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THE LOCAL WOODWORKING WIZARD OF OE CUSTOM

Part of the appeal of our neighborhood’s old homes is their unique character – so meticulously created by artisans with craftsmanship and skills hard to find today. We happen to have one of those talented woodworking geniuses right here in OCNA. Drive down the 100 block of Osborne and you’ll notice a home with unusual and beautiful shutters actually made from old horse fencing. That is where the talented Mr. Paul Timmins lives with his wife, Megan, and their two adorable daughters, Violet and Lucy (budding young businesswomen themselves). Visit OE Custom (OECustom.com) and you’ll feast your eyes on extraordinarily beautiful masterpieces of furniture for office or home, as well as countertops, accent walls, bars and mantels. What makes the creations so exceptional is the aging process of the carefully selected wood as well as the unique designs, many of which retain the live edge – a style which incorporates the natural edge of the wood into the design. Each piece is one of a kind, sourced locally and made by hand right in our area. You should visit this web site (designed by Paul) if only to enjoy true works of art!



quoting Paul saying, “Wood is my whole life.” A true love and understanding of wood exudes from him when discussing his work. The thread of that love and appreciation started as a 10-year-old developing carpentry skills while helping to make repairs in his parents’ rental homes. That same year he built his first deck with his father. Splitting wood for his parents’ Deep Creek home added to his understanding of different wood qualities and grains. As an Eagle Scout at 15, he was able to identify every tree in the forest!

The desire to refurbish, not just discard, started early for Timmins: picking up dilapidated fridges, dehumidifiers and whatnot, fixing them up and then reusing or selling them. Giving new purpose to and recycling the life of old beautiful trees is now the basis of his company. Using only felled trees, OE Custom has slabs up to 20 feet long that have been sliced, milled and then cured for up to several years at the 80-acre Monkton farm they rent, or at their 13,000-square-foot facility on Sulphur Spring Road. The latter location has two kilns for drying (one of which he built from an old shipping container) where they can

dry 20-foot pieces for up to 6 months. It’s this drying process, discovered from British internet sources while the family visited England, that really transformed his ability to achieve the look and quality of wood they sought.

On the site’s homepage you’ll find short videos showing work in progress as well as Paul explaining their process and a bit of history. There’s also a June 2019 Washington Post article

Paul and his business partner of at least 15 years, John Ferrara, started in this specialized work when clients from their home restoration business started asking for customized live edge furniture or installs. It has since taken off into the unique, specialized business that is still going strong today. Their creations are very high end. Not surprisingly, many customers are from the D.C.-Northern Virginia area as well as from as far away as Colorado, Vermont and the U.K. Noted amongst their clients have been The National Geographic Society and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (both in D.C.). Potential clients can visit the Sulphur Spring fabrication facility to look at hundreds of slabs of harvested lumber and to create a design with Paul. None of the wood is ever stained. The natural beauty is showcased only by wax or a special German urethane.

As the need to hire employees grew, the prime characteristic sought in candidates has not been tool-working skills, but a type of personality ready to explore and learn. Three of the eight employees are musicians, people who not only have the discipline and creativity so important to this craft, but also have an understanding of the quality of wood, especially as it affects the sound and construction of instruments. Both daughters are already developing a knowledge of wood types and a business sense. Lucy, 9, helps to make the labels and tag the wood while Violet, 10, helps with bookkeeping – valuable assistants for sure!

OE Custom has relationships with many local arborists and tree companies who can inform it of potentially good sources. In some Catonsville trees, saw blades have encountered pieces of metal, rebar or even once a conch shell! Trees in urban areas have to grow around wires, fences, concrete, buildings and often



just absorb odd things along the way. Only one or two out of ten felled trees hold potential, but it's exciting each time to see what lies within. There are many ways to slice a tree to discover the best grain and beauty. Most people like to just cut a cucumber the same old way, explains Timmins, yet there are so many alternative ways. Trees are the same. One might have a rotten center but knowing how to slice around that can reveal whole new possibilities.

Paul claims every piece they create has a story – it's a story of a story: where did this tree come from, to whom was it important, what happened to it? Each piece is labeled, tagged and recorded so that it can be traced back to “tell their story.”

