

THE MAGAZINE of *SPLENDID HOMES and GARDENS* • JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2014

DESIGN

NEW ENGLAND

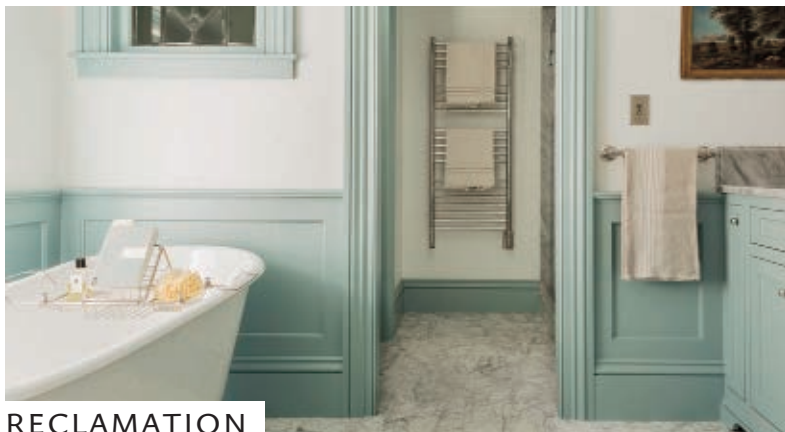
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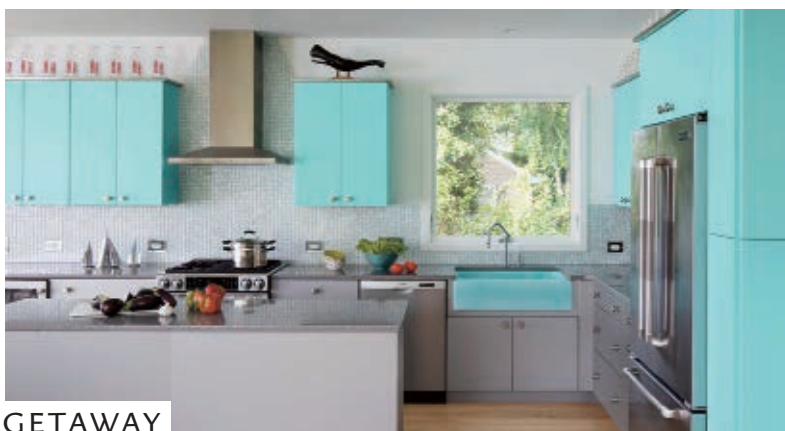
ARCHITECTURE



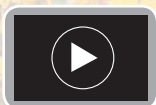
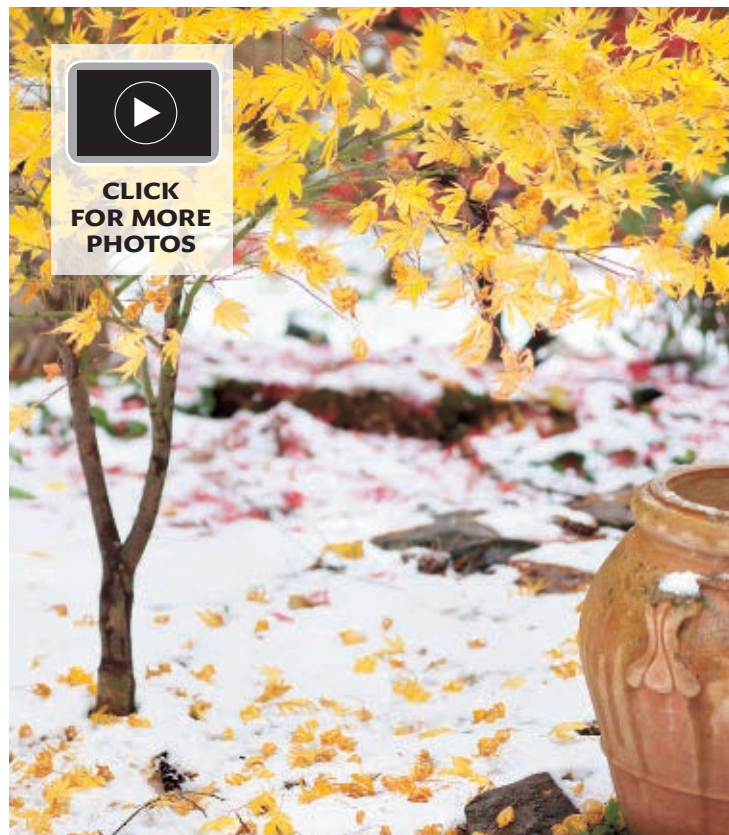
RECLAMATION



