

# Darien

MAGAZINECT.COM

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

Issue No. 11  
Spring 2024



## APRICITY

The Life and Art of  
Katie Southworth

Katie at her  
studio with  
"Evolution,"  
72x96, oil and  
acrylic on canvas



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## Letter to Our Readers | Photo courtesy: The Darien Land Trust

Dear Readers and Residents of Darien,

Sustainability. The word packs a punch for all it represents and the stories ahead are all about it—in its many iterations: sustaining mental wellness, sustaining the environment, sustaining community, sustaining our physical health and more. It's a fitting surround, we think, for an issue that coincides with the renewal spring holds and the care for our natural world the celebration of Earth Day in April calls us to heed.

The lead off to all this is our cover story. It's a profile of Katie Southworth, a Darien native and accomplished abstract artist, and we could not be more pleased. Hers is a story of resilience, listening to the universe and following your heart to create things of beauty aimed at advancing joy and sustaining mental health ...perfect for spring and rebirth.

Thrilled as well are we to bring you "Tux Tutorial" in our *Style* column, new to this issue. "Tuxedos? Sustainability? Huh?" you may rightfully ask. But when you consider that an estimated 11.3 million tons of textile waste end up in landfills each year, it's easy to grasp the wisdom of the build-your-own approach to tuxedos, an item that never really goes out of style.

Speaking of tutorials, we're grateful to Darien Pollinator Pathway's Deepika Saksena and Juliet Cain for sharing their knowledge of native plants in our *Giving Back* column. They help us see how easy it is to lend a hand to our natural world if we pay just a bit more attention to what we put in the ground. Fun also to shout out The Corbin District's tree planting program (right), Darien's ties to the formation of the National Park Service through the Mather family (page 7) and the upcoming 203 Project, the Darien Community Association's Sustainable Showcase (page 11).

We loved spending time with Vavala's owner Danny Porcelli and his crew for our *Good Table* feature this month. In addition to feeding so many of us so well, it is heartening to see how their approach to the business sustains our community.

Linda Stephens weighs in with "Spring Cleaning Your Health" to sustain our physical well-being. A great article. All this and more awaits you in the pages ahead and we hope you get as much out of it as we did putting it together for you.

Speaking of sustainability, we are happy to welcome A Little Something White and Packer Soccer Camps to the magazine this month. It is our advertisers who sustain us. They keep this magazine coming to you and we are grateful.

**PAMELA DEY VOSSLER**  
Editor-in-Chief

**CARL TRAUTMANN**  
Founder & Publisher



FROM LEFT: *David Genovese – The Corbin District, John O'Brien – Darien Land Trust (DLT), Ward Glassmeyer – The Corbin District, Elizabeth Mathus – DLT, and Shedd Glassmeyer – The Corbin District, at Mather Meadow North, a DLT property, with a recently planted native maple, one of ten trees donated by The Corbin District to DLT to plant on their preserved lands in Darien to replace trees removed during construction.*





COVER STORY | cover and above photos by: **BAMBI RIEGEL** | [riegelpictureworks.com](http://riegelpictureworks.com)

## Apricity: The Life and Art of Katie Southworth

Apricity. It means the warmth and light of the sun in winter. A word out of context for spring? Not when considering the life and abstract art of Darien native Katie Southworth. Read all about her here.

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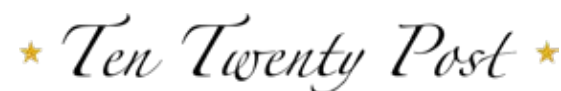
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*Mather Homestead, Darien's only Registered National Historic Landmark, once the home of Stephen Tyng Mather, an avid conservationist and the first director of the National Park Service*

**Darien MagazineCT.com** *inspires, educates and expands minds through stories about Darien residents, influencers, organizations, business owners, charities and more. We uncover the gems in our midst and look at the familiar in new ways, to take you deep into the community we call home.*

### SPRING CONTRIBUTORS

*Special shout out to our local contributors this issue:*

**The Darien Land Trust**  
**Mather Homestead • Kristin Rzasa**  
**The Darien Community Association**  
**Deepika Saksena and Juliet Cain**  
**Linda Stephens • A Little Something White**

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# Mind of a Leader:

## How to Sharpen Your Leadership Skills

What makes a good leader? Like the perfect pizza toppings, the answer can spark lively discussions and friendly arguments depending on each person’s taste preferences, cultural background and personal experience.

You may immediately think of leaders you’ve worked for, those who have led your community, or even iconic global leaders such as Ghandi, Martin Luther King or Winston Churchill.

Or perhaps cringeworthy scenes from the media may come to mind: Michael Scott from *The Office*, Bill Lumbergh from *Office Space*, or Miranda Priestly from *The Devil Wears Prada*. Though they may make us laugh, they are surely shining examples of what *not* to do.

Effective leaders serve as catalysts for growth, innovation and collective achievement. We expect our leaders will have some innate qualities such as integrity, honesty and trustworthiness, but there are also fundamental skills that can be learned and practiced that contribute to strong leadership. Here’s a round up of the most essential among them.

- INSPIRE A VISION**

Leaders have a contagious enthusiasm about both the journey and the destination. They paint a vivid picture, often through storytelling, that allows us to connect emotionally to the vision which in turn motivates and inspires us. Think Steve Jobs and his captivating product launches and stories to illustrate the company’s vision.

