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A handbook for happy, healthy living

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ANYWHERE
FOUR
SIMPLE
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Cantaloupe and
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THE STORYTELLERS

EVERYTHING MARGAUX AND WALTER KENT MAKE
IS STEEPED IN—AND BUILT FROM—HISTORY

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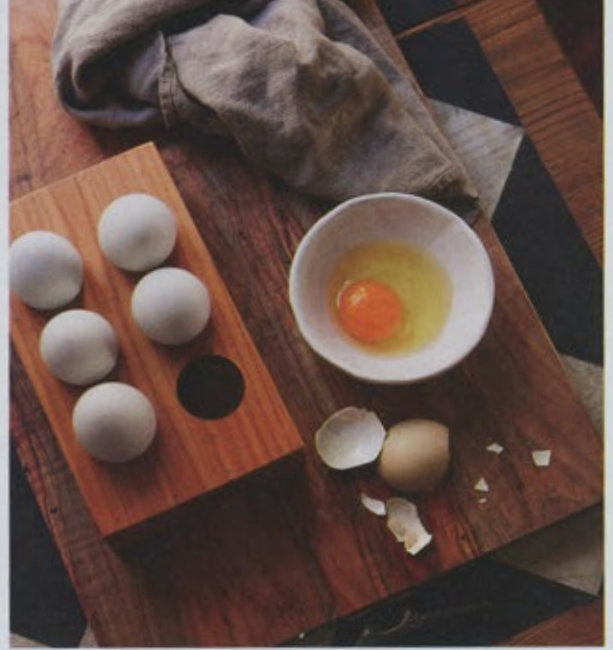


Peg & Awl's
waxed canvas
pouches.
Facing page:
Co-owner
Walter Kent
drills holes into
a desk caddy.

On the third floor of a warehouse in Philadelphia, tales are unfolding. A tree swing hangs from the ceiling. Thumbelina-sized books dangle from chains. Victorian-era boots, their leather earmarked for the covers of those tiny volumes, sit in milk crates, inspiring the kind of questions that get asked around here every day: "Who walked in these shoes? What was her life like?"

This is the studio of Peg & Awl, the housewares-and-accessories company of artist couple Walter and Margaux Kent. Just six years old but growing rapidly, Peg & Awl makes objects that resonate for a reason: the storytelling. Its founders are deeply romanced by history. Spend time with them or read their website and you learn the provenance of every material, every design. Margaux, her eyes the same intense shade of auburn as her hair,





EVERYTHING THE COUPLE MAKES EVOLVES OUT OF THEIR OWN NEEDS

might give you a lesson in 17th-century American botany. “These are weeds that people spray and want to remove from the world,” she’ll say, showing off bronze or silver rings, their faces engraved with depictions of red clover or dandelion. “But they’re all things the Colonists brought with them, intentionally or accidentally.”

Walter, stylish in newsboy cap, scruffy beard, and kerchief, will tell you about the massive beams that provide the heart-pine blocks he drills with wide holes to hold pencils and pens for desk caddies as long as 2 feet. They come from mid-1800s factories, built from trees that were a century old when harvested.

And the knife racks? The series of numbers laser-etched onto each is an idea cribbed from the mess hall at Alcatraz, where the Kents had gone for a tour. “If there was a knife missing,” explains Walter, “they could tell by looking at the board.”

Both Kents were children when they acquired this penchant for reanimating the past. Walter, who learned carpentry at his father’s side, got his love of history from his mother, who home-schooled her children, dreaming up projects like a costumed medieval feast. Margaux’s dad, an amateur photographer, started her on camera lessons at the kitchen table and encouraged her in every artistic endeavor, from jewelry making to bookbinding. He’s the one always pushing her to “tell the story” when marketing her work.

But Peg & Awl objects appeal, too, because they aren’t just throwbacks; they’re highly functional. Everything evolves out of the couple’s own needs. “It started because I wanted a tub caddy,” says Margaux, who asked Walter to make her one when they

met 10 years ago at a party in a local bar that he was renovating. “Most of my life I had used two splintery pieces of wood over the tub.” When Walter moved in with Margaux in the gentrifying area of Fishtown, the materials for a handsome tub-spanning shelf were at hand.