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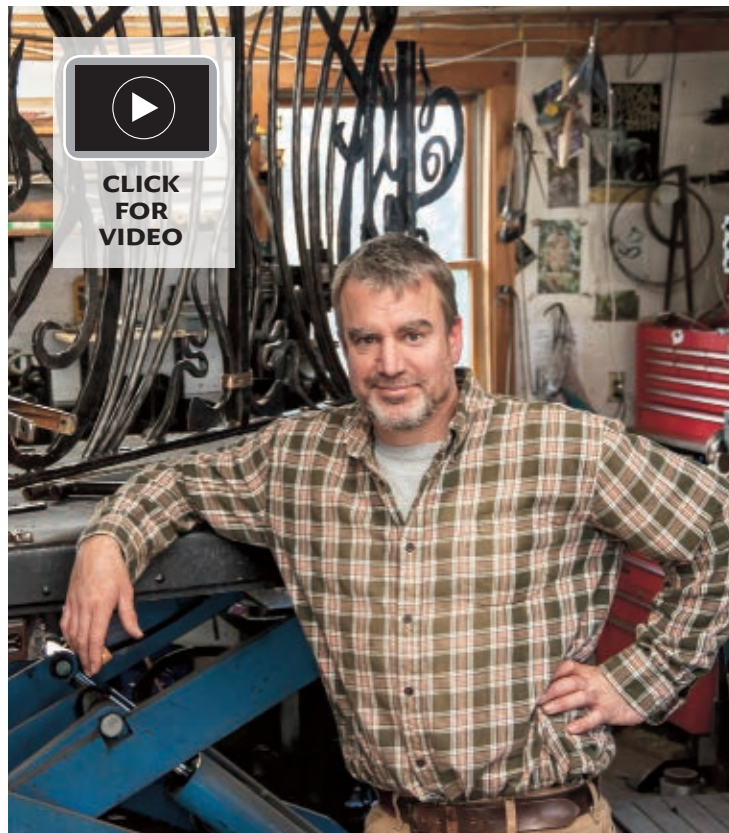
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GARDEN Garden Variety

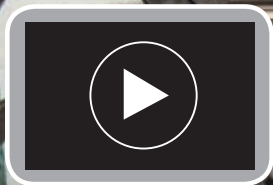
A bramble of a backyard grows into a lush all-season oasis with global influences. See a bonus online gallery of the garden and its art.



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VIDEO

ART Man of Steel

Cape Ann sculptor Chris Williams turns metal into creatures great and small. Watch him in fiery action in a behind-the-scenes video of the artist at work.



ONLINE
BONUS



Man of Steel

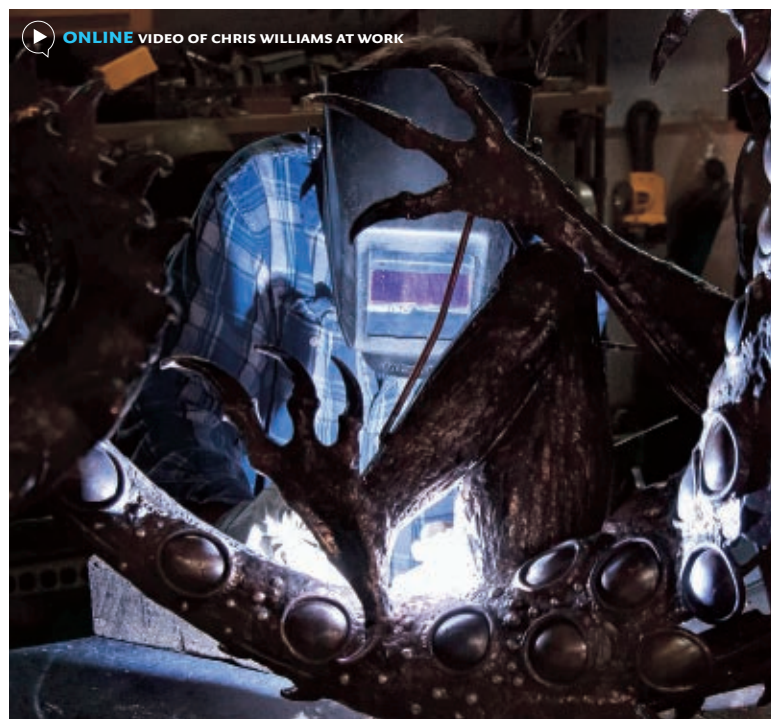
Cape Ann sculptor Chris Williams turns metal into creatures great and small

WRITTEN BY DALE KOPPEL • PHOTOGRAPHED BY KATHERINE RICHMOND

The first time someone called him a sculptor, Chris Williams was caught off-guard. After all, he had no formal art training. He had never even been to an art museum. He was a tinkerer, curious about how to take scraps of metal and turn them into figments of his imagination — the way his father, a metalworker who owned a machine shop in Rockport, Massachusetts, did.

