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In this time of significant change, as witnessed by the unpredictable economy and the historic election, this issue of the SOF News brings together a broad array of contributions from the entire AAR community. Produced over an extended period, they reflect the elaborately diverse influences that make up the institution we share. This institution, beyond its well-loved bricks and mortar, allows all to benefit from the simple notion that a handful of scholars and artists living together in a community can foster and expand the pursuits of each through their day-to-day interaction. This common experience remains unchanged, but the results often change us, our work, our futures, and sometimes times significantly.

Articles in this issue of the SOF News look at two historic AAR “re-openings” that were the focus of well-deserved celebrations in Rome. The first of these marks the centennial of the birth of Laurance P. Roberts, and recalls the re-opening of the AAR after World War II. The second describes the re-opening of the Arthur and Janet C. Ross Library, closed for a year for a comprehensive renovation and expansion. Its rebirth represents the crowning success of Christina Haemer’s tenure as the Drexel Heinz Librarian. The first re-opening brought the AAR into the modern, postwar Roberts era; the second brings the library into the 21st century.

This issue also emphasizes the work of recent fellows in the arts and literature. One article recounts the experience of an artist simulating communal living in a two-dimensional world; another reports on a digital reconstruction of ancient Rome via a real time three-dimensional model. Two other pieces herald enormous and welcome changes to two of the most important and often discussed aspects of the human experience, the food and wine. And yet, these changes are significant, but the essence of the tradition of fellows dining together remains unchanged.

Enjoy!

James L. Bodnar, faar’80

Letter from the Editor
In a year of many highlights and special events, the 2008 Roberts Centenary Celebration, chaired by Charles B. Rittner, faar’57, stood out as exceptional. The weekend of September 30–October 2, 2007, which began as a commemoration of the 100th birthday of Laurance P. Roberts, the extraordinary man who led the academy from 1946 to 1959, grew into something that, we hope, genuinely reflected the breadth of what he and his wife, Isabel S. Roberts, accomplished.

When at the end of the second World War, the trustees of the American Academy in Rome appointed Laurance P. Roberts director, they gave him one assignment: to reopen the academy. We had closed our doors in 1940, and Laurance and Isabel arrived in December of 1946. Laurance had just been discharged from the army. The couple found the property in shambles, without heat, hot water, or furniture. Yet, by June, when the Classical Summer School met for the first time in more than six years since before the war began, the main building was functioning. During the months that followed, the other buildings, too, were brought back to life, one by one.

The buildings were a means to an end: a reimagined community that became our modern academy of today. Before the war, most fellows were single men under the age of 30, and there were a handful of women scholars who lived and dined in separate quarters. When the fellows arrived in fall of 1947, for the first time their number included women artists. Both men and women were allowed to be over 30, to be married, and to be accompanied by spouses and children. Although (after some trial and error) families generally lived outside our precinct, the academy was on its way to being the more down-to-earth institution it is today.

The Roberts also initiated changes to the fellowships, instituting a Rome Prize in the History of Art (then based in the School of Fine Arts), and they launched our still crucial association with the American Academy of Arts and Letters and in so doing created the first fellowship in literature. They began a unique and very successful partnership whereby Italian archaeologists, other scholars, and finally artists, were able to win Fulbright Fellowships to the American Academy and became full-fledged, lifelong members of the academy family. Laurance and Isabel Roberts appointed the first residents, including some distinguished artists and scholars drawn from beyond the United States: among them were Elizabeth Bowen, Richard Krautheimer, Agnes Mongan, and Archibald MacLeish. To quote Martin Boddy’s essay in the program for the Roberts Centenary: the Roberts “transformed the academy into a hothouse of contemporary artistic production while affirming and redefining its commitment to the study of the past.”

The academy’s other programs were also broadened and reinvigorated in the 1940s and 1950s. With Roberts’s encouragement, the newly established International Union of the History of History, Archeology and Art, began sponsoring joint exhibitions of the work of the fellows and students of the many foreign academies in Rome. Also, under the auspices of the Unione, Laurance Roberts offered Ernest Nash a home for his extraordinary photographs of Rome, now known as the Fototeca Unione. The collection includes more than 30,000 negatives. This Phototeca, together with the Academy’s own Photographic Archive which has continued to grow over the years, is today an important resource for scholars, artists, and other researchers.

In 1947, Roberts brought Frank E. Brown, faar’31 (whose centenary we will also recognize in 2008) to Rome to establish an academy excavation, which he did at Cosa, in Italy. Generations of fellows have worked there and in the Cosa Room at the academy, which was also created during these years, and the academy continues to this day to publish the work that has come out of this dig.

The academy’s music program in particular blossomed, with the Villa Aurelia concerts, an ongoing relationship with Rome’s Orchestra that made possible the performance of fellow’s symphonic work as well as those by residents such as Aaron Copland.

Each of these contributions to the making of the modern Academy was addressed as part of the Roberts Centenary Celebration. On Monday October 1, Laurance Roberts’s 100th birthday, there was a public performance on “Roberts’s Rome” with papers given by Richard T. Arnold; Henry A. Millor, faar’59, faar’66; Martin Kopy, faar’02; and Richard Trythall, faar’87, faar’91; Cosa: The Italian Sibyls. Supplements to the Memoirs of the AAR, 2008, by Maria Teresa Marabini Moers, Italian Fulbright Fellow ’41 (the first year such fellowships were awarded), faar’54, was presented, with talks not only about the new book but also about the history of the Cosa excavations and the welcoming of Italian Fulbright Fellows into the academy family. There were remarks by Lawrence Richardson JR, faar’50, faar’59, delivered in absentia by Harry B. Evans, faar’73, faar’75; Russell T. Scott, Jr., faar’66, faar’79, delivered in absentia by Thomas A. J. McGinn, faar’85, Andrew W. Mellon Professor in Charge, Silvio Pincia, Italian Fulbright Fellow ’59, and Maria Teresa Marabini Moers. A Villa Aurelia concert featured music by Roberts-era fellows and residents; it was followed by dinner in the style of the time at the Cortile. A single long table ran the length of each of two arms of the Cortile to seat the more than one hundred people in attendance.

For the event, Charles BrICKbauer had gathered together members of the Roberts family and their close friends; some of them had visited the Academy years ago, and others knew it only through often and fondly told stories. In addition, all the fellows who had been invited had been in Rome under the Roberts’s direction, hoping that the reunion of the class of 1947 through the 1950’s would take the opportunity to confer with the fellows of 2007–2008. Many came: James Ackerman, faar’52; Katherine Geffken, faar’93; James Lamantia, faar’45; Maria Teresa Marabini Moers, Italian Fulbright Fellow; Henry A. Milon, faar’60; Maria Bonfoli Panciera, Italian Fulbright Fellow ’79; and Silvio Panciera Italian Fulbright Fellow ’36. Happily, they were joined by fellows from other years, including Jeffrey Blanchard, faar’79; Harry B. Evans, faar’73; Ronald Fison, faar’70; Stephen Rosten, faar’81; Tristian Michael Comfort, faar’76; and Society of Fellows president James L. Bodnar, faar’84. Others, such as Robert Venturi, faar’66, faar’65, and William MacDonald, faar’96, sent comments, and Evangelos Frudakis, faar’52, gave the Academy a bust of Laurance Roberts that he had sculpted in his studio and cast in Rome during his fellowship years.

One by one, fellows from the 1940s and 1950s and those from the program rose and came to stand at the intersection of the two tables and give a five-minute talk about their work or their time at the academy.

