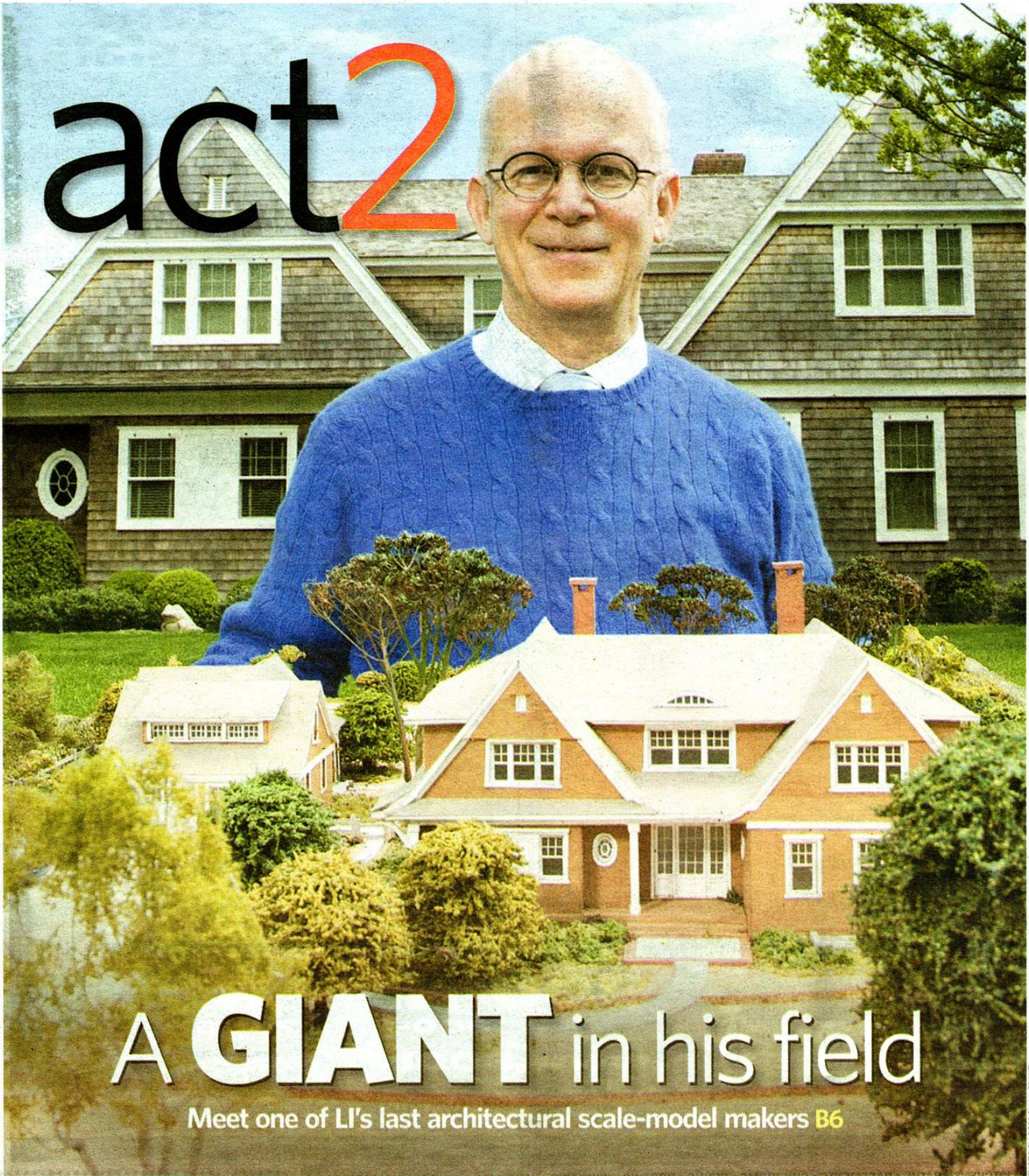


act2



# A GIANT in his field

Meet one of LI's last architectural scale-model makers **B6**

# MODEL ARCHITECT

Gary Lawrance still crafts intricate scale models of buildings by hand — not computer

BY JAN TYLER

Special to Newsday

In a world so seduced by New Age technology that laptops replace pencils in many schools and cellphones replace native drums in jungles, there are those among us who refuse to become "tech slaves." Many are artisans — holdouts who practice their specialties in the same way they learned them, perhaps decades ago, before the era of personal computers.

