

Glamping like a pro: Syracuse friends build luxury camper for Upstate New York nomads

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SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- Heading down West Genesee Street toward Camillus, you pass a lot of everyday stops, like grocery stores, gyms and gas stations. This summer, you may have also passed a not-so-everyday sight: a vivid purple and green camper, parked on the corner of North Terry Road.

At first glance, the vehicle looks like a movie prop stagecoach, dotted with copper filigree moons and trees, surrounded by lush, lacy gardens.

It belongs to Tracey Baum-Wicks, owner of [Sanctuary Spa](#), a holistic skincare and bodywork practice in Syracuse. This year, she took the idea of glamour camping — **glamping** — to a new level.

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Friends Dan Gardner and Tracey Baum-Wicks created this bowtop "glamper" caravan. Photo by Katrina Tulloch.

For years, she wanted a new camper to attend concerts and festivals across New York, and she wanted it to turn heads.

After flipping through a guidebook called "**The New Gypsy Caravan**" by Timothy Lemke, she reached out to her friend, Dan Gardner of Syracuse, to help make her dream come true.

"It was a bit above my head, but I knew Dan had the ability," said Baum-Wicks. "Dan used every tool he has to make this."

Gardner, a retired electric technician, comes from a long line of men who work with their hands. His dad built own home and his uncle was a cabinet maker.

"When I looked at this, it was overwhelming at first, but it quickly fell into place in my mind," said Gardner.

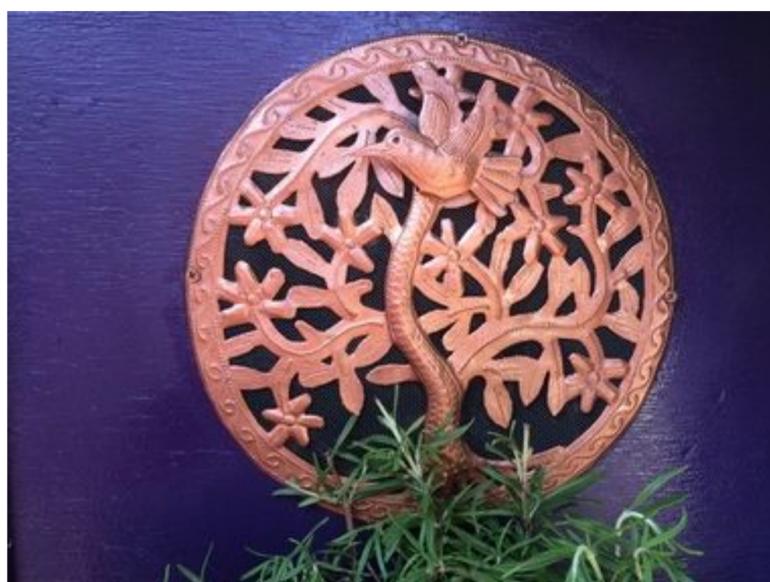
Last July, Gardner came over every day for four weeks to work on the wagon. They finished after about 100 hours of work. In their quiet Fairmount neighborhood, some neighbors watched its construction with alarm; others were fascinated.

"It's truly a movable feast for the eyes," Baum-Wicks said. "I have neighbors who say, 'Sometimes I drive by your house just to see your camper because it makes me smile.'"

Wonderlust

The caravan's basic materials, including the 4-by-8 utility trailer, plywood and tarps, cost Baum-Wicks about \$1,000.

She also painted the entire thing purple and green, with copper touches, then added Haitian oil drum art and removal planters full of strawberries, basil, oregano, parsley, rosemary and thyme.



Haitian oil drum art installed on the camper of Tracey Baum-Wick of Syracuse.

Katrina Tulloch | ktulloch@syracuse.com

"All her blends of colors draw you in," Gardner said. "It's magnetic to me. It takes my breath away."

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Inside, Baum-Wicks added a massive bed with plush red, yellow and blue pillows, with an area for copper mugs, tea leaves and books.

"Glam-camping, or glamping, is all about creature comforts," she said.

She refers to the wagon as her "Boho (Bohemian) bowtop glamper."

"She's named 'Wonderlust' because she inspires wonder," Baum-Wicks said. "She feeds my thirst for the wonder of life.

The toddlers thought I was some kind of Disney fairy godmother.

In the third week of August, Baum-Wicks drove her new wagon to the Quaker **Farm and Wilderness campgrounds** in Vermont, where it captured the imaginations of children at the camp.

"The toddlers thought I was some kind of Disney fairy godmother," Baum-Wicks laughed. "I'd walk in the dining hall and they'd wrap their hands around my knees. They thought they had a sighting of the 'good witch.'"

Quickly, the wagon became a talking point among other campers. They took photos with it and made excuses to visit Baum-Wicks. She welcomed curious strangers, serving cardamom tea, Turkish delights and chocolate-covered dates.

"I could've held court there all week," she chuckled. "In this high-tech world, I think we all need to exercise our creativity. It's important to build completely non-technological moments and experiences into my life. You can't beat human connection."