Every single presentation was fascinating, and together they formed a complete portrait of the academy as a joyful, life-altering opportunity and experience that endures and grows over time but somehow always remains the same. Not Roberts, nephew of Laurance Roberts, spoke especially memorably when he quoted his Uncle’s challenge to all new arrivals in the old days: “Do not think of where you’ve been, but of where you are going, and learn from the people that you’ll meet here to form a continuum through life.”

The final event of the centenary vividly captures the spirit of the weekend. This was a walk through Baroque Rome, a special tour conceived by Charles BrICKbauer, Hank Milon, and Robert Venturi. Led by Milon, it quickly became an ambulatory conversation on art, architecture, Rome and the Rome Prize experience, with contributions by Jim Ackerman, Charles BrICKbauer, David Childs, Michael Conforti, and many of the fellows of 2007–2008. This reunion of members of the Roberts family with Roberts fellows, with the fellows now in residence, and with Rome itself applied the timeless qualities Laurance and Isabel Roberts brought to their restoration and the expansion of the academy in the crucial years of the mid-twentieth century: the timeless qualities of spirit, the life of intellect and creativity that is the American Academy in Rome, and for which we will forever grateful.

Photograph: James Bodnar

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Can one create new spaces, move walls, remove floors, resurface every surface and design new furniture while strengthening the character of what we have known as the American Academy in Rome Library? What is its unique character and how does it relate to the rest of the McKim Building? This, in essence, is what occupied us for a few years and especially last year, during the ten-month intensive restoration and upgrade of the American Academy in Rome Library, now the Arthur and Janet C. Ross Library.

"Us" consisted of the gifted design team, Architects Cinzia Abbate and Carlo Vigevano with Engineer Bruno Masci; MEP/HVAC Engineer Luigi De Marco and structural Engineer Marco Barone; Christina Huemer (Drue Heinz Librarian) and her staff, especially Paolo Imperatori and Antonio Palladino; yours-truly and the Plant, Planning and Preservation Committee of the Academy, who supported and advised us throughout the project without ever asking for compromises.

The scope of the overall project was fairly broad but at its core was the fact that the Italian authorities had demanded that we install a fire suppression system and remove all desks and study carrels. We wanted to design and fabricate most of the new furniture needed, such as folios cabinets, bookshelves, desks and study carrels. We needed to design contemporary furniture specifically for the "McKim" Library and we needed to use metal in addition to wood for conservation purposes.

Guided by these two principles, we selected noce nazareno or national Italian walnut already present in the Library and worked in generous dimensions when we used it alone for the desks and much thinner dimensions when we used it "as a skin", to quote Architect Cinzia Abbate, around the metal folios cabinets.

The scope of the overall project was fairly broad but at its core was the fact that the Italian authorities had demanded that we install a fire suppression system and remove all desks and work spaces from the stacks areas which meant that the Library needed to be closed. So, we decided to take this opportunity to expand the project and solve other needs: specifically the need to increase the shelving capacity, create special cabinets for the folios collection and study carrels, create a private office for the Assistant Librarian Denise Gavio, a new work space for volunteers and upgrade the rest of the offices and building systems. Finally the beautiful woodwork in the Linda Bettman Reference Room and Arthur Ross Reading Room on the main floor had not been restored or cleaned in about 90 years and were in dire need of conservation.

We immediately decided that we were going to design and fabricate most of the new furniture needed, such as folios cabinets, bookshelves, desks and study carrels. We wanted to design contemporary furniture specifically for the "McKim" Library and we needed to use metal in addition to wood for conservation purposes. Guided by these two principles, we selected noce nazareno or national Italian walnut already present in the Library and worked in generous dimensions when we used it alone for the desks and much thinner dimensions when we used it "as a skin", to quote Architect Cinzia Abbate, around the metal folios cabinets.

The restoration of the Library brought one major surprise. During the early stages of demolition and structural consolidation we discovered that the main sewer line that passed below the Library space had collapsed and had to be rebuilt. This added a tremendous amount of work and time to the project, all of which had to be absorbed within our schedule making it mandatory from the very beginning to work weekends.

The linear form of the new double study carrels with book shelves on the side was a direct response to the narrow beauty of the old Metropolitana which was going to become our new Reading and Folios Room. The new reference desk, named for the late Andrew Heiskell, turned out to be the most difficult single piece of furniture to design because of its location in the middle of the beautiful historical woodwork in the Linda Bettman Reference Room. It was not until the very end of the project that we finally felt comfortable with our design. We needed to spend time actually working in the Library and watching the old furniture come back to life, after cleaning and re-waxing, before we could design this desk. We needed to, as Adele often says, "watch the light".

The rest of the project fell into place. We decided on compact shelving to increase shelving capacity, we designed a new mezzanine to gain more space for the offices and created a second Reading Room on the lower level. For this we selected a corner space which never had a continuous use and because of this lacked clear character or relevance. However we knew we could turn it into a relevant part of the Library by anchoring our design around an original McKim table with its chairs and lamps that we needed to relocate from the Linda Bettman Reference Room to make space for the new Andrew Heiskell Reference Desk.

With plans in hand, we went out to bid and began construction in early September 2006. A General Contractor called MarCost, new to the Academy but not to the Architects, won the bid. MarCost turned out to be a very good contractor. Key to the project was Nazzareno Palmieri, the tireless Superintendent who worked every Saturday for ten months, a few Sundays and holidays, almost never lost his cool and consistently went beyond the call of duty. One day, a few hours before the official Curtile Dinner for Fellows and Trustees during Trustee week in Rome, with over 100 dinner guests expected, the Sous Chef Chris Boswell called me in a slight panic because their pasta maker had just broken. The Maintenance Crew had already left for the day so I immediately called Nazzareno who instead of going home, came to the kitchen with his tool box and fixed the pasta maker.

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Our work completed (including the move of all 120,000 plus books first out and then back in, a painstaking enterprise that was carried out under the supervision of Christina Huemer and her staff), the Library reopened on September 3rd, 2007 to the new Fellows and a week later to our outside readers just as Carmela had promised.

It is always a little sad when a project comes to an end for those of us so intensively involved. But after ten months of noise and loud voices it was now quiet. The readers were back inside the Library, working in silence and the Library was where it belongs, at the center of Academy life.

Architect Carlo Vigevano was the Architect of Record for Construction which meant that his professional liability was on the line while we were carrying out major construction and excavations right below the Fellows bedrooms and studies.

The Director Carmela Franklin was a great supporter and advocate for the project, always finding the positive side of the project even in the face of the dust and noise that the project brought on everything and everybody. She also kept us on schedule by reminding us during her frequent site visits that she had given her word to the Roman community of scholars that we would reopen the Academy Library on time.

One of the great privileges of living and working at the Academy is that it deepens ones understanding of the purpose of the institution, the buildings, the gardens, the community and how it all comes together. This knowledge is fundamental during the design phase of any project and must continue to guide the project as it unfolds during construction and implementation.

Restoration is a process and each new insight and decision must be checked against the overall project intent. Close attention must be paid to understand the nuances of the evolving project and one needs be ready to refine design decisions, whether it is the amount of shellac to be applied to the original wood or the height of a vertical element for a new railing.

Finally, if everyone involved in the project understands the spirit of the restoration process, then changes can be made without major “change orders” or extra cost. When we uncovered some old rails which had been used to transport coal back in the early life of the McKim building, we were able incorporate them into our floor design as if they had always been part of the project.

