



# History Repeating Itself



*After living in one of Ohio's most historic homes, Paul and Nancy Holcomb packed up their family and their remarkable collection of early New England antiques and headed west to Missouri - where they've rebuilt another historic jewel, this time a Connecticut house from 1670.*

**T**here was a time in early America when families from New England longing for a new start packed up their essential belongings and headed west. Some settled in the fertile territories of the Midwest, while others crossed the Mississippi River and continued on through the Great Plains and beyond.

This westward migration lasted nearly two centuries and is why later generations found pieces of New England spread across America - architectural styles, early furniture, and all kinds of household goods among them.

In 2007, a much smaller migration occurred. Though Nancy and Paul Holcomb were from Ohio, they were longtime collectors of rare New England antiques. And when it came time to pack up their three children and head west in search of their own new start, they took their colonial-era treasures with them.

But what's distinctive about the Holcombs' move is that when they settled in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, they also rebuilt -

*Rare items from early New England grace the Holcombs' dining room, including banister-back, circa 1700 armchairs in original black from Connecticut, and an exquisite 1690s Rhode Island gate-leg table in its original old Spanish brown. The early Queen Anne wood box has retained its original red paint, next to the early 1700s child's chair. Blue Delft containers and early pewter adorn the 1670 home's original mantel. The wood walls, floorboards, and granite are original, as is the granite fireplace, which is rebuilt exactly as it was before the house was moved.*





*Top: One of Nancy's favorite items is this English circa 1700 Bristol Delft punchbowl, with the saying at its bottom "Drink Fair, Don't Swear."*

*Left: A number of early 1700s pieces, including wine glasses on a painted charger, pewter coffee pot, and hog scraper candlestick.*

*Above: A selection of the Holcombs' cherished tableware, including early pewters and English Delft, are displayed in this Queen Anne cupboard from early colonial Rhode Island. It still has its original Spanish brown and blue paint, with mustard on its backboards.*



piece-by-piece – an original Connecticut house from 1670. Today the venerable Captain John Parke House stands proudly on a bluff a few miles west of the Mississippi.

From the moment you step inside the Holcomb home, you're transported to a distant era. The walls, woodwork, windows, floors, ceilings, and stonework are well over three hundred years old. Stately banister-back chairs, tables both majestic and humble, assorted cupboards and shelves – most dating from earlier than 1720 – adorn the rooms, all bearing the patina of use by many generations of owners.

## Lure of the Past

One reason these New England artifacts have a new home in Missouri goes back to the 1970s and a young girl's visits to her grandmother's farm in eastern Ohio. "When I was little, my grandmother

had a farm with all these outbuildings,” Nancy recalls. “My great-grandmother lived there too and she’d tell me not to go into them.”

But the lure was too much, and young Nancy would explore the barns to discover remnants of earlier times – dusty stoneware, old canning jars, discarded Hoosier cupboards. Poking around in the old barn instilled in her the lifelong thrill of the treasure hunt. “I still love old canning jars,” she laughs. “And for me, the joy of antiquing will always be the hunt.”

Nancy was raised near Youngstown, Ohio, always loved history and became a schoolteacher. Paul grew up in a 1900-era farmhouse in Berlin Center and was well on his way to becoming a cardiologist when they met coincidentally while vacationing in South Carolina. “It was love at first sight,” she says, “and this year we celebrated our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.”

They’ve had three children. Ethan and his younger sister Eliza are in college, while Ira is in high school. (Ethan and Ira were names of the famous Allen brothers who founded Vermont’s Revolutionary-era Green Mountain Boys.)



*Called the “little tavern,” the area next to the kitchen boasts the original Hyde Tavern cage bar from the historic tavern near Boston made famous by Lafayette’s visit in 1824. Surrounding the early New Hampshire hutch table are sturdy 1720s black ladderback chairs from Massachusetts. Along the rear wall are a 1700s Windsor candle stand, two-slat ladderback chair from late-1600s Massachusetts in original red paint, and an early buttery shelf, also in its original red, with several early bottles. The sand-weighted chandelier is from the late 1700s and still has its original green paint.*













Above: Nancy is skilled at colonial-era cooking in her kitchen's massive hearth. Its original stones are reconstructed in the same arrangement as when the house stood in Connecticut. The boards around the hearth retain their original red paint, while centuries of smoke have darkened both them and the large lintel above the hearth. An assortment of period cooking utensils hang from the long arm of the fireplace crane, as well as from the rare standing-crane in front of the hearth. The large iron cover at the back of the hearth conceals the oven and is original to the house. Two early candle molds are at the front edge of the hearth, along with various trivets, pots and kettles.