Your dream doesn’t have to be as revolutionary as a new phone, simply tap into a mission that excites you, share it from your heart with infectious passion and see what happens.
- COMMUNICATE WITH CLARITY**

A leader who can listen actively and understand their team’s needs is gold. A true leader encourages open dialogue to build trust and foster collaboration while ensuring that everyone’s voice is heard and valued, creating a sense of belonging and inclusivity. They ask probing questions, seek clarification when needed and paraphrase or summarize to make sure they understand.

continued on page 10

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# Mind Set

Whether we’re leading a department at work, a team or our families, communicating with clarity will enhance any relationship.

Think about your most recent conversation. Were you actively listening? Were you asking clear questions? Bringing these reflections into your next conversation is an excellent way to develop a communication style that contributes to good leadership.

## FOSTER A GROWTH MINDSET

Strong leaders not only encourage growth on their team, but they also continuously improve their own skills.

Growth mindset, a theory made popular by Dr. Carol Dweck, suggests our intelligence isn’t fixed but, rather, we are able to grow through consistent learning, hard work and perseverance. This mindset impacts how we approach challenges, respond to criticism and orient our goals.

Try reframing something that initially felt like a failure as a springboard for growth and developing your abilities.

## DELEGATE WITH AUTHORITY

This does not mean delegate in a firm way (although that can be helpful too). Delegating with authority is not only assigning the responsibility of a task to a team member, but also empow-

ering them with the necessary resources and decision-making power to complete the job. This is crucial for creating a sense of ownership and autonomy and also for building confidence.

Combining these leadership skills—inspiring a vision, communicating with clarity and fostering a growth mindset—will enable you to delegate with authority and ease, and achieve the desired results.

Ultimately, leadership isn’t just about telling others what to do. It’s about guiding yourself toward success and being the best version of yourself you can be.

Good leaders empower others, creating a ripple effect that cascades throughout their spheres of influence. Good leaders inspire others to lead, and innovate and make a positive impact while they’re at it. Most importantly, good leadership can be learned!



**KRISTEN RZASA** is a holistic business and life strategist, productivity expert, intenSati leader and wellness educator who combines her corporate leadership experience with her background in health and wellness to guide clients. For more about Kristen, visit [kristenrzasa.com](http://kristenrzasa.com). Learn more about the co-working space, community and programs at Darien-based HAYVN at [www.hayvn.com](http://www.hayvn.com)



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# Around Town | photo by: BAMBI RIEGEL | [riegelpictureworks.com](http://riegelpictureworks.com)



Mural in the Darien Community Association (DCA) dining room; painted by local artists Lisa Thoren, Lori Leckliter and Chris Filmer for the DCA’s 203 Project, a Sustainable Showcase. Tickets available at [dariendca.org](http://dariendca.org)

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# Plant This Not That:



## Why Native Plants Matter and What to Do About It

As you consider all you may be doing to give back to the community this year, why not think about a gift to the environment as well? If you have a garden, it's as easy as choosing native plants instead of invasives. What's more, when you give to the environment by choosing native plants, you give to yourself, your family and the future.

### WHY NATIVE PLANTS MATTER

By native, we mean those plants growing here before the Europeans arrived, plants which have a symbiotic relationship with our native insects, birds and other wildlife, providing food and shelter necessary for their survival, and attracting a diverse array of species—from colorful birds to beneficial insects, thereby fostering a dynamic and thriving ecosystem within your backyard.

Native plants usually have deep root systems which help aerate the soil, making it able to absorb more water than soil that hosts only ornamental plants or grass. Native plants also filter and cleanse that water, making any runoff not nearly as damaging to the Sound and surrounding waterways.

The soil and water quality is further improved by the fact that native plants don't need any synthetic chemicals to help them grow because they are perfectly adapted to our geolog-



ical and climatic conditions. This makes them resilient, low-cost, low-maintenance and healthy choices for your garden.

Most importantly, many of our local insects and other species are specialists, meaning they can only be supported by a single native plant. For example, the Milkweed family is the only host plant for the Monarch butterfly. Another great example is the Oak tree which supports thousands of species of butterflies and moths, providing an abundant supply of caterpillars for birds. A loss of Milkweed or Oak therefore results in a direct loss of insects and pollinators that are so key to our food supply!



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY DEEPIKA SAKSENA AND EARTH TONES

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

The best place to start is to know what you're planting. Some non-native plants are actually invasive, spreading aggressively and out-competing native vegetation, while offering no contribution to our ecosystems since they don't support our local species. These plants can therefore wreak havoc on ecosystems by displacing native flora and disrupting wildlife habitats. Some invasive plants, like the Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*), whose seeds are spread by birds and small mammals, and which also spread via their root systems, have become a destructive understory tree in our forests, replacing native vegetation like Spice Bush (*Lindera benzoin*), New Jersey Tea (*Ceanothus americanus*) and Highbush Blueberry, and thereby reducing biodiversity. Another invasive, the Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), is a preferred host for the Spotted Lantern Fly which is destroying

fruit crops and trees in many states, including Connecticut. These plants have become a financial and ecological liability and yet Burning Bush continues to be sold in Connecticut.

