

# COUNTY LINES

MAGAZINE

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### Historic Fairville Inn in Chadds Ford

This historic property features 10 tasteful guest rooms, eight of which have gas fireplaces. The Main House features the guest reception area, living room, after-hours sitting room, dining room, kitchen and the possibility for 5+ additional rooms. Contact us for full details about what else is possible with this gorgeous property.

Price Upon Request



### Superior Family Compound with Four Living Units

This fabulous c.1886 home features 3 BR, 2.1 BA, great Kitchen & a wonderful floor plan. Additionally, the property has three, one or two bedroom living units, making this an exciting opportunity for someone seeking a wonderful family compound! This 3+ acre property boasts superior amenities. Mechanical systems have been updated. Unionville Schools. Low taxes!

\$1,590,000



### Overlooks French Creek Golf Club's 14th Hole

Set in Olde Bulltown Village is this charming 3BR, 2.2 BA home which combines the old with the new featuring cathedral ceilings, stunning main level primary suite, antique hardware, finished lower level and beautiful quarter sawn oak floors! The kitchen has high-end appliances and handsome cabinetry. This wonderful property must be seen to be fully appreciated.

\$1,585,000



### Great Property in Kennett Square

This updated 3BR, 2BA home is a "Must See"! The open floor plan features a generous living area that flows into an eat-in kitchen, complete with granite counters, white cabinets, and stainless steel appliances. The main level includes 2 BRs with hardwood flooring, updated hall BA, and a laundry/mudroom. Upstairs, the primary BR has an ensuite BA and walk-in closet. The finished attic offers flexibility for an office or storage. Unionville Schools!

\$650,000



### Crebilly Farm

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### Unionville Schools

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### Chadds Ford

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### West Nantmeal Township

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### West Bradford Township

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WEST CHESTER | 4.6 ACRES

Chester County farmhouse in Unionville-Chadds Ford School District featuring a gated entrance, fountains, gourmet kitchen, lush gardens, and resort style pool. An additional building parcel bordering open space offers exceptional investment potential.



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## from the EDITOR

February can be bitter cold, but *County Lines* wants you to feel the warmth of home, hearth, community and country.

Start with part of the America 250 celebration. The project "Dare to Declare" invites people to gather and read the Declaration of Independence aloud. In "Delcare Where You Live: Bringing History Home," Kim Andrews finds these readings have become a regional phenomenon.

For more heritage, Allen Burke shares the winners of the 14th West Chester Preservation Awards in "Finding Preservation Excellence," highlighting architectural projects and other contributions, including a nod to *County Lines Magazine* (we were honored!).

And our Fine Home feature tells the story of preserving and reimagining the 1799 Dowlin House by John Milner Architects, linking our past with modern day living. Laurel Anderson takes you through the history and revival in "White Acres Farm."

There's more on homes in our "Dream Kitchens" photo layout with inspiration for your own renovation, plus our "Fine Homes & Design Resource Guide" is a good reference for plans for your entire house.

Our winter look at independent schools led Ed Malet to find "AI Is a Part of Local Schools," for better or worse. Read how five schools are handling new developments. For more on your child's education, consult our "Guide to Private & Independent Schools."

Need an easy winter getaway? Shannon Montgomery suggests a "Weekend in the Western Brandywine Valley," highlighting local inns, eateries, museums, theaters and shops. For relaxation, she explores the appeal of saunas — their history, health benefits and recent popularity — in "Turn Up the Heat."

Finally, February requires chocolate, not as novelty but as nourishment with intention, writes Brandywine Table's Liz Tarditi. Read "Chocolate to Warm the Winter" to find out how and why.

And as always, we have the Best Local Events and Family Fun features to keep February lively. Read what Marci Tomassone has collected.

Thank you for reading.

Jo Anne Durako  
Editor

## COMING IN March



WOMEN LEADERS ISSUE  
Profiles of Local Women Leaders  
Women's Health • Summer Camps  
Datebook Calendar • School Sports  
Books • Wine • Vacation Planning

## COUNTY LINES MAGAZINE

February 2026

Volume XLIX Number 6

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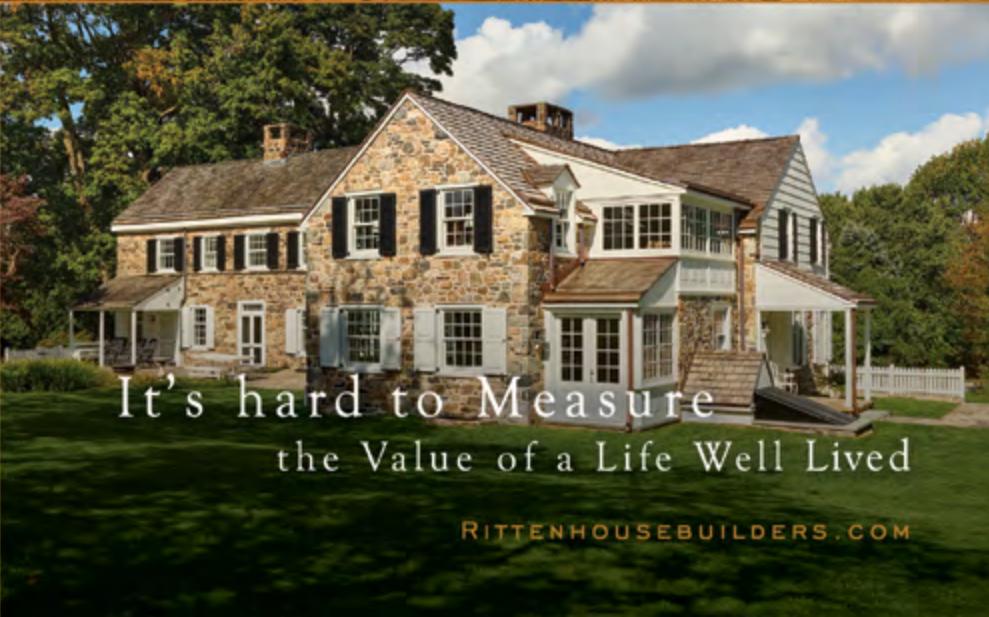
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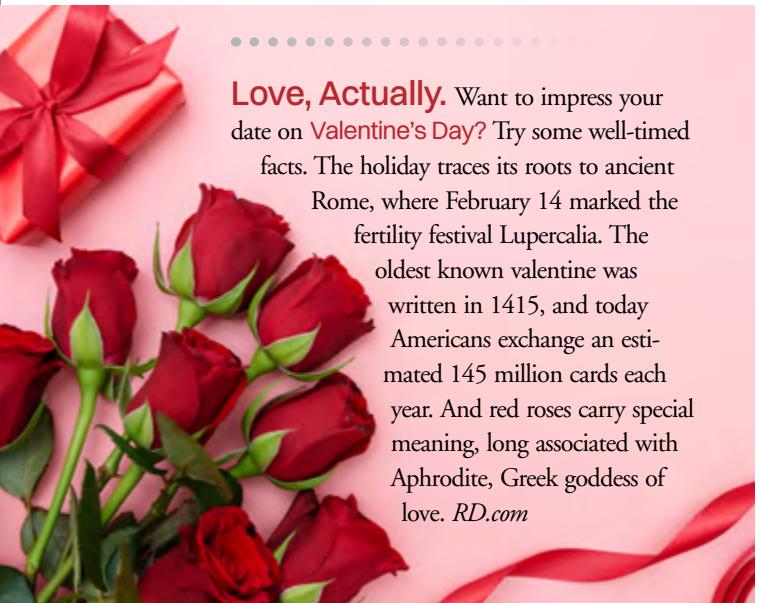
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the Value of a Life Well Lived

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## [Good to Know]

*Just a few things we'd thought you'd like to know this month*



**Love, Actually.** Want to impress your date on [Valentine's Day](#)? Try some well-timed facts. The holiday traces its roots to ancient Rome, where February 14 marked the fertility festival Lupercalia. The oldest known valentine was written in 1415, and today Americans exchange an estimated 145 million cards each year. And red roses carry special meaning, long associated with Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love. [RD.com](#)



**Facial Fermentation.** The kombucha trend is more than skin-deep — and is for more than just drinking. Phoenixville-based brewer Olga Sorzano, owner of Baba's Bucha, recently launched [A Culture Factory](#), a kombucha-infused skincare line. Products include face masks, cleansers and toners, face and eye serums, body scrubs and oils made with organic, food-grade ingredients like essential oils, grass-fed tallow and plant actives. Order online. [ACFSkincare.com](#)

**We the Bobbles.** To celebrate America's 250th birthday, the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame unveiled a special [Declaration of Independence](#) bobblehead set. Based on John Trumbull's famous painting, the set features Jefferson, Adams, Franklin and Hancock, with the rest of the signers depicted in a replica of the painting behind their bobbling heads. Sets are individually numbered through 1,776 and available for preorder. [BobbleheadHall.com](#)



**Funding Freedom.** Got big plans for America's 250th birthday bash? The Chester County Community Foundation wants to help. Local nonprofits and municipalities can apply for an [America250 Let Freedom Ring Mini-Grant](#). Grants are awarded monthly to support local programs, events and initiatives commemorating the semiquincentennial and our continuing journey toward liberty and justice for all. Applications are available online. [CCCF250.org](#)

**Golden Banishments.** For 50 years, Lake Superior State University has [reached out](#) with a [Banished Words List](#) of 10 *massively* overused words and phrases, hoping to *incentivize* people to cut them from their vocabulary, *full stop*. The top spot was taken by the ubiquitous *six-seven*, which is absolutely *cooked* in 2026. This year LSSU also *gifted* us a not-so-*demure* list of repeat offenders that have been banished multiple times. Did we miss any? If not, *perfect*. If so, well, *my bad*. [LSSU.edu/Traditions/BanishedWords](#)





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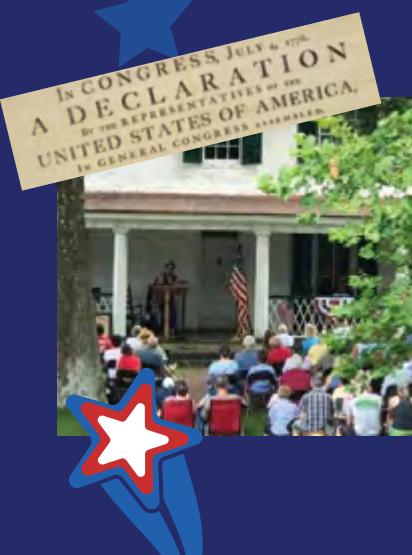
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# February Picks

by Marci Tomassone

Rachel Harris: "One Woman Over the Line" at Uptown!



February 6 & 8

Experience a multimedia dance performance by West Chester Dance Works, telling the true story of Rachel Harris, a runaway enslaved woman, and her journey to freedom in Chester County. Performances are followed by a Q&A session with members of the Kennett Underground Railroad Center and cast. *Uptown! Knauer Performing Arts Center, 226 N. High St., West Chester. Fri., 7:30 p.m.; Sun., 2:30 p.m. \$34-\$41. [UptownWestChester.org](http://UptownWestChester.org)*

WCU Live Presents  
The Sharpe Family Singers

February 13

Here's a live performance that's an unforgettable experience for the whole family, combining great melodies, choreography and storytelling from this popular singing family, with 75 million viewers of their videos on YouTube and TikTok.



*Emilie K. Asplundh Concert Hall, 700 S. High St., West Chester. 7 p.m. \$20-\$35. [WCUPA.edu/OCA/WCU-Live](http://WCUPA.edu/OCA/WCU-Live)*

Philly Home + Garden Show

February 20-22



Find inspiration, tips, innovative products and fantastic deals on remodeling, home improvement, decor and outdoor spaces from experts. *Greater Phila. Expo Center, 100 Station Ave., Oaks. Fri., 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Sat., 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Sun., 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. \$10-\$12. [PhillyHomeAndGarden.com](http://PhillyHomeAndGarden.com)*

West Chester Restaurant Week

February 22-March 1

Treat your taste buds to exclusive, prix fixe menus (\$40-\$60) at some of the borough's best restaurants. From signature dishes to creative new offerings, it's the perfect opportunity to try something new or revisit favorite spots, while supporting local restaurants. [DowntownWestChester.com](http://DowntownWestChester.com)



Kennett Winterfest

February 28



Enjoy an afternoon of good cheer with exceptional brews, hearty food and live music, while you support community programs in Kennett Square. Brewery list on the website. *600 S. Broad St., Kennett Square. DefCon (VIP Session), 11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., \$100. Reg. admission, 12:30 to 4 p.m., \$60. Designated driver, \$20. [KennettBrewfest.com](http://KennettBrewfest.com)*

The Philadelphia Flower Show

February 28-March 8

This year's theme is "Rooted: Origins of American Gardening." As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of American independence, the 2026 Flower Show offers a chance to reflect on the gardening legacies we've inherited and those we're growing for the future. *PA Convention Center, 1101 Arch St., Philadelphia. Feb. 28-Mar. 7, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Mar. 8, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. \$25-\$54. [PHSOnline.org](http://PHSOnline.org)*



# FAMILY FUN

## THROUGH FEBRUARY 1

**Flight on Ice.** This pop-up outdoor ice skating rink brings a season of family fun, offering a kids zone with moon bounces, heated tents, a large LED TV, fire pits and more. Enjoy local entertainers and DJs plus food and beverages. A portion of proceeds are donated to the Delaware County Veterans Memorial Association. *4901 West Chester Pk., Newtown Square. Thurs, 4 to 8; Fri, 4 to 9; Sat, noon to 9; Sun, noon to 6. FlightOnIce.com*



## FEBRUARY 8

**Family 2nd Sunday at Delaware Art Museum.** Join this hands-on art experience where kids and their grown-ups can unleash their creativity in a space filled with colorful, quirky materials. There are no rules—just pure imaginative play. All ages. *Delaware Art Museum, 2301 Kentnere Pkwy., Wilmington. 10 to 4. \$6-\$18, under 6, free. DelArt.org*

## FEBRUARY 13-22

**Fire & Ice Festival in Lititz.** This 10-day celebration features wow-worthy ice sculptures, food from downtown restaurants and food trucks. Special events include kids activities in Winter FUNderland, Art in the Park, a chili cook-off, the Makers Market and entertainment. Check website for times and details. *LititzPA.com/Fire-And-Ice-Festival*

## FEBRUARY 15

**"Curious George: The Golden Meatball" at The Grand.** A new musical and loveable adventure designed for young audiences, sure to leave them singing and swinging down the



*aisles. 818 N. Market St., Wilmington. 2 pm. \$45-\$54. TheGrandWilmington.org*

## FEBRUARY 19 & 21

**At the American Music Theatre.** *Feb. 19*, "Gabby's Dollhouse Live," a new stage show inspired by the preschool sensation from DreamWorks Animation, 6 pm, \$39-\$69. *Feb. 21*, Popovich Comedy Pet Theater, 3 pm, \$25-\$55. *2425 Lincoln Hwy. E., Lancaster. AMTShows.com*



## FEBRUARY 22

**Immaculata Symphony Youth Concert "Symphonic Colors."** Immaculata Symphony partners with the Chester County Youth Orchestra to perform classic works based on color. After the performance, children are invited to meet the musicians and to see and hear the instruments up close. *Immaculata Univ., Alumnae Hall, 1145 W. King Rd., Immaculata. 3 pm. \$10. ImmaculataSymphony.org*

## FEBRUARY 27, MARCH 27

**Family Movie Nights at The Creamery in Kennett Square.** Enjoy a cozy evening held on the heated outdoor patio. These events encourage guests to bring blankets or sleeping bags, with movie snacks available for purchase. *401 Birch St., Kennett Square. 6 pm. Free. KennettCreamery.com*

## ART SHOWS.....

### THROUGH MARCH 9

**Montgomery County Guild of Professional Artists' "30x30" Exhibit.** Celebrating 30 years, the show commemorates this milestone with a showcase of diverse styles, mediums and artistic voices. Penn State Great Valley Conference Center, Henry Gallery, 30 E. Swedesford Rd., Malvern. Mon-Fri, 9 to 5. *GreatValley. PSU.edu/Gallery*

## AUTO SHOWS.....

### THROUGH FEBRUARY 8

**Philly Auto Show.** Hundreds of the latest vehicles to hit the market will be on site as well as dozens of classics, exotic rides and more. *Jan. 30*, Black Tie Tailgate, Fueling Hope, benefits Children's Hospital, 7 pm. PA Convention Center, 12th & Arch Sts., Philadelphia. Sat, 10 to 9; Sun, 10 to 8; Mon-Thurs, noon to 8; Fri, noon to 9. \$15-\$20. *PhillyAutoShow.com*



