

Hanging with Paul Neuman

by Julie Schlenger Adell

After 40-plus years as a caterer in New York City, Paul Neuman has embarked on a new project involving sustainable packaging related to the food industry. Growing up in Flushing, Queens, he worked in his father's store in Manhattan, the Rosedale Fish Market, which his grandfather Cornelius bought for \$250 in 1906. Adorned with a 19th-century codfish trade sign, the shop, on Third Avenue between 78th and 79th Streets, was well known to the carriage trade of the Upper East Side. It closed in 2003, a couple of years after Paul's dad died. "Almost sixty-three years at hard labor," said the son.

He has always loved antiques, patina, and surface.

Now the original trade sign is kept in Paul's apartment, while a duplicate the family commissioned in 1985 from carver William Sullivan—which was stolen from the shop and returned by an unknown antiques dealer some years later—is kept at Paul's brother Alan's house in New Mexico. "It's my most treasured thing," Paul stated. "If there was ever a fire...."

While he was growing up, his next-door neighbor was Ferdinand Speyer, a pawnbroker by trade. "Uncle Ferdie was always collecting stuff," he recalled fondly. "Dad and Ferdie were very close. I got a bit of the bug from Ferdie."

Paul has been making stuff "since I'm a kid," and his youth was spent working on his electric train sets. "I packed up the trains when I went to college," he said. He added, "For me, the trains were a world in miniature that I was re-creating."

Attending three colleges and eventually graduating from Alfred University with a bachelor of fine arts degree, Paul was his class's graduation speaker, an honor rarely bestowed on an art student, he said. Having studied woodworking, glassblowing, and welding, when he returned to New York to work in the fish store, he made a stained-glass sign to celebrate the store's 70th anniversary.

The family spent time in the Hamptons when he was a young man, and one weekend Paul stopped at Amagansett Farmers Market and tasted a mussel salad. "I can make that!" he realized. "All you need are mussels, chopped pimentos, parsley, and a mustard dressing." On Monday he prepared the salad and served it in the store. He signed up for cooking classes, worked in the evenings for a caterer, and eventually taught a class at The New School on fish and food preparation. There he met a young woman who became his wife and mother of their son, who is now 38 years old. Together they opened Neuman & Bogdonoff, a prepared food store one avenue over from Rosedale Fish Market. "There was a hotline between the stores," joked Paul, for when "Dad needed an ingredient or two."

(Full disclosure: When this writer's son was born, Neuman & Bogdonoff catered the celebratory lunch. She recalls it was a delicious day.)

A few years later a Starbucks, followed by a large, luxury food store, opened in the neighborhood, and Paul decided to close the uptown store, moving to a commissary space on Chrystie Street on the Lower East Side.

Neuman & Bogdonoff closed in the early 2000s, and Paul, newly divorced, rebranded as Neuman's Kitchen. In 2016 the company moved to Long Island City. It was recently bought by a catering and facilities management company. "Catering filled my need for creativity. It's a fusion of creativity and food history," he said.

He has always loved antiques, patina, and surface, and he and his family have spent years in Kent, Connecticut, and the surrounding area. Paul went to antiques fairs and toy shows, captivated by Märklin trains and Richter stone blocks. "For thirty years I lived at The Elephant's Trunk. It fed me. I found my ingredients there," he said.

Furthermore, "I did the circuit—Brimfield, Madison-Bouckville, et cetera. I found stuff to collect but also to cut up and use."

Paul Neuman is partial to the number three—he went to three colleges; his birthday is on the third day of the month, as is his son's; and he now carries three business cards—his Neuman's Kitchen card, his artist card (www.paulneumanartist.com), and one for his new sustainable packaging project related to catering.

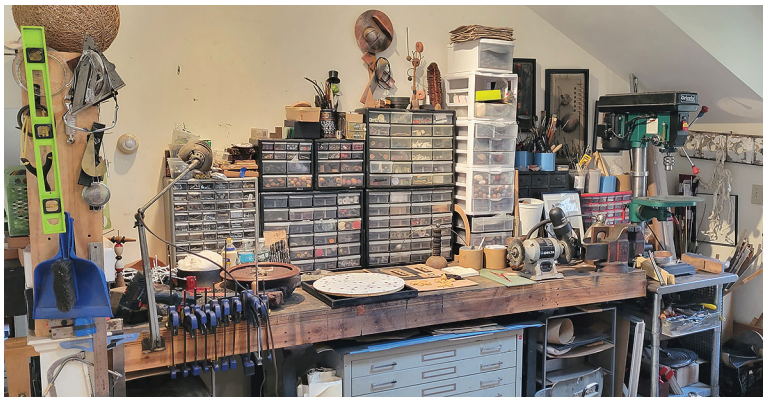
"Three is a big number. Good things come in threes."



Paul Neuman in his New York City apartment.



This stained-glass sign commemorating Rosedale Fish Market's 70 years in business was made by Paul, who earned a B.F.A. from Alfred University. The numerals and scales on the red snappers are sandblasted.



Paul's studio in his house in Kent, Connecticut. His website is (www.paulneumanartist.com).



A 19th-century painted plaster mirror is seen with some of Paul's art. The sculpture (left) is made from old rubber-working tools; the coiled bowl is bronze, painted blue; and the totem sculptures are made from fishing bobbers and miscellaneous metal and wood components.



Seen by the window in Neuman's New York City apartment are a wave sculpture of apple tree twigs made by Paul; two alabaster pomegranate bowls from Morocco; a pair of Italian lamps; a spherical moon ceramic vessel; and a glass vase.



On the left is a paper collage from the silhouette of a fish sign that hung outside the family store. It was made by Paul from Wassaic Project posters. Wassaic Project is an artist-run nonprofit gallery in Wassaic, New York, a 15-minute drive from Kent, Connecticut. The two wood assemblages were made by Paul from Vermont road signs. He refers to them as “quilts.” On the right is an abstract painting by Robert Kingston (b. 1955), who lives and works in Los Angeles.



Seen here is a still-life photograph by Lynn Karlin, a New York-born photographer who lives and works in Maine. The 19th-century carved and gilded wood trade sign in the shape of a fish is from Paul’s family’s store, the Rosedale Fish Market. The bowling pin lamp is from the 1950s-60s, and the red glass box is by Kyohei Fujita (1921-2004).



Some examples of Paul’s art inside his Connecticut house. On the left is a wood cube made from Vermont road signs. A miniature sculpture garden of metal pieces used in an auto body repair shop is at the center. On the right is a fish and hand sculpture from a glove mold with wood typography letters.



Paul and his wife, Dr. Karen Binder-Brynes.



Fiddlers

ANTIQUES SHOW

FEBRUARY 14 - 17, 2024

We’re the ‘Kick-Off’ event of Nashville’s Antiques Week.
Get your tickets on our website starting Jan. 1

FiddlersAntiquesShow.com

THE FAIRGROUNDS NASHVILLE!
500 Wedgewood Ave. S., Nashville, TN 37203

EARLY SHOPPERS: Wed. Feb. 14, 8am-noon GEN. ADM.: Wed. Feb. 14, noon-5; Thurs. 10-5, Fri. 9-5, & Sat. 9-3
For more info.: Kay Puchstein 740-998-5300 or FiddlersAntiquesShow@gmail.com



