

# destinations

**a shop for all seasons.** Like a fine garden, The Marston House, an antiques business in Wiscasset, Maine, marches to the beat of the four seasons. The peak gardening days of spring and summer whisk along at a frenzied pace, as tourists wending along the coastal highway stop to browse for genuine New England souvenirs and to enjoy the lush and fragrant perennial gardens.

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**PRECEDING PAGE:** A froth of white blossoms welcomes guests to Marston House. Lychnis, phlox, silvery artemisia, and daisies are old-fashioned flowers that go perfectly with antiques. **ABOVE:** When shopping at Marston House, customers can easily furnish a room with practical pieces of vintage Americana, from tables and beds to hooked rugs and game boards.



**ABOVE:** A bird's-nest, berries, and an antique ornament turn a bare tree branch into an informal Christmas tree. **LEFT:** Red lobster-trap buoys and clay pots blend usefulness with nostalgic beauty. **BELOW:** The proprietor of The Marston House, Sharon Mrozinski, loves utilitarian antiques, especially those with original paint.



Fall air is brisk and purposeful, hinting of colder days to come, and Marston House customers mimic the season, shopping with purpose as they choose treasures to fill Christmas lists. The business year winds up in December with the shop's holiday open house, which coincides with the village's annual tree-lighting ceremony on the first weekend of December.

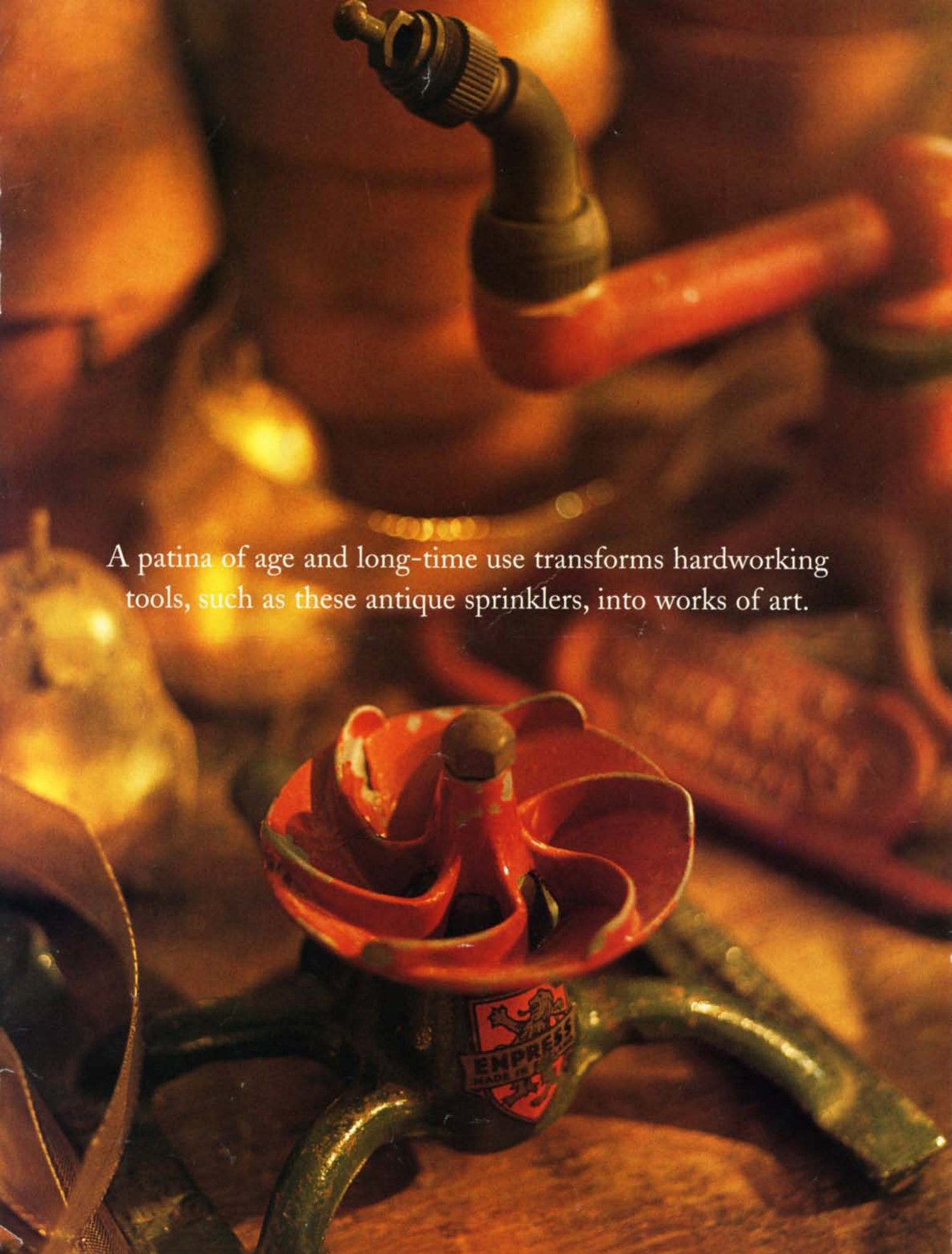
At Christmas, when the surrounding countryside is white with snow, The Marston House shines with Yuletide trappings and finery. New England chairs and cupboards, hatboxes and stands are festooned with festive holiday ribbons. So are the hundreds of garden tools, a Marston House specialty.

