STRIDING THROUGH the newly rebuilt barn at his Sanborn Mills Farm, in Loudon, New Hampshire, F. Colin Cabot ’72 explains his plan: to develop a center for learning and preserving traditional crafts and farming skills, like blacksmithing and ox-yoke-making.

In the barn’s teaching kitchen, visitors will cook and can the farm’s produce, and they’ll gather in the dining room, for which a carpenter is busy creating Shaker-style tables and chairs from the property’s ash trees; decimated by the emerald ash borer, they are now milled and kiln-dried on site, using eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tools and techniques.

“Making things by hand and creating art are so undervalued in today’s world,” says Cabot, “that I suppose I want to provide access to a different way of living than what, for lack of a better term, is often called ‘the rat race.’”

A tall, prepossessing man who’s retained his boyish grin, Cabot was a theatrical producer in Milwaukee for two decades, before diving into rural life. His days at Sanborn Mills Farm, beautifying the landscape and overseeing a team of employees, are not unlike producing live theater. He laughs cheerfully at the thought of this, and doesn’t disagree.

Upstairs, he leads the way through seven dorm rooms and shared baths. “The view is better over here,” he calls out, directing attention through one window to a hilly pastoral scene. The dirt road winds past the main house (built in 1875), two dams, and a scattering of outbuildings. “There’s the original grist mill, and the old blacksmith shop, and the water-powered sawmill,” he says. “Those are what hooked us, because there’s no other place that I know of that has those three industrial/preindustrial structures all in one place, and in working condition.”

They weren’t entirely “working” when Cabot and his actress wife, Paula Dewey Cabot, bought the dilapidated property in 1996. What started with a few restoration and renovation projects—stabilizing the mills, rebuilding both dams, and clearing a site for “The Red House,” an antique saved from destruction in a fire-department training exercise in Maine, and for a second barn moved 20 miles from Northwood, New Hampshire—has led to wholesale re-booting of the working farm. Both mills are now operational, fields are cultivated, and a new, fully equipped teaching blacksmith shop has five forge stations.

This past year, the focus was on revamping the largest barn (it once incorporated a milking shed), and the abutting “New Carriage Barn.” There’s also a new addition on the main house, where Cabot and his wife live when in residence. (They spend about half the year in Key West, and also visit his family’s estate Les Quatre Vents, on the Saint Lawrence River north of Quebec City.)

CABOT’S ARTISTIC VISION for Sanborn Mills Farm knows almost no bounds, making it a boon for those who care deeply about the traditional skills, like woodworking, that are preserved at Sanborn Mills Farm.

The new blacksmith shop’s five forges are used in workshops ranging from basic techniques to hardware- and tool-making.
craftsmanship, as well as artisans working on-site, including six woodworkers/carpenters, three farmers/teamsters, two millwrights, and a gardener. Cabot also aims to foster self-sufficiency in the age of climate change. When a tool or piece of vintage equipment breaks, he points out, you don’t need to go to a store to replace it: you can learn how to fix it—just as you can learn how to grow food, forge tools, and weave cloth: “It can be done!”

Inside the New Carriage Barn, a multi-purpose space to be used for gatherings and workshops, Cabot had challenged carpenters to construct a free-standing, wooden spiral staircase. Also made from wood on the property, it required, among other labors, steam-bending, kerfing, and laminating six layers of white pine, and an underside covered with steam-bent and twisted tongue-and-groove ash wood strips. That section would “naturally be all made of plaster—but I forbade it!” he says, in a mock-tyrant voice. “The idea is to remember how to do this stuff because nobody knows how to do it anymore, and these skills and crafts are dying out.”