By incorporating native plants into your landscaping (maybe even replacing some of your lawn with native plants), avoiding the use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, and removing invasive plants, you will literally bring your garden to life with a pollinator paradise and all the additional benefits of a healthier soil, such as better water retention (remember the floods Darien has faced in recent years?), reduced erosion and less watering.

### PLANT THIS ...NOT THAT

With native plants, you can not only nurture biodiversity and support our local ecosystem, you can also enhance the beauty of your surroundings: There are gorgeous native alternatives to the invasives you may not even know you're planting. Here are just a few. For more information or if you have questions, we are standing by ready to help at [pollinator-pathway.org/contact-us](http://pollinator-pathway.org/contact-us) Note: Be sure to ask your garden center if the plants you are considering are native or not.

	NATIVE	INVASIVE
Vines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trumpet Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>)</li><li>• Virgins Bower (<i>Clematis virginiana</i>)</li><li>• Virginia Creeper (<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Japanese Honeysuckle</li><li>• Oriental Bittersweet</li><li>• Wisteria</li><li>• English Ivy</li></ul>
Perennials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Butterfly Weed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)</li><li>• Beebalm (<i>Monarda didyma</i>)</li><li>• Joe-Pye weed (<i>Eupatorium dubium</i>)</li><li>• Purple Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>)</li><li>• Swamp Milkweed (<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>)</li><li>• Blue Giant Hyssop (<i>Agastache foeniculum</i>)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purple Loosestrife</li></ul>
Ornamental Shrubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• White or Pink Pepperbush (<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>)</li><li>• New Jersey Tea (<i>Ceanothus americanus</i>)</li><li>• Highbush Blueberry (<i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>)</li><li>• Winterberry (<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>)</li><li>• Shining Sumac (<i>Rhus copallinum</i>)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Butterfly Bush</li><li>• Burning Bush</li><li>• Japanese Barberry</li><li>• Tree of Heaven</li></ul>
Understory trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flowering Dogwood (<i>Cornus florida</i>)</li><li>• Red Chokeberry (<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>)</li><li>• Red Twig Dogwood (<i>Cornus sericea</i>)</li><li>• Eastern Redbud (<i>Cercis canadensis</i>)</li><li>• Spicebush (<i>Lindera benzoin</i>)</li><li>• Shadbush or Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>)</li><li>• Witch Hazel (<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bradford Pear</li><li>• Kousa Dogwood</li></ul>



# Spring Clean Your Health

*Refresh, Renew and Revitalize*



As the days grow longer and the weather begins to warm, spring presents an ideal opportunity to rejuvenate our health and well-being. Just as we engage in spring cleaning to refresh our living spaces, we can apply the same principle to our health. By making mindful choices and embracing positive habits, we can revitalize our bodies and minds for the season ahead—increasing our health span for a long lifespan. Here are six strategies to spring clean your health and foster a renewed sense of vitality.

## 1 REFRESH YOUR DIET

Spring is the perfect time to reassess your dietary habits and introduce fresh, seasonal foods into your meals. Embrace an abundance of vibrant fruits and vegetables such as leafy greens, berries, asparagus and artichokes. These nutrient-dense foods provide essential vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that support overall health. Reduce your intake of processed foods and added sugars to help decrease water retention and inflammation. Additionally, stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water and herbal teas. This can help cleanse your system and promote optimal functioning.

## 2 REINVIGORATE YOUR FITNESS ROUTINE

As the weather improves, move your workouts outdoors. Whether it's walking, running, cycling or practicing yoga in the fresh air, outdoor exercise can invigorate both the body and the mind, not to mention the dose of vitamin D you'll get from the sun. Engaging in physical activity not only enhances cardiovascular health and strength but also boosts mood and reduces stress. Set new fitness goals for the season and explore different activities to keep your exercise routine exciting and motivating.

## 3 REVITALIZE YOUR SLEEP PATTERNS

Quality sleep is essential for overall health, yet it's often overlooked in our busy lives. Use the transition to spring as an opportunity to prioritize restorative sleep. Establish a regular sleep schedule (for your kids too), create a calming bedtime routine, and optimize your sleep environment by keeping it cool, dark and quiet. Adequate sleep supports immune function, cognitive performance and emotional well-being, making it a cornerstone of a healthy lifestyle. Most adults need 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY: LINDA STEPHENS

## 4 CLEANSE YOUR LIVING ENVIRONMENT

A chaotic environment can lead to stress and anxiety. Conversely, a clean and orderly home contributes to a sense of well-being. It promotes mental clarity and relaxation and fosters a positive mindset while neutralizing stress. So take time to declutter and tidy up your surroundings. Open windows to let in fresh air (my favorite), and consider using natural cleaning products to reduce exposure to harmful chemicals.

## 5 CULTIVATE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Spring is a time of renewal and growth, making it ideal for prioritizing mental and emotional well-being. Practice mindfulness, meditation or deep breathing exercises to reduce stress and enhance mental clarity. Engage in activities that bring joy and fulfillment, such as spending time in nature, pursuing creative hobbies or connecting with people you love. *Note: Consider seeking professional support if you're dealing with persistent mental health challenges.*

## 6 EMBRACE HOLISTIC HEALTH PRACTICES

Explore holistic health practices such as acupuncture, massage therapy or aromatherapy to support your body's

natural healing processes. These complimentary therapies can help relieve tension, improve circulation and promote relaxation. *Note: Spring is also a good time to make sure you are on top of regular checkups with your healthcare providers and up to date with any routine screenings. You want to be sure you are monitoring your health status and addressing any concerns proactively.*

So get out that broom, wipe down those shelves and while you're at it, clean away the debris littering your path to best health with choices that refresh, renew and revitalize this spring. My team and I are standing by to help with any questions you may have. Just ask!