## BOAT SHOWS .....

### FEBRUARY 25-MARCH 1

**The Atlantic City Boat Show.** Celebrate life on the water. Climb aboard hundreds of boats for every budget and lifestyle. Atlantic City Convention Center, 1 Convention Blvd., Atlantic City, NJ. Wed-Fri, noon to 8; Sat, 10 to 8; Sun, 10 to 6. \$20; under 12, free. *ACBoatShow.com*

## BOOKS.....

### FEBRUARY 4-18

**Wellington Square Bookshop. Classics Book Club:** *Feb. 4*, "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald. **NonFiction Book Group:** *Feb. 5*, "You Don't Belong Here: How Three Women Rewrote the Story of War" by Elizabeth Becker. **Fiction Book Group:** *Feb. 18*, "The Wildes" by Louis Bayard. *549 Wellington Sq., Exton. WellingtonSquareBooks.com*

### FEBRUARY 4-21

**Main Point Books. Special Guest:** *Feb. 4*, Radha Lin Chaddah presents her debut novel "And the Ancestors Sing." **Fiction Book Group:** *Feb. 17*, "The Go-Between" by L.P. Hartley. **NonFiction Book Group:** *Feb. 19*, "History Matters" by David McCullough. *Girls*

## in Capes Book Club:

*Feb. 21*, "The Crane Husband" by Kelly Barnhill. *116 N. Wayne Ave., Wayne. MainPointBooks.com*

## DANCE.....

### FEBRUARY 21 & 22

**First State Ballet Theatre Presents "Dreams in Motion."** A contemporary double bill that revives two works from FSBT's repertoire by acclaimed choreographer and frequent FSBT collaborator Viktor Plotnikov. The Grand, 818 N. Market St., Wilmington, Sat, 7 pm; Sun, 2. \$57-\$77. *TheGrandWilmington.org*



## FOOD & BREWS .....

### FEBRUARY 7 & 8, 14 & 15

**Berks County Wine Trail Chocolate & Wine Pairing Weekends.** Enjoy four weekend days of pairing fabulous wines of the region with chocolates and other sweet confections. *BerksCountyWineTrail.com*

### FEBRUARY 7-MARCH 1

**Wine & Chocolate Pairings at Penns Woods Winery.** Pairings include a tasting of four wines perfectly paired with four gourmet, handcrafted chocolates. Reservations required. *124 Beaver Valley Rd., Chadds Ford. Check website for hours. \$38. PennsWoodsWinery.com*

### FEBRUARY 21-MARCH 1

**Restaurant Week in Annapolis, MD.** Take a daytrip to Annapolis, where participating restaurants will offer prix fixe menus for you to enjoy for breakfast, lunch and dinner. *DowntownAnnapolisPartnership.org*

## MARCH 3

**Chester County Community Foundation's Sweet Charity Event.** Join the fun for a sweet taste of history with a theme of Red, White, Blue: America's 250th Birthday! This dessert competition between the finest caterers, restaurants and bakeries supports CCCF's mission.



sion to connect people who care with causes that matter. Downingtown Country Club, 85 Country Club Dr., Downingtown. 4 to 7:30. Tickets \$125 and up. *ChesCoCF.org*

## MARCH 3-14

**King of Prussia Restaurant Week.** Dine out for a good cause. Find your next favorite restaurant and enjoy prix fixe lunch menus for \$15, \$20 or \$25 and dinner menus for \$30, \$40 or \$50. Benefits CHOP's King of Prussia campus. *KOPRestaurantWeek.com*

## MARCH 5

**Field to Feast Demonstration Dinner.**

Demonstration dinner with Chef Donna Lavner featuring three courses of locally sourced menu items, inspiring late winter dinner ideas to cook for family and friends. Rushton Conservation Center, 915 Delchester Rd., Newtown Square. *WCTrust.org*



# ARCHER & BUCHANAN ARCHITECTURE



MARCH 5

**ACTNow Annual Chef's Best Food Truck Event.** Vote for your favorite offerings from competing food trucks. Benefits ACTnow, formerly ACT in Faith of Greater West Chester. Chester County History Center, 225 N. High St., West Chester. Details at [AssistingNow.org](http://AssistingNow.org)

MARCH 7

**Live! Music Brunch at Delaware Art Museum.** Good vibes meet great music. Enjoy a delicious brunch and the chance to connect with musical artists. 2301 Kentmere Pkwy., Wilmington. 11 to 1. \$6-\$18. [DelArt.org](http://DelArt.org)

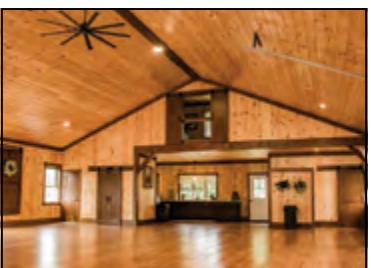


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**FUNDRAISERS.....**

FEBRUARY 5

**Peoples Light Presents "Lights Up: A Company Cabaret."** Musical theater songs soar for this cabaret at The Farmhouse, transformed into a swanky nightclub. Enjoy food stations, a cocktail bar and company artists performing from the legendary American musical theater songbook. 39 Conestoga Rd., Malvern. Times and tickets, [PeoplesLight.org](http://PeoplesLight.org)

MARCH 6-8

**Unite for HER—Annual Pink Invitational.** Over 4,000 athletes compete to raise funds to

## Local Farm Markets



**Artisan Exchange**, 208 Carter Dr. West Chester. Sat, 10 to 1. [ArtisanExchange.net](http://ArtisanExchange.net)

**Berwyn Farmers Market**, 511 Old Lancaster Rd. Jan-Apr, 2nd and 4th Sun, 9 to noon. [BerwynFarmersMarket.com](http://BerwynFarmersMarket.com)

**Bryn Mawr Farmers Market**, Lancaster Ave. Bryn Mawr train station lot. Jan-Mar, 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sat, 10 to noon. [LMFarmersMarkets.org/BrynMawr](http://LMFarmersMarkets.org/BrynMawr)

**Downington Farmers Market**, Kerr Park, Log House Field, 28 E. Pennsylvania Ave. Jan-Apr, 2nd, 4th Sat, 10 to noon. [GrowingRootsPartners.com](http://GrowingRootsPartners.com)

**Eagleview Farmers Mkt.**, Eagleview Town Ctr., 570 Wellington Sq., Exton. Jan, 2nd, 4th Thurs, Feb-Apr, 1st, 3rd Thurs, 3 to 5pm. [GrowingRootsPartners.com](http://GrowingRootsPartners.com)

**Farmer Jawn Farm Store**, 1225 E. Street Rd., West Chester. Tues & Wed, 10 to 6; Thurs-Fri, 10 to 7; Sat-Sun, 9 to 5. [FarmerJawn.co](http://FarmerJawn.co)

**Kennett Square Farmers Mkt.**, 600 S. Broad St. Fri, 3 to 5:30. [KSQFarmersMarket.com](http://KSQFarmersMarket.com)

**Lancaster County Farmers Mkt.**, 389 W. Lancaster Ave., Wayne. Wed, Fri & Sat, 6 to 4. [LancasterCountyFarmersMarket.com](http://LancasterCountyFarmersMarket.com)

**Malvern Farmers Market**, Burke Park, 26 S. Warren Ave. Jan-Apr, 1st, 3rd Sat, 10 to noon. [GrowingRootsPartners.com](http://GrowingRootsPartners.com)

**Media Farmers Market**, Edgemont St. between Front & State Sts. Dec-Apr, 1st and 3rd Sun of the month, 10 to noon. [MediaFarmersMarket.com](http://MediaFarmersMarket.com)

**Oxford Village Market**, 193 Limestone Rd. Thurs, 8 to 6; Fri, 8 to 7; Sat, 8 to 5. [OxfordFarmMarketPA.com](http://OxfordFarmMarketPA.com)

**Phoenixville Farmers Market**, 200 Mill St. Jan-Apr, Sat, 10 to noon. [PhoenixvilleFarmersMarket.org](http://PhoenixvilleFarmersMarket.org)

**Thornbury Farmers Mkt. & CSA**, 1256 Thornbury Rd., West Chester. Thurs-Fri, noon to 6; Sat, 9 to 6; Sun, 11 to 5. [ThornburyFarmCSA.com](http://ThornburyFarmCSA.com)

**West Chester Growers Mkt.**, Chestnut & Church Sts. Jan-Apr, 1st, 3rd & 5th Sat, 10 to noon. [WestChesterGrowersMarket.com](http://WestChesterGrowersMarket.com)

**Westtown Amish Market**, 1165 Wilmington Pk., West Chester. Thur, 9 to 6; Fri, 9 to 7; Sat, 8 to 4. [WestChesterAmishMarket.com](http://WestChesterAmishMarket.com)

For more visit the Chester County Farm Guide online, [ChesCoPlanning.org/Agriculture/FarmGuide.cfm](http://ChesCoPlanning.org/Agriculture/FarmGuide.cfm)

support local breast cancer and ovarian cancer patients. Enjoy a vendor fair and gymnastics at all levels. Pennsylvania Convention Center, 1101 Arch St., Phila. Daily 8 am to 10 pm. \$15-\$25. [UniteForHER.org](http://UniteForHER.org)

**MUSEUMS.....**

THROUGH MARCH 1

**Delaware Art Museum.** *Through Feb. 15*, "In Focus: Photographing Plants," featuring plant pictures from the 20th and 21st centuries. *Through Mar 1*, "Imprinted: Illustrating Race," examines imagery over the course of more than three centuries, which has reflected and shaped perceptions of race across time. 2301 Kentmere Pkwy., Wilmington. Wed-Sun, 10 to 4. \$14-\$25. [DelArt.org](http://DelArt.org)



THROUGH MAY 31

**Brandywine Museum of Art.** *Through Mar. 1*, "Jerrell Gibbs: No Solace in the Shade." *Through May 31*, worldwide museum debut of a rediscovered masterpiece by Jasper Francis Cropsey not seen in the U.S. since it was painted over 150 years ago. 1 Hoffman's Mill Rd., Chadds Ford. Wed-Mon, 9:30 to 4:30. \$8-\$20. [Brandywine.org](http://Brandywine.org)

**MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT .....**

FEBRUARY 1-MARCH 1

**The Keswick Theatre.** *Feb. 1*, The Uncle Louie Variety Show; *Feb. 5*, The Man in Black: A Tribute to Johnny Cash; *Feb. 13*, "Tonight's the Night" celebrating the music of Rod Stewart; *Feb. 14*, Justin Willman; *Feb. 18*, "Grown-Up Girls," Ukraine's most popular women's YouTube show; *Feb. 19*, Larry Fleet; *Feb. 20*, All You Need is George, a celebration of George Harrison; *Feb. 21*, Emily Grove's



FEBRUARY 6-15

**Uptown! Knauer Performing Arts Center.** *Feb. 6 & 8*, Rachel Harris—One Woman Over the Line; *Feb. 7*, Nellie McKay; *Feb. 13*, Acad-

## America250 Events



*Feb. 6 & 8*, Rachel Harris One Woman Over the Line at Uptown! See February Picks in this issue.

*Feb. 10*, The Chester County Community Foundation announces the release of *Dare to Declare*, a powerful short film commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Kennett Library, 320 E. State St., Kennett Square. 6 p.m. Free. [CCCF250.org](http://CCCF250.org)

*Feb. 14*, Flag Raising Ceremony by Scouting America in partnership with National Flag Foundation & Sheriff's Association of Chester County. Location, time TBD. [CCCF250.org](http://CCCF250.org)

### Regional Meetings

Monthly Zooms provide an open forum for the community to share ideas & plans for America250 celebrations & commemorations. Visit [CCCF250.org/Planning](http://CCCF250.org/Planning) for details.

- *Greater Phoenixville*: 4th Tues. monthly at 3.
- *Greater West Chester*: 4th Mon. monthly at 2.
- *Southern Ches Co*: 4th Wed. monthly at 2.
- *Main Line*: 2nd Mon. monthly at noon.
- *Coatesville*: TBD.

emy of Vocal Arts—Sentimental Journey; *Feb. 15*, America's Sweethearts. 226 N. High St., West Chester. Times and tickets, 610-356-2787; [UptownWestChester.org](http://UptownWestChester.org).

FEBRUARY 6-MARCH 6

**American Music Theatre.** *Feb. 5*, Brett Young 2.0 Tour with special guest Jenna Davis; *Feb. 6*, TUSK: The Classic Tribute to Fleetwood Mac; *Feb. 7*, Little River Band with Seals & Crofts 2; *Feb. 13*, Josh Turner: This Country Music Thing Tour; *Feb. 15*, '50s Dance Party: The Music of Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, and Ritchie Valens; *Feb. 28*, Gregorian: Pure Chants World Tour; *Mar. 4*, 7th Annual CPMAs & Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony; *Mar. 5*, The Phil Collins Story; *Mar. 6*, Vienna Boys Choir. 2425 Lincoln Hwy. E., Lancaster. Times and tickets, [AMTShows.com](http://AMTShows.com).



**The Grand in Wilmington.** *Feb. 6*, "An Evening with Josh Ritter" at The Baby Grand; *Feb. 6*, Adam Pascal and Anthony Rapp, original stars of "Rent" at The Playhouse; *Feb. 6*, Billy F Gibbons at Copeland Hall; *Feb. 20*, Kansas; *Feb. 21*, The Rock Orchestra performs Lynyrd Skynyrd; *Feb. 27*, Keb' Mo';

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**Mar. 6**, The Simon & Garfunkel Story. 818 N. Market St., Wilmington. Times and tickets, TheGrandWilmington.org.

**FEBRUARY 15 & MARCH 1**  
**Delaware County Symphony. Chamber Series Concert: Feb. 15**, Black History Month Event. **Symphony Series Concert: Mar. 1**, "Fanfare for the New World" featuring the music of William Grant Still, Edward MacDowell, William Schuman and Duke Ellington. Neumann University, Meagher Theatre, 2 Neumann Dr., Aston. Times and tickets, DCSMusic.org.

very end. 12 N. Prince St., Lancaster. Times and tickets, 717-397-7425; TheFulton.org.



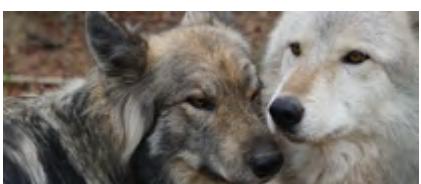
**FEBRUARY 18-MARCH 8**  
**"Glory Ride" a New Musical at Delaware Theatre Company.** Based on the true story of legendary Tour de France champion Gino Bartali. 200 Water St., Wilmington. Times and tickets, DelawareTheatre.org.

**FEBRUARY 27-MARCH 22**  
**"The Shark is Broken" at Fulton Theatre.** This comedy dives deep into the tumultuous, murky waters of the making of a major motion picture with testy, feuding costars, unpredictable weather and a shark prop.



### OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES.....

**MARCH 7**  
**Wolf Sanctuary of PA Full Moon Fundraiser.** Bring a blanket, flashlight, chair and a sense of adventure. The event features a bonfire (weather permitting), entertainment and wolf tours that are self-guided with volunteers. 465 Speedwell Forge Rd., Lititz. 6:30 to 9 pm. \$35, must be 16 years old. WolfSanctuaryPA.org



### THEATER.....

**FEBRUARY 12**  
**"Girls Night The Musical" at The Keswick Theatre.** A celebration of friendship that follows five women on a wild night out as they relive memories, share secrets and dance. 291 N. Keswick Ave., Glenside. Times and tickets, KeswickTheatre.com.

**FEBRUARY 13-MARCH 8**  
**"And Then There Were None" at Fulton Theatre.** One of Agatha Christie's most foreboding tales, this classic play's growing sense of unfaltering tension will keep you guessing to the

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with constant breakdowns. 12 N. Prince St., Lancaster. Times and tickets, 717-397-7425; TheFulton.org.

MARCH 7

"*Dirty Dancing in Concert*" at The Grand. A live-to-film concert featuring the original film in full, accompanied by a live band and singers performing songs from the soundtrack. 818 N. Market St., Wilmington. Times and tickets, TheGrandWilmington.org.