All photographs on this spread: Mimmo Capone

Architects: Studio Abbate and Vigevano, Architects Cinzia Abbate, Carlo Vigevano and Engineer Bruno Masci.
HVAC and MEP: Engineer Luigi De Marco.
Structural Engineering: Engineer Marco Barone.
Graphic Design: 2x4.
General Contractor: MarCost—Geometra Erminio Marinelli; Project Manager: Geometra Domenico Sabatini, Site Superintendent: Matteo Cattani.
Building Systems: Roche & Child.
Wood Conservation: Franco Calzino.
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All photographs on this spread: Mimmo Capone
Arthur Ross (1900–2007) was elected a trustee of the American Academy in Rome in 1981 and remained a member of the academy family in that capacity and later as a trustee emeritus until his death on September 9, 2007. He was a wise and engaged advisor, bringing his renowned business acumen to the Academy’s finance and investment committees, and his love of classics, learning, and international scholarly exchange and of parks, trees, and gardens to his oversight of the Academy’s programs and property. Janet Ross, an artist whom he married in 1946, was a passionate supporter of many of these interests, and also became an integral part of the academy family.

At a luncheon celebrating the endowedowment gift Arthur and Janet Ross made to name the library in memory of Arthur Ross, historian and humanities professor at the University of Connecticut’s School of Fine Arts, in 2007. "...the library, with its world-scale collection of over 135,000 volumes on art and archaeology, has always interested us, [as has] the reading rooms, with which we have had a love affair since early on. ’As the years have passed, adding to my devo- tion to the academy, I began to feel a sense of patriotism and the attraction of supporting this great cultural outpost of our country. We have enough army and naval bases around the world and enough preoccupation with guns and military hardware, so to raise our flag high over the library was an opportunity not to be missed.’ Arthur Ross’s affection for and commitment to the American Academy was expressed not only in his support for the library but also in his promotion of the fellowships, the creative and scholarly programs, and the place itself.

He endowed the Arthur Ross Predoctoral Rome Prize Fellowship in Ancient Studies, the first endowed position at the Academy. Arthur Ross was 57 years old.

The Academy gathers each spring to announce and introduce the Rome Prize winners at the Academy and at the Arthur Ross Rome Prize Ceremony. It is the most important event of the year, both of a reunion of returning and former fellows and a welcoming of new ones.

Arthur Ross planned and also for many years hosted a fall event for artists and scholars who had recently completed their fellowship year. The Returning Fellows Dinner had an almost therapeutic role, easing these scholars’ return into life after the academy. This occasion is now organized and sponsored by the Society of Fellows, and serves as an inauguration into the organization of alumni and the continuing fellow- ship it represents.

In 1990 Arthur Ross launched the international tour of an exhibit of his Piranesi prints at the American Academy in Rome. Today, everyone who visits the academy’s New York offices today finds two of the Piranesi prints on permanent view, a gift of Arthur Ross.

Arthur Ross will always be at the presence in the Academy in Rome, a part of the space. He supported the restoration of Villa Aurelia, helping to provide the Academy with it’s ideal setting for public programs, from concerts and lectures to symposia and conferences, and for private receptions and small meetings, such as lunch, dinners, and overnight accommodations for guests of the Academy. Finally he will also be remembered always by his elm tree, which that grow in the Chiaraviglio and Trieste Gardens.
By mid-December the air in the shadows has grown painfully cold. Hardly any Italians seem to bring their children outside. When we push our twins through the Villa Sciarra, where stone fountains and nymphs stand in the frozen basins of fountains and two peacocks strut through a chain-link aviary trailed by dozens of pigeons like royal attendants, we are often the only parents strolling babies. Virgil claims in the Aeneid that the Romans dunked newborns into freezing streams to “harden them,” but the few baby carriages we’ve seen this winter contain infants enfolded in snowsuits under down comforters, not so much a baby at all as a pillow with a head and two mittens and two shoes stitched on the corners. On buses older women slide the windows shut as soon as we wheel through the doors. In the supermarket, a woman in an ankle-length parka queues at the checkout, her purse stuffed with heavy gloves. Virgil prefers storks,ODEE, who “lay storks such as we see birds, they put on shows that take the breath away. We dress the twins in hooded sweatshirts, fleece jumpers. We draw glances of horror. We are parenting daredevils.

Late afternoons, as it’s getting dark, I walk from my studio to the terrace and take whichever boy happens to be awake out in the backpack to see the starlings. Tonight, it’s Owen. We head downhill from the apartment, kicking up leaves, the frame of the carrier creaking in the cold. He hums a sustained C-sharp into my ear. We pause beside the piers of the Fontanella where the water is splashing blue and cold across the marble and cross via Garibaldi to look out at the city. A few tourists brave the cold. Traffic throbs past. The view beyond the railing still dazzles me, every time. Rome is strange. The sky is deep-ocean blue. Above the Alban Hills, Venus shines a pale white.

Not quite black, not quite gray, in the hand a starling Feather shimmers with greens and purples, like a puddle touched with oil. Lovely, but common, too, and the rampanty of starlings more than anything casts them as grimy, despised birds. They take over winter feeders, pave neighborhoods with excrement, feast on seeds for winter wheat. But above Rome, in winter, they assemble in flocks ten thousand strong and put on shows that take the breath away.

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Tonight there are three flocks. They stretch into quarter-mile bands, winding apart, then slowly snapping back together. In one minute they are three separate helices, a heart, a velvet funnel, two falling scarves. A flock swings closer to us, a shower of black against the blue, plunging in coordination—suddenly a thousand birds turn their wing tips to us and are gone.

Here on the Janiculum, Romans supposedly post a augur or two, priests who would interpret the flights of birds to determine the will of the gods. The birds swing east and it’s time to go to battle. See too many hawks, or not enough, and an inauguration should be postponed. From what I’ve read, Livy’s history of Rome is dotted with good and bad auspices, generals passing to take them, emperors ignoring them at their peril. Pliny’s Natural History, too, is stuffed with omens: comets, eclipses, thunderclaps, birds, fish, spiders, fig trees, natural springs, snares, and stumbles portended events. Pliny claimed that ravens understood the meanings they conveyed in auspices. Eagle-owls signalled terrible things to come, and fighting cocks gave the most powerful signs; the manner in which they ate grain determined if state officers could open their homes, and what formations soldiers would take on battlefields. These chickens, Pliny said, held “supreme empire over the empire of the world.”

Down in Trastevere streetlights come on, one after another. The starlings rematerialize, washed in blue, a five-hundred-foot-tall dancer turning flips. I prop the backpack on its stand and adjust Owen’s hat and give him a bottle, wondering what he sees. Maybe you know the history: In 1890, in New York City, a drug manufacturer named Eugene Schieffelin, who wanted to make sure that every bird mentioned in Shakespeare’s plays was introduced to North America, released eighty starlings in Central Park. A hundred and fifteen years later the United States alone has 200 million starlings—and angry wheat farmers and flocks sucked into jet engines and histoplasmosis, a respiratory disease that originates in starling feces. And that doesn’t count the birds in Canada and Mexico.

In Rome there are a million or so. When they’re twisting above the rooftops, hardly anyone seems to notice. Outside the Feltrinelli on Largo Torre Argentina, where almost every night a flock performs arabesques above six umbrella pigeons, I am usually the only person on the sidewalk looking up. The few Romans who do pay attention seem to want them gone. A couple of years ago volunteers tortured a couple of starlings, recorded the distress calls, then walked laps of Termini broadcasting the recordings through megaphones. Imagine what the birds heard! Strange voices shouting, Ouch! Ouch! Ouch! It didn’t appear to scare them off.