In good health, Linda

**LINDA STEPHENS**, M.S. Nutritionist, Darien Resident and Owner, Linda Stephens Fitness, LLC. My virtual door is always open if you want to discuss your health concerns and goals. You can schedule a complimentary call with me through my website at [www.lindamstephens.com](http://www.lindamstephens.com).



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BY PAMELA DEY VOSSLER

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# APRICITY

The Life &  
Art of  
Katie  
Southworth

**APRICITY.** It means the warmth and light of the sun in winter. A word out of context for spring? Not when considering the life and abstract art of Darien native Katie Southworth—and the light and color she taps into for both. They're more than enough to dispel all manner of winters.

Which is exactly as she intends. →

||||| Katie in her Knowlton  
Street studio in Bridgeport,  
"Apricity" (LEFT) in background.



Cover Story

Katie, a 2012 graduate of Darien High School (DHS), is a full-time independent artist who uses her art to promote joy and mental wellness. A case in point: a painting she did called “Apricity.” In her description of it, Katie wrote: “The first time I heard (the word apricity), I nearly melted. I think it’s one of the best, most beautiful, and most ubiquitous examples of an easily missed good thing during a tough time. Once you learn it, and start noticing it, it’s almost impossible to keep taking it for granted. And then, you start finding warmth during coldness, and light during darkness in more areas of life.”

...and those colors! “You can’t get them without light,” Katie points out passionately. “Color is energy. Energy is joyful and joy is what makes us feel alive,” she said.

Katie paints intuitively without visual reference and calls color “her language.” She uses it as a metaphor for emotions, memories and hopes for the future. It’s what she paints.

“Color reflects so perfectly for me how many emotions we have, how many human experiences we can have, the interactions we have, it goes on and on,” said Katie. “I love how infinitely diverse and full of possibility the world of color is.”

To her, color is, above all, a path to mental wellness. “My work is about celebrating and focusing on color and light as a way of promoting mindfulness and joy and ultimately staying away from darkness and depression,” Katie explained. It drives all she creates, in honor of and inspired by her mom – former DHS Gymnastics Coach Ellie Southworth – who she lost to suicide in 2015, one week prior to her senior year at Colby College.

“We didn’t know that she was even living with any type of illness until eight months before we lost her,” said Katie.

With her art, Katie gets to what’s going on beneath the surface. It provides a way to tackle the not-so-perfect things in our lives and inspires a more joyful way forward.

“I feel like (my mom) was forced either through pressures or stigma or fear to hide so much of what she was actually going through. My work helps me decide each day that I’m not going to do that,” said Katie. “If there’s anything I can learn from what she went through it’s that keeping everything in is just not an option,” she continued.

It’s a decision she helps others make as well through the light, vitality and vibrancy of her art. She opens the door to her paintings through piece statements that take people behind the curtain, to her thoughts, memories and emotions contained in each work. They are also her invitation to viewers to explore what the creations evoke in them, inspiring them to embrace vulnerability in their own lives as the irresistible pull of her art compels them to the same place of truth, authenticity and meaning that she finds in creating it. In sharing her take on the world in her art, Katie creates space for others to understand theirs.



||||| **“Towel for a Giant,” 144×65 acrylic on canvas. Piece statement: “It’s always fun to see things on a larger-than-life scale. Including one’s own ambitions, dreams and vision for the future. Which was my intention for this piece. Through a playful, imaginative lens, I see what a giant might take to the beach. Through a psychological lens, I see an overcompensation of joy that I think is missing from the modern human experience.”**

“The dark parts of the human experience are really depressing to talk about,” acknowledged Katie, “but over a welcoming, visually appealing piece of art, it just flows. It’s a catalyst for honest conversation,” she continued, describing the ways in which so many have reacted to her art. “It’s amazing how much more willing people are to open up once they’ve been sort of welcomed by something not threatening,” she added.

With more than 250 of her original works in private and public collections in 50+ cities across the nation, it’s an invitation an ever-growing number of devotees are thrilled to accept—though she never imagined anything like this for herself.

“My whole life right now is a giant surprise to me,” said Katie. Sure, she has loved art for as long as she can remember, but being an artist “was never an ambition of mine growing up,” laughed Katie.

At DHS, she was a standout three-sport athlete. She earned first-team all FCIAC honors in gymnastics and swam

PHOTO COURTESY: KATIE SOUTHWORTH

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*“Fantastic Grocery store...Beautiful displays... throughout. Bakery to die for... see if you can walk through w/o buying something...fresh bread, desserts...and they cater events!!!! AND the produce is perfect!!! Tons of ready made salads, seafood, chicken, beef & pasta dishes! The best of the best and always has been.....consistently! Palmer’s really cares about their customers! This is the longest & best review I’ve ever given... & I’m NOT related!!! They just deserve it!”*

-Dale O., Darien



**PALMER’S**  
— MARKET —





ABOVE LEFT: “Tiger Lily,” 24×24 in oil and tempered glass on panel. Piece statement: “Never forget, beautiful human, that you have a fierce, brazen, fiery spirit somewhere within you. Like a roaring, summer-born tiger lily, face toward the sun, open, wild and free.”