“It was made out of reclaimed wood,” she says, “because we had been gathering bits and pieces from the neighborhood when houses were being torn down.” Walter snapped photos of Margaux journaling in the bath, and they put a listing on Etsy. “It was this thing we knew that other people would also be excited by.”

They were right; the caddy took off. Then they needed a diaper bag that Walter wouldn’t feel silly carrying, so they contracted with New Jersey’s Martin Dyeing and Finishing Company, a seventh-generation family-owned company specializing in waxed canvas. The couple sourced World War II gunslings for the straps and designed a tote that was a hot item, too. So were the spice racks with vial-sized bottles, and the chalk tablets, a riff on the scrap wood Walter’s dad used to jot down shopping lists on job sites. Everything was made with salvaged and upcycled materials, and everything was selling—especially once they got orders from stores like Terrain and Anthropologie.

“My dad, my stepmom, and our son Søren, who was 4, were all tagging chalk tablets for the bigger orders,” says Margaux. “That’s when more hands started becoming necessary.”

It wasn’t long before the company had outgrown the backyard studio Walter had built. In 2012, the Kents moved their operation to a former coffin factory, where cut pieces are ferried from the second-floor woodshop up to the studio via a conveyor belt that once moved caskets. Here, where 14 Peg & Awl artisans work, much of the counter space and shelving is repurposed from a deconstructed building. “I was looking for a string holder from a general store to tie our packages. And I typed ‘general store’ into Etsy and found an entire store,” Margaux laughs. “The drawers are made of shipping boxes. You can see the labels from the crates of fruit.”

The Kents get giddy over stories like this, or the one in which Margaux travels to Ecuador to volunteer at a bear sanctuary, and there are no bears, but she goes horseback riding, finds a saddle rotting on a fence, and realizes that if she goes door to door she can buy all the saddles no longer in use. “People were thrilled,” she says. “I was thrilled.”

It’s the same sort of adventure at home. The row house that Margaux bought after poring through records at city hall was once a bootlegger’s den. There’s a hole in a step to snake a tube through, and she found an old barrel beneath the stair. Today, the house is filled with Margaux’s photographs and Walter’s paintings and woodwork: floor-to-ceiling library shelves with a pole for hanging a ladder; a country-kitchen cupboard with edges cut in the shape of old

Clockwise from top left: Peg & Awl’s Lewis and Clark Expedition stool; Aldermere tray; book necklace; Mess Hall knife rack, Apothecary cabinet, Bishop board, and Apothecary caddy; chalk tablets; and decoupage candle blocks.



mug shots; and wooden sandwich plates made because it's hard to keep ceramics intact with two young boys, Søren and Silas, in the house.

The plates were milled from trees felled by storms. It's a new source for Peg & Awl. As the price of reclaimed wood rises with demand and as artisans like the Kents use up supplies of old leather, says Margaux, "we're figuring out what it means to get beyond scavenged material."

They've turned to sustainably harvested wood for their tree swings, and they're hoping to develop a new source of leather by cultivating a relationship with a small farm where animals are treated well. "We started this because we had fun doing it, gathering stories, and the fun is changing, it's evolving," says Walter.

Then the stories they tell about the materials may change, too, says Margaux, "but we can still do something that has the same intentions as when we started without having to transform what we're making." ♣



Peg & Awl's waxed canvas tote. Facing page: The Kents at home with their sons, Søren (left) and Silas, on a tree swing the couple designed.

Outdoor



WELCOME, SUMMER!



Clockwise from top left: Reclaimed Wood Daydreamer Tree Swing Classic Seat \$200; Stainless Steel 2-Tier Mini Tiffin \$12; HERShovel™ Garden Shovel for Women \$69; Salad Serving Set \$70; Conservation Bat House \$75; Stainless Steel Ice-Pop Mold \$50