednesday as a group to meet and chat; or Emmanuela, the seven-year-old who lives upstairs and just moved to Seattle from Florida. She likes to wipe down the counters for a free cookie. The customers keep my job exciting! And my kids like it as well—they often want to walk down after dinner and grab dessert and see who we’ll bump into.”

These regulars keep coming back because Robin’s cookies are unique and irresistibly delicious. From the traditional chocolate chip to a curry cookie that incorporates white chocolate chips and apricots, there is a flavor for everyone. “It’s encouraging when customers come in and say things like, ‘My grandmother made the best molasses cookies. But these are even better,’” attests the baker, who attributes her success to quality ingredients and attention to detail. “Our cookies are bold. You can taste the brown butter, rosemary, and bourbon in our brown butter bourbon cookie. They are also smaller, so you can try a few, without feeling sick. All cookies are made with high quality, local ingredients wherever possible. For example, we use Shepherd’s Grain Flour from Spokane, Singing Dog Vanilla and Red Ape Cinnamon from Eugene, and our milk comes from Smith Brother’s Farms in Kent.”

Using quality ingredients as the base, there is no end to the various flavor combinations, and every day, Robin is thinking up new recipes to try out. “The craziest was the SPAM® cookie I made in a cooking contest while vacationing in Hawaii; it won first place,” she recalls. “I’m also really crazy about our pecan and onion cookie, but I never make it because our shop is nut free. I’m currently working on a ramen cookie; my husband and I recently ate the most delicious ramen in Portland, and I’m inspired to work with those flavors and textures.”

Robin has poured her heart and soul into her bakery and continues to be very active in the day-to-day operations. After seeing her kids off to school, you will find Robin at the shop before 9 a.m. to greet the first customers. “After my morning coffee drinking ritual, I start baking right away and usually make between six to nine large batches of dough a day,” she explains. “We hired four amazing women when we opened one year ago, and they all still work with us. They’ve become family. We’ve picked up more staff along the way as we’ve gotten busier and our family has grown. Our staff is hardworking, fun, and unbelievably kind. Customer service is important to us, so we feel lucky.

“Work is still very fun, and we are constantly laughing and joking around,” states the entrepreneur. “We have a quote by Julia Child that hangs at Hello Robin. It says, ‘Find something you’re passionate about, and keep tremendously interested in it.’ And that’s what I’ve done.”

[For more info, visit hellorobincookies.com](http://hellorobincookies.com)



# art to feather

## your nest


### Front of Tear Out Card 2

ricotta fritters  
WITH GRAPE JAM

GRAPE JAM  
2 lb. very ripe red-fleshed grapes  
Pinch of granulated sugar,  
if needed

FRITTERS  
2 qt. vegetable oil, for frying  
1½ c. all-purpose flour  
1 tbsp. baking powder  
1 tsp. kosher salt  
4 eggs, lightly beaten  
¼ c. granulated sugar  
2 tsp. grated orange zest  
Seeds from 1 vanilla bean  
2 c. ricotta  
Confectioners' sugar or  
granulated sugar, for dusting


**American Lifestyle**  
magazine



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### Back of Tear Out Card 2



ricotta fritters WITH GRAPE JAM | MAKES 24

1. Make the jam: In a fine mesh strainer set over a bowl, pull open the skins of the grapes to expose the flesh. Holding the skins, press the flesh against the strainer to extract the juice, and allow it to drain into the bowl. Discard the skins and seeds. Use as is, or season the juice with a tiny pinch of sugar if needed. Refrigerate, covered, until ready to use, up to 1 day.
2. Make the fritters: In a wide medium stockpot, Dutch oven, or deep fryer, heat the oil until it registers 365°F on a deep fry thermometer.
3. Meanwhile, in a bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and kosher salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together the eggs, granulated sugar, orange zest, vanilla seeds, and ricotta. Whisk the dry ingredients into the wet just until incorporated. (The batter can be stored, covered, in the refrigerator for several hours or up to 1 day.)
4. Working in batches of about 8, gently drop 1-tablespoon balls of the batter into the hot oil, and fry, turning them occasionally, until golden all over, about 3 minutes per batch. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the fritters to paper towels to drain. (Allow the oil to come back to temperature between batches.)
5. Sprinkle the fritters with confectioners' sugar, or coat them with granulated sugar. Serve warm with the grape jam.

Recipe excerpted from *Sunday Suppers: Recipes and Gatherings* by Karen Mordechai (Clarkson Potter, 2014).



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—Dan and Stacey

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