



An Interview with Andrew Pate, Class of '69

Andrew Pate is a self-taught designer and building consultant specializing in fine wooden cabinetry and traditional and contemporary furniture. Resilient wooden dance floors built to his design have been installed at Columbia University, Bennington College, Tufts University, Boston College, and in dozens of private studios. He recently spent three years designing woodwork and managing the renovation of a Federal Period Vermont farmhouse and is currently working on building a zero energy, high efficiency house. He lives with Stacey, his wife of twenty four years, in the rural, upstate village of Cambridge, New York.

PAINTING BY JERI MACDONALD. INTERVIEW BY DAVA STRAVINSKY

What is your most vivid memory of Bellport High School?

One of my most vivid memories was classmate Victor Bono's effort to build a sculpture of car hoods on heavy pipes cemented into the ground to represent a clipper ship at the entrance to the school. I don't know if it was completed or if it survived for any length of time. I found it inspiring that someone could work on something that was not part of the curriculum or class assignment. It might have been his art class project, he was definitely thinking creatively and BIG.

What was your favorite class?

I remember enjoying French class, reading literature in a language other than English was a challenge but seeing or imagining life through the words of another culture was enlightening. Taking French emboldened me to travel to France several times; a very rich and stimulating experience. I also became interested in French cooking and have cultivated my taste for great food of all sorts.

What are some of your more recent activities?

About 12 years ago I took up windsurfing. I visit Cape Hatteras for a couple of weeks in the spring and fall to sail and spend time at the ocean. I always wished I had taken advantage of sailing on Bellport Bay in HS, now I get back to Bellport occasionally and can rig up on the lawn by the band shell and head out onto the water. I am also on the board of the local art center, work on a recycling advisory board with the county, and am involved with a citizens group advocating for intelligent land use, development and conservation.

How did going to Bellport prepare you for your life and profession?

My second favorite class was mechanical drawing. I took it for two years. Although I might have gone to architecture school, I ended up leaving college and going into furniture making and building restoration. The drawing classes in conjunction with math and science skills and a general curiosity have allowed me to run a business on my own terms for over 35 years. I have designed and built cabinetry, furniture and sculpture. I have worked on several Frank Lloyd Wright houses and helped restore and remodel many older New England homes. I invented a sprung floor system popular with dancers. Regularly I advise clients on design and energy issues related to their homes. All of this was possible to some degree thanks to habits I developed and guidance I received at BHS.

What is your advice for BHS students?

I didn't know at the time what my High School classes were preparing me for. I would like to think students today know more about how they will support themselves and what they might do to contribute to making the world a better place. Life is complicated, busy, full of responsibilities, nothing is guaranteed. I recommend trying to get as much as you can out of the classes you take, looking for activities that expose you to ideas and people outside your comfort zone. Read, I was always a slow reader but reading has exposed me to valuable information, knowledge, and ideas. Reading has helped me to think deeply about the values and concerns of our society. Reading is also a great escape. Be prepared to think for yourself, defend your ideas, don't be afraid to try something new. Take time to commune with nature. Realize that you are connected to all other living things in the world one way or another.