

WHAT IT'S LIKE

*I Feel Like I'm
Becoming This Inn*

B2

GOOD SEASONS

*What Does Truly Sustainable
Landscaping Look Like?*

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CALENDAR

*Cooking: The Art
of Nextovers*

B6

Village Life



VILLAGERS

Rockport's Dance Teacher for Life

*Jimena Lasansky has given
generations of Midcoast kids
and adults a love for movement.*

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When Jimena Lasansky was just a little girl sum-
mering on Vinalhaven with her family, she found
a lady's slipper in the boggy forest. She fell in
love with the delicate pink flower and used the shovel
she always carried to dig it up and take it home. Despite
her best efforts caring for it, the plant died, and Jimena
was heartbroken. Her father, Mauricio Lasansky, gently
explained that to transplant a living being without un-
derstanding its habitat or knowing what it needed was a
grave mistake. This lesson lives with her to this day, per-
petually unfolding, the bittersweet under story of covet-
ing beauty and leaving it to be free. It's the story of what
it means to teach the arts, as Jimena does.

She stood on a deck off her Rockport studio, bare-
foot in striped, baggy leggings with a hole in the knee
and layers of tee shirt, soft cotton button down and
fleece, telling the story of her life, the places she taught,
learned and explored, and the people who have shaped
her along the way. She named these influences as she
moved with the breeze: Bolivia, New Hampshire, New
York City, Nancy Griffin, Adrian Lo, deaf and mute
children, and Argentina, where her parents were born.

She'd done a stint in the Peace Corps in South Ameri-
ca, was the assistant director of the Folkloric Ballet and
danced as a soloist. As she invoked far off memories, a
single leaf, the color of lightly tanned leather, shook; it
was the only one on a tree of thousands that stirred with
such abandon and articulation. Her wanderings always
led her back home, to the Midcoast.

The building, designed by her architect husband Wil-
liam Sepe, is home to Lasansky Studio of Dance: a strik-

***"Ballet is really not so serious
as some people think!"***

ing white bower on a wooded lot down a long, narrow
dirt drive that starts just over the Rockland/Rockport
border on Old County Road. It sits suspended over a
valley on the edge of their property, which also includes
their house and gardens. The garden is where the wild
and human meet, and this is where she was busy on a
blue-and-gold colored Sunday afternoon. There is no
distinction between work and life for Jimena, who re-

mains both a dancer and educa-
tor at 78 years old. "It is who I am;
what I am; why I am." The studio is
where she awakens, and welcomes
the outside world in.

Jimena has taught ballet and
modern dance in the Midcoast since the late 1970s. She
started as a young mother on the stenciled kitchen floor
of her St. George home, Franklin woodstove burning,
her son Richie practicing piano in another room. "Richie
drew a picture of a tiger, which became a poster to adver-
tise lessons," she recalled. This keen eye for persuasive il-
lustration is not surprising, since her father Mauricio was
a renowned artist who made the printmaking program at
the University of Iowa one of the best in the country. Vi-
sual art is always part of the picture when Lasansky is cre-
ating, as are words and music, all present and abstract, in-
forming the process, open to interpretation. "I teach with
the metaphor," she said, left hand lightly on the railing,
right arm slightly bent, elbow lifted, wrist lifted, fingers
following through in a ballet port de bras.

*Jimena Lasansky
poses against the
ballet barre in her
Rockport dance
studio on Nov. 5.*

LASANSKY, B14

LASANSKY, B1



Jimena Lasansky crouches while working with Nicole Hogarty on knee and foot alignment as her Monday evening ballet class practices pliés in first position on Nov. 3.



PHOTOS BY JOHN BLODGETT



While her career as a performer was gratifying, it is teaching that is her true vocation. The interplay between individuals is where Jimena finds the good stuff, the honesty. She is a collaborator, sparked by the relationship between musician and practitioner, or among the company of dancers. She has created pieces with poets and bassoonists, composers and painters. She spoke lovingly of Joan Beauregard and David Ellis, New York artists who eventually settled in Rockland, who created a deck of abstract cards that have inspired her staged choreography and private improvisation. For over 45 years she has worked with children and adults on the project of the dance lesson.

Her youngest students enact creative movement, which they understand intrinsically. Small children are spontaneous in their exploration of rhythm and space. She does teach them anatomy, using a skele-

ton as a visual reference. There are drums and bells and tutus. They play pretend. They listen. The studio feels like sacred space. It says to them, "come in, come in." Argentine blue doors with big windows invite one to step inside, to the glossy floors, natural light, and high beamed ceiling reminiscent of birds. One wall is mirrors, the opposite mostly windows, where the barre is. Her father's prints of figures, like good guardians, on the walls all around.

Lasansky's oldest students are in their 80s. She is currently teaching women's intermediate ballet on Monday evenings and women's beginning ballet on Tuesdays. Some of these women have been studying with her since they were 3 or 4. Others came to ballet only in adulthood. She encourages all dancers to be brave, to take risks, to run and jump. She clicks her fingers in time with the classical music. Jimena walks in the woods or by the ocean every morning before a practice of stretching and improvisation. The beauty of the Maine landscape is a balm for the soul.

Jimena has been a true Midcoast villager for decades. She has lived and

taught from the St. George peninsula to a Rockport studio above what was once the Hoboken Schoolhouse, in the building that now houses Bleeker and Greer, to a space in Lincolnville where her company came into its own. The Lasansky Dance Theater Ensemble offered modern, pointe and summer workshops in poetry, imagination and movement, and produced vibrant, modern performances and lovely dancers. She has taught so many Maine children over the decades, inducting them into the mystery school of art.

Her pedagogical philosophy is inclusive, rather than restrictive. She wants everyone to explore the physical world and "feel proud of the body they inhabit." A classical ballet education proffers vocabulary. From there, curiosity and joy take over. Proper technique keeps the body safe from injury. Understanding its form and function is an essential part of her formal training. But "ballet is really not so serious as some people think!" She is always looking for the humor, for the fun. There is a lot of laughter in her classes, a levity that belies ballet's reputation for somber tones and

Jimena Lasansky shares a light moment with her ballet student Sarah Scordino after observing her form on Nov. 3.

physical austerity. Jimena Lasansky is a conduit of delight and passion. You can discern the poets Federico García Lorca and Mary Oliver alive and smiling in the ways she instructs and exists, with a puckish persistence.

Mauricio Lasansky taught his children how to fix a house. On Vinalhaven, summers were spent at work, which was indistinguishable from play to young Jimena. There was flow between outside and within. The Lasanskys all sketched, constructed and repaired. They used their hands. They made useful things; they made art. Each of her siblings had their own room to create. Jimena started then on a journey of discovery, responding with her entire being to the interdependence she found in nature. Now the sun dipped behind a cloud and the November day turned chilly. She took a breath and reached into her pocket, where she found cloth ties for dahlias. She was headed back into the garden, where there were late flowers to admire and tend.

PHOTOS BY JOHN BLODGETT

Jimena Lasansky shows her ballet students how to coordinate arm flow with breathing, top, and works with them on head position and eye focus, bottom, on Nov. 3.