



Perry Ercolino holds shoes like the pair he made for President Barack Obama.

Bridget Wingert: Happy to Be Here

The shoes fit

How do you get a president to fill your shoes?

It takes persistence and patience. Perry Ercolino decided a couple of administrations ago that he would like to make shoes for a sitting president. The son of Doylestown's longtime shoemaker, Ercolino has continued in the family business, but with a difference.

He makes custom shoes. He starts by taking measurements and sends them to England where a skilled artisan translates this information into a pair of hand-carved lasts, the three-dimensional model of the foot. The last determines the shoe's fit, and a custom-cut last ensures a custom-fitting shoe. The last also gives the shoe its shape; thus an elegant last is an essential element of an elegant shoe.

Ercolino makes a pattern to fit the last, the uppers are cut and fashioned to the lasts, the lining is built, and the welts are hand-sewn to the insoles. Artisans work on the construction in his shop off East Oakland Avenue in Doylestown.

Ercolino promises he can make a pair of shoes that will last 25 years, and they will fit.

In addition to working in his Bucks County shop, Ercolino works with a custom clothier on Madison Avenue in New York.

A few years ago, he started working with a custom clothier in Georgetown, who catered to the Washington set. One of his customers was a speechwriter from Chicago. The clothier broached the idea that men looking for suits might add shirts to match and they might be interested in shoes. "Shoes are the last piece of a custom outfit that a man will choose.

Ercolino got to know a few White House aides and found his way to propose making shoes for President Obama. He connected with the White House social secretary, Desiree Rogers.

But that connection was not to last. She resigned after Tareq and Michaela Salahi, uninvited guests, showed up at a 2009 state dinner hosted by President Obama in honor of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

"They were the last great party crashers," Ercolino said. He started all over again, getting to know White House insiders, or at least the people close to insiders.

After working through layer upon layer of staff, Ercolino was able to find out the

president's shoe size. "So many layers," he said. He laughed that he got the size from "an anonymous source." He got to know the president's style and size made a pattern that included a perforated design at the toes. "He has a high instep," Ercolino said. "His store bought shoes didn't fit right."

In the end, he was able to build a pair of black calfskin blucher oxfords and present the shoes through the White House Gift Unit, according to protocol and delivered them just before Christmas.

The gift unit screens all gifts sent to the president and first lady; they do not even see most of the gifts. But the Ercolino shoes from Doylestown, Pa., made the cut. Ercolino has a framed thank-you note hanging on his shop wall. It is signed by both Barack and Michelle Obama.

Not bad for a guy whose father was the town's shoemaker all the way back to the Great Depression, or for a Central Bucks West High School graduate.

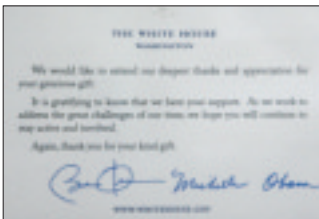
Perry hung around his father's shop as he grew up and gained a taste for the business. He later studied design in Milan and learned of the larger world of craftsmanship.

The price might not be right for everyone, about \$1,200 to \$8,000. Alligator in the top of the line Bespoke shoes can run up to \$6,600 a pair.

He didn't say how much the president's shoes were worth, but gifts to the president and first lady might be accepted as domestic gifts. They do not have to purchase them from the government but a law requires an annual listing of all retained gifts "from any source other than a relative" which are valued at \$35 or more.

Ercolino is developing a range of women's shoes, confident that the market is there.

"There's a resurgence of people wanting to get back in the craft movement," he says. They like the sound of "made in America."



A thank-you note from the White House.

Alex Cohen: Investigations in Art

An epic childhood

This will be the third year that I am participating in the Elephant's Eye Bucks County Studio Tour and I am pleased to be joined by Jenny Kanzler as the visiting artist in my studio. The Elephant's Eye Tour continues May 21 and 22 at artist studios in Central and Upper Bucks.

Jenny was in the graduate program at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts when I was studying there and I fell under the spell of her imaginative paintings. Following is an excerpt from our conversation in advance of the tour.

Alex: Do you feel like the place that you are painting from is a harkening back to your childhood or are those elements of a childhood narrative a jumping off point to another place entirely?

Jenny: The latter. It's a way of quickly getting to the heart of emotional experience because that's the point when I learned everything ... well I'm still learning.

A: It's when your paradigms are formed.

J: Like the first time you learn what a cavity is – you come to take for granted what a cavity is later in life, but the first time you learn about it it's kind of horrifying. When I think back about my childhood there's this blending between what happened, what I imagined happened based on stories people told me, and what is the equivalent of a memory that is the memory of a dream. It's all intertwined.

A: Do you find that painting preserves the memory for you?

