



The author (left) with Lara Lerner, founder of Amagansett Applied Arts.

Amagansett Applied Arts

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Amagansett Applied Arts, a new school and art center devoted to the visual arts, opened in June of this year, just two blocks from the Atlantic Ocean in Amagansett, New York. This twenty-first century art school stems from more than a hundred years of practice and appreciation of the visual arts on eastern Long Island that began when artists and students from The Art Students League of New York City congregated on the shores for summer classes. From the end of the nineteenth century to the present, artists as diverse as William Merritt Chase, Jackson Pollack, and Chuck Close have lived and created their art in the string of beach towns known as The Hamptons. One of the extraordinary pioneers of twentieth century hand papermaking, Douglass Morse Howell, spent much of his professional life interacting with many of the East End's artists from his different studios on Long Island. For those of us interested in both hand papermaking and the visual arts, this year-round school and art center promises to become an unusual resource where the measure of support for fine crafts, including hand papermaking, is equal to that of the traditional fine arts, such as painting. Incorporated into the vision of the school are a respect for and a desire to pass on centuries-old traditions in the arts. Beyond that, comprehensive computer and digital media labs invite students and artists to explore and integrate twenty-first century technology with these historic disciplines.

For the two founders, the genesis of this unique school began in their own early educations, but the impetus that motivated Lara and Randy Lerner to make their shared vision a reality began about five years ago. The Lerner's possess considerable leadership skills, financial experience, and creative energy to inspire and motivate a group of talented teachers. Though they both have business backgrounds, the Lerner's each bring to the school years of commitment to the visual arts. For years, Randy Lerner has lectured at and served as Chairman of the New York Academy, a graduate art school in New York City noted for its academic training in drawing, painting, and sculpture. To Randy's scholarship in fine painting, Lara brings a hands-on involvement in photography and the applied arts.

In creating a model for the structure of the school, they researched the philosophy and work of William Morris and The Kelmscott Manor in England, as well as Walter Gropius and his colleagues of the Bauhaus School in Germany. The Lerner's studied contemporary visual arts programs at The Chelsea College of Art and Design (London), The Moore College of Art (Philadelphia), and The Parsons School of Art and Design (New York City). They also consulted independent professionals and fac-



Papermaking on a sunny day at the center.



Gail Deery and Ethan Shoshan in the print studio.



Mina Takahashi demonstrating Japanese papermaking.

ultly from the Rhode Island School of Design and the Fashion Institute of Technology. Supplemental research from the Penland School and the Black Mountain School, both in North Carolina, and the Haystack School, in Maine, helped provide an overview of educational programs in the applied arts. By incorporating some of the ideals from these models, the Lerner's have created an educational program that offers an array of classes in the fine and applied arts to the varied constituency of professional artists and students who either visit the Hamptons or reside there year-round.

During its first summer of operation, Amagansett Applied Arts launched a six-week traditional foundation course specifically for young teenagers from local public schools, introducing them to multiple disciplines, beginning with highly structured drawing classes. More than one hundred workshops make up the curriculum in painting, printmaking, papermaking, fiber arts, book arts, photography, video, and digital printing, and are available for students and professionals of all ages. While students are trained within each distinct discipline, the school also offers interdisciplinary classes. "The Drawing Surface" is co-taught by the drawing instructor and the hand papermaking teacher, to encourage the exchange of ideas and a depth of understanding. During this class, students explore a variety of drawing media—such as charcoal and India ink—on a range of Western and Asian handmade papers that vary in surface texture, color, weight, and opacity. As part of the class, students also design and fabricate their own drawing paper, suited to their specific needs. Other workshops included in the papermaking program relate to the native environment of the seashore and farmland of Long Island. In a class entitled "Seaside/Garden Papermaking," students harvest local seaweed, mulberry, and flax from the Lerner's nearby farm and make paper from them.

Every aspect of the school, from locating an appropriate building in the community to tracking down the best studio equipment to finding the most qualified and inspired teachers, took years of research and planning. The school is housed in an historic barn elegantly renovated in the Arts and Crafts style to enhance the experience of creating art in an aesthetic setting. The Lerner's engaged me and other specialists in the actual planning and design of the facilities. The ground floor contains state-of-the-art darkrooms and a computer lab for digital media. The second floor houses studios for weaving, silkscreening, fiber dyeing, and book binding, and the papermill. Working with

Western sheets up to 40" x 60". On the third floor the school are open studios for drawing, painting, a printmaking. The third floor also houses a lending library and rolling gallery walls for exhibitions.

Visiting international teachers and collaborators such as Charlotte Kwon, an expert in dyeing from Vancouver, British Columbia, and Maurice Payne, a professional printmaker from England—join a pool of renowned artist-instructors from the greater metropolitan New York City area and Long Island. Many art papermakers from Dieu Donn  Papermill, including Paul Wong and Mina Takahashi, have contributed their distinctive talents in workshops in which they have passed their skills on to a new audience. When the Hunter/Howell Fellowship inaugurates its program to train master papermakers, Amagansett Applied Arts will join Dieu Donn  and other fellowship institutions to provide on-site training. The school is also in the process of planning collaborations with East End artists, such as John Alexander, and organizations including Robert Wilson's Watermill Center.

The Lerner's have done their homework in their endeavor to create an environment that will nurture the creative process and provide a center for independent learning and synergy. As Lara Lerner says, "It's not just about the object that you're making; it's about the people that you're doing it with. It's about sharing the experience with people who did it long ago. Trying to create something is a universal part of humanity." Amagansett Applied Arts is well on its way to helping fulfill this universal need.

For information about Amagansett Applied Arts