ABOVE RIGHT: “Number One,” 40×30 in oil, 3D mixed media and mirror on panel. Piece statement: “It’s normal, healthy and important to place yourself at the center. Self-care is affirming each day that you are surrounded by love, and that love starts with yourself. Because we are all pink on the inside, and at the end of the day it’s just us and the skin we’re in against the world. That’s why taking care of you, filling your cup before you serve others, that matters.”

LEFT: Katie with her mom

PHOTOS COURTESY: KATIE SOUTHWORTH

well enough to make the swim team at Colby where she became one of the top swimmers in the Division III league in which Colby competes. She also pole vaulted for the track team during her “off season.”

“I was a jock, a student-athlete. That was my lane,” said Katie, who won the DHS female athlete award for her class in her senior year.

It wasn’t until her last year at Colby, after she lost her mom, that she began to “feel like an artist.” Before, studio art had been something she enjoyed but pursued as just a minor while she majored in psychology. After losing her mother, it became a lifeline.

Describing her return to Colby after her mom died, Katie said, “I felt I’d be okay, surrounded by healthy friendships and professors I knew would be there for me. Part of me then didn’t know I needed art, but it was the one thing that both sustained my attention and helped me process my trauma; it helped in a way that no family member, friend or therapist could have.”

Thanks to some shifts in requirements, she was able to add a major in Studio Art her senior year and became a double major. She need “only” produce a capstone project. With her signature drive, she completed it ...and won the Charles Hovey Pepper Prize, the single studio art award Colby gives each year.

It was a big deal. Validating ...though Katie had been so absorbed in her work, she barely knew it existed, let alone that it was something she could win.

Still, it took a while for her to see herself wholly as the artist she has, in fact, always been. After graduating, and unsure of her path, Katie took “the first job that sounded not awful:” a one-year position in the AmeriCorps City Year program in which applicants who make it through the rigorous screening process spend a year at an urban public school as a teacher’s assistant. Placed at the Trotter Innovation School in Roxbury, MA, Katie started an after-school art club for fourth graders, many of whom had never held a paintbrush.

“I would watch these kids that needed so much come in after school just seething in anger ...and then leave feeling so much better,” recalled Katie. “I had no time to plan anything miraculous, but sometimes simply an hour of doodling or whatever, just totally calmed them,” she added. “It was a perfect way to see the true power of what art can do.”

Inspired by her City Year, Katie entered a one-year intensive program at the Tufts School of the Museum of Fine Arts to earn a Masters in teaching art. Next came three years of teaching elementary school art at the James Otis Elementary School in Boston ...and increasing despair as her self-care hit the cellar.

She’d gone from grieving her mom’s death, to adding a major, to finishing college (by way of that massive capstone project), to an all-consuming City Year, to an accelerated

|||||

ON HER  
NEW  
BOOK:

NAMED FOR THE ORDER OF COLORS IN A PRISM—R-O-Y-B-G-I-V, ALSO AN ACRONYM FOR THE RAINBOW, KATIE’S DEBUT BOOK FEATURES CLOSE TO 100 FULL COLOR IMAGES OF HER FAVORITE PIECES AND COINCIDING STATEMENTS. ORGANIZED BY TOPIC, THE BOOK CHRONICLES EVERYTHING FROM HER CHILDHOOD TO HER STORY OF LOSS TO HER TRANSITION TO FULL-TIME ARTIST. AVAILABLE SOON ON AMAZON. SUBSCRIBE TO HER MAILING LIST AT [KATIESOUTHWORTHART.COM/CONTACT](https://katiesouthworthart.com/contact) FOR UPDATES.

master’s program, and then straight to full-time work. No breaks. No breath. No painting.

“I kind of forgot how to take care of myself. I was desperate to have independence and start my own life. So I did that, and I was like, cool. I have a salary. I have my own apartment, with roommates or whatever, but I’m miserable,” said Katie.

Something had to change.

Again, her art called to her—offering the same respite it brought before. Impossibly, she landed studio space in the SoWa arts district of Boston in February 2020 within just months of deciding she needed it. (It’s something that takes years, typically, to pull off.)

Then COVID hit.

“All of a sudden, right when I chose to get back to something that made me feel healthy, there was nothing but time for it,” said Katie.

It takes effort not to see the universe calling in Katie’s life.

When she wasn’t teaching on Zoom, Katie spent “every spare millisecond” (as she says) of those quiet years in her studio, sequestered with a mix of oils, light and increasingly larger canvases. A distinct artistic point of view emerged,





centered on vivid color, vertical lines and minimalism—her “through lines,” she calls them. Next came wood blocks, mirrors, gold and silver leaf, bits of this and that, recycled tape from previous work and even acrylic, laying more of the groundwork for the mixed media abstract artist she is today.

Feeling the pull to pursue her art full time from an ever-increasing following of buyers and admirers, Katie resigned from her job in August 2021, smack in the middle of COVID. It was a risky but calculated leap of faith based on passion, purpose and self-understanding.

“Life is so precious. We only have so much time so what do we really want to do? COVID inspired me to lean into this thing that was giving me so much hope and meaning and sense of purpose in a really dark time,” confided Katie who credits part of her success to “being as true to myself as possible.”