**TOWNS, TALKS & TOURS.....**

FEBRUARY 10

**True Crime on Trial.** You be the judge! Join historians from the Chester County History Center for this interactive presentation of one of Chester County's most controversial murder trials of the early 20th century. Interact using your smartphone throughout the evening, ultimately delivering the verdict at the end. Victory Brewing, 420 Acorn Ln., Downingtown. 6 to 9 pm. \$20. MYCCHC.org ♦



Stay in the know with everything going on in *County Lines* country. Sign up for our Events Newsletter (sent twice monthly) at [Newsletter@ValleyDel.com](mailto:Newsletter@ValleyDel.com).

Send a description of your activity to [Info@ValleyDel.com](mailto:Info@ValleyDel.com) by the first of the month preceding publication.  
For more events visit: [CountyLinesMagazine.com](http://CountyLinesMagazine.com)

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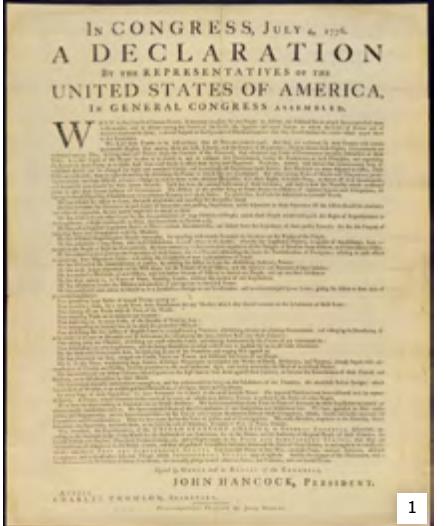
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# Declare Where You Live: Bringing History Home

## DARE TO DECLARE SPREADS ACROSS CHESTER COUNTY

Kim Andrews



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1. Declaration of Independence, printed by John Dunlap in Philadelphia
2. General Duportail created the Army Corps of Engineers at Chesterbrook during his stay in 1777
3. "Martin's Tavern Ruins" by Jim Lawson  
PHOTO CREDIT: FRIENDS OF MARTIN'S TAVERN
4. Continental soldier reenactors at Thornbury Farm event  
PHOTO CREDIT: THORNBURY FARM CSA

# Declare Where You Live: Bringing History Home

## DARE TO DECLARE SPREADS ACROSS CHESTER COUNTY

Kim Andrews

**N**OLD HOUSES, CREAKS AND wind can echo in the hall, but in some Chester County homes that predate the Revolutionary War, those quiet rooms once overflowed with talk of liberty, war and freedom. If walls could talk, many would speak the language of revolution. Beneath their plaster and fieldstone lie stories of ordinary people who made extraordinary choices, risking fortune, freedom and family for a new nation.

Two and a half centuries later, those same porches, parlors and tavern greens are again resonating with patriotic voices. Across Chester County, residents are preparing for America 250, the national commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

And in this landmark year, a new civic ritual in Chester County is helping communities reconnect to the founding document that began it all.

### A LIVING DECLARATION

The initiative, called "Dare to Declare," was conceived by Rose Fennell, Superintendent of Valley Forge National Historical Park. Her simple idea — to invite people to gather where they live, work and play and read the Declaration aloud — has grown into a regional phenomenon. At Valley Forge, regular public readings now draw families, students and veterans to speak those timeless words in the same landscape where the Continental Army endured for freedom's sake.

From that inspiration, "Dare to Declare" is spreading across Chester County. In 2026, neighbors will be meeting on front lawns, in parks and at historic sites to recite the text that proclaimed America's independence. Each reading begins as it did in

1776, with determined voices, and reminds participants that democracy is sustained by citizens who still dare to speak up.

### REVOLUTIONARY ROOTS IN HISTORIC HOMES

Chester County's beauty has always been more than aesthetic. Its stone houses, barns and taverns once anchored Revolutionary life. For example, in Marshallton, the Friends of Martin's Tavern preserve a gathering place where patriots shared news. Thornbury Farm, now a peaceful community farm, witnessed Hessian troops marching toward the Battle of Brandywine. And in Chesterbrook, the stately Duportail House served as headquarters for French General Louis Duportail, the father of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, whose designs helped fortify Washington's defenses at Valley Forge.

For Richard Downes, Board Chair of Duportail House, which is hosting a 2026 Declaration reading, preserving that legacy feels vital as America 250 nears. "When you stand here, you can almost picture it," he said. "This was farmland during the war, ransacked by the British, rebuilt by neighbors and transformed into a place where democracy began to take shape." ♦

These properties, once family dwellings and farmsteads, became crucibles of independence, a manifestation of colonists' determination to attain the unalienable rights of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Throughout 2026 and 2027, Chester County's homes and heritage centers will open their doors for community readings, exhibitions and celebrations that merge architecture, storytelling and civic pride. These shared readings exemplify the

America 250 spirit, linking history and hope and reminding participants that the Declaration was never meant to be silent parchment under glass. It was intended to be heard.

### WHERE BEAUTY MEETS MEANING

For many, "Dare to Declare" can renew appreciation for the region's architectural legacy. The balanced lines of Georgian façades and the endurance of fieldstone farmhouses mirror the founders' pursuit of stability and justice. Preservation, like patriotism, requires care and commitment, an act of faith that what was built with purpose should endure with meaning.

When voices rise inside a centuries-old parlor or across a sun-washed lawn, the words "We hold these truths to be self-evident" feel startlingly present. Each syllable bridges 1776 and 2026, turning Chester County's dream homes into living classrooms of freedom.

As America marks 250 years of independence, Chester County's historic houses, barns and parks remind us that liberty is not confined to monuments. It lives where people gather, remember and recommit to the ideals of equality and self-government.

Whether spoken beneath the sycamores of Valley Forge, on the green at Marshallton, or from a porch in West Chester, every reading is a renewal. "Dare to Declare" invites all to celebrate not only where freedom was won, but where it continues to be lived, right here, at home. ♦

*Kim Andrews is an America 250 Outreach Officer of the Chester County Community Foundation and a non-profit consultant. She drafted this article to raise awareness of Chester County's role in our nation's fight for freedom and build engagement for 2026, the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. More information about America 250 in Chester County at A250Friends.org.*



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### Revolutionary Foundations: Where History Speaks in 2026

Across Chester County, the places that once witnessed the birth of American independence will again echo with its words in 2026:

- At Valley Forge National Historical Park, visitors will join public readings of the Declaration of Independence led by rangers and reenactors.
- In Marshallton, the Friends of Martin's Tavern will pair their annual ice cream social with a community reading.
- At Thornbury Farm, families will gather on fields once crossed by soldiers.
- And at Duportail House in Chesterbrook, voices will rise where French General Louis Duportail once planned the nation's defense.

History, spoken aloud once more across the county, reminds us why they fought.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRIENDS OF MARTIN'S TAVERN

# TURN UP the Heat

FROM ANCIENT  
RITUAL TO MODERN  
LUXURY, SAUNAS ARE  
HOTTER THAN EVER

Shannon Montgomery

**S**AUNAS ARE HAVING A moment. From *Vogue* to the *New York Times* to CNN, major media outlets proclaim that saunas are the hottest — literally — wellness trend right now, embraced by elite athletes, business moguls and A-list celebs like Kim Kardashian and Gwyneth Paltrow. They're also becoming a status symbol among affluent homeowners, a signifier of luxury, longevity and intentional living.

Beyond the buzz and bragging rights, the sauna's appeal is rooted in something far more enduring: thousands of years of history, science-backed health benefits, and a modern desire to slow down in an always-on world. Read on to see why saunas have stood the test of time, and why they're hotter than ever.

## A HISTORY OF HEAT

As it turns out, our fascination with getting sweaty dates back around 10,000 years.

To survive harsh winters, ancient Finns dug pits in the ground with a pile of stones at the bottom. They heated the stones over woodfire for 6 to 8 hours, then threw water over the stones to create steam. Beyond just keeping warm, these early saunas were vital spaces for bathing, cooking and laundry, and played a central role in folk healing. Considered deeply spiritual, saunas were used for giving birth, caring for the sick, even preparing the dead for burial.

Across cultures, heat bathing took different forms but shared the same restorative spirit. In the U.K. and Ireland, archeologists have unearthed Bronze Age sweat houses, likely used for medicinal treatments. Ancient Romans built elaborate bathhouses featuring hot rooms, steam and social gathering spaces. Native American sweat lodges were sites of sacred ceremonies, while in Japan, natural hot springs evolved into the enduring onsen tradition — steamy public baths popular with locals and tourists alike.

The first saunas in the United States appeared closer to home than you might expect. Swedish settlers introduced the practice to the Delaware Valley in the 17th century, where the governor of New Sweden built a bathhouse on Delaware County's Tinicum Island.

With the advent of modern plumbing and central heating, saunas shifted from necessity to luxury. Yet in Finland, they remain a way of life, with an estimated 3.3 million saunas serving a population of 5.5 million. Here in the U.S., saunas have been embraced by athletes, wellness devotees and anyone looking to unwind. And the trend is only heating up, with the American sauna market — valued at \$250 million in 2024 — expected to grow by \$151 million between 2025 and 2029.

## THE SCIENCE OF SWEAT

Beyond its long history, the sauna has endured into the modern day for one sim-

ple reason: it makes us feel good. When you step into a sauna's warm embrace, your heart rate gradually rises, mimicking the effects of moderate exercise. As blood vessels expand, circulation improves, delivering oxygen and nutrients more efficiently throughout the body. This gentle cardiovascular workout can help lower blood pressure over time and support heart health — one reason regular sauna use has been linked to reduced risk of heart disease and stroke.

The heat also encourages the release of endorphins, those feel-good chemicals that counter anxiety and fatigue. The result? You feel deeply relaxed — and studies show that those good vibes can last long after you step out of the sauna. Regular sauna sessions have been associated with reduced stress, better mood and improved sleep quality. There's even evidence to suggest potential benefits for cognitive health, including a lower risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Athletes have long embraced saunas for recovery, and it's easy to understand why. Increased circulation helps soothe sore joints and achy muscles, reduce stiffness and can even ease chronic pain. "Rest and recovery are essential parts of wellness," said Veronica Lopez, RN, Vice President of Health Strategies at the YMCA of Greater Brandywine. "For many people, sauna use provides benefits such as stress reduction, circulatory support and muscle recovery, when used safely. Staying hydrated and being mindful of individual health needs is key, and those with medical concerns should consult a healthcare provider."

## SAUNA = LUXURY

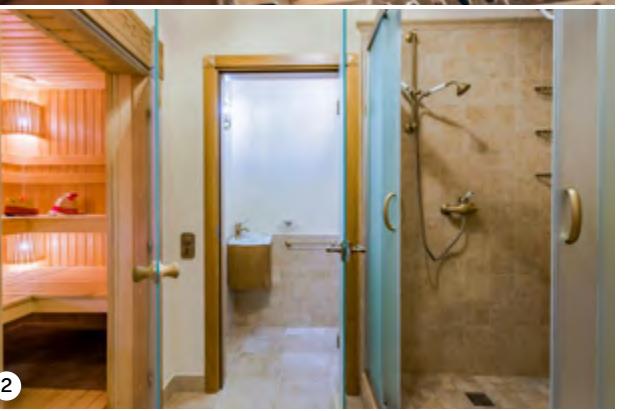
For true wellness aficionados, a home sauna is the ultimate lifestyle amenity. "Here in the Delaware Valley, where the climate is much milder than where saunas originated, saunas are seen as a luxury

item — and what a fantastic luxury they are, especially this time of year!" said realtor Stephen Gross of the Holly Gross Group.

Aside from being a major source of relaxation and luxury, having a sauna is a coveted status symbol — and in competitive real estate markets, it can help a property stand out. "We find saunas in a number of our high-end homes. They enhance the desirability and perceived value of the property by signaling luxury, even if a buyer doesn't plan to use the sauna themselves," Gross said. "It's like a higher-end version of Whirlpool tubs, which make bathrooms feel luxurious — even if not used regularly."

## WELLNESS AT HOME

Ready to build the sauna of your dreams? First, consider what type of sauna is right for you. Sauna purists may be attracted to traditional, wood-burning models, but installation is costly, requiring lots of plan-



1. Traditional saunas use water poured over hot stones to create steam
2. Bathrooms are a popular place to build home saunas
3. A freestanding outdoor sauna can turn your backyard into a private sanctuary



## Two Ways to Warm Up

While saunas and steam rooms both use heat to help you unwind, the experience — and benefits — feel noticeably different. Traditional saunas deliver dry heat, typically between 150 and 195 degrees, using heated stones, electric heaters or infrared light. That intense, low-humidity environment supports cardiovascular health and helps muscles relax and recover.

Steam rooms, on the other hand, operate at lower temperatures, usually around 110 to 120 degrees, but with nearly 100 percent humidity. The warm, moist air helps open airways, loosen mucus and ease breathing, making steam especially beneficial for respiratory health. People with congestion, allergies or asthma often find steam soothing, while the humidity can also leave skin feeling refreshed and hydrated.





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ning, professional expertise and upkeep. Electric models are the most common choice for homes, offering consistent performance and modern conveniences like smart controls, automatic shutoff timers and precise temperature management. Growing in popularity, infrared saunas heat the body directly through radiation rather than warming the air, operating at lower temperatures and using less energy, which makes them appealing for smaller spaces and shorter sessions.

Location is another key decision. An indoor sauna can be tucked into your basement, bathroom or home gym, offering year-round convenience. It benefits from existing climate control and easier access to plumbing and electrical systems — keeping costs down and requiring fewer, or no, permits to build. Outdoor saunas, meanwhile, can transform your backyard into a

4. Infrared saunas use radiant heat to warm the body directly

private retreat. While they typically require higher upfront investment for things like site prep, weather-resistant materials and dedicated hookups, they don't take up valuable indoor space and do keep the heat and humidity out of your home.

Depending which route you take, your cost will vary. *Business Insider* reports the average home sauna installation ranges from \$2,000 to \$7,500, with high-end custom models exceeding \$10,000. Electrical upgrades, ventilation, permits and ongoing upkeep should also factor into your budget. But done thoughtfully, a home sauna isn't just an indulgence — it's an investment in comfort, wellness and long-term value.

From ancient ritual to modern luxury, the sauna has always been about more than heat alone. It's a place to unwind, recharge and feel your best. Whether you drop by your local gym or build your own personal wellness sanctuary, make time this winter to get sweaty! ♦



## Finding Preservation Excellence

### 14TH ANNUAL WEST CHESTER PRESERVATION AWARD WINNERS

Allen Burke, Chairman, West Chester Preservation Awards Committee

**R**EMARKABLE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE HAS become West Chester's trademark. So it's only fitting that exceptional examples of restoration stewardship were recognized at the West Chester Preservation Awards ceremony at the Chester County History Center, which has been home to the annual event for each of its 14 years. The West Chester Downtown Foundation has nurtured the event since its beginning. And again this year, the ceremony also included announcement of grants awarded to 16 worthy nonprofit organizations serving West Chester.

And the Preservation Award winners in the categories of Bricks & Mortar, Service and Legacy awards were ...

#### BRICKS & MORTAR AWARDS

The Bricks & Mortar Awards are given to recognize architectural projects that exemplify best preservation practices. The five winners are given the opportunity to display on their buildings the distinctive brass plaque that serves as the award's signature.

**221 West Virginia Avenue.** This c. 1872 green serpentine home, built in the Second Empire style, is one of the borough's distinctive "Four Sisters" — a quartet of stately 19th-century homes, built side by side along Virginia Avenue. The homes were designed by noted Philadelphia architect Addison Hutton.

Because a previous owner divided the building into two separate residences, the interior was renovated to reunify it as a single-family

home, now with a small separate rear guest apartment. A rear entrance was constructed with a covered porch that connects to a new slate-roofed garage, faced with locally sourced serpentine stone.

The work also included restoring a stained-glass kitchen window, original wood windows, exterior porches, ornamental woodwork, slate roof and brick chimney. The owners installed new copper flashings, gutters and downspouts as well as repointing the serpentine stone walls, restoring the front brick walk and new serpentine stone entrance pillars.

This thoughtful stewardship of the home's distinctive architectural character also demonstrates appreciation and respect for the neighboring "Three Sisters."

**522 North Church Street.** This beautiful home had just three owners in its 146-year history. A photo dated 1896 shows the first owner, Ruthanna Haines, sitting on the front porch with her companion.

The home had fallen victim to voracious overgrowth and the ravages of time to the extent that the porch had been condemned when the letter carrier fell through the floor. The entire metal-roofed porch had to be rebuilt, but the shutters were saved.

A garage designed to be architecturally compatible was added on the alley. Although the living space was expanded, the new owners sited the work so the visual impact from the street was minimized, allowing the home's architectural character to prevail. The work completed an architecturally important block.



