



FrenchBlue Photography

Jon and Patricia Huffman bought a Bernhardt canopy bed for their primary bedroom. Not only is it larger and fancier, but the mattress is adjustable.

Bedroom-bathroom project seeks to make life a little safer

By Diane Cowen
STAFF WRITER

When Jon and Patricia Huffman had leaky pipes a few years ago, they agreed it was time to remodel their primary bathroom.

They'd been thinking about ways to update the room and accommodate what they knew would be worsening symptoms of Jon's diagnosis of Huntington's disease, a genetic and progressive brain disorder that affects movement, mood and thinking skills.

Couple makes a few special accommodations after husband's Huntington's disease diagnosis

The Huffmans had met interior designer Juliana Ewer of J Squared Home Designs, who helped them remodel and redecorate the living room in their Rosenberg home, so they asked for her help with the primary bedroom and bathroom.

Huntington's disease is genetic, passed down from parent to child. When Jon's mother started showing symptoms, they learned what they could about the disease and went on with their lives.

He started showing symptoms around 2008 and noticed

Design continues on D6

FINE ARTS

Rice University's new opera house is up to the task

By Chris Gray
CORRESPONDENT

Rice University's new Brockman Hall for Opera is proof that attention to detail results in a first-class facility. Better, it has that new-theater smell.

It took a little longer because of the pandemic (like everything else), but Thursday night the Brockman finally got a proper christening when the Shepherd School of Music produced "Don Giovanni," Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's dark

masterpiece of deception and revenge.

Productions take place in the 600-seat Morrison Theater, which somehow feels both roomy and cozy. Three balconies ring the central cylindrical space, which funnels sound straight up from the spacious stage and roomy orchestra pit. Many thousands of dollars went into getting the acoustics of the room just so, and it paid off: A rag whooshing across the surface of the stage was audible from the Grand



Jeff Fittlow

Brockman Hall for Opera at Rice University currently is hosting a production of "Don Giovanni."

Tier on the third level. Heavier props rolling on and off the stage sounded like thunder.

But more crucially, the sound is balanced. The orchestra did not overwhelm the singers, or vice versa, even during more complex numbers that entangled two or more vocal lines. All the musicians and actors seemed comfortable on-stage (or beneath it), free of any opening-night jitters. The appreciative audience came ready to laugh and applaud.

Largely unmasked, they were apparently healthy, too — minimal coughing during the performance.

Equally game and enthusiastic was the talented student cast under the stage direction of Vera L. Calábria: Dylan Gregg as Leporello, Rachel Shaughnessy as Donna Anna, Hidenori Inoue as Il Commendatore, Hayden Smith as Don Ottavio, Jessica Crowell as Donna Elvira, Madeline Lyon as Zerlina, Keaton Brown as

Opera continues on D2

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COMMUNITY

Filmmaking camp turns kids into young Spielbergs

By Allison Bagley
CORRESPONDENT

For its 14th summer, local nonprofit Aurora Picture Show will host camps where kids step behind the camera as filmmakers — culminating with a red-carpet-style premiere, complete with paparazzi.

No prior filmmaking experience is needed for the camp, which is open to ages 7 to 15, and Aurora’s Camilo Gonzalez says most campers return for subsequent summers once they’ve experimented with the medium.

Some of the short films have gone on to juried film festivals.

Professional artists and animators teach each weekly session, beginning with basic technical skills. Campers tour the editing areas and animation stations and try out equipment, including lighting and tripods.

They work in teams to pitch their ideas before getting to work on their three- to five-minute films.

From silly and fun to abstract or political, Gonzalez says film topics come from campers’ own life experiences. “We are showing them what their voice is and how important their stories are,” he says.

“Getting their ideas out of their heads, onto paper and onto a moving image is a really good tool for them to have as a kid in this multisensory world that we live in,” he adds.

One style kids can employ in their filmmaking is stop-motion animation. Digital animation, which is more advanced, is not taught at the camp.

Using objects available in the studio or that they bring from home, kids move items in front



Aurora Picture Show

Participants in the Aurora Picture Show Filmmaking Camp work together to create a film.

of the camera, take pictures, then move the object again to tell a story.

They’ll learn frame rate, composition and other fundamentals.

In postproduction, kids use technology to splice all the images together to create the illusion of movement.

Stop-motion films might feature Claymation, collage elements or objects such as Legos or fruit.

“You can really take any object and bring it to life,” Gonzalez says. “It’s mostly about letting their creativity take the wheel.”

Gonzalez recalls one short in which a strawberry with a face began to eat other strawberries. In another, “Godzilla’s Day

Off,” filmmakers featured a stuffed animal and showed how the monster might relax, depicting him drinking coffee and other everyday acts.

Kids use the same iPads, DSLR cameras, tripods and Go Pros to make shadow puppetry films.

Relying on white bed sheets, overhead projectors and other types of lighting, they’ll cast shadows using their bodies, objects or cut-outs, then learn how to film the movements smoothly.

Other campers might make use of a green screen for their movies, learning how to key tone the background and gaining skills to make a subject invisible, to make objects float or to overlay screens so that a

character appears to be talking to a clone of himself.

Finally, kids choose music to enhance their stories.

For a film about Pac-Man coming to life, kids overlaid a soundtrack reminiscent of the original retro game.