Previous Page: The home's "early kitchen" was the heart of the original 1670 house and now holds some of the Holcombs' most prized pieces, most of them in original red or black paint. At the far left is a large settle from early 1700s New England with extraordinarily wide pine boards and original attic surface, an early purchase from Ohio dealer Marge Staufer. Above it is a large blanket crane extending more than seven feet, from early 1700s Connecticut, in original mustard paint. Draped on the crane is an unusual early onionskin blanket, so called because it was colored with a dye made of onionskins. The early Massachusetts sawbuck table has rosehead-nail construction, original reddish brown paint, and a scrub top worn thin by three hundred years of use. The Connecticut banister-back chair by the window has its original brown paint and an unusual cutout in its crest. The hanging shelf by the window has early red original paint and holds a number of Nancy's early Pennsylvania and Connecticut redware pieces. The early Connecticut shoe-foot table has its original red paint and a drawer that opens to reveal a hand-painted checkerboard. Around the table are a 1720s black New Hampshire ladderback, a 1720s leather cant-back chair in original red, and a children's high chair from Massachusetts, dating from the early 1700s and once part of the Henry Ford Museum collection. At the far right, is one of Nancy's most prized pieces, a massive 1690s ladderback armchair once owned by legendary collector Roger Bacon, who kept it next to his fireplace. Between the windows stands a tall Connecticut chimney cupboard, also from the 1690s, with heavily worn mustard paint over the original red paint. The chandelier is from the 1700s, with tallow candles. The tricorn lantern hanging near the chandelier is from the historic Richard Sparrow House, a 1640s home in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The lantern still has its original red paint and wrought iron chain.



*Left: Nancy obtained the early hanging shelf in the kitchen from her longtime friend and noted Ohio antiques dealer Joan Darnell. The large chest is from 1702, while the child's desk sitting atop it is very rare, from 1690 and featuring its slanted top, rosehead nails, and original red paint.*

*Below: Another view of pieces of Nancy's early redware collection in the kitchen's Northshore cupboard. Most of her redware is from Connecticut, which became the New England leader in producing earthenware in the 1750s, particularly from Norwich. Her collection contains several pieces of slipware, a form of earthenware with distinctive decoration popular in England beginning in the 1600s.*

*Following Page: The early kitchen's ambience is captured in this photo showing the original ceiling with its hand-hewn beams, as well as the original floorboards, which Nancy herself regularly scrubs by hand. Next to the window is a rare Northshore cupboard from the early 1700s, in excellent condition in original red paint. It holds much of Nancy's collection of early redware, including noteworthy pieces from Norwich, Connecticut, early slipware, and redware plates bearing people's names. The nearby door is original to the house. The chandelier's candles are made of tallow, and their bending is typical even in mild heat.*

The Holcombs lived in Pennsylvania for four years while Paul completed his cardiology fellowship. In what scarce free time they had, they scouted antique shops, farm sales, and auctions – “I never went for the Victorian, but always loved the early,” she says – before returning to Ohio.

Back in their home state, they settled in one of Ohio's most historic homes. Ironically, it too was a colonial-era Connecticut home that had been salvaged, transported, and reconstructed along the early New England path of westward migration.

## Moving West

In the 1790s, a group of Connecticut surveyors explored a large swath of northeastern Ohio known as the Connecticut Western Reserve. The group's leader was General Moses Cleaveland, who laid out the village that eventually would become the city of Cleveland. Then he returned home to Canterbury, Connecticut.











Above: As in the house originally, the parlor is more formal than most other areas of the house. It features finished walls and ceiling, with the ceiling beams encased in planed wood. Especially impressive is that the ornate corner cupboard is original to the house, in this location. The Holcombs have maintained the formal aspects with more stately furnishings, such as the English wingback chair from the late 1600s, with its unusual black-painted ornate base and Spanish feet. The day bed is a Rhode Island piece with uncommon medial stretcher running lengthwise. The tea table is from early 1700s New England, also with a medial stretcher. The X-base candle stand in original red

was featured in *Antiques* magazine during the 1940s. The portrait next to the corner cupboard is believed to be of a brother of President John Adams.



Above Middle A grouping of crystal "wines" and other early glassware stand in front of Delft plates and chargers. Most of these 1700s Delftware pieces are English, except the rare Dutch charger on the right, depicting a bare-bosomed woman.