“I started doing art again for my own mental health,” she added. “But then, seeing how people would feel so uplifted or calmed down or welcome to express their own life from looking at my work, I realized that this might be more of what I’m supposed to do,” she said.

“The self I was wouldn’t recognize the self I am now,” she observed, laughing. But, “you’re allowed to change,” she continued, more seriously.

Artist? Philosopher? Therapist? Crusader? Katie Southworth is all of the above.

“Katie Southworth is a young woman holding wisdom beyond her years. She has transformed personal suffering into a beautiful message for us all. When you view her art and read her inspiring words, take a moment and breathe it in deeply. There is surely magic here!” said Chris Chance, a New-Hampshire-based clinical psychologist Katie met at one of her art shows last summer.

“Yes I did lose my mom. And that was really horrible and heartbreaking. But also I learned empowerment and self-sufficiency and to appreciate the joy in each day,” said Katie who feels her mom with her every day as she pursues her art and the mission contained within it. “A lot of what I do honors my mom’s legacy and advocates for a world that she would have liked to live in a little more.”

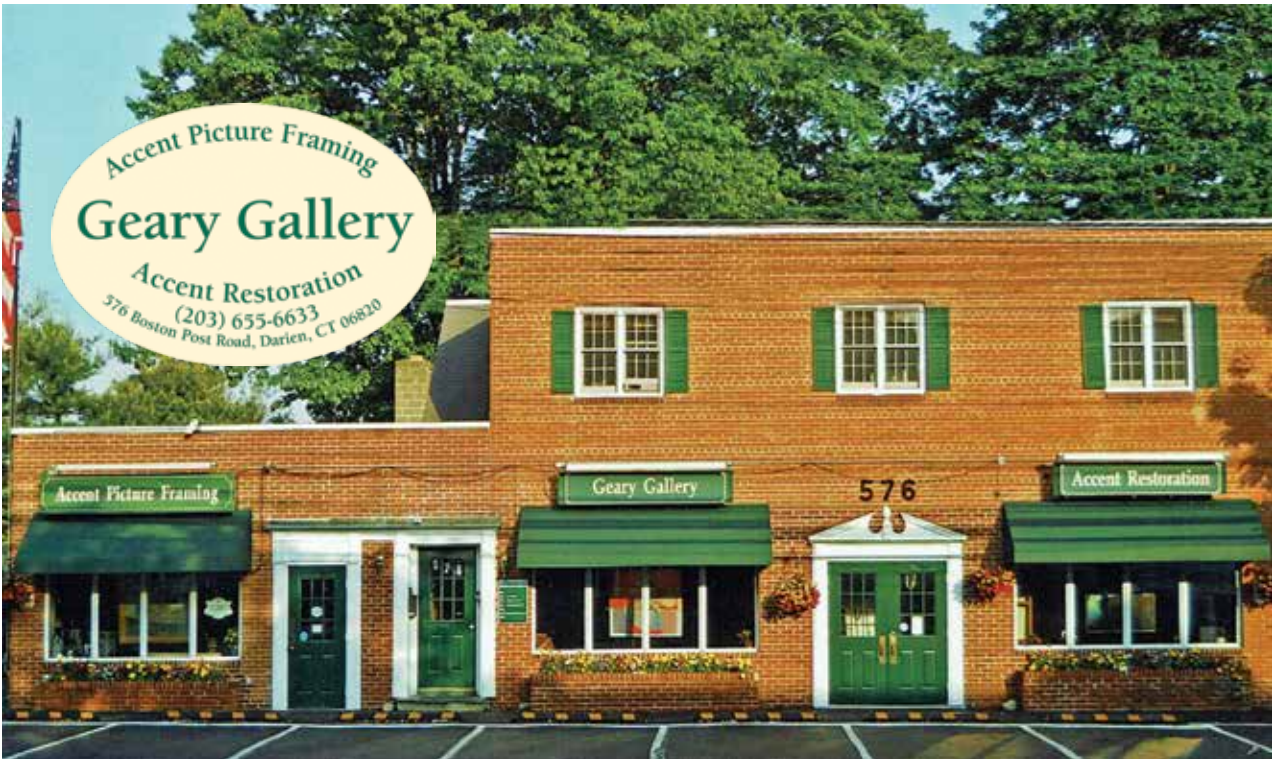
“No one is alone in the crushing reality of surviving loss to suicide and we are all part of the solution for a world without it,” she added.