For the film “Nectar,” a team used stop-motion animation to show a procession of origami butterflies migrating. Set to a piano score, the film was “gorgeous, kind of ethereal,” Gonzalez says.

Throughout the week, campers also view and critique full-length movies.

“There’s something magical about movies (that connects us),” Gonzalez says. “We all want to make something that gets the story across.”

FILMMAKING CAMP AT AURORA PICTURE SHOW

When: June 13-Aug. 12

Where: 2442 Bartlett

Details: \$350 per week; ages 7-15; aurorapictureshow.org

In past years, campers’ short films have been selected for the Chicago International Children’s Film Festival and other juried shows.

But, Gonzalez says the highlight of each summer is an August film premiere at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston that wraps up the camp term.

As campers enter the event with their parents and guests, an Aurora team member using flash photography acts as the “paparazzi.” Guests receive printed invitations and each camp team has the chance to discuss their film in front of the audience.

It’s an “empowering experience that happens when they get to share their film with the world,” Gonzalez says. “The theater feels full of energy. It’s kind of a drum-roll moment.”

Campers are always eager to see the premieres of their peers’ films, he says. Each child receives a diploma and takes a bow.

“They are film directors, they’re famous ... some parents are asking for their autographs,” Gonzalez says with a laugh.

There are multiple ovations before the night is over.

“Their smiles and their egos are barely going through the door,” he says. “It’s really beautiful.”

Allison Bagley is a Houston-based writer.

DESIGN

From page D1

that he had a heavy foot while driving and found it difficult to execute slow-rolling stops in the car. Patricia noted that those with Huntington’s often realize they’re showing symptoms when they find themselves getting more speeding tickets.

Jon, 61, stayed at his job as a pharmacist as long as he could, retiring in 2014. Patricia, too, was a pharmacist; she retired last August at age 59, wanting to spend more time with Jon and travel as much as they can until it’s too difficult for him. Their two grown sons and their grandchildren have tested negative for the disease.

Now, Jon describes his symptoms as mild, and he’s participated in clinical trials, hoping they’ll find a cure for the disease in his lifetime. Patricia, though, noticed that his gait had changed recently, shuffling a little bit more and not having the stamina for longer walks. But they stay active, going to the gym and even taking dance lessons that a physical therapist recommended.

“With Huntington’s, everyone is on their own journey,” Patricia said. “They say people with Huntington’s first seem intoxicated. Jon’s brother had Huntington’s disease and died in his 50s. He had gotten speeding tickets. They thought he was intoxicated and had an alcohol problem.”

For now, the Huffmans are getting their home ready for the day Jon’s condition worsens and his mobility is affected. Sprucing up the bedroom and adding special accommodations in the primary bathroom are part of that — and all of the work was done during the coronavirus shutdown.

Measures include wider doorways and more open spaces so there’s less furniture to get around or run into. They still have carpets and rugs, though Patricia knows there could be a day when they may have to remove the carpets and rugs, as they’ll be easy to trip over if Jon’s gait turns into more of a shuffle.

In the shower, they added grab bars and shower controls on the doorless end, with more grab bars and the showerhead on the other end, making it usable for Jon for the first time in quite a while. The shower



Photos by FrenchBlue Photography

The shower is doorless for easier access, and hand controls were placed outside of the water stream. A chandelier hangs over the free-standing tub.



The walk-in shower features grab bars at both end of the shower. The shampoo niches feature a unique basket weave tile design.



Before starting the renovation, the Huffmans and their designer gave special consideration to aging in place.

never had enough water pressure to suit either of them, so that problem was corrected, too.

Ewer found the couple a free-standing tub and designed a pony wall behind it to hold plumbing and provide a shelf to hold soap or towels. One of the most beautiful touches is the chandelier they chose to hang over the tub, a Regina Andrews design made of brass and crystal.

A great-looking tile in a creamy taupe covers the shower walls. Shampoo and soap niches have a ceramic basket weave tile pattern. Counters — previously Formica — were upgraded to quartzite slabs.

The toilet area needed special considerations, with a Toto bidet that’s taller than standard toilets and more grab bars so Jon can remain independent. As if the bidet isn’t fancy enough, it’s also motion sensitive, so the lid raises as soon as someone enters.

Even something as simple as a pocket door entry helps, tucking neatly into the wall and staying out of the way.

One change they’re glad they made had nothing to do with accessibility. There had been a windowlike opening in a wall between the bathroom and bedroom. Because of an arched window in the bathroom, harsh sunlight poured into the bedroom, making it bright and uncomfortable.

After sealing the opening with sheetrock, the bedroom is as dark as they want it to be. For the arched window on the exterior wall, Ewer designed a metal tableau that sits on top of an opaque screen to filter the light that comes into the room.

The wall with the sinks transformed with Graham and Brown wallpaper as a background, Venetian glass mirrors and pretty sconces, all above more of the basket weave tile — this time used as a small backsplash.

In the bedroom, they bought a new king-size adjustable Bernhardt canopy bed with an upholstered headboard and footboard, and new custom-made bedding.

“The flow will be perfect no matter the situation,” Ewer said. “When we laid everything out, we considered what might come in the future and we made it easily walkable and accessible for later on.”

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