## WINTER IS HERE.

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**51 Patton Alley.** This apartment building was built around 1940, reportedly as a structure for soldiers and staff of the adjacent National Guard Armory on North High Street.

A devastating fire consumed much of the building on December 26, 2023. Despite the valiant efforts of multiple local fire companies, the fire left the building uninhabitable. What was left of the roof had to be replaced, and most of the interior was lost.

Hazley Builders worked with the West Chester Historic and Architectural Review Board (HARB) to ensure the work complied with the *Design Guidelines for the West Chester Historic District*. The project illustrates how effectively borough ordinances, HARB guidelines and HARB itself work to help owners preserve their buildings.

The exterior of 51 Patton Alley now appears much as it did before the fire, preserving the neighborhood's historic architectural character.

**435 West Miner Street.** This c. 1900 home has undergone extensive and costly exterior restoration. The work has been completed to a remarkably elevated level of quality, using original materials and techniques.

The crumbling roof, a combination of original slate shingles at the front and replacement asphalt shingles at the rear, was nearing the end of its life. The owners replaced the entire roof with slate because they valued the importance of retaining the home's original

1. 435 West Miner Street
2. 221 West Virginia Avenue
3. 522 North Church Street
4. 51 Patton Alley

materials. New copper flashings were installed throughout. Damaged exterior wood trim and soffits were replaced and refinished to match the original.

The owner's thoughtful five-year maintenance campaign to repair and restore significant architectural features of their home embodies the best of historic preservation practices. The overall visual effect is now a striking 125-year-old home in pristine condition. The owner's stewardship clearly illustrates how restoring original materials can make a significant contribution to the authenticity of West Chester's historic fabric.

**233 West Gay Street.** The leadership and congregation of Saint Agnes Church were recognized for the careful restoration of their church's front main entrance doors.

In 1793, a congregation of fewer than 100 local Roman Catholics built a church on this site. It became the first house of worship in West Chester and remained the only church in town for 20 years. The current church building, erected in 1925 and designed in an English Gothic style, is the third church built on this site.

After a century of use and weathering, the church's three pairs of front main entrance doors had deteriorated, exhibiting advanced moisture and ultraviolet light damage.

Each door consisted of an astonishing 220 pieces of hardware, which had to be removed and taken to an offsite shop for stripping, sanding, washing, staining and varnishing. The work also included replacing damaged and deteriorated wood as needed.

It's a happy coincidence that Saint Agnes Parish was presented with a Bricks & Mortar Preservation Award this year, as the parish marks the 100th anniversary of the church's construction.

#### SERVICE AWARD

Service Awards are given in recognition of educational or advocacy projects, publications, events and activities that educate the public and promote a better understanding of West Chester history.

**County Lines Magazine.** A preservation Service Award was presented to *County Lines Magazine* for its almost 50 years of highlighting West Chester and Chester County's local history and lifestyles.

The husband-and-wife team of Edwin Malet and Jo Anne Durako took over the magazine in 2006. Under their guidance, the editorial content has reflected a special appreciation of Chester County's rich culture and remarkable history.

The public develops an appreciation for good restoration by being exposed to the best examples, and that's what *County Lines* delivers regularly. Articles typically address a wide variety of historic subjects including historic architecture, local preservation events and historic sites.

In an era of shrinking print media resources, *County Lines* is a crucial voice for the preservation community, both in West Chester and throughout the region. Their long-term commitment to the comprehensive coverage of West Chester's history, historic architecture and preservation events provides an invaluable service to the community.

#### LEGACY AWARD

Legacy Awards are given to individuals to recognize an outstanding contribution to the better understanding of West Chester history.

**Tom Comitta** was recognized with the prestigious Legacy Award for his important contribution to the preservation of West Chester, including his service as West Chester Borough's Planner & Landscape Architect since 1988, for many years working pro bono.

Describing West Chester's streets as intimate "outdoor rooms" where the dimensions are crucial to the town's livability, Comitta believes "85 feet is as far away as you want to be ... Beyond that you can't recognize someone's face." His sensitivity to the importance of scale, proportion and design began at an early age and became a central focus.

In 1993, he made a series of public presentations about West Chester's unique character and unfulfilled potential that



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were a catalyst, inspiring business and political leaders to coordinate their future efforts. Borough businessman Stan Zukin commented, "Tom opened all our eyes ... [he] showed us that we're sitting on a treasure here. And if we can't protect it and develop it, we're going to ruin it."

Comitta worked with the borough task force in 2002 to develop the WC Urban Center Revitalization Plan, a 131-page comprehensive blueprint for the development of the borough. He later played a pivotal role in projects such as the development of the Bicentennial Garage on South High Street, a model for urban garages in historic towns.

The 2001 *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine* article about West Chester becoming "a perfect town" focused on the substantial progress from its truly bleak condition in 1981, the year Comitta started his firm in West Chester. At that time there were only six restaurants in West Chester — today there are over 60. Thanks in part to Comitta's efforts, the borough now serves as a model for other regional towns to follow.

The character, life and health of West Chester depend on the passion and involvement of people like Tom Comitta. It's his legacy.

The next West Chester Preservation Awards ceremony is scheduled for October 15, 2026. Nominations close June 10, 2026. More information can be found at [WCDFor.org](http://WCDFor.org). ♦

*Editor's Note: We were delighted and proud to be recognized for what we love doing.*



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5. Legacy Award winner Tom Comitta, second from right

6. Saint Agnes Church, 233 West Gay Street

7. Edwin Malet and Jo Anne Durako, owners of *County Lines Magazine*



# Weekend in the Western Brandywine Valley

## YOUR WINTER GETAWAY AWAITS

Shannon Montgomery

**B**Y FEBRUARY, WINTER HAS settled in, and a change of scenery feels especially welcome. Maybe you're dreaming of a vacation in a far-off tropical locale. Or maybe you're looking for something a little closer to home.

Enter the winter staycation. Pack a bag and head a short drive west for a weekend getaway right here in the Brandywine Valley. From Downingtown to Coatesville to Chester Springs and beyond, you'll discover rolling countryside, walkable downtowns, standout dining, shopping and a rich mix of history and culture. It's an easy escape with plenty to explore — and an ideal setting for a romantic Valentine's Day weekend.

Your weekend in the Brandywine Valley awaits. Read on for your itinerary.

### CHECKING IN

To really get away from it all, book a stay in one of the area's charming country inns. For a retreat steeped in history, look no further than the [Duling-Kurtz House & Country Inn](#) in Exton. Part of an original land grant by William Penn, this cozy 1830 stone house is home to 13 one-of-a-kind historical rooms and suites, each named for a notable figure in U.S. history — from George Washington and Thomas Jefferson to Betsy Ross and Susan B. Anthony.

Or check in to Downingtown's [Buck School Inn](#). This 1840 schoolhouse has been transformed and expanded into a boutique hotel, featuring salvaged hand-blown glass windows and a new timber-frame floor. Choose from three comfort-

able rooms: the School Room, located in the historic schoolhouse section of the building; the Van Gogh Room, with Vincent van Gogh reproductions and vaulted ceilings; and the Brandywine Room, with 270-degree views of the gardens and artwork from famous Brandywine Valley artists.

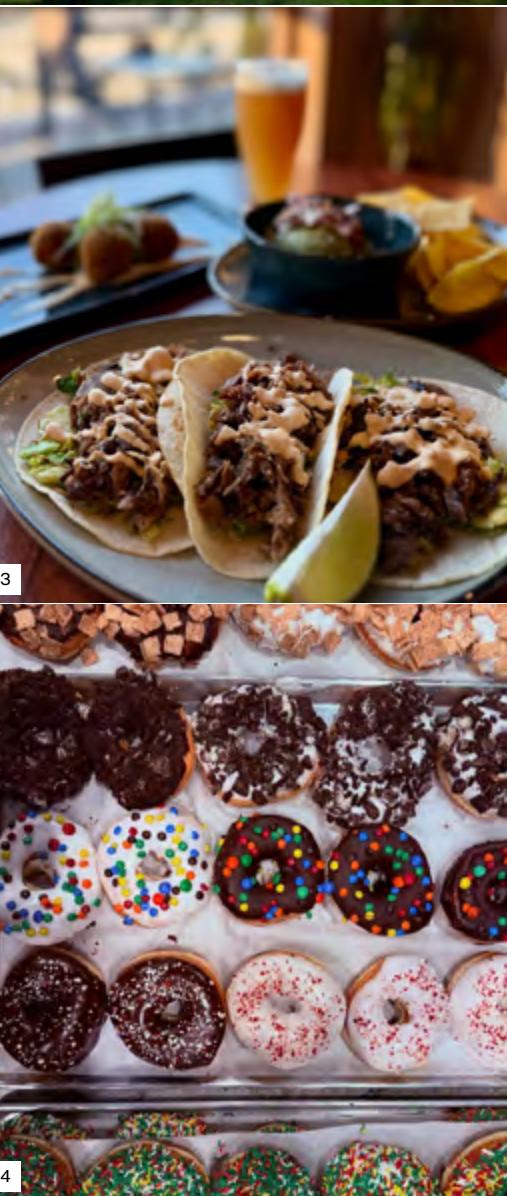
### DINNER IN DOWNTOWN

For a memorable evening, make your way to Downingtown's small-but-mighty downtown. There's a restaurant for whatever type of cuisine you're craving. Enjoy homestyle Italian cooking and handcrafted pasta at [Anthony's Cucina Fresca](#), or authentic Greek flavors — gyros, kebabs, rack of lamb — at [Myrtos](#).



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Craving Mexican? Newcomer [Mother](#) has you covered. Choose from seven different tacos (beef birria, cured pork belly, fried jerk chicken), empanadas, three kinds of guac and more. Pair with a craft beer, local wine or, of course, a margarita — take your pick of classic, spicy, peach and thyme or smoky pineapple.

Or, for a little bit of everything, take a quick trip down Brandywine Avenue to River Station, home of [The Noble Goat](#). The latest venture from Bryan and Andrea Sikora (of Wilmington's La Fia and Merchant Bar) has an eclectic menu of small plates, hearth-baked pizzas and globally inspired dishes.

### AFTER-DINNER DRINKS

Before the evening winds down, linger a little longer at one of Downingtown's lively after-dark spots. Grab a draft or signature drink at [The Borough](#), the town's newest gathering place. Live bands and DJs keep the energy high, while 60 TVs lining the walls keep every game in view.

Hopheads have their pick of two standout breweries. At [East Branch Brewing](#), sample small-batch beers in their laidback taproom — and look forward to rooftop sipping in warmer weather. And at [Victory Brewing](#)'s flagship location, classic pours like HopDevil and Golden Monkey shine alongside seasonal releases in a spacious, industrial-chic setting.

For a change of pace, head to [Dressler Estate Cidery & Bar](#). Opened last spring by husband-and-wife team Brian and Olga Dressler, this cozy tasting room showcases

ciders made onsite — lauded by the *Inquirer*'s Craig LaBan — plus select beer and wine for non-cider fans. Just be sure to get there before they close at 9.

### BRUSH WITH HISTORY

After a good night's sleep, it's time to get ready for the big day ahead. If you're an early riser, try your luck at Downingtown's [Pan-DoughMonium Bakery](#). Scratch baker Robert Weinrich's solo project opened last summer to, well, pandemonium. Avid fans of Weinrich's pastries and sweet treats line up each weekend long before the 8 a.m. opening — check their website and socials for the most up-to-date hours, and get there early!

Prefer to sleep in a little bit? You can't go wrong with one of our Best of the Best winners — see our January issue for the full list — or opt for the continental breakfast at your lodgings for a more relaxed start to your day.

Then it's off to Coatesville to explore the city's rich steelmaking history. It was here that Rebecca Lukens, America's first female industrialist, grew her family's steel mill into one of the largest steel manufacturers in the country. Today, the site is home to the [National Iron & Steel Heritage Museum](#). Take a guided tour of the museum, with exhibits in the Visitors Center (inside the Lukens Executive Office Building) and the 120" Mill Motor House. Admission times are 10 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Prefer your own pace? It's free to explore the 20-acre grounds, open sunrise to sunset daily. Don't miss the massive steel products, including a narrow-gauge locomotive, sub-

1. Buck School Inn
2. National Iron & Steel Heritage Museum
3. Mother
4. PanDoughMonium Bakery



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marine sonarsphere and the Steelworkers' Memorial, featuring a steel trident from the World Trade Center.

### SHOPPING SPREE

Worked up an appetite? Then it's time for lunch. Downtown, old-school diner [Little Chef](#) is a local favorite. For classic pub grub, try [Kings Tavern](#), the Coatesville outpost of local restaurateurs Philip and Kate Ferro (of Chadds Ford and Main Line Taverns). Or, if you're up for a bit of a drive, head south to [The Whip Tavern](#). This acclaimed English-style pub has a distinctive horse-country feel, serving up bangers and mash, fish and chips, shepherd's pie and more — washed down with an perfect pint, of course.

Next up, a little retail therapy. The [Made in Coatesville Small Business Incubator](#) is home to several local shops. Find the your next read at [Looker Books](#), stylish chapeaus at [Stingy Brims Hat Company](#), chic fashion at [Closet Babe](#) and self-care products at [Mimi's Favorite Things](#). Then treat yourself to a scrumptious dessert from the [Butter Pecan Cafe](#) — served with a side of home-made butter pecan ice cream, of course.

More shopping awaits in Exton. Here you'll find big-name brands, but some standout local businesses, too. [Bella Boutique & Consignment](#) has the latest trends — without the hefty price tag. In Eagleview Town Center, [Wellington Square Bookshop](#) is a beloved indie bookstore full of cozy nooks for reading and a cute café. And, if you catch them before closing, pick up a sourdough loaf — or English muffins for tomorrow's breakfast — at nearby [Good Girls Bakery](#).

### EVENING IN EXTON

For dinner, take your pick of Exton's many popular restaurants. Enjoy health-conscious Italian faves at [Ron's Original Bar & Grille](#), classic steakhouse fare at [ChopHouse Grille](#), or handcrafted brews and casual eats at veteran-owned [VK Brewing](#). Eagleview's Restaurant Row has even more choices, including newcomer [L'Olivo Trattoria](#). Owned by Francis and Nui Pascal — the duo behind Birchrunville Store Cafe and ButterScotch Pastry Shop — and spearheaded by Executive Chef Jon Amann (formerly of Amani's BYOB), L'Olivo highlights the flavors of northern Italy, with fresh pasta made daily.

For a truly special meal, take a drive through the countryside to [Birchrunville Store Cafe](#) — provided you make reservations way in advance. Chef Francis will take you own a culinary journey through an ever-changing menu of inventive French and Italian cuisine. Bring your best bottle of wine, and don't skip the mini butter-scotch Bundt cake.

### SUNDAY IN CHESTER SPRINGS

End your weekend on a high note with a trip to charming Chester Springs. Start your day right with a trip to [Life's Patina Co. Mercantile & Cafe](#). This adorable café in the historic Jenny Lind



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House has been lauded by TikTokers as one of Pennsylvania's best — and for good reason. Order a hot drink and pick out an artfully decorated pastry served on ornate china, then grab a seat (if you can find one!) in the crystal-chandeliered dining room, at the counter overlooking the scenic property, or on the welcoming front porch. Before you leave, browse the shop's collection of vintage finds, home decor and unique gifts.

Next, bundle up for a stroll through [Historic Yellow Springs](#). This vibrant living village has a storied history, from its origins as an 18th-century spa village to a Revolutionary War hospital, home for Civil War orphans, fine arts campus, movie studio ("The Blob" was filmed here) and now a center for studying art, history and the environment. Pick up a map in the lobby or follow the online self-guided walking tour. Feeling creative? Sign up for an art workshop — find the course catalog online.

For lunch, options include scratch-made comfort food at [Bloom Southern Kitchen](#), craft beer and wood-fired pies at [The Stables Kitchen & Beer Garden](#), and farm-to-table seasonal fare at [White Dog Cafe's](#) location in the restored Vickers Tavern.

Finally, cap off your weekend with a matinee performance of "Once Upon a Mattress" at [SALT Performing Arts](#). This laugh-out-loud musical is a twist on the classic tale of "The Princess and the Pea," following the bold and unconventional Princess Winifred as she turns a proper kingdom upside down and helps a shy prince discover true love.

