

## Taunton Press Celebrates 25 Years By Honoring Its Founder

By Karen Valenta

In 1975 amateur woodworker Paul Roman and his wife, Jan, formed a private company and launched a magazine, ***Fine Woodworking***, from a small office in their home on Taunton Lake Road.

***Fine Woodworking*** was a black and white magazine, published quarterly. Success came quickly and within a year The Taunton Press had moved into its own building on Church Hill Road.

This year [The Taunton Press](#) is celebrating its 25th anniversary. From its first publication, now a glossy, full-color bimonthly, Taunton Press has expanded to include five other magazines - ***Fine Home Building***, ***Fine Cooking***, ***Fine Gardening***, ***Kitchen Gardener***, and ***Threads*** - and an active book-publishing program that includes 40 titles a year. Taunton Press is now the third largest local taxpayer in Newtown.

In a surprise ceremony at the company's headquarters building on South Main Street this week, Dick West, an artist as well as the advertising manager for Kitchen Gardening, presented Mr Roman with a bronze bust created from clay sculpted from photographs of the company founder. Many of the firm's 275 employees watched as Mr West unveiled the bust in the building lobby.

"I asked [Mr Roman] to pose for some photographs in 1999 that I could use for an exercise in sculpting," Mr West explained. "It turned out so well that I decided to have it cast. John Lively [managing director of Taunton Press] made the base."

Born in France, where his French father and American mother lived until he was six, Mr Roman is a graduate of Middlebury College in Vermont with a degree in physics. He later did graduate work in physics in Yale. He was a member of the corporate staff of General Electric, involved in government relations and public affairs, when he moved his family to Newtown in 1974 and started his own business the following year. He became the publisher and editor-in-chief of Taunton Press; his wife, who had a degree in English, took charge of the business operations.

"Our five children were ages two to 15 at the time," Mrs Roman recalled. "They went through the Newtown schools. Two of them have joined us in the business. Sue is the publisher for ***Fine Gardening*** and ***Kitchen Gardening***. Sarah is the circulation manager for all of the magazines. Her husband, Tim Rahr, just joined us this year in the office."

Son David works for Yahoo in California. Two other daughters live in the Boston area. Melinda and her husband, Doug Clott, have four children; Andrea, who married Tom Gloria from Newtown, works for Lotus.

Technology, and especially the Internet, is changing the field of publishing, Mrs Roman said.

"We have a Web site, [www.taunton.com](http://www.taunton.com), with all of our products on it," she said. "We want an expanded Web presence. We are content providers to other sites - like [cooking.com](http://cooking.com) and [building.com](http://building.com) - with links back to us." "This is the kind of industry we need when we talk about the need for more business in Newtown and the use of Fairfield Hills," she said. "We need clean, literate business. I'd love to see some development of Fairfield Hills as a huge Internet cooperative, maybe with state involvement. Then our kids can come back after they graduate from college and work here. You've got to have the right kind of industry in town if you want people to stay."

Mrs Roman was a member of the original Fairfield Hills Advisory Committee, which met for 18 months and produced a thick report with recommendations for reuse of the campus. "Carol Recht and I wrote the report," Mrs Roman said. "Now all of a sudden it's as if the report never existed and the town is starting all over again."

Mrs Roman said she and her husband chose to live in Newtown "because it offered a town center and also freedom for our children to be out and around and doing their thing. They all played some sports, all played music, and were excellent students. But they also had a lot of free time for independent play and thinking."

"You didn't have to have a ball field for every kind of sport," she said. "I'm concerned that we are losing the independence of our children by being too structured. I think what Newtown needs for its children is open space, bike paths, individual sports, and unstructured playtime. Lots of children aren't good at sports."

## Taunton Press Grows

From its 15,000 square foot building on Church Hill Road, Taunton Press expanded in September 1985 by buying the 23-acre former Dual-Lite property on South Main Street. A 20,000 square foot addition was constructed to house a direct mail distribution center from which Taunton Press sells its books, videos and back issues of the magazines. In May 1993 the company purchased a building at the corner of Mile Hill and Tinkerfield roads [originally a duck-pin bowling alley] to use as a photographic studio. It also leases space at 191 South Main Street.

"None of the printing is done here," Jan Roman said. "The magazine printing is done mostly in Wisconsin and we subcontract the book printing. We do everything up to the printing stage. When we started we did paste-up but now everything is done electronically. And we also have all the new color technology."

"We have a full complement of editors and artists. We also go out into the field and get stories, submissions from experts in the field and who do [the craft] all of the time. We think we provide better information, a caliber that sets us apart from other publishers."

Mrs. Roman said Taunton Press intends to celebrate its 25th anniversary throughout the year 2000.

"It has really worked out well in Newtown," she said. "We've had some long-time employees that have been real supporters. And we have employees who are just entering the field, but mostly they have come with some knowledge of the field or experience."

Taunton Press is enjoying the boom in homebuilding that has been occurring during the past few years, she said.

"***Fine Homebuilding*** is now our largest magazine with a circulation of 290,000," she said. "***Fine Woodworking*** is 260,000; ***Fine Cooking***, 175,000; ***Fine Gardening***, 180,000; ***Threads***, 160,000, and ***Kitchen Gardening***, 80,000."

The book publishing division also has been successful.

"We had a very hot selling title last year, ***The Not So Big House***, by Sara Suzanka. It is an architectural look at designing a house for multiple uses and won a lot of awards, including Life magazine's House of the Year."

Taunton Press has changed considerably since its founding 25 years ago, but it is still fundamentally the same, she said.

"We are no longer a small private company. We are a medium-size private company. We don't intend to be large and we don't intend to sell. We plan on being here a long time."

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