In front of me, in front of Owen, ten thousand birds swerve, check up, and float. Then they plunge. A tourist at the railing asks, in English, “Who’s the leader?” but no one answers. Knowingly or not, we all stand there taking our auspices, reading the omens of the birds. Starling, earthing. How little we understand. Nero had a staring that spoke Greek and Latin. Mozart kept a starling in a cage beside his piano. The real question, the one that keeps me coming back to this railing, night after night, is, Why do they bother to be so beautiful?

On the street beside me Owen hums as he drinks his milk. He explores the texture of his backpack with his fingertips; he blinks his big eyelids. Adapted from Four Seasons in Rome: On Twins, Insomnia, and the Biggest Funeral of the World, by Anthony Doerr (Sciblner, 2007.)
Flatland was a collaborative art project installed at New York’s Sculpture Center.

The main things to know about Flatland are that it is four stories tall and only two feet wide, and that six artists—Pelle Bruge, Eva Le Cour, Douglas Paulson, Maria Petchnig, Alex Scherder (saa’06), and myself (saa’06)—decided to live in it around the clock without coming out, starting 24 April 2007. Two members of the group stayed inside Flatlands for 21 days.

The shape of the Flatland structure is schematic, a thin-sliced sculpture revealing a diagram of six people’s (temporary) lives pressed between two plates of glass. You can see us all, all the time. It is like living in a giant flat screen TV.

Flatland was designed for living in. It was outfitted with a bathroom, a kitchen, and multi-purpose personal spaces (work and sleep) for each participant. Food was delivered (by Fresh Direct!) so that we could stay in the structure and not come out. This we did, and it was central to the meaning of the piece.

Flatland is a proposition. What would your life be like if your life was different, if things you took for granted were gone and your world was (metaphorically) reduced to two dimensions? This notion falls within the concerns of my work, which has involved creating and living in (grobeously) alternative architectures. In doing this, I exploit a fundamental aspect of architecture: the mutually formative relationship between subject and object, between people and buildings.

Alex, the Flatlander with a degree in architecture and a knack for aphorisms put it like this, “We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us.”

Another way to look at Flatland is as a short, weird, social experiment. Flatland is a collaborative piece and the participating artists came from distant places. Only one of us knew more than two of the others. So, we were not a group of total strangers, but we weren’t a family either. Initially, we became a community on the internet. We were aware of the problems we might have coping with each other in this tightly compressed environment and we started working to avoid these on our wiki-page chat room (Our group history, and blog of members’ thoughts and feelings are all linked to our web site, http://www.flatlandproject.com, which also has lots of pictures.) We divided up areas of responsibility according to interest, and we came up with a system for making decisions as a group based on the Quaker consensus method, which stresses agreement, not majority rules. And the Flatlanders were chosen partly based on their emotional maturity, self-reliance, and tolerance.

We tried to prepare ourselves individually and set up a community that could cope with the confining effects of our new chosen home. We knew it would be extreme; the prospect was in fact a little scary.

Surprisingly, no one ever felt the claustrophobic sense of being trapped that you might expect. The transparent walls dissipated the sense of confinement. When we divided up Flatland into private spaces, the lower ones were chosen first. They would be less private, but less scary too.

After a day or two, height ceased to be an issue. There had been a lot of concern talk about the deadly ladder holes in the floor, but we started to get up in the middle of the night to pee, and it took much longer than in the outside world, but we didn’t really notice. It was hard to work, hard even to read. We watched a lot of Netflix DVDs; we even tried to do that as a group but that was unsuccessful. It was uncomforable for even two people to try to watch a movie together, but we tried it a number of times: it was a way to show that you cared about being together, that friendship was worth the stiff neck.

In the end, I think the struggle came down to this: balancing individual needs and comforts against the need to keep the group cohesive and fluid. One had to take care of oneself, but show openness and caring to the others. We depended on trust, tolerance and displays of good will to get past the friction and misunderstandings that our close-quarters made inevitable.

It was not the goal of all of us to last the whole 21 days. All were free to leave at anytime they chose without drawing any criticism. I think that four of us stayed exactly the length of time we had decided on beforehand; the other two had been proceeding open-endedly, and when they reached the point of diminishing returns, they elected to leave.

Adaptation was a struggle for each of us, and each found her/his own way, with a personal set of results and lessons learned. Some of us felt exhaustion and muscle cramped a few days after we left. We call it “flatlag.” Others did not experience this. Some became depressed and (relatively) litters in Flatland. Others did not.

So what is Flatland good for? What is the value in doing something dumb in a difficult way?

Adversity is instructive. You understand the sun best by being in its presence, but you understand its value to you by bettering it by having it taken away. Grotesque distortions separate the meaningful from the merely taken for granted. When you reduce the structure and surface of things to the absurd, you are left with meaning and nothing else.

People joined the Flatland project for their own reasons. I did it for the same reasons I make art: hoping for those brief, unexpected views behind the curtain, hoping to re-discover questions I had never answered but had stopped asking. I found a few this time.
There’s a certain freedom in the long blue slant of its uncaring, in the wind that knocks the surface onto rocks, and there’s a dent made in that wind by the woman who recites straight into it, pretending the waves might hear or that some larger being that is sea or seeing hangs there listening, when sea air’s so clearly full of its own gusts and grunts, inanimate uprisings. In the line of no one’s sight, her voice lost in the spray, she feels a chilling freedom: how the foam edges the sheets of zig-zag patterned water while gulls’ shrill outbursts punctuate the sky (one cloudy, sentimental phrase or canvas brushed with amber, green, and rose). What welcomes, and ignores, and doesn’t question? Sheer emptiness. It’s like a husk for her alone. It’s like a shell for absence. Without an audience, she makes a noise swallowed by waves and wind, just as the waves themselves—or no, just like the drops lost in the waves, which neither care nor keep distinctions—sweep out a place inside an amphitheatre she imagines rising around her, with columns that crash instantly, like the white foam that collides and shreds its layered castles. Her words drift, dissolve, and disappear. A crest of words has surged and poured into the sea. It doesn’t matter now what the lines say.

Tasso’s Oak
Seeming cinder clinker your collapse prolonged by iron arms whose square trunk too is splitting, swollen with rot reaches in death skyward as blackened flecks filter silently invisibly through the fume-filled air the exhalations of hospital ductwork incessant cars huffing unknowing (knowing) pilgrims that enshroud-embalm you enwrap-attack you as beer bottles blossom amidst snuffed-out cigarettes and withered weeds all crowd round the lopped off remains of an interloping shrub taken root in your crumbling thigh near the once shady slope (now backed with a rampart of solemn brick) where Tasso laid his wrecked body grasped soft grass touched chill earth with knowing fingertips gazed at sprawling Rome through swaying green.


Painting by: Franco Mondini-Ruiz, faar’05

Photograph: Patrick Barron
Rome Reborn

For more than a decade Diane Favro (Fulbright Resident 1979–85) has been engaged in an exciting and innovative endeavor to make ancient Rome accessible in a virtual format. Peter Holliday (FAAF ’91) met with her to find out more about the project.

Peter Holliday: What is the “Rome Reborn” project?

Diane Favro: Rome Reborn is a real-time model of late antique Rome formally presented to the world by Rome’s Mayor Walter Veltroni. The greater city model is based on the famous plaster model of Rome in the Vatican Library, and as such, encourages global collaboration. This amazing model allows us to appreciate individual buildings of ancient Rome within a broad urban context, and thus also to understand how the city took shape over time.

PH: How did the project originate?