By the time Sunday evening arrives, you'll have traded winter's routine for full days, fresh air and a welcome change of pace. As you head home, take one last look around, knowing this corner of the Brandywine Valley is just a short trip away, ready whenever you need another escape. ♦

5. The Whip Tavern

6. Made in Coatesville Small Business Incubator

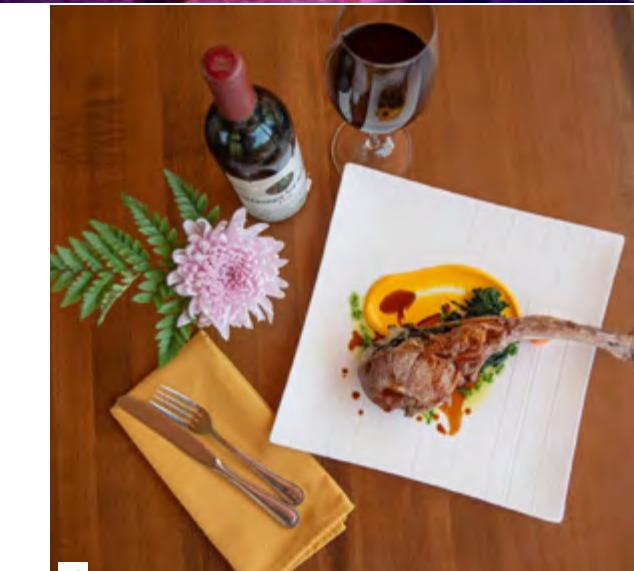
7. Wellington Square Bookshop

8. Historic Yellow Springs

9. SALT Performing Arts

10. Birchrunville Store Cafe

11. Life's Patina Mercantile & Cafe



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# DREAM KITCHENS



What's your dream kitchen? Pristine white? Rustic feel with brick? Modern vibes with wood accents? Or maybe you'd like a dedicated baking space? We've got ideas for you.



This classic Gladwyne kitchen was designed by Main Street Cabinet Co. using Plato Woodwork custom cabinetry and was part of a large renovation involving the kitchen, pantry and mudroom. The kitchen features classic white, painted inset cabinetry on the perimeter, complemented by a large rift cut oak island that is great for entertaining. There's also plenty of refrigeration, and the large range can handle virtually any cooking needs. All these details make for a great space to enjoy!

*Courtesy Main Street Cabinet Co.*



This kitchen by Windle Design and Construction blends refined craftsmanship with warm, rustic character. Custom cabinetry with fully paneled appliances creates a seamless, furniture-like feel, while a large new kitchen sink window floods the space with natural light. A rustic hickory bar, designed to read as standalone furniture, adds depth and charm. Anchoring the room is an oversized 14-foot island topped with rich soapstone countertops, offering both dramatic presence and everyday functionality.

*Courtesy Windle Design & Construction*



This kitchen features a refined, classic design with a balanced mix of traditional detailing and modern elegance. Soft white cabinetry with inset doors and polished brass hardware lines the perimeter, creating a bright and timeless backdrop. A substantial walnut island anchors the space, topped with marble countertop and accented by warm brass pulls and fixtures. The marble backsplash behind the range adds subtle veining and visual interest. A black-and-brass pendant provides contrast and a focal point above the island. Dark hardwood herringbone-patterned floors ground the room, while thoughtful symmetry and layered textures give the kitchen a composed, sophisticated feel.

*Courtesy Dewson Construction Co.*



This Malvern party barn marries Old-World charm with contemporary amenities. Built as a place to entertain throughout the year, it's large enough to host 130 people, yet the 5,000-square-foot space remains cozy through the beauty and warmth of timber frame construction and small, intimate spaces throughout. The kitchen blends crisp, white cabinets against natural wood. A mix of open shelving, glass-front cabinetry and integrated interior lighting balances the darker wood tones. The rustic stone fireplace anchors the space, drawing attention to the signature pizza oven, while the oversized island serves as a gathering space plus prep and serving area.

*Courtesy B&D Builders & Contractors*

With the homeowner's style defined by clean, modern lines and an organic influence, this local home follows suit, resulting in a warm and contemporary kitchen. Soapstone tops an expansive L-shaped island of white oak cabinetry, while white quartz counters provide a strong contrast to the perimeter cabinets. Two appliance garages bookend a symmetrical range wall, providing a clean and uncluttered space, while fan-shaped mosaic tiles create a stunning backsplash. Brass accents were used throughout the kitchen, including the bar area, which features a brass-coated counter and brass mesh cabinet doors. The result? An organic, contemporary, clean—and dream—kitchen!

*Courtesy Pine Street Carpenters, Jon Friedrich Photography*

Crisp, classic and timeless, this reimagined kitchen blends thoughtful design with modern livability. Custom Shaker-style cabinetry provides a fresh, inviting foundation, while a handcrafted plaster range hood adds soft texture and focal interest. A full-height marble backsplash introduces depth and continuity throughout the space. Anchoring the kitchen is a generous island with mitered-edge Danby marble, providing ample prep space and casual seating for everyday living and entertaining. Integrated appliances maintain clean lines, and expansive windows flood the room with natural light. Layered lighting and refined millwork complete the design where every detail feels intentional and elegant.

*Courtesy Hazley Builders*

# White Acres FARM

Restoration and expansion of the  
historic Dowlin House for a modern family

Laurel Anderson



THREE BAYS WIDE, TWO STORIES, RECTANGULAR farmhouse with wood shingled gable and a box cornice. The plain box chimneys are at both gable ends that also feature square windows. The symmetrical façade has plain framed windows, a single centered main entrance and a porch. Other features include evidence of a bake oven, quoins, and all original mantels. Many outbuildings are on the property."

That's the description from the Pennsylvania Historic Resource form for the original Dowlin House, a simple English Colonial fieldstone farmhouse that was transformed by John Milner Architects into this year's Fine Home. As with many historic properties in the Brandywine Valley, there are stories behind the property, its name, and the process of preserving, reimagining and decorating the home for a modern family and future generations.

## Story of Dowlin Forge

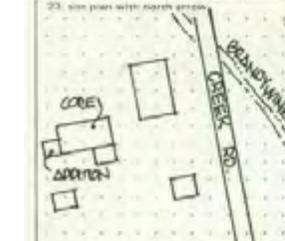
Along the east branch of the Brandywine Creek, two miles north of Downingtown in Uwchlan Township, are the ruins of an old iron forge. Established in 1785 by Samuel Hibberd and sold to John Dowlin in 1801, this forge operated into the middle of the 19th century. The surrounding area grew into a thriving community known as Dowlin Forge.

The forge processed pig iron rods into wrought iron and later plate iron. It flourished, employing a hundred blacksmiths and supplying the Brandywine Ironworks and Nail Factory operated by Dr. Charles Lukens, later the Brandywine Ironworks run by his wife, Rebecca Lukens.

During the three generations of family ownership, the Dowlin family's property holdings increased to 2,000 acres, encompassing the forge, grist mills, a sawmill, denim factory, company store, a school, worker's housing, several farms plus forest land for making charcoal, according to Susannah Brody's research in the 2018 Chester County Historic Preservation Newsletter. In 1854, William Dowlin succeeded in bringing a railroad to the area, the East Brandywine and Waynesburg Railroad Company. Today, the Struble Trail follows the old railroad right-of-way.

Because of its reputation for a high-quality product, Dowlin Forge prospered long after its competitors, though ultimately closing around 1875 due to the rise of steel production. Although the grist mills and other operations also gradually closed, the Dowlin family continued to own lands there through much of the 20th century.

A walk along the scenic watershed and forests of the Struble Trail makes it difficult to image its industrial past. As Brody wrote, "150 to 230 years ago the lands ... were alive with the sounds, smell and activities of the grist mills, blacksmith, sawmill, farms, charcoal hearths, wagon teams, water wheel and iron forge — the community once known as Dowlin Forge."

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY FORM OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION Box 1026 PA HISTORICAL & MUSEUM COMMISSION Harrisburg, PA 17120		1. Local surveyor/owner CHESTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 225 NORTH HIGH STREET WEST 30-6-22	
2. Property owners name and address Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Whitaker R.D.1 Downingtown PA 19335		4. Tax parcel number / other numbers 102-18-4136-141010 V.T.A. 30-1 Map# 414-311-31510 50-1 Downingtown	
6. Classification a. 1. structure / 2. object / 3. site b. 2. historic use / 1. non-hist.		7. date(s) when determined 1799	
8. architect or engineer		9. style, design or folk type English colonial	
10. site plan with north arrow		11. original use residence-farm	
		12. proposed use residence-farm	
13. photo location PC: Carol Castner PD: January, 1980 PV: south elevation, #16		14. contractor or builder fieldstone	
15. photo location CCHS, 09-31-#16,17		16. primary building material/construction fieldstone	
17. other description than visual features, integrity, environment, threats and associated buildings Three bays wide, two story, rectangular farmhouse with wood shingled gable roof and a box cornice. The plain stock chimneys are at both gable ends that also features square windows. The symmetrical facade has plain framed windows, a single centered main entrance and a porch. Other features include evidence of a bake oven, quoins, and all original mantels. Many outbuildings are on the property.		18. condition excellent	
19. integrity excellent		20. acreage 0.2-0.9-3.0-0.25	
21. photo location Original Dowlin House, owner of Dowlin Forge.		22. photo location Original Dowlin House, owner of Dowlin Forge.	
23. sources of information Owner has historical information, Bureau of Land Records, observation.		24. prepared by Carol Castner 3/1980	
25. photo location Original Dowlin House, owner of Dowlin Forge.		26. photo location Original Dowlin House, owner of Dowlin Forge.	



## Story of the Dowlin House

Part of an agricultural complex, the historic Dowlin House is set on rising ground west of North Creek Road, among rolling fields near the edge of a flood plain of the Brandywine Creek. Built in 1799 by wheelwright Jesse Stringfellow, who bought the property for 200 pounds, the stone house, stone barn and springhouse were part of a working farm raising

wheat, rye, Indian corn, oats, potatoes and 10 tons of hay, along with livestock — horses, milk cows, cattle and swine. The property was sold in 1854 to Augustus Dowlin, owner of the forge, who owned the property until 1884, when he died intestate.

Since that time, many other families took stewardship of the farm and house, including Jesse Pollock

in 1886, John Bowman in 1923, Henry Brooks in 1934 (after years of disputed ownership), Charles Perrin in 1937, David Wilmerding in 1948, and Robert Whittaker in 1955, when the property came to be considered a "hobby farm."

The current owners of Dowlin House and White Acres Farm have revitalized both house and farm.

## Story of the Renovation and Expansion

It's not surprising that John Milner Architects was chosen for this project. Founded in 1989, it's become a leading historic preservation and adaptive reuse firm because of its expertise in understanding, analyzing and sensitively transforming historic buildings for modern use.

Under the guidance of firm Principal Joshua Kiehl, who noted "the property was beautiful, with original character, and respectfully modified," the goal was to renovate and expand the existing 1799 historic house to serve as the new owner's primary family residence. This involved work on the original structure along with building a substantial addition that added nearly double the square footage of the stone farmhouse.



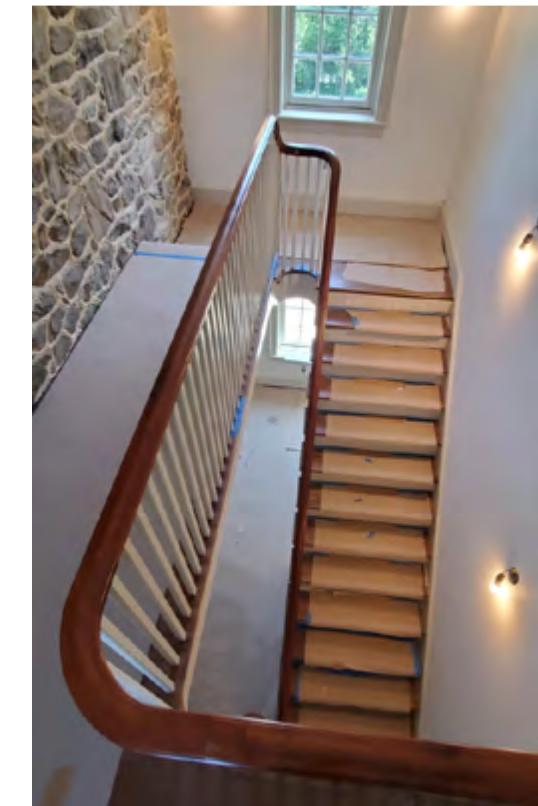
### Original Home

In the original fieldstone farmhouse, the layout of the rooms was largely unchanged, keeping three rooms on the first floor and bedrooms upstairs. The first-floor space includes a formal living room, dining room and music room.

Work on the original structure included such necessary projects as replacing roofing and non-original windows and reframing deteriorated interior floors. To the extent possible, care was taken to salvage and reuse existing framing, hardware and other materials.

On the exterior, masonry was cleaned and repointed and an existing three-season room and porches were reconstructed with increased depth. A wider wraparound porch was installed to provide outside living space for enjoying the views of the valley.

Other changes to the original building included adding dormers at the third floor — creating space for a guest suite — and adding a new entrance on the north side, where it's believed an original door had been located. A kitchen, added mid-20th century, was removed because a modern replacement was planned for the addition.



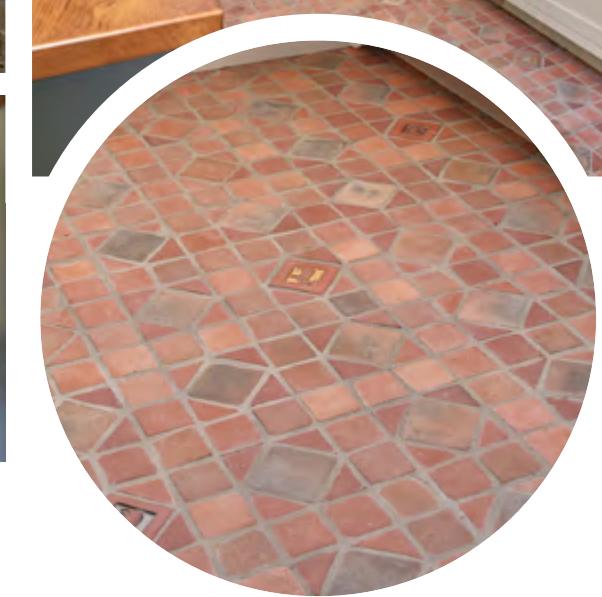
### The Transition

It's a truth universally acknowledged that every modern family needs a big kitchen and family room. The cherry on top is a spacious primary suite removed from kids' bedrooms. That was the plan for the addition.

But how to add such a big dream to a modest classic farmhouse? Two key concepts made for a sensitive solution. First, a transitional space, which Kiehl called "the hinge point," was needed for a smooth flow from the old to the new. To that end, a new entry and stair hall was created to link the existing historic house to the modern addition. This approach allowed exposing the original exterior west stone wall of the house within a stunning, new two-story stair hall with an open and airy feel, foreshadowing the new space.

And second, the roof lines of the two-part addition were each stepped down from the roof line of the original home. Though large in terms of square feet, the addition did not overpower the historic structure since both sections presented lower rooflines. Inside, the transition evolved through two sets of steps — down to the stair hall, then down again to the kitchen, explained Kiehl.





## The Addition

"The original house is situated on a very steep slope that drops away sharply to the south and west, so the addition was configured in an L-shaped plan, turning to the north to avoid the drop," said Kiehl. This required digging into the slope to situate the laundry and mudroom.

The addition includes a kitchen, family room, laundry room and mudroom entry on the first level, with a primary bedroom suite on the second. The modern kitchen included amenities like a large central island, marble

pastry stone and breakfast nook in a sunny bay window. With the additional three common rooms and bedrooms in the original space, a historic property became a comfortable home.

In building the addition, the intent was to create bright interior spaces to serve the needs of an active family. Higher ceilings, large and multiple windows plus French doors provide light and a sense of spaciousness. Simplicity in design honored the feel of the original structure — "maintained, not replaced," added Kiehl.

While choosing details for the project, traditional materials and craftsmanship were emphasized, including Okie-inspired Colonial Revival features. "Construction used materials such as natural stone (from Rolling Rock Stone in Oley Valley), plaster, reclaimed timber beams, cedar siding and cedar roofing, and mahogany exterior doors and trim," said Kiehl. For example, the mudroom ceiling is clad with walnut boards milled from trees on the property.

## Decorating to Honor Past and Present

Decorating a historic property requires more than good taste. Challenges posed by low ceilings and narrow stairs must be navigated with ingenuity. Interior designer Barbara Gisel explained the need to find low-profile overhead fixtures (low ceilings in old homes) from sources she's cultivated and period-appropriate lighting fixtures from antiques shops and auctions.

As for other challenges: "We took a bathtub up to the third floor for installation before the walls were built around it," she said of the Dowlin House project. "And the steep-pitched roofline on the original third-floor inspired built-in bookshelves under the eaves."

