

The Renfield House

The origin story of our 1868 house and the coffin box that still resides in the attic of the original builder of the house at Mezzacello.

The Gift of the Magi

Two people share a combined passion but come at it from completely different angles, it can be interesting. So we laugh and compromise.

Being a Renaissance Smurf

Y'all remember the Smurfs? When I was in middle school every Saturday morning I would watch "The Smurfs". I loved the message of community and resourcefulness. The singular villain, Gargamel, was a stand in for the cruel world and later on I would learn was me as well. I was enchanted by their village that they created from found materials. LOL! There was one thing about the Smurfs that I did not connect with and it is coming back to haunt me in my adult professional life, ironically enough. Why were Smurfs so one dimensional?

I mean really! All of the Smurfs were one dimensional (except for Papa Smurf, the mysterious wise daddy with all the answers). They were all one note characters that were useless without the specific skill they brought and useless without

the care, recognition, and aid of the others. I always saw that as a weakness; even as a child. Today as I navigate the world as a 21st Century Mentor, Data Scientist, Hobby Anthropologist, Inventor, Poet, Activist, Educator and Farmer I find that the world is really far more like the Smurfs than I had ever imagined. Everyone wants to be a specialist and being a Thomas Jefferson, DaVinci, Hedy Lamar, or Buckminster Fuller is anomalous. Those people are my heroes. We all need to be more like them or at least Papa Smurf. We sure as hell need more Smurfettes in STEM. It boggles my mind that people think they have to be one thing really, really well, or one thing just good enough. I knew even as a kid that I would need a "Ride or Die" team of Smurfs to effectively exist in the real world.

My dream team was always Brainy, Brauny, Farmer, Handy, Happy, Poet, Smurfette, and Papa Smurf. That's who I am today (Smurfette in spirit) and it boggles my mind that people are frustrated – especially on LinkedIn – that I take credit for being all of those things. It seems without fail every time I post on LinkedIn about my "other" interests I get confused comments or messages along the lines of "what is it you do again?" I chose the job title "Sultan of Systems" ON PURPOSE. I know the entire universe – empirical, quantum or relativistic or hell, even a holographic data projection – is a system. I knew even then that it was really a sustainable ecosystem. To act instinctively with coherent laser focus is to take without giving and renders you useless in a world that deals in analog and incoherent light and a web of life.

One should be as useful and engaged as your mind, body and community will allow. I happen to believe that every interest is an opportunity to change the world. And I act on that impulse. Don't be a Smurf; Be a dimensional, interested and interesting person. Surround yourself with challenges, vibrant community, and fabulous colleagues and friends. Feel love and give it freely. Accept your inner Gargamel and be patient with

it and the world at large. I am enough. I am a Smurf Village.
I hope you all are too. Cheers!

Parterre Gardens, Guerrilla Gardens

That one time when I came home from a conference to find 64 1-gallon boxwood bushes that had to be planted. farewell DMZ.

The Neighbors Truck

The Neighbors Truck



Mezzacello is an enclosed sustainable urban ecosystem, but it is also part of a larger ecosystem of community that is our awesome neighbors. [Community](#) is like a garden, I didn't know this but I quickly discovered it to be true. This is the story of the neighbors truck.

Rick and I have owned houses before. We had never been so invested in transforming a property like we have transformed Mezzacello. What we didn't know when we started on this journey was how valuable a truck would be.

It is no exaggeration to say Mezzacello exists because of Randy and his generosity.

Jim Bruner

We NEEDED a Truck

It was always a “nice to have” item. We soon learned it was a “must have” item but there was no budget in the beginning. Enter Randy and his Ford Ranger truck.

We started installing the [first potager garden beds](#) and it quickly became apparent that one ton of horse manure wasn't going to fit in my car. That's when Randy offered us the use of his truck.

It is no exaggeration to say Mezzacello exists because of Randy and his generosity. He saw our vision early on and he was willing to help. With the use of Randy's truck, our vision blossomed.

Blocks, pergolas, bags of mulch, soil, grass feed, and many lawnmowers and chainsaws were bought and delivered in the bed of our neighbors truck.