DF: The project began over 10 years ago at UCLA when Professor Bernie Frischer and I established a digital lab to reconstruct historical environments (website: www.etc.ucla.edu). The operating goals were to allow full interactivity (movement through the models in real time) and to include as much context as possible rather than focusing on models of individual structures. Initial work centered on the Roman Forum as a well-documented and important urban center. With generous support from numerous foundations, including the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project expanded. Carefully documented high-resolution models of individual buildings are placed within a larger urban model of the entire city inside the Aurelian Wall. The greater city model is based on the famous plaster model of Rome in 310 C.E., located at the Museo della Civita Romana.

PH: The Plastico, based on Italo Gismondi’s reconstruction in the museum at EUR. We all use animation for each building or urban space. These teams include archaeologists, historians, and architects, as well as the scholars who work closely with the modelers, most of whom are UCLA architecture graduate students knowledgeable about construction, design, software, programming, and architectural history. The scholars and architects collaborate, carefully selecting the appropriate data and interpretations.

What information is documented to clarify the parts of the reconstruction based on archaeological remains in situ, the parts based on extant architectural fragments, and the more hypothetical sections based upon secondary representations and analogues. The aim is not a hyper-realistic depiction, but an informed representation and visualization of current knowledge about ancient Rome. Thus we do not include features that we know existed in the ancient city (such as plantings and painted architectural components), but for which there is insufficient information for a reconstruction.

PH: What have you described sounds much more fluid and dynamic than the old Plastico. As the scholarship evolves, so does “Rome Reborn”!

DF: Right. An important aim is the creation of a scholarly platform that will allow various researchers to add, comment on, or change the existing model, or provide alternative solutions. This resource would be something like a Wikipedia site, but with a mechanism for vetting the contributions; in effect it would be a dynamic digital publication with peer review. How do you envision your virtual model being used?

DF: For me, the process of creating the model is especially informative. Building a model digitally requires the researcher to add, comment on, or change the existing information as constructing a real physical structure. As a result, the researcher is compelled to consider the ancient architectural environment holistically. In addition, collaboration among fields from archaeologists to acoustical engineers to computer scientists, is especially stimulating. The modeled environments are used as humanities labs, where scholars test theories about view sheds, processional movement, construction, acoustics, and other aspects. The models are also used as settings for live performances. In addition, these interactive models are invaluable teaching tools used in many different classes, including art history, classics, architecture, and urban design. The UCLA Experimental Technologies Center also has a robust outreach program, showing the models to hundreds of K-12 students and general audiences each year. The ability to excite and inform viewers of all ages makes such immersive creations particularly compelling.

PH: Who will have access to it?

DF: The ultimate aim is to have complete open access to the models over the internet. We hope that improvements in web delivery will make this possible in the near future. In the interim, the Experimental Technologies Center at UCLA will soon launch new, lower-resolution models of ancient Rome in different periods on the website, viewable using the free Google Earth application.

PH: Will it ever be finished?

DF: Like the city of Rome itself, the digital model lives. In contrast to physical reconstruction models of cork or plaster, digital reconstructions can be continuously altered and improved. The Rome Reborn model is not a definitive, static model of ancient Rome, but a malleable knowledge representation. In this virtual environment scholars from around the world can conduct experiments, add alternative reconstructions, and visualize new research and findings.

John R. Clarke (FAAF ’95) published two books in 2007 looking at Laughter: Humor, Power, and Transgression in Roman Visual Culture, 100 B.C.–A.D. 250 (California) and Roman Life, 100 B.C.–A.D. 200 (Abrams). He is continuing his work on the excavation and publication of Villa [‘of Pope Joan’] at Ostia, near Pompeii.

Marla Stone (FAAF ’96) spent the fall semester of 2007 as a fellow at Princeton University’s Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies. Gail Wittwer-Liebold (FAAF ’96) designed a new park at the intersection of Canal, Varric, and Laight Streets in Lower Manhattan and received a Design Excellence award from the New York City Arts Commission. Ground was broken for the $2.5 million park this spring.

Chuck Close (FAAF ’94) is the subject of a documentary film by the late Marian Cajori opened in Manhattan in December of 2007.

Paul Davis (FAAF ’98) has solo museum exhibits in Baltimore, Venice and Aix en Provence. He has completed murals for Mercer Consulting and a poster for Mike Broadway’s production of The Country Girl by Clifford Odets, which opened in March.

Agnes Denes (FAAF ’98) received the “Mononymous Was a Woman Award” given to a mid-career women of exceptional talent and achievement, the prize takes its names with experts in Wood’s famous essay “A Room of One’s Own.” Denes gave Otis lecture at Bates College, ME on 28 September 2007 and participated in the college art museum’s “Green Horizon” exhibition. She also gave the keynote address for an arts panel at the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston on 9 November 2007.

Joya Rasheed (FAAF ’00) and Joan Jonas, Vising Artist ’03, exhibited their work on the Johns Hopkins campus in February 2008, and in the exhibi-
Interview with Pina Pasquantonio

Interview conducted by James L. Bodnar, FAA, on behalf of the Society of Fellows on 1 October 2007.

James Bodnar: So let us begin with you describing your personal interest in wine.

Pina Pasquantonio: Yes. That started a long time ago. I’ve always been interested in wine. My grandfather made wine, my father made wine.

J. B.: And where is your family located?

P. P.: My family is from Abruzzo. I’ve always been interested in wine and enjoy it very much, so this had been in my thoughts for a long time, to become a sommelier and actually learn the secrets of the trade. But it’s a very expensive field to get into and involves a lot of study.

J. B.: Is the education itself expensive?

P. P.: Yes, and you also have to participate in a lot of wine tastings, and those are costly as well, so it becomes a pretty expensive proposition.

But three years ago, when I celebrated my twentieth anniversary at the American Academy, the academy decided to give me a gift, so they subsidized part of the cost of the course that I took.

J. B.: How did they know you had this interest?

P. P.: I was given a choice, actually. I was told, “We’ll subsidize your education.” I chose wine. “Well, my interest is wine.” Consider that I was already buying wine for the academy without having any expertise, just trying to go on how cleverly we could get by. Then I started this course, which was simply amazing. It lasts for a year and a half, and you’re really taken through basic techniques of wine making, you learn all about Italian wine, and all about Italian grapes, and then you do international wines. The final part of the course is matching food and wine, and they teach you all the techniques for doing that.

J. B.: Now, did you travel at all, or was it all done here in Rome?

P. P.: Mostly here in Rome.

J. B.: So no going off to vineyards or—

P. P.: We did. We went to a couple of vineyards, and you could do more as an extracurricular thing, but we did. We went to a couple of vineyards, and I think about midway through the course I started to set up a little wine cellar here in the academy; buying wine for the academy without having any expertise, just trying to go on how cleverly we could get by. Then I started this course, which was simply amazing. It lasts for a year and a half, and you’re really taken through basic techniques of wine making, you learn all about Italian wine, and all about Italian grapes, and then you do international wines. The final part of the course is matching food and wine, and they teach you all the techniques for doing that.

J. B.: Very economical.

P. P.: It’s very economical if you consider that you’ll probably be spending twice as much in a store for the same kind of bottle. Now that I have been introduced to the wine world and various people in it, I get to hear about wines that are good and taste them before they become well known, so I can purchase them before they become too expensive.

J. B.: That’s great. What regions do you like the most, and share with the fellows?

P. P.: I try to make the fellows—last years and this year—understand that there’s the famous Langhe, and Chianti and the super Tuscan, so I take them all through Italy. I often like them to taste really specialized wines. For example, last year I introduced them to wines which they would never have heard of and you’ll probably not find in the United States. The technique used to make this wine is antique. You let the must ferment on the skins of the grapes very briefly, and continuously add new grapes to the fermenting must. So it’s a fresh, good wine.