But not all free thinkers are nearing retirement; some are just now easing into the Act 2 generation. At 54, architect Gary Lawrance, a builder of architectural models, is a prime example of a craftsman who earns his living with simple hand tools, a keen eye and a wealth of experience.

His creations are custom-made presentation models — exact miniatures of structures designed by other architects. "The method I use to build detailed, realistic models is becoming a lost art," Lawrance says. "Most architects now use computers in the design process."

Computer-aided design software — widely known as CAD — has many applications for designers in the automotive, shipbuilding, plumbing and other industries. For architects, he explains, CAD can help design and construct no-frills work models with precision but little surface detail.

## Tools for contractors

Lawrance's miniature structures, mostly of private homes, are in demand and prices start at \$3,000. He is acknowledged by architects to be one of the few, if not the only practitioner of the art form of comparable stature on Long Island. During his 30-year career, he's turned out about a thousand projects.

## ON THE COVER

Gary Lawrance poses at a Bridgehampton home with his model of the home.

## A SMALL EXHIBIT

"Phenomenal Places" features the architectural models of Gary Lawrance and is on display until Sept. 3 at the Southampton Historical Museum. It offers the public a rare perspective of 12 exclusive Long Island residences.

**WHERE** The Rogers House, headquarters of the Southampton Historical Museum, 17 Meetinghouse Lane, Southampton Village

**WHEN** Tuesdays-Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**CALL** 631-283-2494

**ADMISSION** Adults, \$4. Under 17 and members free

—JAN TYLER



An architectural model of a North Shore residence made by Gary Lawrance

"Long Island architects including Francis Fleetwood, Preston Phillips and Peter Cook, to name a few, all commission models for the high-end homes they design to give clients a preview of how the finished house will look," he says. "They see the model while the plans are still on the drawing board; it's a kind of insurance against client misunderstandings. If there are any problems, they're easier to fix on paper than after construction is under way. The architect usually presents the model to the owner as a house gift. I've also done layouts for landscape architects, and some architectural review boards require them."

Bridgehampton architect Kathrine McCoy says, "Presentation models are fabulous tools for everyone involved in a project, from clients to contractors." And for homeowners who want replicas of their family home to display and pass along to their children,



Models, like these of Southampton homes, show clients how their completed houses will look.