The scheduled yoke-making workshops may seem more anachronistic. But they’re of “vital interest to anyone who wants to work with oxen,” Cabot explains: yokes aren’t commercially available anywhere, and they must be hand-made to custom-fit specific animals. The long process involves cutting, drying, and carving the yoke from green wood—and requires knowing which trees are strong enough to withstand the pressure of the workload, and when and how they should be harvested. The farm currently buys its oxbows from Amish communities in Ohio, because, he reports, “We do not have any hickory in our forest, and because we haven’t taken the trouble to build a jog to bend the bows after making them bendable in a steam box.”

Employees at Sanborn do work with teams of oxen and two Percheron draft horses to plow, plant, and till. Sheds also house two pigs (raised for meat), a dozen layer chickens, and occasional batches of meat chickens. Down the dirt road, adjacent to the farm’s critical locus of agrarian technology from the early 1800s to the early 1900s. The footprint of Cabot’s farm—with its 10 buildings, arable land, and managed forests—is 540.5 acres, smaller than the Sanborn operation. But it’s also surrounded by nearly 2,000

Miller-Hunn Alumni Interviewer Awards

This year, the newly renamed Miller-Hunn Awards—the original award, which recognized the work of Hiram S. Hunn, A.B. 1921, now also honors recently retired admissions officer Dwight D. Miller, Ed.M. ’71 (see “Admissions, through the Ages,” September-October, page 30)—went to eight alumni for their volunteer efforts to recruit and interview prospective undergraduates.

David Babin ’56, of Falmouth, Massachusetts, has served as an alumni interviewer since 1972. He has also served as president of the Harvard Club of Cape Cod (2005-2007), and is now the club’s “vice president for schools.”

Michael Cominsky ’80, of Old Forge, New York, began interviewing for the Harvard Club of Syracuse as a law student in 1982. After graduating, he returned to Utica, New York, where Arthur Freedman ’37 (his College interviewer), asked him to keep it up. He now chairs the schools and scholarships committee of the Harvard Club of Mohawk Valley. (His son Manuel ’14 is now an alumni interviewer for the Harvard Club of New York.)

Katie Williams Fahs ’83, of Atlanta, has led the Harvard Club of Georgia’s schools and scholarships committee for 11 years, coordinating more than 800 applicants and 200 interviewers per year, and is a former director of the national schools and scholarships committee.

Daniel “Bud” Kelly ’43, M.B.A. ’48, of Santa Fe, has long been familiar with the admissions process: his father, Daniel T. Kelly, was a member of the class of 1908. The elder Kelly subsequently served as the office’s New Mexico representative, a role later assumed by his son, who has served for more than 40 years.

Carlos Mendoza ’88, M.P.P. ’90, of Panama City, has been an interviewer, and chair, for the local schools and scholarships committee since 2001. He also founded the Harvard Club of Panama, serving as its first president, and then as director and treasurer, and directed the Clubs and Shared Interest Groups for Latin America between 2008 and 2012.

Marjorie Murstein ’71, of Boca Raton, has interviewed candidates for the Harvard Club of the Palm Beaches since 1982. During her service, she has met students from Palm Beach and Boca Raton to the crop fields of Belle Glade and Okeechobee. She currently serves as both vice president for the schools and scholarships committee and as area chair.

Frances O’Leary ’54, of Cambridge, has served the Wellesley area since her son, Mark ’81, was admitted to Harvard. Within her first years as an interviewer, she became chairman of the area, and only recently retired as committee co-chair.

Susan St. Louis ’81, of Mirale, California, has been an alumni interviewer since 1998 in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, and has chaired the committee for 15 years.

Reprinted from Harvard Magazine. For more information, contact Harvard Magazine, Inc. at 617-495-5746
contiguous acres held in conservation easements placed by a group of property owners in the 1980s.

Sweeping views and majestic rural beauty suit the single-minded, visionary projects that run in the family. His father, the late Francis H. Cabot ’49, a financier and self-taught horticulturist, spent decades creating extraordinary landscapes. Stonecrop Gardens, a plantsman’s haven and horticulture school in the Hudson Valley, is open to the public; Les Quatre Vents, and the elder Cabot, star in The Gardener, a 2018 documentary. “He explains how he got into gardening because he’d had business reverses and then he found out he loved this and he could do it—and do it right,” Cabot says of his father, who also founded the Garden Conservancy and helped preserve old mills. “His art involved setting up liminal spaces, preparing for transporting surprises: ‘Aha! Moments.’”

