

## A how-to on renovating the cities' finest oldies

By Jeff Davidson  
 INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

With the green architecture movement taking the housing industry by storm, there's nothing more eco-friendly than buying and restoring an old house or even updating the one you have.

Ingrid Abramovitch's new book, *Restoring a House in the City: A Guide to Renovating Town Houses, Brownstones, and Row Houses* (Artisan Books, \$40), offers an outline for work at any stage of the renovating process. See **CITY HOMES** on E5



From "Restoring a House in the City" **A 1763 Society Hill home**, restored by Minima Gallery, is featured in a renovation guide.



SHARON GEKOSKI-KIMMEL / Staff Photographer

Mary Jane McCarty, in her Yardley home with dog Buddy, created a business making and selling pillows (\$200-\$500) of vintage fabric.

## Vintage-fabric lover builds pillow empire

By Kathleen Nicholson Webber  
 FOR THE INQUIRER

Mary Jane McCarty has seen her designs in print, but never on the big screen. So, when she was tipped off that they might be glimpsed in the recent documentary *The September Issue*, she had to see for herself.

In a scene in Anna Wintour's Long Island home, an array of her vintage-fabric pillows are on the Vogue editor's sofa getting their close-up. Wintour buys McCarty's wares at New York's Treillage for her home and for friends. She refers to



McCarty, whom she has never met, as "the pillow lady."

McCarty, who sells to Treillage, Bergdorf Goodman, and many renowned decorators, will host a biannual private sale of her pillows, throws, and Christmas stockings in Yardley for three days next week, beginning Thursday.

Her home-accessories collection is made from an impressive inventory of vintage fabrics — including Fortuny, Aubusson, early printed linens and cottons, mid-century-modern prints, as well as silks and tapes. See **FABRIC** on E6

## Art center visitors use texting for context

By Paul Jablow  
 FOR THE INQUIRER

Andrew Bickford's days as a Haverford College student and docent at the Philadelphia Museum of Art date back well before the advent of text messaging. You either took a standard tour — audio or guided — or just walked through on your own.

But on a recent afternoon, Bickford could be seen walking through the sculpture garden at the Abington Art Center, alternately looking up at the art. See **HUNT** on E5



LAURENCE KESTERSON / Staff  
 Her mobile phone close at hand, Jennifer Deck studies a work at Abington Art Center, Jenkintown.



## LifeStyle

These knives, forks, and spoons are for showing off, not eating. **E3**

## Auctions

Art — some by well-known names — is the attraction next weekend at Freeman's. **E6**

Inga Saffron's column, "Changing Skyline," does not appear today.

# Creating a pillow business from vintage cloth

**FABRIC** from E1

tries — that she has assembled from 20 years of carefully combing markets in the United States and Europe.

McCarty's business was an idea forged by a lifelong love of textiles and a desire for a more stable work life. The daughter and granddaughter of seamstresses, she loved to sew and collect fabric. "It is second nature to me to make things," she says.

She spent years, first in Toronto and then in New York, designing costumes for film, TV, and theater before reassessing her erratic work schedule when she became a mother.

In 1989, she combined her love of textiles and sewing in a creative business. She and her husband had moved out of the city to Bucks County, and she made a pillow out of "the most beautiful piece of cut velvet left in a neighbor's trash." Her antique-dealer friends loved it and encouraged her to put it into a local shop in Frenchtown, N.J. She did, and they soon asked for more.

"I had already had a little collection of textiles," she said, "so I hired some home sewers to help me and sold to decorators and shops in New Hope and Lambertville, N.J."

Over the years, McCarty has done work for such celebrated designers as Michael Smith and Kathryn Ireland in Los Angeles; Bunny Williams, John Roselli, and Caroline Wharton in New York; Fury Design of Philadelphia and Kathleen Jamieson of Haverford; and Princeton's Dennison & Dampier.

Eric Rymshaw of Fury Design did a whole house in Spring Mill with McCarty. "She can go from traditional to transitional in the way she mixes different patterns, and her use of color to me is very modern," Rymshaw said. "Clients love that she uses vintage fabrics in her designs; it adds a certain patina to a room."

Two years after her first pillow debuted locally, she approached Bergdorf Goodman in New York to carry a collection. When she received a rejection letter, she packed up her vintage suitcases with swatches and samples and talked her way into a meeting there. As fortune would have it, Corky Tyler, then director of the decorative-home department, walked by, saw the display, and did a double take.



SHARON GEKOSKI-KIMMEL / Staff Photographer



Mary Jane McCarty's Yardley home reflects her love of old textiles. Besides pillows, she makes unique Christmas stockings.

"She said, 'Whatever that is, we will start with a dozen,'" McCarty recalls. She has been with the store ever since.

The store and designer now collaborate. They tell her what their season theme may be — this fall it was medieval forest — and she comes up with a collection. She has two months after they pick swatches to create something unique for the store. Her medieval pieces featured olive green, bronze, and teal fabrics with antique ribbon or peacock-feather trim. For Christmas, there are pieces inspired by the work of interior designer Tony Duquette.

"They are always open to new ideas and product," she said. Right now, she is working on other product lines for the store: baby blankets, hats, and pillows using vintage cashmere sweaters, as well as photo albums with vintage children's fabric, and dog beds and pillows.

The home-and-garden store Treillage in New York, owned by interior designer Bunny Williams and antique dealer John Roselli, started

buying McCarty's collection in 1997 and sells more garden-themed pillows. "The trick for any of my clients is I need to always find something new and fresh."