Left: The Bible on the tea table has an unusual flame-stitched cover.





Cleaveland's stately saltbox house in Connecticut was built in 1740, but two hundred years later it was a shambles – its sole occupant a dead cow – and slated for demolition. A couple in Hudson, Ohio, purchased the building in 1979 and reconstructed it on Ohio land that had been part of the Connecticut Western Reserve.

In 1995, the Holcombs purchased the Moses Cleaveland House in Hudson and lived there for twelve years. Paul established a busy cardiology practice in Cleveland and Nancy focused on raising their children. Together they expanded their collection of early furnishings, matching both Nancy's love of early New England pieces and the era of their historic home. When they eventually put the Moses Cleaveland House on the market, the realtor described it as "like walking through Williamsburg, only better."

Paul's long hours – often logging ninety hours a week – and a lengthy commute, made harder by Ohio winters, eventually got to him. "Paul was ready for a change," Nancy recalls. "After all he'd done for me over the years, I was willing. He wanted warmer weather, I wanted my four seasons, and Missouri had both. And Paul found a great career opportunity there."

"While we both loved this house," she adds, "he promised me: 'We'll do it again – we'll find an early house and we'll move it to Missouri.' So that's what we did."

## Finding the Parke House

The Holcombs' move west, as with generations of migrating pioneers before them, was filled with challenges. Aside from all of the usual pains of moving a family to a new location, the search for the right acreage and an early New England house suitable for a long-distance move took longer than expected.

The Holcombs lived in a condominium for 18 months and, after purchasing their property, built a carriage house on the land and lived there for two more years.

During that period, Nancy spotted an ad in the Maine Antique Digest for the Captain John Parke House in Preston, Connecticut. The Parke family is one of New England's oldest, and Parke himself earned his military rank in the late 1600s during King Philip's War, which pitted colonists against Native Americans. His home in Preston was built in 1670 but had fallen into disrepair over the centuries.

*Top: The frame holding the mirror is stumpwork, an elaborate style of raised embroidery popular in England beginning in the 1600s. The frame depicts the English king and queen and is trimmed in gold-thread tape and has its original glass. The large 1720s Bible box still has its lock and original red paint. On the brass bookstand is a Bible and very rare metal-framed beeswax seal, dated 1502, showing the Pope's approval for the opening of an English church.*

*Above: A man's flame-stitched wallet from the 1700s rests atop two women's silk pockets, which were worn beneath petticoats.*



*The large dresser, from Connecticut dealer Bob Bettcher, is an early 1700s piece with original feet and brass hardware. Its original paint over time has turned from gray to green. The wainscot chair and sofa both are William and Mary pieces from mid-1600s England. The two women's portraits are from the early 1700s. Nancy years ago bought the portrait on the right, which had once been in the collection of famed New York antiques dealer Israel Sack, depicting a prominent Rhode Island woman. More recently, Ohio dealer Marge Staufer sold Nancy the portrait that now hangs on the left. They were able to determine that the subject is the lighter-haired daughter of the woman on the right. The family resemblance is strong and both women wear the same dress in their portraits. The mother holds a fern leaf and her daughter holds a wildflower. The artist is unknown. The mid-1600s sofa in red linsey woolsey dates from Cromwellian England and still has its original horsehair stuffing and early brass tacks. Its mate is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

"The house was pretty much intact, which is amazing," Nancy explains. "Things like a large corner cupboard were still there, as was most of the original iron hardware with initials stamped into it. There were even fifteen different pegboards and several shoes that had been concealed in the walls. I remember one day they called during the dismantling and said, 'Nancy, we just found the original red featherboard – it'd been plastered over, but it's here!'"

Sunderland Period Homes of East Windsor Hill, Connecticut, had purchased the house and had run the ad. The Sunderland firm dismantled the Parke House for the Holcombs, prepared voluminous instructions on how to reconstruct it, and shipped it – along with selected pieces of a circa 1720 Connecticut house – in two semi truck-trailers and five flatbed trucks to Cape Girardeau on the western shore of the Mississippi, a hundred miles south of St. Louis.

"It was a huge project to take on," Nancy says. "Paul was here, of course, but he also had to work – and he works a lot. I was here every day while the house was being rebuilt, and I'll tell you, after three years I never wanted to hear the sound of a hammer again."