The inspiring story here is that a local boy with “old world” skills and talent has followed his dream and not only developed a successful business but has also been filling the world with gorgeous works of art that will last for generations to come. ■

by Jane Bowie



EL GUAPO – HOT NEW LATIN AMERICAN RESTAURANT

Guapo means good looking, with a connotation of “hot,” but not in a spicy-food sense. Owned by the people who also own State Fare – across the street on Frederick Road – it opened in October. Its indoor seating is not recommended for the COVID-cautious, since tables are a bit close together. Therefore, my group of reviewers elected to do take-out.

We ordered hours ahead, for pickup at 6:00 p.m., which I do not recommend because the food was cool when we picked it up. Better to order just before pickup. The indoor tables were full on that Saturday evening. I would have loved to sample some of their drinks, including some nice beers on tap and a huge array of tequila drinks, but oh well.

We opened our packages on our patio, huddled around a propane heater. Drew (not of OCNA, so not to be trusted) found his fish tacos to be perfectly cooked and quite tasty. The same was said of Pam’s Chili Relleno, Michele’s Chipotle Chicken Sandwich, and my Mole Cochito Pork. The sides that we had tasted a bit special: Black Beans, Refried Beans, and Cauliflower Rice – a cut above the standard Mexican fare. I was underwhelmed by the mole sauce served with my mole; it seemed like slightly flavored mayonnaise. Maybe it was a take-out packaging error. Overall, we gave the food a thumbs-up, partly due to its not being your average Mexican fare, and because the flavors popped.

For comparison, I would also recommend trying El Patron, a Mexican/Salvadoran restaurant a mile East on Frederick Road, in Paradise. The menu has less variety than El Guapo, but the tastes



are good, the prices are lower, and it, like El Guapo, offers some choices that you will not find elsewhere in the region.

I should note that the main theme of El Guapo is Mexican, though they do branch out into other, more unusual Latin American dishes. There are take-out specials, some of which could feed a family. But if you try the family-sized meals you will sacrifice variety for quantity. The full menu is online, of course, on their web site: elguapomd.com.

We reviewed El Guapo just a couple of weeks after it opened; it may have evolved since then. You can see an amusing video review by Evan Brown on YouTube if you want a lot more info. ■

by Larry Wilt

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ADVENTURES IN AIR CONDITIONING

Now is the time to consider AC installation since companies are a little less stressed from emergency calls in the heat of summer. Plus, planning now allows more time for this very challenging decision. I first wrote about this in 2005, finally installing it in 2018!



So, here's my **DOS and DON'TS List for AC Installation:**

DO check with neighbors for their experiences – an *immense* help for us.

DO get proposals from several different companies (should be no charge). Our four proposals varied drastically. Some recommended building knee walls, expanding the dining room's fireplace wall for vents (dear Lord!), blowing insulation into the walls (a no-no for the historic tax credit and detrimental to old homes) and/or running more electrical lines to the house – totally unnecessary. Some insisted on only high velocity for the entire house or only traditional central AC with ductwork, using ductless units on the third floor, or using only heat pump/AC systems. The initial cost estimate was double what we wound up paying – so there's a definite benefit to exploring various companies.

DO consider insulating your attic if the air handlers are up there; it'll keep the units cooler.

DO keep the compressors as close as possible to the air handler. Anything over 60 feet lessens the efficiency.

DON'T get too large of a compressor. It runs for too short a period to successfully dehumidify.

DO check out Beaux-Arts Classic Products (Salisbury, MD) <https://www.beaux-artsclassicproducts.com>. They made two beautiful antique grills to cover the return vents in the living and dining rooms.

DO apply for the State and County tax credits. There are 20% tax reductions available from each. (See the Spring OCNA Newsletter article.)

FINAL DECISION:

We went with standard AC for the first floor with vents in the floor, high velocity for the second floor with tubes weaving through the walls from the attic and a heat pump/AC unit with vents coming directly from the attic for the third floor. All of the work was done so well and unobtrusively, we qualified for

both historic tax credits.

SURPRISES: Our first surprise was that we actually have an attic above the third floor! Who knew? Andy first cut a little hole and sent up a telescope hoping not to see any eyeballs looking back. Cutting a larger hole revealed a 5-foot-tall peak and ceiling boards stamped by the original Wilson Lumber Company from the late 1880s. After installing a pulldown ladder, Andy painstakingly put in an entire floor after leveling out completely uneven joists; this eased the installers' job for two air handlers. Another surprise was finding pocket doors in the living room and a doorway in the wall of the dining room that used to go into the parlor. We also found a beautiful little metal sewing tool with a heart shape on the end under the third level floorboards.