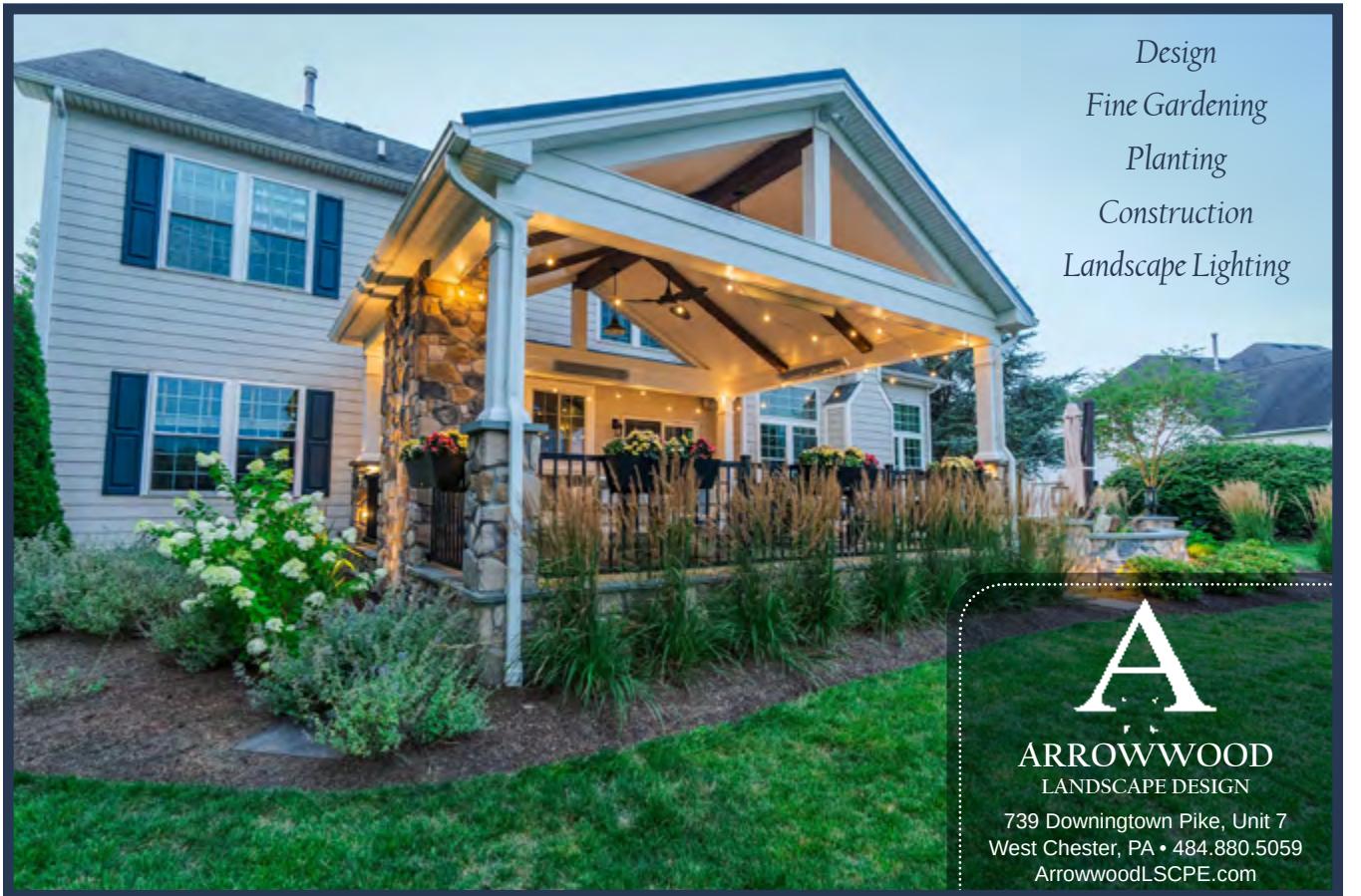
"Most important is to get a sense of what the client wants. Here it was light and bright, plus livable yet simple to match the style of the original house, using old materials," she continued.

An example of attention to detail and history is found in the clay tiles used. Handmade Mercer tiles, from the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Doylestown, were handpicked for a mix of craftsmanship, history and distinctive beauty not found in mass-market options.

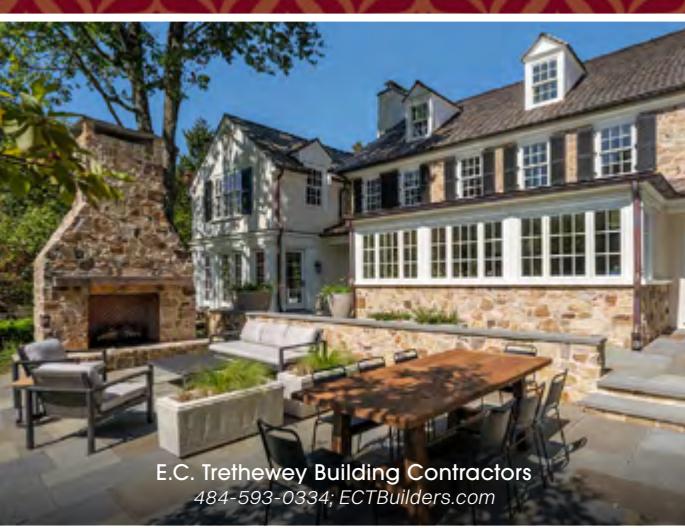
One of many special touches paying homage to history, yet responsive to modern needs, and ultimately creating a timeless new home. ♦

- **Structural Engineer:** Structural Design Associates
- **Civil Engineer:** Edward B. Walsh & Associates
- **Interior Designer:** Barbara Gisel Design
- **General Contractor:** McGettigan Builders
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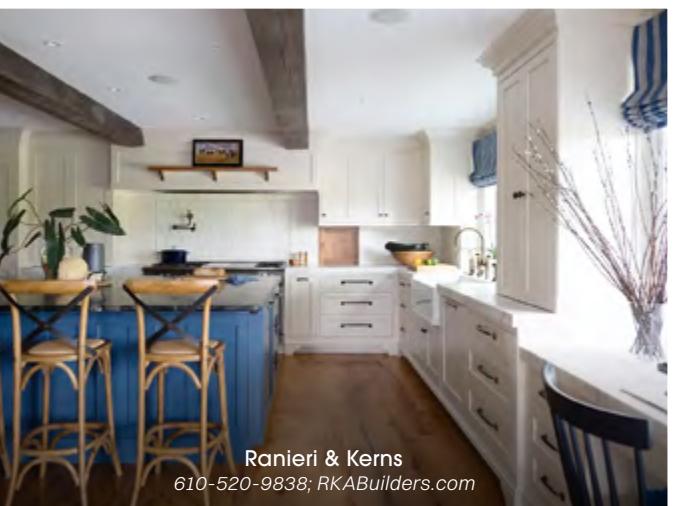
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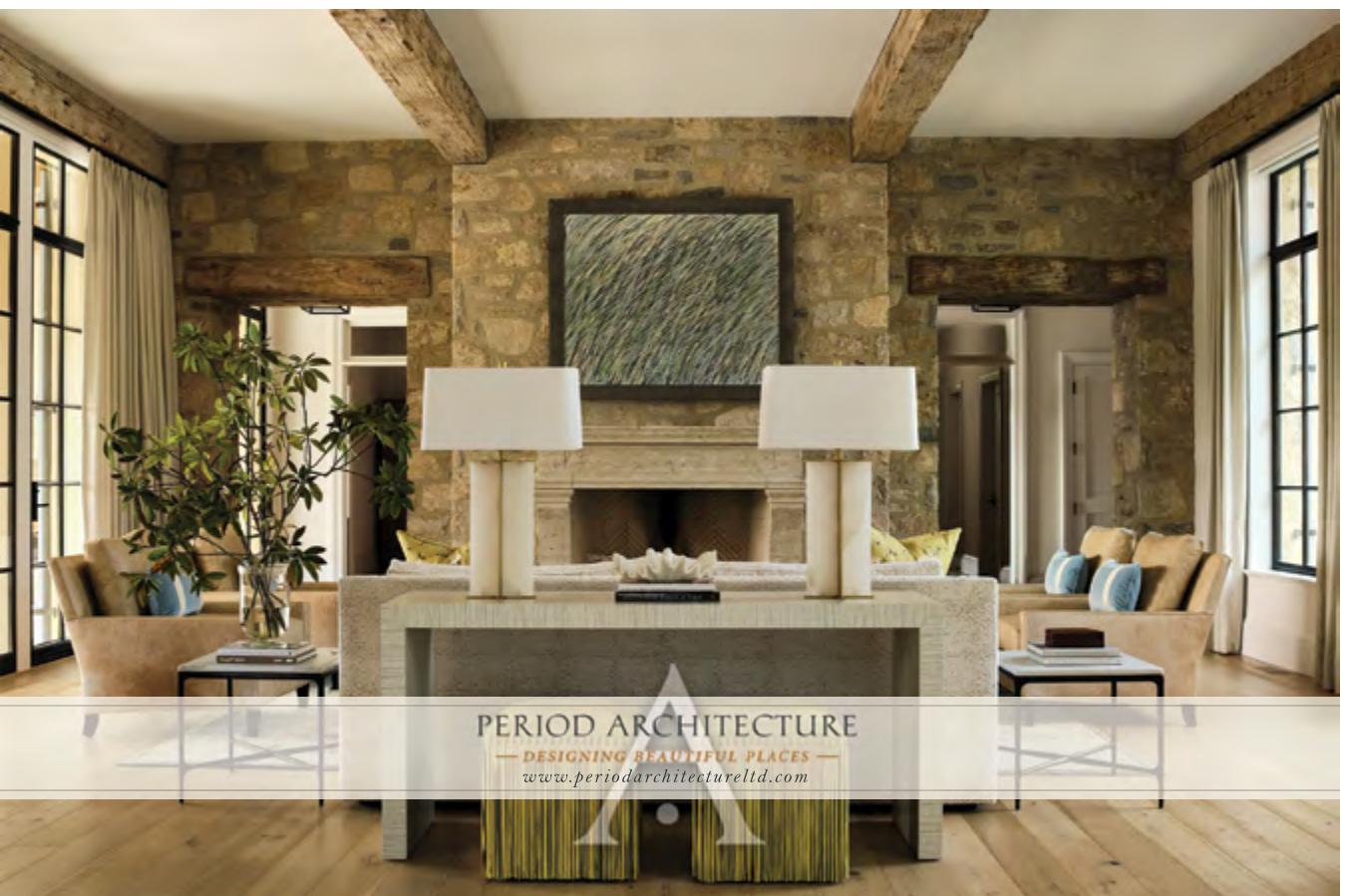
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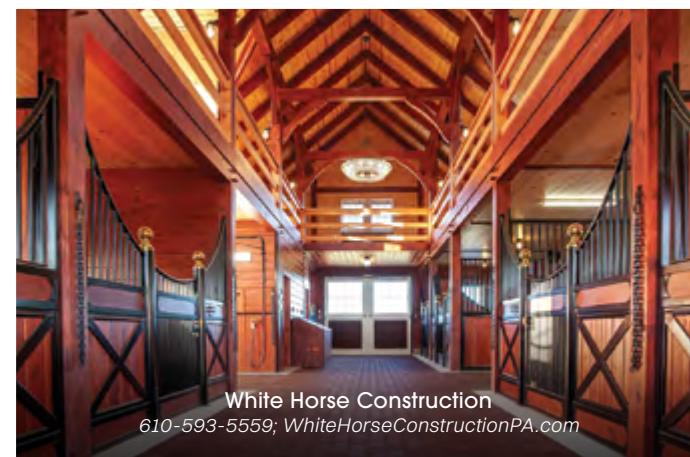
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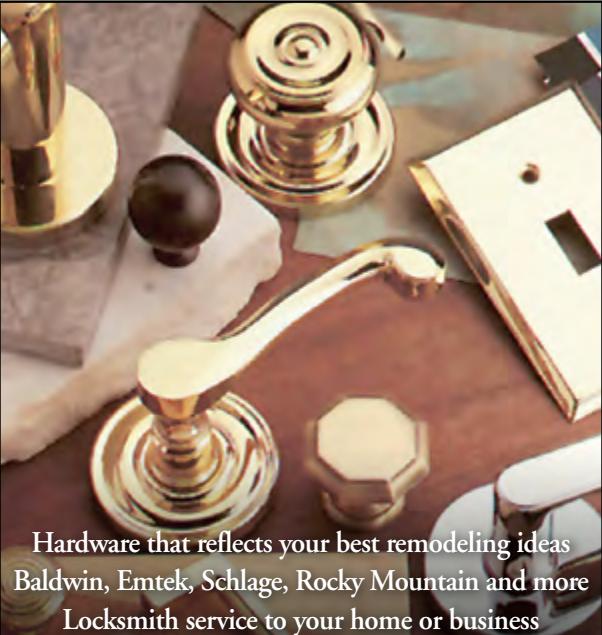
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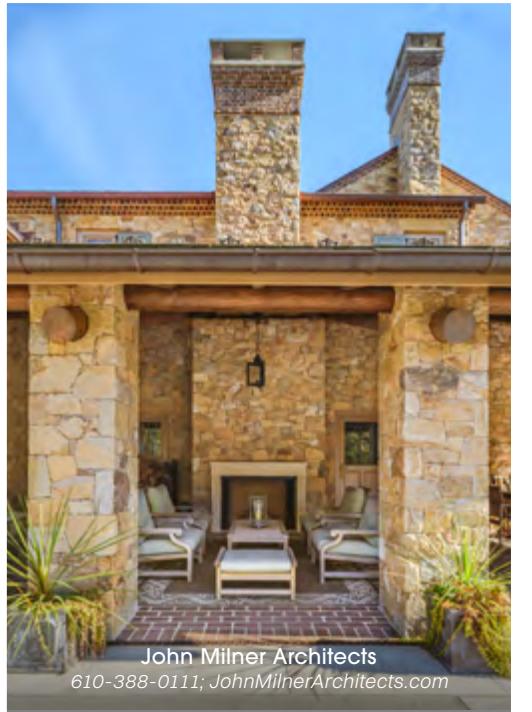
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## AI Is a Part of Local Schools

### CAREFUL STEPS INCORPORATING A NEW TECHNOLOGY

Edwin Malet

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IS NO LONGER A futuristic topic reserved for tech talks. It's reshaping much of how we live our lives today, including in local classrooms. From tools that draft text to platforms that help structure student thinking, AI promises powerful new capabilities.

But AI in schools also raises complex questions about academic integrity, equity and ethics. In *County Lines* country, independent schools are navigating these opportunities and challenges in ways that reflect their distinct missions and values.

Here's what we learned from five local schools.

### INTENTIONAL INTEGRATION AND ETHICAL GROUNDING

Rather than as a substitute for critical thinking, AI use is viewed at Episcopal Academy as a tool that should support meaningful learning. The school's mission emphasizes intellectual curiosity, ethical reflection and integrity — themes that guide how AI fits into academic life there.

According to Kelly Edwards, the Academic Dean, the faculty use AI like a "teaching assistant." For example, it's used for shaping alternative assessments, for making curriculum guides and, to avoid cheating, for creating alternate versions of a test. While creating presentations, teachers will ask AI tools, "What's the theme I want to emphasize? What's the format? What do I want this to look like?

"How do I want it to flow? How many examples do I need?" Teachers get quick assistance creating a better, polished product.

Students, said Edwards, use AI tools as a "thought partner." They'll get feedback to help improve essays or get assistance to present their work in a "beautiful presentation."

In general, Episcopal Academy encourages transparent, ethical use of AI tools. Students are taught to develop technological fluency without losing judgment. The goal is not avoidance, but preparedness — students who use AI thoughtfully, ethically and with self-awareness.

### LEARNING WITH PURPOSE AND MORAL INSIGHT

Approaching technology through the lens of mission and moral development, Villa Maria Academy's long history of academic excellence, character formation and critical thinking provides a natural foundation for responding to incorporating AI in the classroom.

Villa Maria treats AI as a tool with ethical expectations attached. According to Linda Schweitzer, the school's Education Technology Specialist, the computers of our childhood replaced the "monotonous tasks that may not be difficult but may be time consuming." In contrast, generative AI responds to "a prompt" to replicate "what humans have historically done." The school's teachers are using AI



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1

to "enhance their lesson plans, classroom activities and assessments." Meanwhile, students use AI for such learning tasks "to help them create study guides, do practice tests and brainstorm ideas."