Of forged antique steel, English gardening tools dating from 1880 to the 1920s have their own showroom. There are spades, pitchforks, edgers, onion hoes, potato hoes, cultivators, and hand tools, along with measuring reels and marking lines, dandelion forks, ladies' shears, herb shears, lavender shears, and children's tools. Wooden grips and handles have interesting turnings and rich hues.

"These were made to last," says owner Sharon Mrozinski, "before business became, well, Business." Naturally, men buy most of the tools. "It used to be that the husbands were dragged into the shop reluctantly, and just stood around, asking their wives, 'Are you through yet?,' or, 'Why are you buying that?' Then I'd send them down the street," she laughs, "to pass the time at the hardware store."

As The Marston House's tool collection expanded, men began to enjoy the shop, too. "They have a wonderful time taking down every tool, laying them out together, and making weighty comparisons," says Sharon. The first time she saw a man comparing tools, Sharon thought it was one man's idiosyncrasy. But when every male customer seemed to buy tools that way, she realized it was gender-specific shopping. (Women usually pick out one or two tools, pay, and that's that.) For the men, it's an exciting, big deal.

Although Sharon and husband Paul have been in Wiscasset for years now, native "Mainers" still think they're "from away," and have been shocked to their Down East cores by the high prices that Sharon's

A collection of antique fire sprinklers and tools, including a red-handled tool and a red flower-shaped sprinkler head with a 'EMPRESS' logo.

A patina of age and long-time use transforms hardworking tools, such as these antique sprinklers, into works of art.



Even an antique wheelbarrow brimming with garden tools takes on a holiday feel when draped with gold ribbon. Heirloom watering cans celebrate the season in style by sprouting branches bedecked with Christmas ornaments (see Buyer's Guide on page 131).



utilitarian New England antiques command. After all, they say, "Granny's barn was full of things like that."

So, every Christmas, to return a little something to the town she's come to love, Sharon invites various community groups and schoolchildren to tour her shop, look at the merchandise, and learn from her the value of their own heirlooms. "That way," she says, "they won't take their priceless heritage for granted."

Once the holiday bustle subsides, The Marston House becomes dormant, much like the perennial borders surrounding the shop. When Sharon opened The Marston House, the first winter was the most frightening experience of her life. She'd been warned that business reflects tourist traffic and that sales drop off in winter. But having been a dealer before, in Carmel, California, she interpreted the local merchants' "in winter, business is dead" to mean fewer customers, not no customers at all.

Now, eight years later, Sharon closes the shop, except by appointment, during the coldest months of the year: from the first of the new year until the end of April. "Winter has become our best friend," says Sharon. "Mother Nature has slowed us down, so we just relax and enjoy Maine. In summer, the shop's so busy we never find the time."

These days, she and Paul, an architect, spend the snowy season in the "keeping room" of their handsome 18th-century Federal-style home. (The antiques shop occupies the living room, kitchen, and dining area.) In this cozy room, they cook over the fireplace all winter long, rest, regroup, and happily work together planning next summer's perennial garden.

Paul has taken to New England gardening like a man born to trowel. The Marston House, along with

## details, details

**SHOP:** The Marston House is located at the corner of Main Street (U.S. Route 1) and Middle Street in Wiscasset, Maine. Contact owner Sharon Mrozinski at P.O. Box 517, Wiscasset, ME 04578; or call 207/882-6010.



**HOURS:** From May 1–December 31 open Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., and Sunday, noon–5 p.m. From January 1–April 30, please phone for an appointment.

**GOODS:** Along with antique garden tools is a gold mine of New England furniture and accessories, with an emphasis on utilitarian items and original paint. Also a tremendous inventory of late-1700s to late-1800s American ticking and homespun textiles.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Portland, head north on U.S. Route 1. Wiscasset is approximately one hour from Portland, between Bath and Boothbay Harbor. Route 1 is a two-lane highway, and in summer traffic jams in Wiscasset are not uncommon. If your goal is to escape gridlock, visit in May, June, September, or October.

For more information on area events or attractions, contact the Wiscasset Regional Business Association, P.O. Box 150, Wiscasset, ME 04578; 207/882-9617.

its carriage-house turned bed-and-breakfast, sits right on U.S. Route 1—which is a perfect location for business, but lacks privacy. In self-defense, and with newly developed Yankee ingenuity, Paul pruned their old lilacs to encourage growth, and planted perennial borders with a profusion of old-fashioned perennials and biennials: hollyhocks, foxgloves, peonies, and daisies.

If a given plant doesn't do the trick in one spot, he simply digs it up and drops it in another and another, until, at last, it clicks. "Perennials," says Sharon delightedly, "are incredibly tolerant." And incredibly useful, too, for with masses of flowers, Paul has succeeded in beautifully blocking their view of the busy road, and made a marvelous garden as well. Actually, it's too beautiful, because cars pull into their driveway now just to look at it!

Whether visitors stop to admire the garden or poke around among the antiques, they're sure to find something worth enjoying here every season of the year. ■

**BELOW:** In addition to antique garden tools, customers at The Marston House can buy fresh herbs, then choose from a treasure trove of cachepots, from terra-cotta bowls to wooden pantry boxes.