KUDOS!: We can't say enough good things about the math whiz, Glenn Robinson (now retired) and his team from Warthen Fuel Co., Inc. (Yes, they do air conditioning.) Glenn's design was ingenious and totally unobtrusive, falling completely in line with the stringent tax credit standards. I'd come home some days and hear voices in the house with no idea where anyone was. Following a trail of light, I'd find them buried back in places I never knew existed in our house. It was amazing to watch!

Needless to say, we have totally enjoyed the new AC and the flexibility the different zones allow. Our bills are much lower as is the noise level. Andy's back has improved with no bulky AC units to lift and install. Best of all, we no longer have to debate the topic of AC!

Now on to ripping out the kitchen floor!! ■

by Jane Bowie

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818 MARKET – MOSTLY OPEN



The long anticipated 818 Market opened November 16. Pam Wilt and I walked over on the 19th to see what was going on. Our summary: picture a mini-Whole Foods and add a bar/restaurant on the second floor.

They took our temperatures on the way in. I approve of that. The place is well-staffed – so much so that we had no trouble chatting up several of the workers. All were very friendly and helpful. They gave us a good picture of what still needed to be done over the next couple of weeks to get things fully running. Don't wait for that, though. You will enjoy going there right now.

Much was still getting organized. For example, on the first floor, we saw no prices on the baked goods. So far, there are few offerings in baked goods, meats and seafood, but what they have looks great. There are a lot of quality organic groceries, with very tempting, unusual selections. We emptied our wallets on a few purchases.

If you get a cup of brewed coffee at the little coffee shop, it will set you back \$4 and will not be worth the money. Whether a result of the brewing or the Orinoco brand, the coffee was very weak tasting. They also have fancier drinks like cappuccinos, which we didn't try.

The second floor gets really interesting, with a full bar and restaurant mostly ready to go. They don't have a menu yet and

seating was not fully set up. There are church pews scattered around, and a garage door at the back end for opening in good weather. The small outdoor area beyond the garage door will have seating any minute now; I will brave the cold to try a draft beer out there. In the front, there is a narrow closed-off space with café-like seating and lots of operable fenestration (meaning, they can open the windows) that could be used to increase ventilation to be more COVID-safe.

The 818 cheese department is near the stairs on the second floor. They have a good variety of interesting but costly cheeses. They need to have a more detailed sign for describing the cheeses that are not out on display, though the staff can easily talk you through their selections.

Also on the second floor is their small liquor store. Many of its selections are quite interesting and of medium-to-high quality. The manager is knowledgeable and very helpful. I shouldn't have gone in there, because I came out with something interesting that I didn't need.

In sum, if you want to have a gourmet-quality party, you can get everything you need for it at the 818 Market. Or, just get something to spoil yourself. You deserve it and it's been a rough year. ■

by Larry Wilt

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN OLD CATONSVILLE

Hello Neighbors,

Are you looking for ways to get more involved in your community? Well, look no further than your Old Catonsville Neighborhood Association. Whether you're new to the neighborhood or a seasoned resident looking to reconnect, we'd love for you to join us!! The purpose of OCNA is simple: to unite individuals in the community, to promote action on issues impacting the neighborhood, and to continue to make 21228 a great(-er) place to live.

Here are a few ways you can get started:

Attend our board meetings. In normal times, these are held in a board member's home but we will continue to host them virtually until it is safe to meet again in person. The next one will be scheduled for February.

Volunteer for an OCNA project. Two upcoming projects are the yard sale and clean-up day - both in April. We are looking for volunteers to post signs, rally participants, and help with day-of activities. Contact me if you're interested.

Talk to a board member or street representative. You can find our contact information at the back of this newsletter. And remember to sign up for the listserv - it's the easiest way to stay on top of neighborhood goings on.

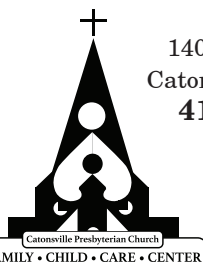
I look forward to seeing more of you all (I hope in person) in 2021!! ■

by John Marshall, OCNA President



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