Although Cabot never spoke with his father about the concept of the numen “as a prereligious divinity,” he says they both felt what renowned British gardener Penelope Hobhouse says in The Gardener, which he paraphrases as: “when you’re in the presence of something that is so beautiful that you can’t believe it’s an accident or just evolution, the numen is present.” Both men approached their living creations with that aesthetic in mind, he adds: through a “making process [as] a piecemeal development without a master plan: letting the site speak to us over time.” Sanborn Mills Farm, though, also has an externalized purpose: “I strive to find a vocation—making a craft school, using the mills as practical machines—whereas he was making an intensely private expression of his personal vision.”

**Cabot followed** his father to Harvard, where he concentrated in English literature and immersed himself in theater, participating in more than 40 productions, and served as president of the Harvard (now Harvard-Radcliffe) Dramatic Club. In hindsight, though, he says he feels that he “wasted” his Harvard education, and was “scarred” by that tumultuous period on campus; he felt angry and disillusioned by the University’s actions during student protests (see “Echoes of 1969,” March April, page 52). He then spent two “miserable” years at the Business School, failing to graduate, and left Harvard for Milwaukee with his then-wife and fellow theater practitioner, Marie Kohler ’73, to be closer to her family.

There, he served as assistant to Clair Richard-ardson, the brilliant, erratic co-founder of the Skylight Opera Theatre, before spending a year abroad working for another larger-than-life personality, the opera composer Gian Carlo Menotti. He then returned to Milwaukee to become the Skylight’s managing director, and for 12 years built the company, expanding both the staff and the annual budget (from $150,000 to $1.8 million). “I loved the theater. We had a wonderful time, it was a family—a community of people and we worked hard and made things happen,” he says. In 1989, however, feeling burned-out, he “retired” to take a volunteer post, chairman of the campaign to build the Skylight’s new performance space. The grand 358-seat Cabot Theatre, a replica of an eighteenth-century European opera house, opened in 1993.

By then, he and Kohler (they have two grown daughters) had divorced and he had married Dewey; the two met through the theater and periodically performed as a cabaret duo: she sang and he accompanied her on the piano. Because the theater-building had ended and because “artistic people and nonprofits need change,” he and Dewey in 1996 began eyeing a move to Boston to pursue graduate degrees (urban planning for him, Celtic studies for her), and second careers. Then a friend showed them the fateful real-estate listing for Sanborn Farm. Resurrecting pre-Industrial Revolution machinery (“as a tribute to the
achievement of water power”) and renting it out for use, captured Cabot’s imagination.

Twenty-three years later, he is still enthralled, still “having fun” fashioning buildings and landscapes with artistic flourishes. Next year, he plans to re-assemble the town of Loundon’s former grange (removed to make way for new town offices) and erect a donated 1919 Lord & Burnham greenhouse on the farm.

Alongside all that, he’s also addressing the realistic matter of the farm’s sustainability. Cabot has established the nonprofit Sanborn Mills Inc., with its own executive director, and plans are under way to design a long-term business model that identifies more sources of revenue, and an endowment, to cover operating costs and further develop the center. A slate of weekend workshops, including fiber arts and draft-animal handling, are scheduled to run from April through early November. And part of the plan entails expanded public programming and training partnerships (apprenticeships already exist with North Bennet Street School, in Boston, and the Guild of New Hampshire Woodworkers). There’s also the possibility that other academic, architectural, and trade organizations, like the International Molinological Society, Society for the Preservation of Old Mills, and the Timber Framers Guild, could use the farm for conferences and educational events.

