

New Refrain

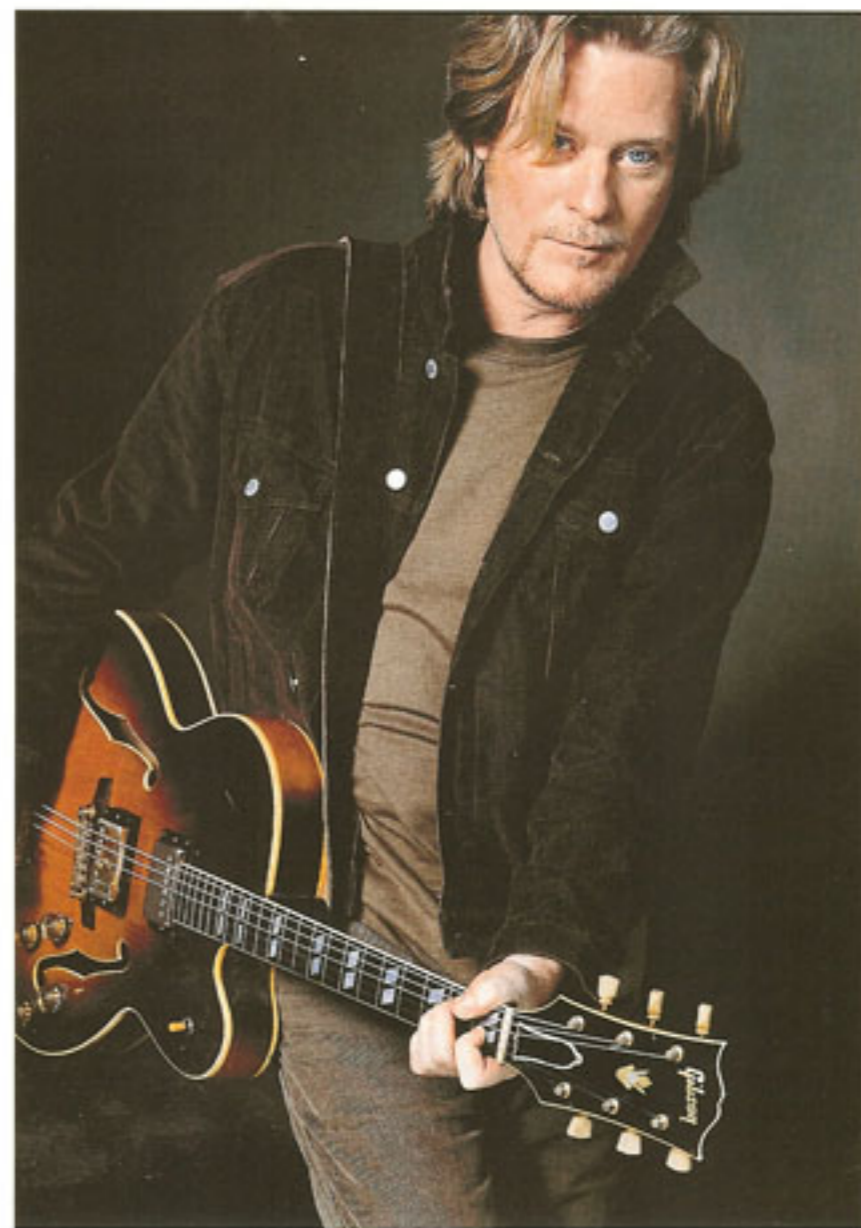
In Dutchess County, Pop Star Daryl Hall Builds a Legacy

Text by RICHARD W. STEVENSON Photos by LAURIE CABOARDI

Daryl Hall, the singer-songwriter who's logged more than 30 years as half of the eternally successful duo Hall and Oates, has no doubt endured thousands of interviews. But this may well have been the first one to be held in a construction site trailer on a hilltop in Dutchess County, N.Y.

There, on a commanding piece of land owned by Mr. Hall, two 18th-century Connecticut houses, paradigms of Colonial-era vernacular American architecture, are being carefully, correctly and lovingly restored and re-erected by Mr. Hall's team of experts and specialists.

The project has been underway for three and a half ▶



Daryl Hall, left, and, facing page, a long view of the structures he is preserving in Dutchess County, N.Y.

years, and when it's more or less finished by the spring of 2006, it will have cost between \$2 million and \$2.5 million, exclusive of the price of the land. "You never really finish," said Mr. Hall, who appeared to relish that irony.

Why did a divorced single man who has houses in London and in the Bahamas, and who could afford the flossiest, glossiest kind of new construction, choose the agita and terrors associated with finding, buying, taking down, restoring and reassembling not one but two ancient, crumbling dwellings?

"I grew up amidst history," said Mr. Hall, who was born in Pottstown, Pa., in 1949 and reared in nearby Chester County, an area that was then still noticeably rural and contained many fine examples of 18th- and 19th-century Pennsylvania houses constructed of native stone.