Safe and sturdy

Baum-Wicks can drive up to 65 mph with her wagon hooked to her car. The trailer had to be inspected when she first bought it, then inspected again after adding the bowtop.

"It's road-worthy and solid," Gardner said. "It really fit together, with a little bit of ingenuity."

The wagon has two escape routes in case of a fire: the front door and back window, which can be kicked out in an emergency. Gardner fashioned a window protector out of an old hot tub cover, which perfectly snaps on to the circular back of the wagon.

Gardner also added layers of Reflectix insulation so the camper can be used on colder days. The bowtop easily sheds snow and rain. During Syracuse winters, Baum-Wicks will deflate the tires, put the wagon on cinder blocks, and wrap it in a tarp.

Wiccan wagon

Although the wagon design came from a book heralding "the new Gypsy caravan," she doesn't refer to it like that. She's Slavic, but not a descendant of Romani people. Still, she holds deep respect for historically itinerant groups.

"I've always felt a deep kinship to all nomadic cultures," Baum-Wicks said. "Great stories and fables come out of those cultures."

Baum-Wicks loves artistic representations of birds, trees and the moon, all of which are represented with ornate designs on her wagon. She identifies as Wiccan.

"In my spiritual path, we're very connected to the cosmos and Earth," she said. "This symbology is so meaningful to me."

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Being Wiccan in Syracuse isn't common, or widely accepted. Baum-Wicks says most of the other Wiccans she knows in the city, aren't open about it, or "out," because they fear prejudice.

"I've had a challenging couple of years here and I often wonder if it because I am 'out,'" she said. "There's a lot of stigma and misinformation about Wicca. It's not understood well by other people."



Tracey Baum-Wicks.

Katrina Tulloch

Earlier this month, she had to undergo a formal inspection by a Syracuse zoning officer because she received a letter threatening her with fines and imprisonment if she didn't remove the camper from her property.

Someone anonymously called the Town Board, complaining Baum-Wicks was conducting business in the trailer.

"Imagine the implications, I don't even want to ask," she said, shaking her head. "Perhaps they're aware of my tradition and are uneasy with that, but I'm not bitter. I'm joyful in my faith."

Baum-Wicks invited the zoning officer to her property. He left noting she was in full compliance of the law, and that her camper was pretty nice.

The push-back didn't surprise Gardner who has lived in the neighborhood for 27 years.

"The people here are opposed to change," he said.

Gardner describes Baum-Wicks as eclectic, but genuine, with a kind, gentle soul.

"I can accept different lifestyles because it has no impact on me," Gardner said. "I don't like the word tolerance. I like the word acceptance."

Katrina Tulloch writes features and entertainment stories for Syracuse.com and The Post-Standard. Contact her: [Email](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Google+](#)



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EileenDoverAnfell

3 days ago

She has clear, lovely skin... a testament to her craft.

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EileenDoverAnfell

3 days ago



Conducting business in the trailer...ha ha ha...." If the trailer is a rockin...don't bother knockin"

Reply



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What makes the trailer luxury?

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redvette1

3 days ago

She looks like a pirate !

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TrolleyCarToSYR

3 days ago

I lover her gypsy wagon. Colorful, creative, one of a kind. I salute your freak flag--long may it fly!

Reply



tom52

3 days ago

I drive by there 5 days a week, her property looks like crap. Not even remotely in tune with the neighborhood. If in a more rural setting it would be fine, but not where she is. Property values have surely suffered in the area and I feel bad for the surrounding homes.

Reply



Karin Wikoff

3 days ago

@tom52 She can park next to my house if she likes. I grew up in the intolerance which is so prevalent in suburban suburbia and though this isn't "my cup of tea," I am all for her doing her own thing in her own home and I don't give a flip "what the neighbors think." It's not like she's overspreading liquid manure and making her neighbors physically ill or something. Oh, wait, that's perfectly legal....

Reply



maineboy207

3 days ago

@Karin Wikoff @tom52 if you owned property in the area you "might give a flip" what she's doing--i cant imagine this is helping nearby property values to have nomads on your street

Reply



Paul747

3 days ago

Is that Hillary??

Reply



Jim B. Johnson

3 days ago

How fun, good for her!

Reply



David Figura | dfigura@syracuse.com

3 days ago

Very cool.

Reply



RAKASHI

3 days ago

NEAT.....reminds me of the Gypsy Caravans in All the Lon Chaney Werewolf movies but theirs were larger & looked comfortably lived in.

Reply



Schmeg

3 days ago

Love it!!

Reply



cicerojimmy

3 days ago

Pretty cool! She seems like a very vibrant woman with a passion for enjoying life. I had to look up "Glamping", but now I know. She can be my neighbor any day.

Reply



zenartist2

3 days ago

Very nice .. as to the complaint .. people need to mind their own business... it hurts no one

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swissarmy

3 days ago

what...

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