From his father, Williams learned not to be afraid of failure. “Failure,” he says, “allows you to keep trying, to change course if something’s not working right.” Often that means improvising, something Williams does with ease. When conventional tools refuse to shape metal the way he wants, he makes them himself. Half the tools in the 27-by-27-foot studio attached to the house he shares with his wife and two young sons in Essex, Massachusetts, he designed and fabricated. And at 6 feet 2 inches tall and 200 pounds, Williams, 44, uses his

SCULPTOR CHRIS WILLIAMS stands in front of the exterior bronze stair railing (ABOVE) he created for a residence in Gloucester, Massachusetts. For a dragon sculpture (RIGHT), he connects a 12-foot tail onto a piece of granite with what he calls a “magic wand,” a gun that injects intense heat into small spaces.



ONLINE VIDEO OF CHRIS WILLIAMS AT WORK

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physical strength as well as his tools to form his sculptures, many of them larger than life.

A recent commission from Massachusetts's Salem State University is a case in point. The school's sports teams are known as the Vikings, and Williams was asked to design a fitting symbol to be placed in front of the new Harold E. and Marilyn J. Gassett Fitness and Recreation Center. His answer is a 9-foot-tall bronze Viking that stands on a 3-foot-high pile of granite rocks. Fist in the air, this 900-pound warrior is strong and edgy and in control, yet Williams made sure he does not intimidate. He is, after all, to be the official campus greeter, and according to Tom Shea, director of athletics at Salem State, the Viking is becoming "the most photographed campus site."

Williams's career as a sculptor began in 1995 when, working in his father's machine shop, he decided to create little dinosaurs out of railroad spikes to give to the children of friends, who encouraged him to make more figures and sell them. He soon moved to bigger pieces and placed them at Local Colors, an artists' co-operative in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Within four days, one of them —

WILLIAMS STUDIES THE finished 9-foot-tall bronze Viking in his studio before moving it Salem State University. "The last thing I want to do is have to move it back in," he says, so having enough time to ensure all details are right is crucial.

a 6-foot-tall unicyclist — sold for \$700. His first commission — and his first from-scratch fabrication — was a \$4,000, 10-foot-tall giraffe. "I couldn't stop looking at the check," he recalls.

In 2000, he was asked to create a larger-than-life dragon for a private home. "I couldn't believe it," Williams says. "As early as I can remember, I dreamed about dragons, but I never imagined anyone would ask me to actually make one for them." He also has a special affinity for real animals. "I feel like there's so much more expression for me to capture in their bodies and their faces," says Williams. "Plus, I'm more curious about their spirits than I am of the human spirit. When I look at animals, I feel like I'm looking into their souls."

Many of his large-scale installations are of animals. There's a bronze bear at Massachusetts's Bridgewater State University, and he's planning an alligator at the University of Florida in Gainesville. A steel moose has



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ART



FOR A COMMISSIONED sculpture of Niki, a pet greyhound, Williams met the animal and took photographs he could reference at his studio. His goal, he says, was to capture her “combination of energy and curiosity” in bronze.

adorned the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport in New Hampshire since 2008, and a 25-foot-long seascape of bronze and blown-glass ocean creatures has been at the American Airlines Terminal B at Logan International Airport since 2010.

It was the request for a stainless-steel and blown-glass octopus for a Gloucester restaurant that led Williams to Peter Houk, director of the MIT Glass Lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts. “Neither of us had ever tried to mold glass and metal into something,” says Williams, “but we were both ready to experiment.” It took them two years to perfect the technique.

Catch of the Day from his Breakwater Collection: *Mysteries of the Deep*, which he sells in his studio and online, is an example of their final success. The 25-pound, 14-by-11-inch forged-bronze and solid-glass fish can be displayed indoors or out, preferably where the sun’s rays will reflect off the glass. At \$395, it is one of the many creatures Williams sells for less than \$1,000. He also makes functional pieces such as

the exterior bronze stair railing he created for a Gloucester residence. Practical and beautiful, it looks like intricate vines. Frances Burden of Rockport commissioned Williams to create a dragon for her garden. “There’s something angelic about him,” says Burden. “Children don’t find him scary, even though he’s baring his teeth.” ▲

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Chris Williams Sculpture, chriswilliams.com