McCarty makes her signature pleated edges on pillows that make them look like couture skirts, or uses backings she makes from hand-dyed linen damask or from vintage tablecloths. "If possible, I use any embroideries or monograms that are on the cloths. People often comment on my fabric, trim, and color combinations that they are unusual and quirky, but tasteful and not too fussy, allowing the beautiful textiles to be the main element." Closures are often made of vintage ribbons or covered buttons.

"Mary Jane is a fashion person making pillows," Rymshaw said. "I love her dressmaking details in her work — the layers of fabric, pleating, the ribbon bows. Mary Jane gives you a strong, visual theme and goes all the way with it."

The hunt for the right kind of fabric takes her to auction houses, es-

tate sales, flea markets, online, and ever so often to France. She has relationships with dealers around the world, like the owners of French-treasures.com, who call her when they have something she may be interested in. "It is harder and harder to find vintage fabric now because the demand is so high. All kinds of designers these days use it for inspiration."

Each piece she makes is one-of-a-kind and labor intensive. She carefully cuts fabric to exclude damaged spots, then decides on the composition, and assembles it — a process that can take five hours per item. And clients pay \$200 to \$500 for these unique pieces.

When she is not creating new styles for stores, she does so for interior designers, as well as restoring rare antique textiles. "Designers come to me with their swatches and palette," she says, "and we collaboratively create custom pillows."

McCarty literally lives with vintage fabrics, framing large, rare swatches to display on her walls, slipcovering sofas, upholstering chairs, making lampshades, fashioning lace-cutwork tablecloths as shower curtains or duvets. And of course, there are piles of luscious pillows everywhere that her dog, Buddy, tests out daily. "I love collecting, and I love renovating houses," she says. Both of the homes she has owned in Yardley have been featured in *Country Living* magazine.

She would like to add bedding to the line, add stores, and explore online selling. But her real dream is to design a line of textiles based on her archived patterns and make a product line out of the fabrics. "It wouldn't be a copy of vintage, but rather a modern twist on traditional motifs." Her home, filled with her accessories, is a testament to putting a new twist on something old. "Pillows can give an otherwise boring expanse of upholstery color, texture, and comfort. Just ask Buddy."

The Mary Jane McCarty private sale, featuring current fall and holiday overstocks and past-season merchandise, will be 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday through Dec. 5. Included will be covered books, stockings, pillows, and throws, ranging from \$40 to \$400. E-mail maryjmccarty@gmail.com for an invitation and directions.

## Antiques/Art/Crafts

**Annual Craft & Food Fair** Crafts, hot sandwiches, homemade soup & chili, homemade baked goods. Bethany Presbyterian Church, Glenview Ave., Haddon Heights; 856-546-8457. 11/28. 11 am-3 pm.

**FREE Annual Gingerbread House Competition and Display** More than 100 gingerbread creations are displayed throughout the holiday season in the Village Gazebo. Peddler's Village, Rtes. 202 & 263, Lahaska; 215-794-4000. **FREE** 11/27.

**Cape May Designer Show House** Tours of a newly remodeled historic home. Various show house tour/tea/lunch packages available. Closes 1/3. The Carpenter Cottage, 511 Franklin St., Cape May. \$15; \$10 children 3-12.

**Early Furniture by George Nakashima** Moderne Gallery, 111 N. Third St.; 215-923-8536. 11/27.

**Gimme Shelter** Displays of six functional woodland shelters designed to raise awareness about sustainable building/living. Closes May 2010. Schuylkill Center, 8480 Hagy's Mill Rd.

**Handcraft Unlimited Craft Show** Call 717-656-4849 or visit www.handcraft-unlimited.com. Allentown Fairgrounds, 302 N. 17th St., Allentown; 717-656-3208. www.handcraft-unlimited.com. \$4; free for children 12 and under. 11/27.

**Holiday Open House** New Jersey garden clubs will decorate rooms at Drumthwacket for the holiday season. Reservations required. Drumthwacket, 354 Stockton St., Princeton; RSVP required: 609-683-0057. Donation suggested: \$5. 12/2.

**Logan Model Engineers Open House** Model railroad displays. For more information visit www.loganmrr.com or call 610-483-6986. Logan Model Engineers, 2 W. Broad St., Souderton. www.loganmrr.com. Donations accepted. 11/28.

**Tibetan Festival & Bazaar** Holiday shopping, meditation instruction, storytelling, music, traditional Tibetan food, sand mandala demonstration. Ethical Society of Philadelphia, 1906 Rittenhouse Square; 215-701-7018. www.tibetanbuddhist.org. 11/27.

**Treasures From the Collection: Museum of American Glass** Celebrates 40 years of collecting & focuses on the most significant pieces in the collection. Closes 12/31. Wheaton Arts & Cultural Center, 1501 Glastown Rd., Millville; 856-825-6800. Included in admission.

**FREE Two Merrells: Art on Paper and Fabric** Watercolors & stitched & painted wall quilts by a mother-in-law/daughter-in-law team. Orchard Artworks, 520 Tomlinson Rd., Bryn Athyn. **FREE** 11/27.

**Winter Craft Market** More than 40 artisans. Whitmarsh Art Center, Cedar Grove Rd., Lafayette Hill; 610-825-0917. \$5 Fri.; free Sat. and Sun. 12/3-12/5.