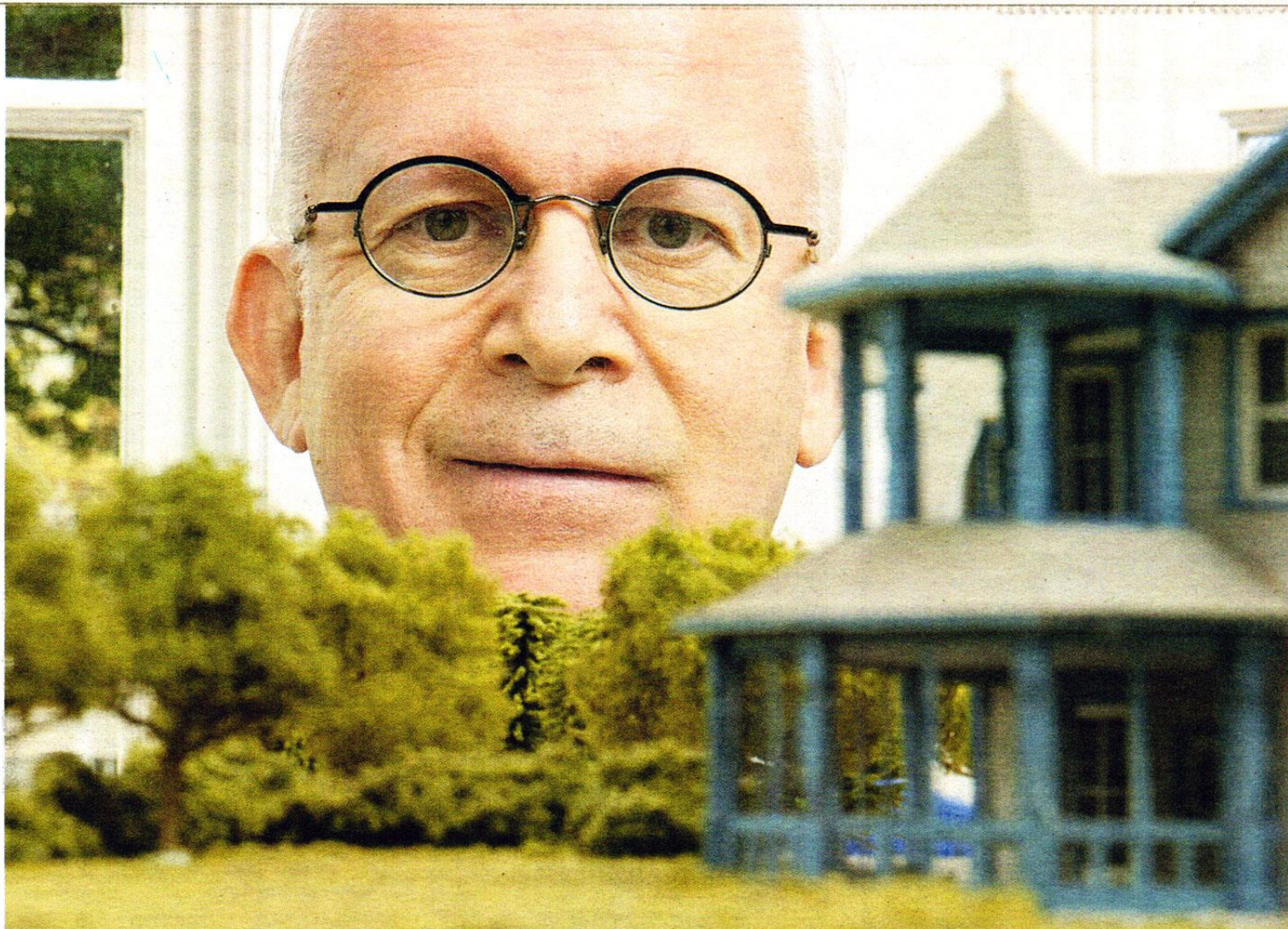


the miniatures are loaded with nostalgia.

"I make them as realistic as I can," Lawrance says as he shows a visitor his sky-lighted Stony Brook studio, where a project-in-progress is centered on a large work table.

T-squares, metal rulers and containers of Elmer's glue are scattered within easy reach, but there's nary a computer in sight. Working from blueprints, floor plans and elevation drawings scaled 1/8-inch to the foot, he uses an X-Acto knife to cut a

sheet of mat board — his basic "construction" material — into facades, dormers and chimneys. On a cork-topped plywood base, he builds the components into a three-dimensional image of the original architect's drawing, a process that can take



Lawrance with his architectural model of a Water Mill home designed by architect Peter Cook, on display at the Southampton Historical Museum



An overview of Lawrance's model of the Water Mill residence designed by Cook

weeks to complete. Certain roofs can be removed, affording a birds-eye view of the interior, its rooms defined with walls that match the floor plan. "Since I'm a licensed architect, I sometimes find flaws in a plan that were not easy to spot in

the blueprint, like an awkwardly placed window or a missing door," he says.

The model is landscaped with shrubs and trees he creates with twigs and moss. The mailbox at the curb, the SUV in the driveway and the match-

ing urns at the front door — items purchased from model builder's catalogs — bring the dwarf world into human scale.

The art of model making is rooted in history, according to Pennsylvania model maker Dennis Heinzeroth, spokesman

for the 800-member Association of Professional Model Makers, a trade organization. "Evidence exists of scale models being used by builders thousands of years BC; even that models of a deceased person's house were buried with the owner to shelter the spirit in the hereafter."

Heinzeroth observes that while CAD technology "is a necessity to meet tight deadlines imposed by clients, there are still a few of us old-fashioned, do-it-by-hand dinosaurs around."

#### Author and lecturer

Lawrance co-authored a tome about the gilded age: "Houses of the Hamptons, 1880-1930" and also lectures on Long Island architecture at libraries, historical societies and garden clubs.

"Gary's models are like art pieces, but aside from their aesthetic value, they're indispensable for illustrating to

clients exactly how their new home will look," says Locust Valley architect Brian Shore. "The model provides a sense of intimacy with the house that a computer can't duplicate."

"Model making is an important part of the learning process all through the five-year architecture program," says Frank Mruk, associate dean of the School of Architecture and Design at New York Technical Institute in Old Westbury, where Lawrance studied for his architecture degree more than 30 years ago. Lawrance says, "I found I liked making models of houses more than I liked designing them." That preference has served him well.

"Although an architect who doesn't offer a 3-D model is doing his client a disservice, study models don't come close to Lawrance's realistic versions," Murk observes. "Gary Lawrance found a niche for his skill and fine-tuned it into a career."