Cabot allows that he’s “guilty of succumbing to the concept of ‘If you build it, they will come.’ Perhaps I devote so much energy to creating things of beauty that function in a pleasing way because I want others to experience what I think is meaningful, inspiring, and, most of all, restorative.” He idealizes the Jeffersonian agricultural ideal—sans slaves—of sustainable community farms, because he believes “that modern industrial agriculture has made it almost impossible for people to connect with nature and the land.” He points to other influences, such as the writer, activist, and farmer Wendell Berry, Land Institute founder Wes Jackson, and environmentalist Bill McKibben ’82: “In reading the work of these modern conservationists, and the writer Michael Pollan [RI ’16], you realize we have to do this.”

“This” is succinctly captured in a quotation that Cabot has had meticulously painted over a bank of windows in the large common room of the main house: “The Life So Short, the Craft So Long to Learn.” This Chaucerian version of Ovid’s Ars longa, vita brevis (itself originally from Hippocrates) means, Cabot explains, that “if you take the ‘making part’ of art seriously—like growing hickory trees for oxbows—you will run out of time before you get the job done,” he adds. “The only way to keep art—craft—alive is to have a community of artisans continually transmitting knowledge across generations—to those who will follow them.”

2019 HAA Award Recipients

Six alumni were recognized with HAA Awards, for their outstanding service to the University, during the alumni association’s fall meeting.

Salvo Arena, LL.M. ’00, of New York City, has served in various roles since 2004, including as president of the worldwide Harvard Law School Association. He is now president of the New York City chapter, co-chair of the HLSA International Committee, and a graduate-school director on the HAA board of directors. Arena has spearheaded alumni events that blend law with other disciplines, drawing record attendance from across Harvard’s schools.

Paul L. Choi ’86, J.D. ’89, of Chicago, is a former Harvard Club of Chicago president, and has served as a reunion leader for his College and Law School classes, as elected HAA director, and as HAA president (2015–16). As president, he promoted University-wide citizenship and the strengthening of Harvard’s global alumni community; he also led a review process resulting in changes to the HAA board’s structure and approach to work.

Katie Williams Fahs ’83, of Atlanta, is a former Radcliffe Club of Cincinnati president who has been a member of the Harvard clubs of New York, London, Cincinnati, and Georgia, and held board positions in the last two. In Georgia, she initiated the use of Facebook to connect alumni with current local undergraduates and chaired the schools and scholarships committees. In 2011, she was elected to the HAA board, where she has chaired the University-wide schools and scholarships committee and advised the Harvard College Fund.

Kevin Jennings ’85, of New York City, has been an alumni interviewer, Harvard Club of New York member, and, as HAA elected director, co-chair of the fundraising campaign for Harvard’s first endowed chair in LGBT studies. He is the former co-chair of the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Caucus (now the Harvard Gender and Sexuality Caucus). As the first college-bound person in his family, he also founded the First Generation Harvard Alumni SIG, which earned the 2017 HAA Clubs & SIGs Committee Award.

Patrik Johansson, M.P.H. ’01, of Omaha, became an HAA elected director in 2006, and has also served on the School of Public Health’s alumni council and the Harvard Club of Sweden’s board. Of African-American, Cherokee, and Swedish descent, he completed the Harvard-affiliated Commonwealth Fund Fellowship in Minority Health Policy and was integral in ensuring the representation of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, the Nipmuc Nation, and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah in ceremonies commemorating the 350th anniversary of the Harvard Indian College.

Rev. Gloria White-Hammond, M.Div. ’97, of Boston, joined the School of Public Health’s Children’s Health Advisory Council after graduation, and has spoken at campus gatherings about her work with two fellow Divinity School (HDS) alumnai in aiding the liberation of thousands of enslaved Sudanese women, and the subsequent founding of My Sister’s Keeper, a humanitarian and human-rights initiative. She has also served as a graduate-school director on the HAA board.