J. B.: Almost like Côte de Beaune.

P. P.: Exactly. Yes, and there’s another one called Susumaniello, which is a particularly old grape that originates in Puglia, if I’m not mistaken. I also introduced them to real Verdicchio, not just the old Fazi Battaglia with its distinctive bottle, but excellent Verdicchio that has gotten top marks.

I also introduce them to all kinds of grapes and wines from Sicily, which is just a wonderful powerhouse, and wines from Tarentes, LaMarche, Umbria, and my own region of Italy, Abruzzo, in fact the entire peninsula. They all come away knowing a little bit about Italian wines in general and this year I hope to do a fireside chat where I’ll talk about—what I do.

J. B.: Do you ever actually speak with the fellows about what your approach is and your strategies for buying and serving wine?

P. P.: Sometimes at lunch, when it’s a particular wine, I’ll try to write up something about it, but there’s too much to do here that I don’t always have the time to indulge in that. Last year I asked my fellows to name a few times to organize a tasting, but things were just too busy; I really couldn’t manage. But this year when I do my fireside chat, I would like to explain to them about how Italian wines are classified as opposed to French wines, and to give them the idea of the techniques involved in wine tasting, just little things. And then I’ll have them taste these wines—but nothing famous. Instead, I would like to have them taste something that they might not know about, such as a Taurasi, which is considered the Barolo of the south, and which they might never taste unless they went to Campania.

J. B.: Did you ever spoken with Hank Millon about this?

P. P.: No.

J. B.: Hank—I have heard through the grapevine—used to send an academy vehicle up to the Piedmont period-odally to pick up wine, in the year when he was a director.

P. P.: Piedmont is just a fantastic, fantastic area. Le Langhe produces outstanding wines, but they’re mostly beyond our price range. I will introduce them eventually to some nice Barolo’s, and they’ve already had a few Barbaresco’s. I would also like to have them taste some Lambrusco, because there’s a lot to be said for this wine, even though many people think, “Oh, this is sparkling red; it’s disgusting.” It most certainly is not if it is matched to the right kind of food.

I take great pride in the fact that last year my fellows were writing down the wines served at dinner and asking me questions about them and they subsequently left with a bit of an education on Italian wine—not too bad at all.

J. B.: How large a cellar do we have at the Academy?

P. P.: It’s not huge. We have a little climate-controlled area in the cellar—meaning that we have air conditioning in there—so I am able to keep the wines at a constant temperature. And this is also so that I can maybe buy cellars for it, so it looks very nice and is more functional, though it’s not huge. It’s not huge; you know, it stores about three months worth of wine. Eventually I would like an authentic cellar where I could store a good wine being sold at a lower cost in bulk, or a wine with excellent aging potential, the kind you taste and think, “This is a good wine; a few more years and it’ll be a fantastic wine.”

J. B.: Are these wines that you are now buying the kind that age well?

P. P.: No, because there is a rapid turnover. I would like to do that in the future. It would be a good investment for me.

J. B.: So what volume of wine does the Academy go through in a month, approximately?

P. P.: Oh, my goodness. Calculate that at every dinner we serve between 18 and 24 bottles, depending on the number of people present.

J. B.: That’s six nights a week.

P. P.: There’s no wine served at lunch. But then I also provide the wine that is sold at the bar. I try to keep them distinct.

J. B.: So that’s 500 bottles a month.

P. P.: It’s a lot.

J. B.: In the course of a year, that’s five to six thousand bottles.

P. P.: I am talking about a lot of money.

J. B.: And that’s not including the bar or special events.

P. P.: That’s right, because for a special event I’ll purchase a specific wine, to match the menu.

J. B.: So looking forward, besides buying bottles that age so you can build a better wine cellar, what are your other plans?

P. P.: Well, I’d like to build an appropriate cellar that has all the conditions and requirements that you really need. The ideal location, of course, would be the cellar of Casa Rustica, where the wine cellar was located before the academy took over the property. There should be little noise, no vibrations and the humidity and temperature have to be controlled and a certain type of lighting installed. With a proper wine cellar we could stockpile things that we know are good and well become excellent. There are so many tracks and trends of the academy who are interested in wine and could help us get donated wine, we could take the whole project a lot further.

J. B.: Anything else you want to add?

P. P.: I think I’ve said everything I needed to say—except that I also become a sommelier in olive oil.

J. B.: That’s my second interest.

P. P.: So tell me a little bit about that for a moment.

J. B.: My family owns olive trees in Abruzzo and produces olive oil, so I became interested in learning more about that as well. In becoming a sommelier, you learn the techniques for making good oil and also how to taste it properly. I have a lot of ideas about how to improve my olive grove and the oil we produce in order to eventually bottle it and sell it commercially. It’s going to take a few years’ work because you need to invest in improvements and then determine when and how you want to harvest it and how many types of oil you want to produce. So that’s my next project.

James Bodnar, FAA, on behalf of the Society of Fellows on 1 October 2007.
Arts

Architecture
FRANKLIN D. STEELE ROME PRIZE
Frederick Fisher, Principal-in-Charge, Frederick Fisher and Partners Architects
Art Space College

DOWNSIZED ROME PRIZE
Daniel Mihalyo/Annie Han, Lead Pencil Studio

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
PENCHESE CARSTENS TRIETS ROME PRIZE
Alan Reznik, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University
Landscape Reclamation and the Pontine Marshes

GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA ROME PRIZE
Lisa Taiona Switkin, Senior Associate, Field Operations
Monument Landscapes: Construction and Construction of the City

Design
ROLLAND ROME PRIZE
John Cary, Executive Director, Public Architecture
Activist Architecture | Attivismo architettonico

CYNTHIA HAZEN POLSKY AND LEON POLSKY ROME PRIZE
Melissa Fenley, Artistic Director, Melissa Fenley and Dancers
The Pattern of the Surface

Historic Preservation and Conservation
BOOTH FAMILY ROME PRIZE
Jana Dambroglova, Conservator, Document Conservation Laboratory, National Archives and Records Administration
A Technical Study of Northeastern Italian Manuscripts Legal and Accounting Documents and Bindings at the Vatican Secret Archives

National Endowment for the Arts Rome Prize
John Ochsenschlager, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
The Preservation of Masonry Vaulting in Rome

Language Arts

MUSICAL COMPOSITION
SAMPSON ROME PRIZE
Eric Gan, Composer
Sleep Towards Sound: An Opera in Four Acts

JOSEPH BRODY ROME PRIZE, A GIFT OF THE DUKE HUMEL TRUST/AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS
Sarah Manguso, Writer and Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Writing for Publication, Publicity and Media, Pratt Institute
The Guardians (a collection of short prose)

Visual Arts

JOSEPH H. HAZEN ROME PRIZE
Tim Davis, Photographer
In the Noctes Atticae

Humanities

ANCIENT STUDIES
ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION POST-DOC TORAL ROME PRIZE
Robert R. Chenault, Interdepartmental Program in Greek and Roman History, University of Michigan
Rome and its Senators in the Fourth Century A.D.

