

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PROCESS A New School Transcends the Usual Bounderies

As looms and silk screen washers, paper pulpers and easels began to fill the studios at the Amagansett Applied Arts, Lara Lerner felt as if she were watching a dream turn into reality. In fact, "I wouldn't dare to have dreamed it," Ms. Lerner said as she surveyed the site a few weeks ago.

The art school, which Ms. Lerner founded with her husband, Randy, will open in less than a month. Classes will be offered in media from photography, painting, drawing, and silk screening, to papermaking and weaving.

The philosophy behind the school, Ms. Lerner said, is that making art is "not just about making the product. It's about the process and how you get there. It's really about people having an idea and learning how to use the tools the need to express those ideas."

That could be considered a loose description of the applied arts in general. Ms. Lerner likes the definition given by Jim D'Andrea, who will coordinate the drawing and painting floor at the school. Applied arts, he said, "represent the junction between theoretical aspects of aesthetic and practical concern of production."

Amagansett Applied Arts is at the site of the former Nichol's Livery

Stable, a looming old barn on Indian Wells Highway that ultimately proved too unstable to renovate. With the help of their architect, Douglas S. Moyer, and contractor, Ben Krupinski, the Lerner's salvaged what they could and reconstructed the building to nearly the exact dimensions of the stable.

Outside, it may resemble the barn it once was, but inside, it has been transformed. Students will enter the building at basement level - the photography floor - where there are two classrooms, a room for digital photography and editing, two gang darkrooms, two rental darkrooms, and a gallery space.

Up a flight of stairs, at ground level, is the textile and paper floor, where workshops will be given in printmaking, weaving, silkscreening, dyeing, quilting, knitting, and other subjects. The painting and drawing studios are on the top floor.

"I can't wait to take some classes," Ms. Lerner said.

Although she has a degree in business and communications from the Wharton School of Finance in Philadelphia, Ms. Lerner has always been drawn to the applied arts. Mr. Lerner, who has a background in art history, is the

chairman of the board at the New York Academy of Art, a graduate school offering painting drawing and sculpture classes.

"We started wanting to do this and looking at spaces four years ago," Ms. Lerner said. In the meantime, the couple visited art schools in this country and abroad to see what worked and what did not, when it came to the applied arts.

They looked at the Glasgow School of Art and the Edinburgh College of Art and Design in London, the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, and the Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia, among others.

Ms. Lerner was inspired by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, which sought to elevate the applied arts to the level of fine art.

At Amagansett Applied Arts "our mission is keeping these traditions alive," she said. She envisions students using tools on all three floors. They might make their own paper and then use it in a printmaking, bookbinding, or drawing class, for example. "You will figure out what you want to express and use all of the spaces," she said.

In creating programs, Ms. Lerner sought out the experts in the fields she was interested in. The creators of the photography labs at the International Center for Photography in New York helped design the photo classrooms. Sue Gosin, who founded Dieu Donne paper mill in New York, helped create the paper making programs. The master printmaker Maurice Payne will set up shop at the school for at least the first year. Jim D'Andrea, a painter and drawing teacher associated with the New York Academy, is heading up the drawing programs.

The Faculty will include many East End artists and artisans, including the tapestry artist Pamela Topham, the bookbinders Paul Vogel and Jodi Musnicki, the print makers Sheila Batiste and Bill Negron, and the painter Paton Miller.

"We've gotten some people who I would have never imagined and it's raising the bar on everything else," Ms. Lerner said. Her enthusiasm is contagious. As she led a tour of the school, it was very easy to picture its studios buzzing with creative activity.

"There's nothing more engaging than when an art school is chugging along," said Mr. Lerner, who worked closely with the architect on the schools interior. "I care an awful lot about how the space works and making it beautiful," he said. "A good art school is going to evolve based on how it's used and that doesn't reveal itself for four or five years."

The Lerner's, who are funding the school themselves, said that it will be guided by their own vision and instincts rather than by a board of directors. And the shape it takes will be informed by the desires of the community, Ms. Lerner said.

"As a school, you want to respond and not try to compete with what's already out there, You want to add to it". For that reason, she is

reluctant to formulate a mission statement, aside from saying the schools purpose is to advance the cause of the applied arts. It will evolve as it finds its bearings, she said.

Ms. Lerner hopes that the schools equipment will eventually be used to create a product line, Just as William Morris and his Collaborators produced their own textiles, furniture, wallpaper, tapestries, and stained glass. "This is an old model," she said.

She imagines handmade paper, bound books, fabrics for furniture, scarves made on the looms. "If we're dealing with artist collaborations, why don't we put it all together and create a line?"

The Lerner's farm on Town Lane in Amagansett has been drawn into the schools orbit. There, they are growing flax and other natural plants for making paper and natural dyes.

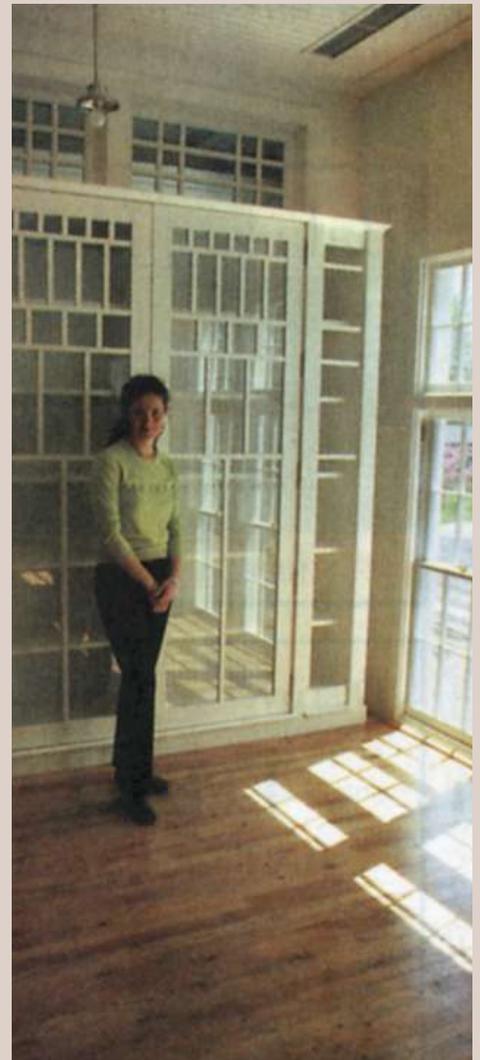
Mr. Lerner has offered the East Hampton School District a free program that is meant to give seventh, eighth and ninth graders a foundation in the arts at the school. He designed it in collaboration with Lisa Thayer, the districts director of unified arts, Gail Parker, the East Hampton Middle School Principal, and Mr. D'Andrea, who is also a certified teacher.

A six week curriculum for East Hampton students this summer will include two weeks during which they will work in all the studios, a two-week drawing workshop, and two weeks in which they can concentrate on the medium they like best.

"I'll go to shows that high school kids put on and all they want is more," Mr. D'Andrea said. He hopes they will find some of what they want in Amagansett Applied Arts. This summer, most of the school's 100 workshops will be offered to adults, though many will be open to anyone over 12 to 14. "Quite often people stop their involvements in the arts at a very early age, so its quite possible we could have a 14-year old and a 40-year old at the same level," Mr. D'Andrea said.

"It's a gift for us to be able to do something like this, and you just hope that the town responds," Ms. Lerner said.

Classes at the school will start on June 23. A full list of offerings can be found on the schools Web site at www.a3arts.org.



RIGHT: Lara Lerner, the driving force behind Amagansett Applied Arts, surveyed the work on the schools drawing and painting floor.