*Above: A William and Mary ball-foot desk and banister-back chair stand at one end of the parlor. An early courting mirror hangs above the desk. To the right of the hearth is a hooded cradle from about 1720 with original paint and rosehead nails. The open door in the fireplace surround is for a concealed cupboard.*

*Right: The parlor desktop displays a number of flame-stitched items from the mid 1700s. From left are an embroidered book cover; a small book safe still has its key; a tiny Bible rests on an unfinished man's wallet; an early eyeglass case is of green sharkskin, and the man's wallet retains its embroidery's bright colors.*



## Standing Her Ground

Homebuilding has changed considerably in three centuries. It's a fact that most of today's skilled carpenters and cabinetmakers are not familiar with the old ways. "It's not like putting up a new house," Nancy says. "When the house arrived here, all the parts had been tagged and labeled and I had books of instructions. But post-and-beam construction is like a puzzle. It's hard to explain it to someone who's never put a post-and-beam house back up."

Some local workers adjusted their skills, others simply walked away. "It was hard to explain that the imperfections were from history and we wanted to keep them," she says. "We didn't want mouse holes filled. We didn't want to use new wood for cabinets when we had wonderful, three-hundred-year-old wood stacked and waiting to be used."



*Top: A huge stone farm sink is a main feature of the Holcomb daily kitchen, flanked by countertops constructed of 300-year-old heavy planks. A corner cupboard in original red and dating from the late 1700s hangs above the counter. Modern appliances such as the oven, warming oven, and dishwasher are concealed behind cabinetry, much of it made from centuries-old lumber.*

*Above left: Nancy has a fondness for items with original black paint. Here a trencher bowl with well-worn bottom hangs on a post, above a large mixing bowl, mortars and pestles, small tankard, and a stoneware jug with black design.*

*Above right: An unusual feature of the hearth's surround is a cupboard door with original polka-dot design. The background is the paneling's original red, while the large dots are an aged cream color.*







Opposite Page: The ladderback chair is an early New England piece from about 1700. It is massive and has extra stretchers at the base and turned stretchers beneath the armrests. The banister-back chair is part of a set the Holcombs own, from Connecticut, circa 1700. Between them is a pine X-based candle stand in original red, from 1720 Connecticut. Above the hearth are, at far left, a spoon holder from the late 1600s in original green, and, at right, an early pipe box with a lollipop back, in original red. The swing-arm device that resembles a blanket crane is actually an early herb dryer.

Left: The Holcombs' "mud room" next to the kitchen offers some fascinating period design details. It has original red-painted walls, doors, and red floorboards. The

early bucket bench holds an assortment of wooden buckets from the 1700s. Standing next to the bench, a large hourglass mortar and pestle is likely Pilgrim era from Connecticut. Hanging above the bench is a crude scrub board from the period. On the wall above the red-painted wood box hangs a Revolutionary-era soldier's fur backpack.

Below: This end of the mud room displays several artifacts related to cheesemaking, including the cheese basket and cheese box hanging on the wall, and a cheese ladder hanging next to the musket. Of particular interest is the black band of paint that runs around the base of the room and door, much like a modern baseboard. The painted band is original to the house and was a design feature of several New England homes of the early colonial period.







*The keeping room contains another hearth, reassembled with the original stones. In both photos appears the impressive, tall Connecticut desk from Sturbridge, Massachusetts. It opens to reveal numerous cubbyholes and filing spaces, while the writing surface slides out like a breadboard. Two doors beneath the writing board conceal another large storage area. The circa 1740 piece is pine and has its original red paint. The corner cupboard in the lower photo is from the early 1700s and has its original butterfly hinges and attic surface. Between the desk and the corner cupboard stands an unusual X-base, adjustable-height lighting fixture that once was in the collection of noteworthy Americana collector Roger Bacon.*

Nancy protected her and Paul's investment in the John Parke House by standing her ground. She demanded that the original floorboards, once laid, be taken up and put back in their original order so the knots aligned. She made sure cracks, gaps, and minor crevices were left untouched instead of filled. Any new construction was done with period materials whenever possible.

"It was hard because people wanted to make it so the house was like brand new," she explains. "But I said, 'No - it's history and we want to preserve it, so leave it that way.'"

After three intense years, the Holcombs moved into the Captain John Parke House in November of 2010. "Ethan was a high-school freshman when we started on the house and my goal was to have it done by the time he graduated."



There is no question that Nancy's stubborn diligence has paid off. The house is immaculately restored, floor to ceiling, including five fireplaces with their original stonework. And, like the Moses Cleaveland House back in Ohio, the John Parke House today represents the early colonial period on a par with the finest of the country's living-history museums.