"From my house, I could see the old stone house where my father was born," said Mr. Hall, whose family on both sides had been in the area since the early 18th century. Mr. Hall particularly recalls visits to



the Peter Wentz farm, a now restored Montgomery County house built in the mid-18th century that reflects both English Georgian and Germanic style characteristics. Through his mother's family, Mr. Hall is descended from the Wentzes, whose house served as General George Washington's headquarters for part of the winter of 1777.

In addition to being part of an early Pennsylvania family, Mr. Hall grew up around traditional crafts and craftsmen. "My grandfather was a stonemason and a chimney restoration expert," said Mr. Hall. "I've always liked watching things get built."

Mr. Hall is a keen student of American history who has recently discovered the novels of Kenneth Roberts, a fecund historian writer who produced many books in the 1930s. The Roberts novels, now largely forgotten, are characterized by vigorous action linked to historical accuracy. His book "Oliver Wiswell" had an eponymous hero who was a Loyalist rather than a Patriot, a somewhat daring move on Roberts' part in those days, when "good guys" and "bad guys" were clearly delineated.



Top to bottom, the charm is in the details.

Via a combination of nature and nurture, Mr. Hall's early interest and instruction in music came from his mother, a choir director and a big band singer who performed in what Mr. Hall recalls as "a semi-local scene." "She took me on the road starting at age 0," said Mr. Hall, adding that he studied both voice and piano with his mother. After high school, Mr. Hall moved to Philadelphia to study music at Temple University, a period during which he met his musical partner John Oates.

"John and I first met at the Adelphia Ballroom in Philadelphia," Mr. Hall said in an online interview when his newest album "Our Kind of Soul" came out last November. "It was this big soul revue record hop that quickly turned into a riot. And the group that was on right before that famous fight broke out that night was The Five Stairsteps. We were both on the bill with different groups that evening, so I guess you could say that John and I really met at a Five Stairsteps show."

Mr. Hall and Mr. Oates have been

together since 1972, and the pair still tours five months a year with undiminished enthusiasm and continuing acclaim, an astonishing run in a society in which success famously lasts 15 minutes. John Oates lives in Aspen, Col.

Mr. Hall's hilltop houses combine his interest in American history and his love of good craftsmanship, and provide a rooted counterpoint to his many decades on the road. The first house Mr. Hall found and bought after many miles of looking was the circa 1830 Ruggles house on Route 7 in Brookfield, Conn. This classic Greek Revival building belonged to Lucy Ruggles and her husband, who traveled the world as missionaries. These travels made Lucy Ruggles locally famous as the first woman to circumnavigate the globe, a history tidbit provided by Daryl Hall's right hand man and associate Paul Meissner. Mr. Meissner used to help orchestrate the Hall and Oates tours, but now he's a single parent with a 10-year-old son who wants to stay closer to home.

The dismantled Ruggles house is still stowed in a trailer and will eventually be rebuilt elsewhere, as Mr. Hall's group

discovered two earlier houses more appropriate to the site and the musician's plans. The Bates Tavern was built about 1770 in East Granby on the main road between Hartford and Springfield; the innkeeper's name was Lemuel Bates and he and his descendants lived in the house for 230 years or so, until Kay, the last of the Bates, died recently. Her friend and inheritor Emily Aldrich was intent on finding someone to restore the house—as Kay fervently wished—rather than tearing it down. Daryl Hall bought the house and, said Mr. Meissner, "Daryl considers himself to be the caretaker of the Bates Tavern and tradition."

Old Connecticut houses sometimes have wonderful, if possibly apocryphal, treasure stories attached to them, as the Bates Tavern does. During the Revolution, the story goes, a wagon train escorted by patriot soldiers and carrying gold coins from France to help finance the fight stopped one night at the Bates Tavern. A band of Tories overpowered the sentries and drove the treasure train off into the darkness. The abandoned wagons and horses were discovered the next day, but the treasure was gone, never to be found.

The Oliver Hanchett house was found in Suffield, Conn., a few miles from Granby. It is a slightly later and somewhat grander house, with two fireplace stacks and an upstairs hall that Mr. Hall intends to use as his master bedroom. The two houses will be connected by a modern addition—space for a "great room" and a kitchen, according to the team's architect Analee Cole, who also reported that the three structures together comprise about 6,000 square feet.


Ms. Cole led a tour of the site and pointed out that the restorations rest on modern foundations and cellars that conceal a 21st-century infrastructure. The work reuses old stones from both houses, and granite columns salvaged from the Brookfield house are supporting the restored Hanchett house. The restoration carpenters and masons use old materials wherever possible, said Cole.

Daryl Hall, infused with an admiration for the history and architecture of early America as a boy, is proud of what he and his team are accomplishing in preserving three vintage dwellings. "These are wonderful pieces of architecture that would otherwise be lost," he said.

In researching the histories of the two houses Mr. Hall found that Oliver Hanchett's daughter Rachel married one of Lemuel Bates' sons and lived the rest of her life in the Bates Tavern. Her son William Hanchett Bates inherited the house. "So these houses truly belong together," said Mr. Hall.

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