Schweitzer explained that teachers use a "stoplight formula" when deciding whether to permit AI tools for assignments. Assignments designated red means no AI use is permitted. Yellow means a student must obtain permission for use from the teacher. Green means that the student is free to use AI.

Teachers are integrating AI tools while simultaneously safeguarding student learning goals. Rather than viewing AI as a shortcut, the school's culture encourages students to treat AI as one of many tools that support meaningful intellectual and moral growth.

## CLEAR BOUNDARIES AND ETHICAL USE

Combining a strong academic program with values rooted in integrity, respect and responsibility, the Academy of Notre Dame partners with a company called Flint for some of its AI use. According to Tyler Gaspich, Director of Information Resources and Technology, "Flint responds to prompts with guiding questions and suggestions for the user to consider. So instead of students losing the ability to think critically by having the AI solve that math problem or write that essay for the student, Flint encourages students to consider certain aspects, nudging them in an appropriate direction."

Notre Dame's academic code includes an AI Acceptable Use Policy to make clear the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable uses. Students may use AI for idea generation, research assistance or understanding complex topics, provided they engage critically with the material and ensure that final submissions reflect their own understanding. At the same time, presenting AI-generated content as personal, original work is explicitly prohibited.

Take for example, the case of a senior who's taken a number of classes in computers. This student uses AI "to break down instructions and aid in studying," to build "flashcards, replayable podcasts or create practice tests within minutes" and "to clarify prompts or create a comprehensive list of expectations." She also uses AI "to manage [her] time by creating work schedules for [her] studies, sports, college applications and extracurriculars." All helpful and permitted uses.

## QUAKER VALUES AND THOUGHTFUL EXPLORATION

Operating within a Quaker educational tradition, Wilmington Friends School emphasizes reflection and community, valuing critical inquiry, individual expression and ethical engagement. Its Head of School, Ken Aldridge, reported that AI is used by faculty and staff as a "professional support tool to enhance planning, efficiency, creativity and instructional responsiveness rather than as a substitute for teaching or human judgment."



2

- Schools are integrating AI tools in the classroom with careful guidance from teachers
- Students are encouraged to use AI to enhance creativity and problem solving
- Many AI tools, like ChatGPT, respond to users' prompts

Many teachers use AI tools in their classrooms — some for lesson planning and resource creation, others for research, and still others for creative work and image design — reflecting "thoughtful experimentation, with an emphasis on supporting student learning and teacher effectiveness," said Aldridge.

AI is largely disallowed in middle school. Although "under the guidance of their

teachers,” students are experimenting with several platforms, such as Grammarly, ChatGPT and Claude.

In upper school, AI use is more common, including Grammarly, Duolingo and various features within student devices and platforms. How students use AI “will vary class to class, teacher to teacher and assignment to assignment ... with explicit guidance and instructions from teachers.”

Teachers at Wilmington Friends invite students to reflect on when and why to use AI and when to rely on their own reasoning. Students are encouraged to focus on balanced exploration, helping learners situate AI tools within broader questions of meaning, purpose and ethical responsibility.

## INNOVATION WITHIN A COLLEGE-PREP MISSION

Early and common uses of AI tools have been for middle and upper school subjects like history, math or biology. Yet, Bill Burton, who teaches K to 5 at the Tatnall School, uses AI to teach art. For instance, his second grade students learn about camouflage and make their own “fantasy creature.” Then they’ll use AI to create a background of their animal’s habitat. “Text and writing,” he said about AI uses, “is just scratching the surface.”

Tatnall emphasizes rigorous academics and personal growth. To that end, faculty and administrators are actively considering how AI fits into teaching and learning contexts. In environments where project-based learning, technology literacy and deep inquiry are hallmarks, AI is incorporated to enhance creativity and problem solving, but always with clear expectations about when it is appropriate. Unauthorized AI use is treated as a form of cheating.

## SHARED THEMES — SUPPORT, INTEGRITY AND PREPARATION

Several common themes emerge across these five schools. AI presents their faculty and students with great opportunities. But each school expects AI use to align with ethical principles and academic integrity,

ensuring that students remain responsible authors of their own learning.

Policies and classroom practices distinguish between supportive uses — idea generation, research support, time saving — and unacceptable uses — submitting AI-generated content as original work.

Teachers, not technology alone, determine how AI tools fit within curriculum goals. Professional development, discussion and reflection help faculty guide student engagement with emerging technologies.

All the schools recognize that AI is part of students’ current and future landscape. Rather than treating AI as a threat, they emphasize thoughtful and discerning use.

## AN EVOLVING FUTURE

As AI continues to evolve, schools must balance innovation with values. Not merely embracing technology for its own sake, independent schools are modeling ways to integrate AI thoughtfully. They are shaping its use through intentional policies, ethical frameworks and educational conversations. These schools remind us that AI’s true value lies not in what it can generate, but in what it can help students understand about themselves, their world and how they choose to act within it. ♦



Students can use AI to help with studying, research and time management

## Some Terms Beyond ChatGPT

(an AI chatbot developed by OpenAI that uses advanced machine learning to process and generate human-like text, audio and images.)

- **Claude:** an AI assistant by Anthropic, trained to be safe, accurate and secure.
- **Flint:** an AI-powered learning platform designed specifically for K-12 schools that offers personalized tutoring and transcription services.
- **Gemini:** an AI platform, by Google, that includes a family of large language models (LLMs).
- **Grammarly:** an AI-powered writing assistant, working over other applications, that provides real-time feedback on grammar, spelling, punctuation, tone and clarity.
- **Notebook LM:** an AI-powered research and note-taking assistant by Google Labs. It’s “source-grounded,” meaning it primarily uses documents you provide to generate summaries, answer questions and brainstorm new ideas.
- **Sora:** a generative AI model by OpenAI that creates high-fidelity videos and synchronized audio from text prompts or images.



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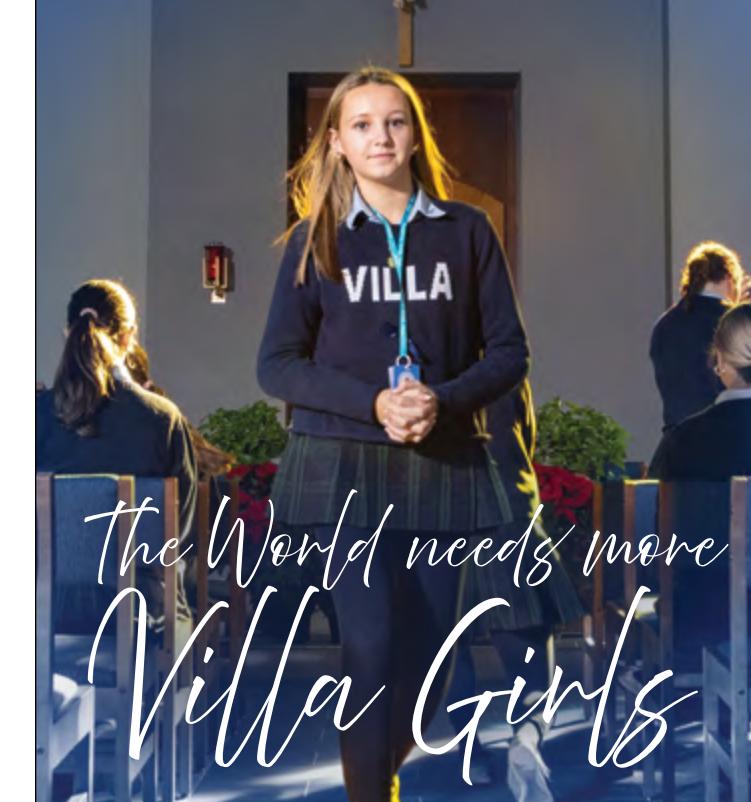
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[TowerHill.org](http://TowerHill.org)

## GUIDE TO

# Private & Independent Schools

### PENNSYLVANIA

Atglen



West Fallowfield Christian School

795 Fallowfield Rd. 610-593-5011; [WFCS.org](http://WFCS.org)

For over 80 years, West Fallowfield Christian School has partnered with families and churches to nurture and grow children on their spiritual, academic and social-emotional journey. WFCS is a private preschool through high school that creates an environment where children feel safe, respected and seen as the unique individual God created them to be. Their teachers and staff pray that each student, past, present and future, will leave the school equipped to shine for Jesus and make a difference in the world.

Open Houses: Jan. 29, 6:30 pm; Feb. 25, 9 am



Bryn Mawr

The Agnes Irwin School

275 S. Ithan Ave. 610-801-1869; [AgnesIrwin.org](http://AgnesIrwin.org)

Agnes Irwin says, We Know Girls. Founded in 1869 by Miss Agnes Irwin, the great-great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, The Agnes Irwin School is nationally recognized as an all-girls, independent college preparatory school for PreK-grade 12. They provide not only a rigorous academic experience for students, but also competitive athletic teams and robust STEM and visual and performing arts curricula that allow girls to explore their creativity, think critically and become empowered leaders.

Open House: Apr. 15, 8:30 am

Touring Tuesdays: Feb. 17, Mar. 10, Apr. 21, May 12



Chester Springs

Montgomery School

1141 Kimberton Rd.  
610-827-7222; [MontgomerySchool.org](http://MontgomerySchool.org)



Montgomery School nurtures students from preschool through 8th grade, valuing both childhood development and future success. Students engage in bold thinking, creative problem-solving and compassionate leadership, with teachers who model these important skills. As students advance, they build proficiency across subjects, gaining confidence, a strong knowledge base and essential life skills that set them up for future success.

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[montgomeryschool.org/visit](http://montgomeryschool.org/visit) | 610.827.7222

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 Preschool - 8th Grade

**VISIT VILLA**  
**March 11**  
 Private tours also available  
[www.villamaria.org](http://www.villamaria.org)

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**9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.**

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### Malvern

#### Malvern Preparatory School

418 S. Warren Ave.  
 484-595-1100; [MalvernPrep.org](http://MalvernPrep.org)



Malvern Preparatory School is an independent Augustinian school for young men in grades 6-12, offering its students a nurturing, Catholic community in which they can grow and become the best possible version of themselves. The curriculum balances rigorous academics, extracurricular commitment, spiritual development and Christian service, providing an experience that places students at the center of learning.

To learn more about Malvern Prep, contact the Office of Admissions at 484-595-1173 or visit [MalvernPrep.org/Visit](http://MalvernPrep.org/Visit)



#### Villa Maria Academy Lower School

280 IHM Dr. 610-644-4864; [VillaMaria.org](http://VillaMaria.org)

With a legacy of over 150 years of empowering young women through leadership and service, at Villa Maria Academy Lower School, they strive to maintain a culture rooted in the charism of the IHM Sisters, which is love, creative hope and fidelity. Villa is designed to meet the educational needs and unique learning style of each girl. The unrivaled academics, fine arts, athletics, student activities and service programs provide a foundation to discover individual passion and prepare for a lifetime of learning and leading.

**Open House: (Preschool-8th Gr.): Mar. 11**

Private Tours available. Register at [VillaMaria.org](http://VillaMaria.org)



### Media

#### The Walden School

901 N. Providence Rd.  
 610-892-8000; [TheWaldenSchool.org](http://TheWaldenSchool.org)



The Walden School is excited that their elementary program is a candidate for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program (PYP). Building on Walden's Montessori foundation of student ownership, empathy and real-world connections, the PYP framework deepens inquiry-driven exploration and experiential learning. Walden students are empowered to think critically, act ethically and communicate effectively, preparing them to thrive as engaged, compassionate and globally minded citizens.



#### Villa Maria Academy High School

370 Central Ave. 610-644-2551; [VMAHS.org](http://VMAHS.org)

Villa Maria Academy High School is an independent Catholic college preparatory school founded by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, where motivated young women grow with intention and uplift others in a faith-filled and nurturing community. Located on 45 acres at the west end of the Main Line in Malvern, Villa Maria encourages students to build lives of purpose at a pivotal time in life through process-driven intellectual rigor, excellence in athletics and the arts, spiritual growth and a commitment to service.

**7th Grade Practice Exam: Mar. 21, 9 am**

**7th Grade Visit Villa Days: Apr. 13, 20, 30**

**Spring Admissions Fair: May 6, 5 to 7 pm**

Learn more and register at [VMAHS.org/Events](http://VMAHS.org/Events)





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grades PK-12

[episcopalacademy.org](http://episcopalacademy.org) | Independent | PK - 12 | Co-ed | Newtown Square

**The Walden School**  
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**Now Enrolling for 2026-27**

Open House: Feb 8<sup>th</sup> 1:00- 3:00PM  
Campus Tours: March 18<sup>th</sup>  
& April 15<sup>th</sup> 9:30-11:00 a.m.



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Newtown Square



Episcopal Academy

1785 Bishop White Dr.  
484-424-1400; [EpiscopalAcademy.org](http://EpiscopalAcademy.org)

Since 1785, The Episcopal Academy has prepared bold leaders in mind, body and spirit. Students thrive through rigorous academics, character education, championship athletics and award-winning arts on a 123-acre campus. With personalized college counseling and a coeducational model that reflects the real world, EA graduates step confidently into life—joining accomplished alumni who are driven by purpose and curiosity.

Spring Open House: Apr. 14, 6 pm  
Register at [EpiscopalAcademy.org/Events](http://EpiscopalAcademy.org/Events)



West Chester

Chesterbrook Academy Preschool & Elementary School

1190 McDermott Dr.  
610-719-0240; [ChesterbrookAcademy.com](http://ChesterbrookAcademy.com)



It's a fun-filled afternoon, and families are invited to explore the campus, meet teachers and celebrate spring with a Community Egg Hunt. Children

will enjoy inflatables, face painting and a special visit from the Bunny. This event is a wonderful opportunity to experience the vibrant school community while children enjoy exciting activities and seasonal fun. They can't wait to welcome you and your family to CBA! Now enrolling Pre-K-6th grade.

Open House & Egg Hunt: Mar. 21, noon to 3, rain or shine



**DELAWARE**  
Wilmington



The Tatnall School

1501 Barley Mill Rd.  
302-998-2292; [Tatnall.org](http://Tatnall.org)

At Tatnall, students from age 2 through grade 12 experience an exceptional education that unlocks their passion for learning. Every student has opportunities to explore endless possibilities through challenging academic, artistic and athletic programs. The devoted teachers, coaches and community members are the driving force behind the school's success. The strong bonds formed at Tatnall between students and educators foster devotion to learning, enabling students to unleash their full potential and nurture their great minds.

Middle & Upper School Tour & Learn: Feb. 5, Apr. 3 at 8:30 am



**Tower Hill School**  
2813 W. 17th St.



[TowerHill.org](http://TowerHill.org)

Ranked #1 Best Private K-12 School in Delaware by *Niche*, Tower Hill welcomes you to experience a place of boundless opportunity, deep commitment to community and a culture of mentorship in all that they do. At Tower Hill, you'll discover an exceptional liberal arts education every day. Their motto, *Multa Bene Facta*, or Many Things Done Well, is a philosophy about commitment, hard work, multifaceted learning and extraordinary achievement.

Open House: Mar. 5  
Register at [TowerHill.org/OpenHouse](http://TowerHill.org/OpenHouse)



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## Conshohocken

## AIM Academy

1200 River Rd. 215-483-2461; AIMPA.org

AIM provides extraordinary educational opportunities through a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum to children in grades 1–12. AIM is the Philadelphia area's largest school for children with language-based learning differences, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. Students experience an innovative, research-based curriculum and a range of elective and extracurricular arts, music, club and athletic opportunities. Discover AIM for Innovative Teaching and Fearless Learning.

Open Houses: Feb. 6 &amp; 25, Mar. 1 &amp; 25, Apr. 8 &amp; 22,

May 8 &amp; 27, all at 9 am



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610-692-7617 Chesterbrookacademy.com



## Malvern

## The Vanguard School &amp; Services

1777 N. Valley Rd. 610-296-6700; VSSPA.org



For 66 years, The Vanguard School has supported students, ages 5–22, with autism, neurological impairments and related challenges. Their year-round retreats, extended school year and Camp Vanguard allow students to build on academic, social and independent living in a fun, supported environment. Through alumni events, employment services and monthly adult social activities, they provide a full continuum of services for neurodiverse individuals regardless of Vanguard School affiliation.