## Early Means Very Early

A word that's spoken frequently in the world of American antiques is "early." With the Holcombs' collection, "early" means "very early." Their preferred cutoff date for their pieces is 1720.

"I don't have anything after William and Mary," she says, speaking of the style associated with the period from 1690 to 1730. "No Chippendale, and Queen Anne is too pretty for me. I'd love to have more Pilgrim – I know there's not a lot of it out there – but we do have some good Pilgrim pieces."

Nancy and Paul concentrate on the high end of the American country antiques market, acquiring rare pieces in mostly superior condition. "I've always been told to buy the best you can afford at the time, and we've always done that," she explains. Early in their marriage they bought good Pennsylvania pieces, over time replacing them with early New England pieces when they moved to the Moses Cleaveland House and continuing to this day.



*Left: The Holcombs have furnished the house's original borning room to reflect aspects of early American medical practice. The portrait depicts an 18th century Brooklyn physician named Tyler Briggs, who is leaning on a medical book Thomas's Practice. On the desk directly below the portrait sits an actual edition of the same book. Sitting next to it is an early stethoscope made of ivory and wood, while to the right of the desk is an early model of human heart made of wax for teaching purposes. The desk is a nautical desk from the 1700s, resting atop a New England tavern table in original black paint.*

*Above: The medical theme continues with a 1700s New England stepback cupboard in original gray and original hinges. Many of the leather-bound books are early medical books. The pantry box sitting on the stepback portion bears the inscription "Medson," for "medicine."*







*The master bedroom on the second floor has all original paneling, though the Prussian blue paint is contemporary. Nancy hand-stitched the linen bed hangings and used period 18th century tape for the edging, which was a popular technique when fabric was scarce. The bed covering is a 1750 quilt of Calamanco, a glossy woolen fabric popular in England and the colonies during the early 1700s but now found mostly in museums. The chest at the foot of the bed has an elaborate folk-painted floral design. On top of it is a miniature document box from Connecticut. On both the miniature box and on the candle stand by the bed are stacks of rare miniature wallpaper boxes, some from the collection of Roger Bacon.*

"This is what we love," she adds. "Sometimes the prices are high. I'm not going to say we only eat peanut butter, but we've made a number of sacrifices to stay with our priorities. We've never gone on tons of cruises or vacations. A vacation for us is going antiquing back east."

Another factor is the people they've dealt with in acquiring their extraordinary collection. Nancy says her longtime close friends – renowned Ohio antiques dealers Marge Staufer of Medina, Sam Forsythe of Columbus, and the late Joan Darnell of Akron, as well as Gail Lettick of Woodbury, Connecticut – have provided considerable guidance over the years.

"These have been my mentors and I've learned so much from them," Nancy adds. "They've been like a wonderful family to me for years and years."

To this day, Nancy continues to maintain regular contact with the upper echelon of dealers and leading collectors of early Americana.

"I've been doing this a long time," she continues, "and the way I get things now is in collections. I know where the things are – and when they're offered, you have to get them right away. Sometimes

that means making tough choices and sacrifices.” She’s been known to quickly sell off her valuable pieces to upgrade to another rare piece that’s suddenly become available.

Although Paul’s time is limited due to the pressures of his profession, the Holcombs still operate as a team. “I’m the one who spots the stuff, finds out what’s available and when, and Paul goes over it in detail. I mean, being a cardiologist, he can find anything that might be wrong with a piece. He’ll go over a piece with a flashlight for two hours, just looking and looking. When you’re buying the sort of thing that attracts us, you can’t afford to make a mistake.”

## Claims to Fame

All of this diligence has provided the Holcombs with some remarkable finds. Rare pieces populate every room. Most still have their original paint, while others have attic surface. Nancy favors early red paint in its many shades. Original black is also high on her list. She favors furniture from Connecticut and Rhode Island, and pieces created with handmade rosehead nails from the early 1700s are among her best loved.

Due to her friendships and connections with leading dealers and collectors of Americana, Nancy has been able to add several pieces that previously were parts of notable collections.