J: I don't think it helps preserve the memory, but it helps preserve the feeling associated with the memory. Starting with something concrete like that you can communicate the anxiety or whatever is contained in the center of that memory that makes it so palpable.

A: Do you find your stories thread together in any larger narrative?

J: Yes, they do. It's not so much about telling what happened as it is about gathering a personal mythology. I like how in a family you have these stories that everyone tells and over the years you don't even have to tell the whole story, you just refer to them and everyone knows what you're talking about.

A: You do have such an affection for the foibles of childhood and the dicey experiences – are those the socially awkward experiences you are looking at?

J: I was either always the underdog or was in a situation where I had a lot of empathy for the underdog. So there were a lot of experiences. I mean it was epic, childhood was epic, which is why it felt like it needed a mythology.

A: I'm curious about what aspects of childhood are poised for



"New Best Friend" By Jenny Kanzler

painting?

J: Operating as an emotional being that hasn't been fully socialized, everything has emotional content and the uncanny is all around you. You know you have a home but there are so many unfamiliar things in the home. Like you are in the bathroom and the shower curtain has butterflies that you look at one day and see as old men's faces and suddenly it doesn't feel like home anymore. Something has changed and it's frightening.

A: That's right, there is this immediate nostalgia for your environment when you are little and you are fascinated with what feels familiar, yet you know so little about it, so it has that capacity to become alienating.

J: There's so much potential to be frightened. We had a red carpet in our bedroom. When I was a kid I learned that red was associated with fire and hell so I thought this

carpet was the portal to hell and I was terrified. Adults don't really worry about that because they understand it's just a carpet.

A: Do you want to say a little more about the comedic aspect in your work?

J: I guess I'm disturbed by the way that there is something funny in tragedy, that there is something pathetic about the human condition. I don't want to see it that way but it's hard not to when you step back and you are surprised that there is humor in it. So it's about probing. But the comedy is also relief.

A: It reconciles absurdity. I'm curious to hear how you'd describe the comedic element in your "New Best Friend" painting?

J: I think I was kind of making fun of myself in that painting. I was thinking about the friend triangle. There was this sought after friend and I was battling with this other friend for her approval. I was caught up in that trial. Every morning one summer that friend would come in and say, "You're my best friend," and the next day Janet was her best friend. And she used to bring Sweet Tarts, the ones that come in a package of three. Two were always for her, but whoever was that friend for the day would get that third Sweet Tart. And we put up with it and I was devastated when it wasn't my day. It was awful. But when it was my day I was very proud of myself. That image is of when it was my day, and I have my dodge ball because I feel very powerful.

Alex Cohen is a Bucks County painter with a studio in Wrightstown. He exhibits at Riverbank Arts in Stockton, NJ. To view more essays and paintings and the full interview with Jenny Kanzler, visit themagpie.org.



Elephant's Eye artist Alex Cohen describes himself as an investigator using paint to explore. He is standing next to one of his newest paintings with which he is beginning a series of investigations of physical comedy and probing at some of the metaphors of the comedic art. Photograph by Natalie Wi

Libby White: Mayor's Report

Protecting storm drains is vitally important

The Bucks-Mont Environmental Advisory Council Summit will take place, at the Coffeehouse at Delaware Valley College Marketplace 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 25. This was announced at Doylestown's Environmental Advisory Council's meeting on May 15 and is being co-sponsored by the borough and township's EAC.

The EAC is considering participating in the "Bird Town" program offered by the Bucks County Audubon Society, whereby residents can learn ways to create more bird friendly habitats in their own back yards. A fee is charged for training and tools. This program may become another joint project.

Where does the water go on our Doylestown streets when it rains? Down the storm drains that are present on most streets, and then directly into our streams and rain water, not for oil, grease, trash or any other foreign substance.

Water is a very precious

resource; we need to keep it clean and allow rain to recharge the groundwater so we can replenish our supply of drinking water. The EAC is trying to raise public awareness and support for the upkeep of our stormwater sewers and by extension protection of our most vital natural resource – water.

Special markers have been purchased to identify the storm sewers. They will be installed by the Public Works Department in the upcoming months. For a modest donation of \$5 residents can defray the expense of these attractive markers and contribute to the upkeep of the stormwater sewer program.

"The song is ended, but the memory lingers on..." Ah, yes, the memory of the aroma and flavor of sizzling sausages, fluffy pancakes and hot coffee filling the Doylestown Fire Company building on Saturday. It's a town event that's been going on for many years, and it's more popular than

ever.

It's a great place to take the family, meet your friends, and enjoy that townie feeling; that is, everybody from ten miles around.

Thank you Doylestown Fire Company!

Libby White is mayor of Doylestown Borough. Doylestown has purchased mark-



ers to show storm drains in the borough. A donation of \$5 can help defray the cost.