Apricity? You bet. In every way.

~~~~~

**For more on Katie:** Now back in Connecticut, visit [katiesouthworthart.com](http://katiesouthworthart.com), follow her on Instagram @katiesouthworth\_art, Facebook @KatieSouthworthArt or see her by appointment at her new studio in The Knowlton at 305 on Knowlton Street in Bridgeport. She also takes commissions and donates a percentage of her sales to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

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# Tux

# Tutorial

## Secrets of a Really Great Tuxedo

Cary Grant, Sean Connery, Sinatra and Astaire: While they wore their tuxedos famously with aplomb, is there any man—at any age—for whom the ground does not similarly lift when he puts on a tux? ...and who doesn't rise to the excitement of an event that calls on us to bust out our best?

But what makes a great tuxedo? It starts with fit, and nothing beats a tuxedo custom made for your build, reflecting your style and personality. A tuxedo is one of those wardrobe basics well worth the investment because, depending on what you choose, it never really goes out of style. And while Cary Grant's tux would still get it done in 2024, there are near endless ways to make today's tuxedos your own with customization and choices for just about every element of the ensemble. Here are key components to consider:

**THE TUXEDO SHIRT** / Black tie events call for French cuffs, either square or rounded are fine. From here, the main differences in tuxedo shirts are:

- 1) The collar – spread or wing tip. While the spread collar is traditional and universal, the wing tip is the more formal option and is designed specifically for bow ties.
- 2) The front – plain, pleated or bib. Plain is the most versatile and on the less formal end of the tuxedo shirt spectrum though you can add a contrasting grosgrain tape to personalize the shirt; pleated comes in many

variations (e.g., width, length and number of pleats) and is the most traditional style; the bib front shirt is the most formal.

**THE JACKET LAPEL** / There are three types of lapels: notch (with a narrow notch variation), peak and shawl. The notch is the most common suit lapel. While less formal than a peak or shawl lapel, it is classic and timeless. The peak lapel is formal, assertive and perfect for any black tie event. The elegant shawl lapel is the most formal choice.

**THE JACKET POCKET** / There are three basic pocket styles: besom, flap and hacking with a ticket pocket variation available for the besom and hacking versions. While any style will do for a black tie event, a besom (non-flap) pocket is most formal and the slanted version (hacking) draws the eye up rather than out, helping shorter, stockier men appear taller and leaner.

**TRIM** / This is the material used on the lapel, pockets, waistband and leg stripes. Choose black satin, black grosgrain or navy satin, just make sure all trim material is the same.

**THE JACKET LINING** / While tradition calls for a black or dark color, the jacket lining is where you can truly mark the tuxedo as your own, opting for patterns and colors that tie to your interests, your style and personality. →

PHOTO COURTESY JULIA JANE STUDIOS



**THE JACKET VENT** / Your choices are no vent, center vent or side vents. The no vent jacket is most traditional. Side vents are a modern take on the traditional style. The single vent jacket is less common but still an acceptable choice if it is your preference.

**Some parting thoughts:**

**FABRIC AND COLOR** / Most tuxedos are made of wool, for the drape and sleek finish it delivers. As for color, black is most classic though color can vary.

**ON VESTS AND CUMMERBUNDS** / While these accessories remain classic and still appear from time to time, the cummerbund is nearing extinction.

**BOW TIE, NECK TIE, NO TIE?** / Hands down, the bow tie continues to rule.

**A WORD ON PANTS** / Either a flat or pleated front is suitable but if there are belt loops, it's not a tuxedo pant. Wear suspenders that button onto the pants if you want help keeping them up. (They also add an attractive finishing touch). Stick to a plain bottom finish (no cuffs). For a more modern look,

hem pants to show just a bit of ankle and pair with a dressy loafer, no socks. This works well with a more fitted pant leg. A longer pant is still the more classic choice.

**ABOUT POCKET SQUARES** / For an added bit of sophistication, consider a simple white pocket square made of silk or some other natural fiber. Color works too, especially if you're going for a more festive look or want something more to express your style. It's also a way for grooms to tie into the wedding color scheme.

As your life calls you to assess the tuxedo you may already own, the one you may need to replace or the one you may need to buy, remember these wise words from the great Diane von Furstenberg, "Style is something each of us already has, all we need to do is find it."

**Editor's Note:** For tuxedo questions and help finding a style right for you, the deeply knowledgeable stylists at Darien's J.Hilburn Stylist Studio, located within A Little Something White at 987 Post Road in Darien (one of only 12 J.Hilburn Stylist Studios nationwide), are ready to assist you. For more information or to book an appointment, call 203-309-5110.

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Photo: Mindy Briar | Gown: Suzanne Neville | Tuxedo: J.Hilburn



# Mom, Pop and the Family You Find in a Really Good Sandwich

Vavala's owner Danny Porcelli and his team (FROM LEFT): Roberto, Natalie, Armando, Max, José RIGHT: Blue Wave Chicken Cutlet



Vavala's just feels good. Sure, the sandwiches at this deli at 156 Heights Road across from the Noroton Heights Train Station are outstanding – the State Champ, the Cheese Lover, the Blue Wave chicken cutlet, their bacon-egg-and-cheese, all of them really. From special acts to the more familiar fare, if you want it, they'll make it. And if enough people like it, it will find its way to the menu as a permanent item. At Vavala's, they pay attention. →



# The Good Table



But what propels this deli to the very top is its mom-and-pop authenticity and the honest-to-goodness pleasure the people who work there get from knowing the customers—especially our children. It’s the kind of knowing that comes from meeting a kid in kindergarten their first time in with their parents then waiting on that same kid when they return throughout middle school and high school, as their sports team posters take their turn on the deli walls. It continues through college and into their adult lives too. It’s a knowing guaranteed to lift any day.

