



TIM BARR

# Living history

**T**he young Marquis de Lafayette was quartered in Gideon Gilpin's home before the Battle of Brandywine in 1777. Next to the home was a large sycamore tree, already old at the time of the battle. Today, the nearly 400-year-old tree is known as the Lafayette Sycamore and commands the countryside. It has inspired artists for generations.

Tim Barr has always been drawn to the history of the Brandywine River Valley and is a lover of history in general. He imbues himself with the subjects he studies, hunting arrowheads, for instance, and learning to make them himself.

"You can go for miles in the Brandywine Valley and feel that you're in the 1700s," he says. "If there are no people around, you can feel like a time traveler."

Barr has returned to the Lafayette Sycamore many times, learning more about how to paint it each time. *Holy Branches* is one of his recent attempts to portray the essence of the ancient tree.

"I like how it came out," he explains. "It has a gorgeous shape—like a beautiful model. I want to learn how to paint it so that it speaks for itself when the painting's done."

Paintings of the architecture and the landscape of the Brandywine are always in danger of becoming a cliché, a danger that Barr works hard to avoid. Establishing the composition of *Wood's Edge*, he recalled a view on a walk he often takes with his dog. A veil of vines partially obscures the view. The image became a perfect foil to the common portrayal of hay wagon, house and snow.

Barr's paintings are filled with light—soft and diffused or strikingly dramatic. "I'm still drawn to that sharp light. A thunderstorm went through here yesterday and everything was lit in orange. It was incredible," he recalls. "I've been watching sunrises and sunsets my whole life. I have to fight the cliché."

The dramatic light and highlights of *Stroud Preserve*, a recent painting of a culturally and ecologically important conservation area in Chester County, Pennsylvania, is an example of Barr's restraint in portraying drama. The low sun makes the sheep in the foreground





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*"Andrew Wyeth once said that he felt most grounded in Pennsylvania, that there was a fundamental, primal pull from the earth on those living here, and that it exuded a permanence and made one feel home. Looking at a Tim Barr painting I am drawn into it, as he has somehow captured that primal pull which wants to take me home."* — David Baldt, collector



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stand out against the lengthening shadows at the same time it draws the eye into the far distance as it illuminates a white farmhouse. "I had everything in that bright light," he explains, "but the painting needed contrast and I had to tone down that old stone barn."

"I'm trying not to be illustrative," he continues. "I want to let the real history come out." ●

1  
Stroud Preserve,  
oil on panel, 24 x 24"

2  
Ha'Penny Farm Still  
Life, oil on panel,  
27 x 36"

3  
Wood's Edge,  
oil on panel, 25 x 48"

4  
Holy Branches,  
oil on panel, 36 x 36"