JOHN ARMSTRONG CHADWICK/JACOB H. AZAABUS METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART ROME PRIZE
Kate Gilmore, Artist and Visiting Assistant Professor, Art and Design, State University of New York at Purchase
Utilital

JESSE HOWARD JR ROME PRIZE
Cavah Zaheili, Filmmaker

MEDIEVAL STUDIES
ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION POST-DOC TORAL ROME PRIZE
FLORENCE ELIZA GLAZ, Assistant Professor of History, and Co-Director, The Honors Program, Coastal Carolina University
Garciapriada and the Salernitan Medical Texts and Medical Practice in Southern Italy

Marian and Andrew Heiskell Pre-Doctoral Rome Prize
Christian Ferando, Department of Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University
Staging Neoklassizism

Renaissance and Early Modern Studies
MILLENCENT MERCIER JOHNSON POST-DOCTORAL ROME PRIZE
Thomas Frederick Mayer, Professor, Department of History, Augustana College
Reforging the Palladian Legacy: Architectural Reform in Eighteenth-Century Venice

ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION POST-DOCTORAL ROME PRIZE
Dan Reynolds, Assistant Professor, Department of English, The University of Texas at Austin
Change in the Highlands of Central Italy

ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION POST-DOC TORAL ROME PRIZE
Paul Arpaia, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Luigi Federzoni, Standardbearer of Italianità from Liberal to Post-Fascist Italy

ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION POST-DOC TORAL ROME PRIZE
(KATE WESTON INSTITUTE OF ART ROME PRIZE)
ARThur ROss Pre-Doctoral Rome Prize
(Year Two of a Two-Year Fellowship)

John Armstrong Chadwick/Jacob H. Azabuus Metropolitan Museum of Art Rome Prize
Kate Gilmore, Artist and Visiting Assistant Professor, Art and Design, State University of New York at Purchase
Utilital

JESSE HOWARD JR ROME PRIZE
Cavah Zaheili, Filmmaker

JOHN ARMSTRONG CHADWICK/JACOB H. AZABUUS METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART ROME PRIZE
Kate Gilmore, Artist and Visiting Assistant Professor, Art and Design, State University of New York at Purchase
Utilital

JESSE HOWARD JR ROME PRIZE
Cavah Zaheili, Filmmaker

JOSEPH H. HAZEN ROME PRIZE
Tim Davis, Photographer
In the Noctes Atticae

JOHN ARMSTRONG CHADWICK/JACOB H. AZABUUS METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART ROME PRIZE
Kate Gilmore, Artist and Visiting Assistant Professor, Art and Design, State University of New York at Purchase
Utilital

JESSE HOWARD JR ROME PRIZE
Cavah Zaheili, Filmmaker

JOSEPH H. HAZEN ROME PRIZE
Tim Davis, Photographer
In the Noctes Atticae

JOHN ARMSTRONG CHADWICK/JACOB H. AZABUUS METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART ROME PRIZE
Kate Gilmore, Artist and Visiting Assistant Professor, Art and Design, State University of New York at Purchase
Utilital

JESSE HOWARD JR ROME PRIZE
Cavah Zaheili, Filmmaker

JOSEPH H. HAZEN ROME PRIZE
Tim Davis, Photographer
In the Noctes Atticae

JOHN ARMSTRONG CHADWICK/JACOB H. AZABUUS METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART ROME PRIZE
Kate Gilmore, Artist and Visiting Assistant Professor, Art and Design, State University of New York at Purchase
Utilital

JESSE HOWARD JR ROME PRIZE
Cavah Zaheili, Filmmaker

JOSEPH H. HAZEN ROME PRIZE
Tim Davis, Photographer
In the Noctes Atticae

JOHN ARMSTRONG CHADWICK/JACOB H. AZABUUS METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART ROME PRIZE
Kate Gilmore, Artist and Visiting Assistant Professor, Art and Design, State University of New York at Purchase
Utilital

JESSE HOWARD JR ROME PRIZE
Cavah Zaheili, Filmmaker

JOSEPH H. HAZEN ROME PRIZE
Tim Davis, Photographer
In the Noctes Atticae
Interview conducted by James L. Bodnar FAA on behalf of the Society of Fellows on 1 October 2007.

James Bodnar: To begin, I would like to ask you about your background and you interest in cooking.

Mona Talbot: Okay. I’m originally from Canada. My grandmother was an exceptional home cook, and I learned a lot from her. When I was in college at the University of Victoria, I got a summer job cooking in a refestration camp in northern British Columbia. I realized that I had a real love for cooking and could possibly make a living at it, and that had a meaning to go to Europe, so I saved my money that summer and was able to spend the winter in Europe.

When I came back, I went to cooking school in Portland, Oregon. When I graduated, I did an internship at Chez Panisise, in Berkeley, California. That’s where I began my association with Alice Waters. I worked at Chez Panisise for about five years and learned everything. It was an incredible experience, all about sustainability, organic food, a great approach to cooking.

And then I decided to go to France, right to the source. I lived in Brittany and cooked in a very small fish restaurant there, and then I was offered a job in Paris. So I came to New York to get a work visa. While I was in New York, I worked one year; I worked a little bit for Elia Zabar for a year.

JB: Which location?

MT: I worked at EAT and the Vinegar Factory, and then opened a new restaurant called Across the Street, right in front of Asphalt Green. He wanted to do a Chez Panisise-style restaurant. I was not the chef. It was another Chez Panisise person, but I worked there, too, while I was waiting for my visa to be processed. During that time, I also catered a wedding at the country house of Annie Siegbahn’s, whose partner was Susan Santag.

JB: That estate is beautiful.

MT: Yeah, it was a great, beautiful home, the old Astor estate in Rhinebeck, New York.

Late, while I was in France, I got a call asking if I would be interested in cooking for them privately—coming back to New York and being their personal chef. I decided to stay on in France for six months. I developed the project, and at the same time I did a lot of private catering.

When the Academy job came along, the Dining Commins project had just been delayed for another six months, so she said, “Why don’t you go to Rome for six months and help the American Academy find a chef and launch their dining room project?” So I came to Rome, initially for six months. To try to get your dining room open, it took six months before I could even get into the kitchen. There were a lot of rules and the caretain wasn’t comfortable with having outside people in her kitchen, so I spent six months finding suppliers, cooking at the Belasco for Carmella the director—doing different dinner parties for her and developing a style that would work for the Academy.

Then, on February 26th, we took over the kitchen, and we haven’t looked back since.

JB: That is a big date, an important date.

MT: Yes, it was very exciting.

JB: So you have complete control now.

MT: Yes, we do. We still have the caterer in the kitchen, who was the previous food service provider who cooked and provided the waiters, and there are still have some employees who work here, but we’re hoping to move in a different direction.

So our goal is to be 100 percent organic, where we’re about 95 percent organic right now. We have suppliers from all over Rome. We’re looking to create a relationship with a coffee company, to have a corporate coffee donor; it would be an exciting thing for us to have a special Academy coffee—you know, the coffee bar does a great business. We have a pasta donor who donates organic pasta, and we’re looking for water, and also wine. So there are exciting developments.

MT: We are a Slow food site.

JB: We have some fruit yesterday at lunch—they were from the garden, as well? MT: Yes. Those purple grapes were from the Balacci. Uva, they’re called. They are sweet, and we make jam with them. The little walnut cookies you ate—the jam in them was made from the Balacci grapes.

We also have a relationship with the Culinary Institute of America. We have interns who come from The CIA and work with us for three months. They are very much interested in Italy and in our style of cooking—Panisse approach and the Slow food philosophy, and the added bonus of being here at the Academy, which makes it a really interesting experience.

JB: I noticed some people here this weekend—I believe they’re staying up on the mezzanine level—who are helping out in the kitchen.