We Finally Bought Truck

After two years, I finally bought a used Ford Ranger and then a Ford F-150 from my brother. But I never had a car payment, thanks to Randy. I put that money towards Mezzacello.

Reframe the idea of a garden as any system to you tend to and bring forth life. Randy definitely qualifies as a pollinator in my garden of people. He and his remarkable generosity are part of the origin story of Mezzacello, and a reminder that good people exist, and you should try to be more like Randy – and his truck.

The “Foundations” of Building an Urban Garden

What you are looking at is the foundation stones from a house that used to sit on this lot. Every garden bed we build we know we are going to excavate some foundation. Luckily at this point we have a pretty good idea of exactly what the footprint of those houses was. But it doesn't make the job any easier.

At this point I have pulled 200 stones up out of the ground. At least half of those are now being used to shore up the interior foundations of the house. While the house was Abandoned some of the interior cellar walls collapsed. I have rebuilt those walls with “garden rocks”. Everything has a purpose and a use at Mezzacello. Everything.

When the houses that used to sit on the plots that comprise the grounds at Mezzacello were abandoned, condemned, and eventually razed, they only tore down the houses. They left the foundations intact and just below grade. One house burned down (you can still see the ash and char in the soil) the other house was dismantled for removal to another site, but that plan was abandoned when it became obvious that the house was riddled with termites. To add insult to injury they filled the now exposed cellars with rubble. Ostensibly this was to save on the costs of hauling it offsite.

This might at first blush appear as an annoyance, but we don't think of it that way. I mean it is initially, especially when there is a stone in a place where we KNOW there was no foundation and this particular stone is actually an 18” x 36” limestone step that was probably the side door stoop at one point. But that's where our imagination and sense of honor kicks in. These stones were people's homes. Lives were created, lived, loved, and lost in and above those brackets of stone rubble foundation. It is the living heritage of living

and building Mezzacello where we are building it.

One day, Mezzacello will no longer be here. But the energy we created, embodied, and expended will have mattered. Those stones matter. We all of us matter. When we honor that, we are living our best life. Now pardon me while I continue to prise this big *ss stone out of the parterre garden bed. I know I can use it somewhere.

Of course it wouldn't be a true Mezzacello story if Rick didn't claim that every stone, pipe, clay sewer line, and random artifact is the evidence of a long buried Roman ruin. He does this just to mess with me – but secretly I play along.

Not All Calcium is the Same

Today was the first day of spring that I have to do planting maintenance at Mezzacello. One of my primary tasks was making sure both the animal, aquatic, and botanical species that we grow here have appropriate levels of the essential elements to thrive and grow.

The animals are pretty well cared for at this point. Chicks and ducklings are thriving. The fish are spawning and the worms and crickets are out of the basement. My attention turns to the biochemistry of the fauna end of the Mezzacello ecosystems; namely the potager gardens and the formal gardens. More on the potager gardens later. Today I am spreading potash, potassium, and calcium amongst the formal gardens. Literally ash, potassium and chicken and duck shells and oyster shells on the ground for next years growth.

While Rick is planting bulbs, I am following behind him with a mixture of crushed eggshells and oyster shells at the base of

peonies, gladiolus, and tulips. (Also some for the chickens and ducks for stronger shells). I just finished spreading a gallon of raw calcium on top of all the mulch above the bulbs that need calcium. As I was going into the house to prepare 2 Cap Cod Cocktails for Rick and I, I saw this egg that Richard had absent mindedly set in the impromptu herb beds on the side door stoop. It made me laugh.

I rushed out of the house at 6:50 this morning to serve as a judge captain at the Ohio Academy of Science's State Science Fair #OhioSSD19 and asked Rick to feed the rabbits, fish, worms, ducks, and chickens. Apparently he had a handful of duck eggs and set one down in the herb bed next to the leeks we were growing from leek bases we'd nurtured in a cup of water in March and was now planted in this box. It made me laugh. Technically it is a source of calcium but it needs a bit more processing before Mother Nature can use it, dude. LOL! Never a dull moment.