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## Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services



267-418-9623

PAEducationReferrals@Devereux.org

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## [Food News]

A few of our favorite things to share this month about local food and drink

**The Goat.** Opened last summer as a brewpub and gathering place in West Grove, **Stubborn Goat Brewing**

has a solid rotating lineup of brews — West Coast and session IPAs, hazy options, seasonal pours — plus cocktails, mocktails, and PA-made wines and spirits, along with wings, fried pickles, hearty salads and double BBQ bacon smash burger. For families and furry friends to hang out in a friendly vibe.

122 Rosehill Ave.  
StubbornGoatBrewing.com



**Eat Local.** Opened in December with a strong breakfast game, **The Local** in Phoenixville now also offers lunch. But with choices like The Elvis French toast, Bridge Street burritos, elevated avocado toast and chocolate chip + bacon pancakes, we wonder why. Guess it's the hot roast pork sandwich with roasted peppers, patty melt, grilled chicken BLT and pesto chicken sammies. 324 Bridge St. TheLocalPhoenixville.com



## Pizza, Pizza.

The Borough, newly opened in Downingtown, offers many features, but little did we know they made *Inquirer* foodie Michael Klein's notable new pizza list. Klein praised pizza consultant Ptah Akai's puffy, neo-Neapolitanish crust, with structure and char, and recommended the cheeseless tomato pie with sliced garlic and the Forager (pesto, mushrooms). Or enjoy the classics — plain cheese, pepperoni or Margherita. 149 E. Lancaster Ave. Go2Borough.com



## Buh-bye Hooters, Hello Boondocks.

Yep, Boondocks Bar and Grill plans to transform the Glen Mills spot into a Nashville-style honky-tonk, complete with rustic atmosphere and neon lights. The folks from Ferro's Five Star Restaurant Group (Chads Ford Tavern) plan a large stage for live country music, DJs, plus a dance floor for line dancing, along with Southern fare such as barbecue, catfish and ribs, alongside Nashville-inspired cocktails. 1110 Baltimore Pk. Check social media for updates.

**Asian Options.** West Chester's long-awaited **Dim Sum Taste** is finally open and serving up authentic Shanghai cuisine.

There's online ordering from an extensive menu with 32 dim sum choices, plus apps, soups and entrees galore, seven days a week. Here's hoping the new pho spot planned for the old Salty Paws location down the block, 27 W. Gay, opens faster! 127 W. Gay St. 127DimSumTaste.com



## Chocolate to Warm the Winter

### CREATE MAGIC IN YOUR KITCHEN

Liz Tarditi

**F**EBRUARY ASKS FOR CHOCOLATE NOT AS novelty but as nourishment with intention. This is the month when cold lingers, daylight is stingy, and pleasure earns its keep.

In this month's Brandywine Table, chocolate answers that call: melted slowly, served deliberately and allowed to be exactly what it is — dark, warming and deeply satisfying. This is not about excess or spectacle, but about choosing richness with restraint and savoring it fully, whether alone at the kitchen counter or shared across a small table for two in the soft glow of a winter evening.

In Paris, a cup of drinking chocolate arrives in dainty porcelain, with whipped cream offered separately so each person may decide how indulgent the moment should be. The ritual matters as much as the recipe. Heat blooms cocoa solids. Salt sharpens sweetness. Vanilla waits until the end so its perfume stays intact. The result is not something to gulp, but to linger over, cup warmed in both hands, the outside world held briefly at bay.

Chocolate has long carried this kind of quiet authority in our cultural imagination, valued not just for sweetness but for its ability to restore equilibrium. In one beloved modern fantasy, it's offered as an antidote after an encounter with a joy-draining force — a small, grounding pleasure meant to bring warmth and steadiness back into the body. February can feel like its own brush with the joyless, and chocolate, properly made, offers the same reassurance.

Here in the Brandywine Valley that understanding runs quietly beneath the surface. At **Éclat Chocolate**, a modern minimalist shop, clean-lined, spare and cool, with Devo playing softly in the background, cacao is treated with the same seriousness usually reserved for wine, speaking fluently about origin, aroma, texture and finish. That sensibility offers a useful reminder for home cooks: chocolate rewards attention, not only professional credentials. You



don't need to be a master pastry chef to make something divine — only good ingredients, patience and a willingness to slow down.

From there, the progression feels natural. Individual chocolate soufflés move chocolate from cup to oven, from immediate gratification to gentle technique. Buttered ramekins, sugared walls, egg whites folded with attention — these are not fussy gestures, but purposeful ones. And Boca Negra — velvety, dense and nearly flourless — finishes the journey with authority. This is a dessert that rewards patience, improves with time and delivers a sultry, truffle-like intensity without heaviness.

Together, these recipes form a February chocolate feast that's sensual without being showy and indulgent without apology. They invite you to slow down, trust your hands and let chocolate do what it has always done best — warm the body, steady the spirit and make winter feel not merely survivable, but genuinely delicious.



### Ultra-Rich French Drinking Chocolate

*TikTok-famous for a reason, this is not hot cocoa as Americans know it. French drinking chocolate — chocolat chaud — is intensely satisfying on the palate, showcasing the rich chocolate with a grown-up sophistication. The typical Parisian serving size is small, sipped from a demitasse or tiny teacup, with plentiful fresh, unsweetened whipped cream to stir in as a condiment and served in individual portions, so no need to share!*



Serves 6, 4-oz. servings

#### For the whipped cream:

2 C. heavy cream  
1-2 tsp. confectioners' sugar (optional)  
¼ tsp. vanilla extract (optional)

#### For the drinking chocolate:

1½ C. whole milk  
1½ C. heavy cream  
1-2 T. brown sugar (optional, to taste)  
12 oz. high-quality dark chocolate (60-75% cacao),  
such as Valrhona Guanaja 70%, finely chopped  
Generous pinch of sea salt  
1 tsp. vanilla bean paste

In a chilled bowl, whip the cream with the confectioners' sugar and vanilla, if using, just until soft peaks form (the cream should be spoonable, not stiff). Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

In a heavy-bottomed medium saucepan, combine milk, cream and brown sugar, then heat over medium heat until steaming but not boiling. (Don't scorch the milk, as that ruins the delicate floral notes of the chocolate.)

Remove the saucepan from the heat. Add the chopped chocolate and sea salt and allow to sit for 2 minutes undisturbed to allow the chocolate to melt evenly. Then whisk gently in small circles, moving from the center to the outside of the pot, until the mixture is completely melted and smooth.

Reduce heat to low and return the pot to the heat, whisking constantly for 3 to 5 minutes. (The gentle heat "blooms" the cocoa solids, thickening the liquid to a velvety, spoon-coating consistency.)

Remove the pan from the heat. Whisk in the vanilla bean paste. This ensures the delicate vanillin aromatics remain vibrant rather than cooking off.

Serve immediately in small cups, with the chilled whipped cream for guests to add as desired.

### Individual Chocolate Soufflés

*The ultimate test of a pastry chef is the soufflé, yet this version is surprisingly approachable for the home cook. The secret lies in preparing the ramekins and carefully folding the egg whites. For a dramatic presentation, serve these immediately because they begin to deflate the moment they leave the oven's heat. Use a spoon to crack the top and pour in a little extra French drinking chocolate for a truly decadent experience.*



Serves 6

#### For the 6 ramekins:

2 T. unsalted butter, softened  
2 T. granulated sugar

#### For the soufflés:

7 oz. high-quality dark chocolate (70% cacao), finely chopped  
4 T. unsalted butter, cut into cubes  
6 large eggs, separated, at room temperature  
1 tsp. vanilla bean paste  
¼ tsp. cream of tartar  
½ C. granulated sugar, divided  
Generous pinch of sea salt  
Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

Generously coat six 6-ounce ramekins with softened butter, using upward strokes from the bottom to the rim. Sprinkle in granulated sugar, rotating to coat the sides completely, then tap out the excess. Place the prepared ramekins on a baking sheet and chill until ready to fill.

Preheat the oven to 375°, with a rack in the lower-middle position.

In a double boiler or a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water, melt the chopped chocolate and butter together until completely smooth. Remove from the heat and whisk in the egg yolks, vanilla bean paste and sea salt. Set aside to cool slightly.

In a large, clean bowl, beat the egg whites and cream of tartar on medium speed until frothy. Gradually add the ½ cup sugar, one tablespoon at a time, increasing the speed to high until stiff, glossy peaks form.

## Mastering the Bain-Marie Technique Safely

Baking in a water bath, or bain-marie, is the secret to the Boca Negra's creamy texture, but it requires careful handling.

Start by placing a small, folded kitchen towel at the bottom of your roasting pan to act as a stabilizer to prevent the cake pan from sliding. To avoid sloshing, place the roasting pan on the pulled-out oven rack first, then set the filled cake pan inside. Using a long-spouted tea kettle, carefully pour the boiling water into the roasting pan until it reaches the correct height — halfway up the side of the cake pan. Close the oven and bake.

Once the cake is finished, remove only the cake pan with sturdy mitts, leaving the roasting pan in the oven. Allow the water to cool completely before remove the roasting pan, ensuring a spill-free and safe kitchen experience.

Stir roughly a third of the whipped egg whites into the chocolate mixture to lighten the base. Carefully fold in the remaining whites using a large spatula until just incorporated, being careful not to deflate the air bubbles.

Spoon the mixture into the prepared ramekins, filling them to the rim. Level the tops with an offset spatula. Run your thumb around the inside edge of each rim to create a small channel (this ensures the soufflé rises straight up).

Immediately place the baking sheet in the oven. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, until well-risen and set on top, but with a slight jiggle in the center. Do not open the oven door during the first 10 minutes of baking!

Dust with confectioners' sugar and serve immediately.

### Boca Negra Cake

Spanish for "black mouth," given its deep intensity, the Boca Negra is a magnificent baked truffle rather than a traditional cake. This nearly flourless dessert is celebrated for its silky, dense texture that melts on the tongue. Unlike a typical torte, it's gently steamed in a water bath\* to maintain its fudge-like core. Serve with raspberry coulis or crème fraîche. Excellent for company, see Serving Notes.



Serves 6 to 8

¾ C. granulated sugar, divided

½ C. bourbon

8 oz. high-quality bittersweet chocolate (70% cacao), finely chopped

1½ sticks (6 oz.) unsalted butter, room temperature, cut into cubes

3 large eggs, room temperature

1 T. all-purpose flour

Pinch of sea salt

Raspberry coulis or crème fraîche, for serving

Preheat the oven to 350°. Butter a 6- or 7-inch round cake pan and line the bottom with a circle of parchment paper. Then butter the paper.

In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine ½ cup of the sugar with the bourbon. Bring to a full boil, stirring until the sugar is completely dissolved. Immediately pour the hot syrup over the chopped chocolate in a medium bowl and stir gently with a spatula until the chocolate is melted and the mixture is glossy. Add the butter cube by cube, stirring until each piece is fully incorporated before adding the next.

In a separate bowl, whisk the eggs with the remaining ¼ cup sugar and a pinch of salt until frothy and slightly thickened. Gently fold the egg mixture into the chocolate base. Then stir in the flour just until combined.

Follow the steps in the sidebar for the bain-marie technique.\*

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes. The edges will be set, but the center should be quite jiggly. Using sturdy oven mitts, carefully lift only the cake pan out of the water bath and move it to a wire rack. Leave the roasting pan in the oven to cool.

Allow the cake to cool completely on the wire rack. To unmold, run a thin knife around the edge and briefly warm the bottom of the pan over a low stovetop flame for a few seconds to release the butter. Invert onto a serving plate, remove the parchment and serve at room temperature.

**Serving Notes:** This cake is excellent for entertaining, as it's even better made at least one day in advance, allowing the complex chocolate and bourbon flavors to fully mature. Once cooled, wrap the cake pan tightly in plastic wrap and store it in the refrigerator for up to five days. Because the high butter content causes the cake to firm when cold, remove it from the fridge at least two hours before serving to regain its signature truffle-like consistency. For Instagram-worthy wedges, dip a thin-bladed knife into a tall glass of hot water and wipe it clean between every slice, ensuring each portion has a perfectly smooth and precise edge. Top with raspberry coulis or crème fraîche.

### Chocolate-Covered Strawberries or Pretzels

Chocolate-covered strawberries are simple in concept yet exacting in execution. When made with properly tempered chocolate and perfectly dry fruit, they become something far more elegant — glossy, crisp and deeply satisfying. A treat that rewards patience and restraint, allowing the chocolate to do the work.

## Why Chocolate Feels So Good

Chocolate's allure isn't accidental. High-quality cacao contains compounds that encourage blood flow and stimulate serotonin and endorphins, the body's own pleasure chemistry. That's why chocolate feels most luxurious when you slow down and let it melt, warming on the tongue and releasing aroma before sweetness ever arrives.

Well-made chocolate is designed to unfold. Bitterness softens into creaminess. Texture shifts from snap to silk. Flavors linger, inviting another bite not out of hunger, but desire. Lower sugar allows those sensations to stretch, creating satisfaction without heaviness.

On Valentine's Day especially, chocolate chosen with care does more than finish a meal. It heightens awareness, sharpens the senses and encourages lingering at the table — a reminder that the most memorable pleasures are the ones you don't rush.



Serves 6, 2 per person

12 large strawberries, stems on, or

12 regular, crisp pretzels (rods or twists)

6–8 oz. high-quality dark chocolate (60–70% cacao),

finely chopped, divided

Reserve 2–3 oz. of the chopped chocolate for seeding

Wash strawberries in advance and dry thoroughly. Arrange in a single layer on a clean kitchen towel and allow to sit uncovered at room temperature for at least 30 to 60 minutes. Strawberries must be completely dry and at room temperature before dipping.

To temper the chocolate, place about two-thirds of the chopped chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of gently simmering water. Don't allow any water or steam to come in contact with the chocolate, as even a small amount will cause it to seize and turn grainy.

Stir slowly until fully melted and smooth, bringing the temperature to 115°. Remove from heat and add the remaining chopped chocolate, stirring gently until melted and the temperature drops to about 82°. Briefly return the bowl to gentle heat, stirring constantly, until

the chocolate reaches 88–90°. Remove from heat immediately. The chocolate should be glossy and fluid.

Dip strawberries by the stem (or pretzels by fork or dipping tool), allowing excess chocolate to drip back into the bowl. Lift and twist slightly to remove excess chocolate, allowing it to drip back into the bowl for a moment before placing pieces on parchment paper to set, spaced so they don't touch.

Allow strawberries to set at cool room temperature until the chocolate is firm and glossy. Avoid refrigeration if possible, since condensation can dull the finish. Chocolate-covered strawberries are best enjoyed the same day, ideally within 4 to 6 hours of dipping.

### Spanish-Style Chocolate Toast with Olive Oil & Sea Salt

This simple, elegant recipe is adapted from a popular Spanish snack and relies on just a few good ingredients. Warm bread, dark chocolate and olive oil come together in a way that feels indulgent without excess, making it ideal for a slow Valentine's morning or an unhurried weekend breakfast.

Serves 2

2 slices rustic or sourdough bread, about ½-inch thick

Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling

2–3 oz. bittersweet or dark chocolate (60–70% cacao),

coarsely chopped

Flaky sea salt, such as Maldon or fleur de sel

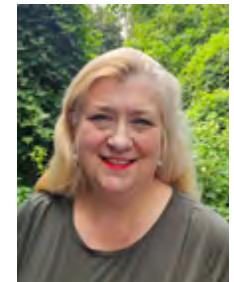
Arrange bread slices on a baking sheet and toast until golden brown and crisp on both sides.

Remove from the oven and immediately drizzle the top side of each slice generously with olive oil. Scatter the chopped chocolate evenly over the warm toast.

Turn off the broiler and return the baking sheet to the still-warm oven for about one minute, until the chocolate softens and turns glossy. It should melt slightly but not collapse into a puddle.

Remove from the oven and smooth the chocolate gently with a knife. Finish with a light sprinkle of flaky sea salt. Serve immediately while warm. ♦

*Liz Tarditi is a chef and wine specialist with more than 30 years of experience in food, wine and event planning. She holds degrees from Villanova University and from a Seattle culinary arts program founded by a Certified French Master Chef, where she trained in a classic brigade-style kitchen. Liz later ran her own catering company and has worked as a wine specialist in Pennsylvania. She brings her training and lifelong passion for seasonal, approachable cooking to Brandywine Table.*



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The image features the Fattoush logo at the top, consisting of a stylized circular emblem with leaf-like shapes above the word "fattoush" in a lowercase, bold, sans-serif font. Below the logo is the tagline "WHERE FLAVOR MEETS TRADITION". Below the tagline are three photographs of Middle Eastern dishes: a falafel bowl with shredded lettuce and tahini dressing, a plate of spring rolls with red sauce and greens, and a plate of shawarma with hummus and salad.

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