*Here are two Connecticut banister-back chairs in the noteworthy “heart and crown” style, due to the cutouts in the chairs’ crests. Furniture historian Robert Trent documented the style, which originated around 1700 with furniture makers along the Connecticut coast. Between the chairs is a 1700 Connecticut tea table with one-board top and original black paint. On top of the table rests an unusual painted box with leather hinges. The box has original green paint with painted decorative house, birds, and trees and was once in the collection of famed folk-art collector James O. Keene.*





*Top Left: This unusual tall chest of drawers is a Connecticut piece dating from about 1700 and never has had hardware pulls on any of the drawers for opening and closing the seven drawers. As a result, the front of the drawers are worn thin from people pulling and pushing on them. The chest still has its original red-wash paint.*



*Top Right and Right: One of Paul's favorite antiques, this tricorn hatbox was once in the collection of Americana expert Roger Bacon. The outside of the pine box is covered with block-printed wallpaper showing images of lions and tricorn hats. The interior also is lined with wallpaper. Based on its dimensions, the box likely held the hat of a civilian gentleman during the Revolutionary era.*

She's a fan of legendary New Hampshire collector Roger Bacon (1904-1982). She has the formidable 1690s Massachusetts ladderback armchair that sat next to Bacon's hearth for many years. She also has an unusual pre-1700s adjustable-height light fixture from Bacon's collection, as well as several miniature wallpaper boxes, and a Revolutionary-era tricorn hatbox that also happens to be Paul's favorite antique.

There's a charming painted wooden box with leather hinges. It has original green paint but also some excellent folk art designs, including a little house, birds, and trees. The box previously was in the personal collection of famed American folk-art collectors Ruth and James O. Keene.

A couple of Connecticut bannister-back chairs in the Holcombs' bedroom are rare "heart and crown" chairs – so called because of the cutout design in the chairs' crests – that furniture historian Robert F. Trent documented in his 1977 book, *Hearts & Crowns: Folk Chairs of the Connecticut Coast, 1720-1840*.



*Left: The master bedroom forms a large ell on the second floor, with part dedicated to the sleeping chambers and the other part as this sitting room, a favorite spot for relaxing next to the fire.*

*Right: The view of the upstairs staircase, looking into the master bedroom. The red wallboards are original to the house.*

In other rooms are pieces that have spent centuries in historic environments. In the Holcombs' early kitchen hangs a tricorn lantern that originally hung in the historic Richard Sparrow House, a 1640s home in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and which still has its original red paint and wrought-iron chain. "Open it and you can still smell the tallow of all those candles," Nancy says.

In a room the Holcombs call the "little tavern" is a cage bar originally from the colonial-era Hyde Tavern near Boston. "Legend has it that Lafayette slept at the Hyde Tavern during his 1824 visit to the United States, so maybe it's our connection with Lafayette," Nancy says with a laugh. She obtained the cage bar through Connecticut restorations dealer Bob Bettcher, who also provided guidance on aspects of rebuilding their house.

"Whatever we have, I like to put it where it would've been appropriate, where the people back then would've actually used it," Nancy explains. "We live with these things. We use them ourselves. Sometimes we may have to warn people that a chair is fragile, but we still use it."

## Time for Enjoyment

After the challenges of relocating their family and the three-year effort to rebuild the John Parke House, Nancy and Paul are in a position to enjoy their home.

"The move has given Paul a much better lifestyle," Nancy says. He's now a cardiologist with the medical team at St. Francis Hospital in Cape Girardeau. In Ohio, his office was an hour from home,



now it's ten minutes. "He still works a lot, but when he has a chance to break away, he can quickly come home, which is nice."

The couple recently started a ritual of designating one room in their house as their time for morning coffee and talking. "We pick a room, and on the weekends we get up early and Paul makes the coffee and starts the fire. We sit there and talk, which is really nice. This way, we get to really enjoy every room of our house."

Nancy runs an antiques business out of the carriage house. She gives guests informal tours of her home – drawing upon her knowledge of the New England colonial period and its lifestyles – that last about two hours. She's considering expanding her tours. "People enjoy my 18th century dinners that I cook on the hearth, so maybe I'll give home tours and include the dinner," she says. "I know I'd enjoy it."

In fact, enjoyment is vital to the Holcombs, especially when it comes to their house and the antiques. "We don't do this to impress anybody. It's just who we are," Nancy emphasizes. "I'll have people come here and say, 'I really like it, but I wouldn't want to live here.' That's fine, because I wouldn't want to live in a new house. People have different preferences, and that's what makes the world so interesting."



*Nancy custom-blended the exterior color for the Captain John Parke House, based on house treatments in late-1600s New England. Using a mixture of brown and black stains, she achieved the monochromatic effect of raw siding exposed to harsh elements. The 5,500-square-foot house has a Connecticut River Valley treatment for the double front door. From this angle, Nancy's beds for vegetable and flower gardens are to the right of the house.*

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