MT: Lynn McNealy is volunteering—virtually volunteering, actually paying his expenses—he’s a visiting fellow who is very interested in Italy and in our style of cooking. He paid to come and work with us, who volunteer their time.

JB: I also heard that you had children from the United States and in Europe as well who come and volunteer. MT: We do. This is a really strong component that I’d like to develop even more: I believe that it’s important that the fellows feel ownership and are brought together as a family around mealtimes. So, we find tasks that the children can do that are safe and fun and we ask them to come in for Friday afternoons and they do a little bit of work with us.

We also put out beans to be shelled and walnuts to be cracked out in the courtyard, and I think the fellows will often sit there and drink their coffee for an hour or two and shell beans and talk. There are even fellows that are very interested in cooking. For them, we have a sign-up sheet, they can put on an apron and come in and work with us in the kitchen. We actually put them to work.

JB: Now, are all the fellows aware of the amount of effort you put into? Do you ever have a chance to talk to them as a group and let them know how hard you work?

MT: Well, this year we haven’t. This may or may not be something that’s right for your article, but… there was so much attention given to us in the first six months, that we were asked to keep a lower profile and play things down this news session, let people discover the kitchen in a more natural way. We have individual conversations with them. We are very open. We’re more than happy to talk to anybody while we’re shelling beans about our projects and philosophy. We will develop this a little bit more, but we haven’t made a big announce about what we’re doing, what our goals are. The food itself is the most important part.

We don’t want to draw attention to ourselves; we’re here to support the academy. By providing food that’s nutritious, delicious and inexpensive, we can support the mission of the Academy. People come here to be with their friends, or residents can come and sit for a long time at the table, shell beans together, and that’s our goal. We really want to integrate ourselves more and more into the academy.

We also love feeding the staff and the faculty, the management—we want them to feel at home, as well as take care of as the fellows. Part of the Slow food mission is to promote the local food, very democratic and everybody is entitled to eat the same quality of food.

JB: Well, that’s the key to the meals at the Academy also—we leave our baggage at the door, and come together and share as a community.
MT: Exactly. Yes. And that’s the driving force for us: to make people feel welcome. Everyone is equal at the table—that’s the whole idea behind one long table and the cotsile we’re all in this together. Another thing that makes our approach to cooking particularly appropriate for the academy is that the people are very interested in the process, not just the final product. We really need that kind of understanding. We do everything by hand; we don’t buy anything premade or packaged. We care enough to do it ourselves and know what’s going into it.

JB: And is the facility adequate?

MT: For the time being, but so much of the kind of cooking that we like to do is over an open fire, so if we were to expand the kitchen the very next thing to do is to cook the whole meal outdoors. The garden, I think, is understood. I would love to have more dinners out there. Under the olive trees, which is just the most incredible place—those are my dreams, and we’re making plans for a big grill, spit roaster, a pizza oven and a sink all outdoors. That’s hopefully going to happen in the future. We also need to redesign our dish room. Before, the food service provider had a lot of food from the cantina that was precooked and they would reheat it. Now we’re working the kitchen hard. To meet the code, we need to have a separate dishwashing setup. We’ve planned to open up the kitchen so we have a place for making pantry and public dishes that move out. So that’s a big project that’s on the agenda for this year.

JB: Any further plans?

MT: Yes. I think that in the future, I would like to develop two things: First, a culinary student scholarship fund. You know, these students come for three months and we give them room and board, but I would also like to be able to help them with their plane tickets and give them a little pocket money. They’re struggling financially, and I think that would enhance the experience. I’d also like to have a little extra funding to take them out of the countryide and to a couple different restaurants, that kind of thing.

The other idea that has been talked about by a number of people, is a culinary fellowship to study food history and food culture, which is such an important part of the Italian experience.

JB: It’s one strength that you could really bring that is lacking in our fellowship program. In the past, we gained no knowledge through the dining experience of the quality of Italian food, it’s regional culture; or how it is prepared and addition, you are bringing this added element, the organic philosophy, which we take for granted in Italy and is definitely less widespread then in the United States.

MT: Yes. Italians are about ten years behind the United States but they will catch up. Now we’re working the kitchen hard. To meet the code, we need to have a separate dishwashing setup. We’ve planned to open up the kitchen so we have a place for making pantry and public dishes that move out. So that’s a big project that’s on the agenda for this year.

JB: Are many people doing what you are doing here? Are there other people in the region who are working with the focus that you have?

MT: I don’t think so. I really don’t think so. Last year at the Slow Food Conference in Turin, there was a huge discussion about academic institutions. There are pockets of restaurants who are getting caught up in the movement and so we are individuals who are a huge food service element, institutional food, that isn’t taking part. I mean, we just did too much for people. If too many people understand what we’re doing, that makes a huge impact. I think that this group of academics and artists understand that interactivity, and also appreciate the way it’s expressed. But in general, I think taste education is the way in. This is a year that’s ripe in Italy and in season and you can feel that leaves a lasting impression. People can appreciate that and they will begin to compare all the other years to that ultimate pear. Or a really good mozzarella, and then a really good bread. That was a huge step for us, finding really, really good bread that people enjoy eating. So everything... comes together and creates a whole.

I think that it’s really important that institutions also understand how to do this for large numbers of people on a very tight budget. We can’t afford to buy a lot of different cuts of meat or have expensive ingredients. That fits into roman cooking. They don’t eat big roasts, they eat little pieces of meat and lots of pasta or grains, and lots of vegetables, greens and fruit, and sweets on the weekends—you don’t eat sweets every single day. It’s actually all here.

We’re learning as much as we’re teaching. That’s really important that everyone is involved. People to help. They just need to be told what to do. Once they do it, they love taking part and being needed. That’s how you train kids in the kitchen, you help them succeed. My impression, from the last five months and with this next group, is that they want to be involved and they want to help.

MT: Definitely.

JB: And now, if you can make food part of their social curriculum or part of their lifestyle in Rome, you will open many doors.

JB: Yes. And I think after being around these people—students in particular—there’s a certain meditation that comes with doing work that is physical. In the gardens as well—as the kitchen...

MT: And repetitive.

JB: And repetitive. And it frees the mind to think in a different way.

MT: Well, I think it’s hard to think in a different way.

JB: Then you bring in ideas from people who thought their work improved after we took over. Not only was the food more enjoyable, but also understanding the philosophy, that to have a pot on the stove and every little while she gets up and stirs the pot and cooks a little bit. I think it’s something that’s so important. That everybody works that way, I guess, but I think it helps things flow. We had a lot of comments last year from fellows who thought their work improved after we took over. Not only was the food more enjoyable, but also understanding the philosophy, that... I think that idea is very important for the people we bring in. We’re very careful who we bring in, because someday there’ll be another chef, but also sharing the physical daily life. This is not just the final product. We really need that kind of thing makes a huge impact. I think that this group of academics and artists understand that interactivity, and also appreciate the way it’s expressed. But in general, I think taste education is the way in. This is a year that’s ripe in Italy and in season and you can feel that leaves a lasting impression. People can appreciate that and they will begin to compare all the other years to that ultimate pear. Or a really good mozzarella, and then a really good bread. That was a huge step for us, finding really, really good bread that people enjoy eating. So everything... comes together and creates a whole.

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212.751.7200
www.sof-aarome.org

Editor
James L. Bodner, faar’80

Associate Editor
Joel Katz, faar’03

Co-Editors
Joanne Spurza, faar’89
Catherine Seavitt Nordenson, faar’98

DESIGN
Joel Katz
Mary Torrieri

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From Roger Hinks, in his Rome journal of 1919–23, the Glimmer of the Mind.

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