In a fractured world hollowed out by screen time, Vavala’s is community. Vavala’s is family, and the kind of business that preserves our small town feel in the midst of so much growth. They know your favorite sandwich. They know what sports you play (or played) and who you root for. They know when you get married. They know you when you come back, even when you’ve been gone a really long time. And in this knowing, the foundation is laid for tackling all manner of life’s wrenches. Caring, face-to-face, is like that.

“Vavala’s is not only home to the greatest sandwich of all time (the Cheese Lover), it’s also home to me,” said Tricia Vossler Cahill who grew up in Darien. Recently married and now living in Manhattan, she continued, “It’s where my dad took me growing up and where I’d get to pick out a piece of candy or a special treat to go with my lunch. It’s what fueled me and my entire lacrosse team at DHS circa 2011. And it’s my favorite stop every time I’m back in Darien. Danny, José and the rest of the team are family, not just to me but to the entire Darien community—we love them!”

“Vavala’s is easily the best deli in town and the workers are very welcoming and make amazing food,” said Sean McGahren, a senior at DHS and member of the football and lacrosse teams who tags Vavala’s about five times a week for bacon-egg-and-cheese sandwiches. He had his first in



TOP LEFT: *Vavala’s Deli, a Darien mainstay* ABOVE: *José “at the office”*

kindergarten. “I like how nice the workers are and how they welcome you the second you walk into the store. They are always in a great mood,” Sean added.

And no wonder. It’s a culture as organic as the guy driving it—Owner Danny Porcelli.

Danny gets the legacy he bought into when he took over the 40-year-old deli 12 years ago. It’s why he kept the name, and so many tried and true specials, having grown up with a Vavala’s-type luncheonette of his own, and worked at a bunch more starting when he was in his early teens.

He gets family too. It’s how he was raised. It is his top priority.

“Having a happy home was very important to my parents. We live in a crazy world. If you have a happy home, whatever happens out there, you can handle. You have your family. It’s always welcoming. That’s what home should be. It’s your safe place,” said Danny who grew up in Yonkers with a brother, a sister and a large extended family. A father himself now, Danny and his wife Diana are raising five kids of their own in Darien—sons ages 10, nine and eight, and six-year-old twins—a girl and a boy.

He also gets people. The welcome you find at Vavala’s is no accident. It’s grounded in Danny’s respect for his six employees. It’s why he’s closed on Sundays.

RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY VAVALA’S DELI

“I want to be open on Sundays. But I have a great crew. We work closely together. I consider them all friends,” said Danny of his staff, “and a lot of them are very involved in their own families and their church and it’s worked better for everybody to take a day and not have to worry about anything,” he continued.

“I respect them they respect me. It’s a good, healthy relationship,” explained Danny, as open, honest and loyal as he is good-natured. (Just try to find a time when this guy’s not smiling.)

Danny knows what goes around comes around. It fuels his commitment to the community as well, and the many groups he supports in town, including the Blue Wave Booster Club, the Depot and Saint Thomas More as well as a range of DHS teams. He also serves on the Board of Darien Little League.

What’s more, Danny does it all with a work ethic and resilience that lift him over the hurdles he faces with grace and perspective – including the flooding in 2021 that pushed five feet of water into Vavala’s and shut him down for nearly eight weeks.

“If you have a vision of something and you work hard and don’t give up, you’ll get it done,” said Danny.

With family like Vavala’s at your back, how could you not? ♥

*“Kicks for the fun of it!”*

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roots that began with Woodrow Cross, the company founder, a WWII veteran who served in the Army in campaigns in New Guinea and the Philippines, as well as in the occupation of Japan. From his kitchen table in northern Maine after he returned from the War, he built what is now one of the largest personal lines insurance agencies in the U.S., representing more than 100 of the top insurance carriers in the world.

His grit, vision, ability to find solutions and evolve with the times, along with his dedication to each customer as if they were his only one no matter how big his business became, continue to set the bar for this third-generation, privately held company. Now with 40 offices throughout the North-

east including Darien, Ridgefield, New Canaan, Greenwich, Westport, Fairfield and Shelton and in Palm Beach County, Florida, Cross Insurance employs more than 1,100 people.

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For more information about Cross Private Client Insurance, visit [crossprivateclient.com](http://crossprivateclient.com) or contact Ryan Garrity at 203-655-7677 or [ryan.garrity@crossagency.com](mailto:ryan.garrity@crossagency.com).

PHOTO COURTESY CROSS INSURANCE

## ASSET PROTECTION - DID YOU KNOW?

### ...Guaranteed Rebuild with a Cash Out Option is the best method for protecting your home?

Standard Home policies do not offer this asset protection, but Cross Insurance has multiple outlets to provide this and many other valuable coverages such as 100% backup of sewer & drain.

### ...Agreed Value is the best method for protecting your automobile?

Standard auto policies do not offer this asset protection which is a predetermined value that holds for a 12-month policy period. Compared to Actual Cash Value (ACV) in the standard auto market that focuses on a daily depreciated value, Agreed Value provides significantly higher returns/protection when cars are totaled or stolen.

### ...There is a standalone insurance policy for jewelry?

While a rider to a standard homeowners insurance policy is an option, it may restrict the amount of coverage on your jewelry and be subject to your homeowner's deductible. Standalone valuables policies cover additional perils and have no deductible.

### ...High-net-worth/successful individuals are 43% more likely to experience identity theft according to the Department of Justice?

Luckily there is fraud protection insurance to help protect from identity theft, fraud and other cyber related crimes.

### ...Floods are the most common natural hazard according to the World Health Organization.

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**NOTE:** Flood is defined as a temporary inundation of two or more acres/two or more properties or a body of water that comes outside of its natural boundary. Mudslide included.

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