

Decor Maine

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LIVING BEAUTIFULLY IN MAINE

The Art Issue

WHERE *the* ARTISTS RETREAT:

A MOODY SLICE OF
EUROPEAN
ELEGANCE
in a Cape Neddick home

AN ART COLLECTION
with a view on the
BLUE HILL PENINSULA

An Abandoned 1700s Home
IN PHIPPSBURG
IS TRANSFORMED



Plus!

The Visionary Behind
**ANDREW
WYETH'S WORLD**
TAKES CENTER STAGE

17 MAINE ART
GALLERIES:
Your Summer of
Inspiration Awaits

Our Souls at Night

LINDEN FREDERICK'S MEDITATIONS ON SMALL-TOWN AMERICA

by ALLISON PAIGE photographs by DAVE CLOUGH

OBSERVING A PAINTING OF LINDEN FREDERICK'S, a humble building outlined by the encroaching dusk, one can almost hear the crickets and feel the crisp evening air. For most of his career, the Maine-based painter has focused his creative powers on depicting small-town America. *Quotidien* architecture—the warehouse, the diner, the shop, take on new life, even an air of mystery, when viewed from his perspective. His nocturnes of homes, particularly, evoke a benevolent voyeurism, where a lone, lit window is the only sign of life. Under the cover of night, the hulks and husks of Linden's lonesome buildings feel nearly sentient, the lives within them obscured.

For his *American Studies* series, he biked cross-country taking pictures of buildings that intrigued him, later turning them into studies, then larger works. *Night Neighbors* series stayed closer to home, in Belfast, where Linden has lived since 1989. Driving through town, I spy for buildings familiar from his paintings, before arriving at the home Linden shares with Heather, his wife and manager. Linden, who hails from a family of builders, designed and crafted it himself. Painted moss green and filled with custom millwork, it is, like most things in his life, beautiful and self-made.

In his adjacent shingle-sided studio, violins hang from rafters and plates for a cello lie upon a worktable, awaiting assembly. Linden is also an in-demand luthier,

and his burnished instruments naturally resemble beautiful sculptures. Up an open staircase is his atelier, where work-in-progress landscapes rest on easels, in varying degrees of completion.

While he often paints New England, Linden's *Memoir* series dwelt on rural upstate New York, where he was raised. *State Highway* (2003) depicts the Cape built by his father, where he and his five siblings grew up. "I can remember how my sister and I would sit on the step and bet about what kind of car was coming next, a Ford maybe. And we'd wait!" he recalls. In the painting, the home is dark save one window, as twin headlights of a car approach, its make indecipherable in the gloom. "In high school, I painted. But in my family, there was no real art. So, I'm kind of surprised. Like: how did I get here?" he asks, with genuine wonder. "I really don't know."

He gestures to a framed childhood drawing on the wall, of an absurdly blocky animal. "I call it *Square Horse*, because of its 90-degree buttocks," he laughs. Figurative art always attracted him, but his eye, no doubt genetically predisposed to understand volume and angles, was more suited for houses and buildings, he concluded.

While Linden's work is realistic, it allows for creative license. "I add and subtract," he concurs. *Peace* (2025) features a sight familiar to Belfastians: The Penobscot McCrum potato processing plant. A wisp of smoke floats



The first floor of Linden's studio is devoted to the wood shop where he creates handcrafted custom violins.



A work-in-progress stands on the easel in Linden's light-filled, aerie-like studio. *below, left:* Linden framed his kindergarten drawing, known affectionately as *Square Horse* (or, as he puts it, more saltily, *Square-Ass Horse*). *below, right:* Various ephemera adorn Linden's easel.





Fallow, oil on linen, 30 x 30 inches, depicts a motif that fascinates both Linden and his collectors, a lone house at dusk.



Peace, oil on linen, 32 x 42 inches. The peace sign in the painting was added later as a memento mori.

“And then there’s people that say *‘Where is this?’* And I say, *‘Where would you like it to be?’*”

—LINDEN FREDERICK

like a ghostly cloud in the foreground, while the illuminated peace sign that gives the picture its name glows dimly from the rooftop. Both elements were added later, a sort of *memento mori*, after the factory burned down in 2022.

Although his work evokes emotion in the viewer, Linden insists that he doesn’t prescribe a reaction. “I’ve had a gallery experience where one person looked at my picture and said, ‘Oh, it kind of gives me the creeps.’ And then the next person at the very same picture said, ‘Oh, this is so comforting.’ They’re bringing very different things to that experience. I’ve had people say, ‘It reminds me of my aunt’s house.’ And then there’s people that say, ‘Where is this?’ And I say, ‘Where would you like it to be?’”

In 2017, tandem with the solo show, Forum Gallery published *Night Stories: Fifteen Paintings and the Stories that Inspired Them*. Well-known authors used studies of Linden’s as prompts, and the resulting collection captures the kind of indelible characters one imagines living in the homes or working in the buildings Linden depicts. He reflects, “All I wanted was to trigger something that sparked their imagination. I don’t care

what the story is. They brought their own experience to it, and that’s the difference.”

As for what’s next, “I’m doing a series on these reflections.” A nearby work-in-progress captures a slice of water mirroring the trees surrounding it; its monochromatic scale resembling a photographic negative. The eye searches, intuitively, for black and white, Linden notes. Underpainting achieves this, providing a sense of depth and breadth. “I’ll paint this program many, many more times. And each subsequent layer will just get more three-dimensional and more complex.”

Where is this body of water, I wonder, imagining, perhaps, the majestic St. George Lake nearby. “It’s called ‘The Muck,’” Linden says with a smile. “It’s in Belfast, right next to the Hannaford. It’s Kirby Lake, but locally, it’s called ‘The Muck.’”

I contemplate this as I leave: how Linden elevates the ordinary into something enduring with a fierce, impartial noticing. On the drive homeward, down small country roads and a long stretch of highway, the open sky is just beginning to darken. Amid the modest homes, rolling fields, and tumbledown barns, I see art everywhere. ■