



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild GAZETTE



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The March meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Saturday, March 19, 2016, at 2:00 P.M., at the Rockland House on Route 206 in Roscoe, NY. We will be tying flies to donate to Project Healing Waters, so bring your tools and materials and enjoy an afternoon of tying together for an excellent cause.

Project Healing Waters is dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active military-service personnel and disabled veterans through fly fishing and associated activities, including education and outings.

The Fly Tyers Rendezvous

The Fifteenth Annual Fly Tyers Rendezvous, sponsored by the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, will be held on Saturday, April 2, 2016, from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum Education Building, Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY.

Join us for a day of camaraderie, reunion, and fly tying. Come hang out with some of the most talented fly tyers in the Northeast. There will be over forty tyers present. And from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M., there will be a silent auction benefitting the guild's current activities. Offerings include a fine 8-foot 5-weight cane rod from Chuck Neuner of Carman's River Rods, collectible books and flies, and an unused tube of Overton's Wonder Wax—auction donations will be gladly accepted, as well.

Everyone is welcome, and the Rendezvous is free to everyone. Lunch will be available.

If you wish to tie at the Rendezvous, space is limited, so contact John Kavanaugh by e-mail at FlymanK@optonline.net or by phone at (943) 586-3673.

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild at Somerset

Thanks to all who made the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild presence at The Fly Fishing Show in Somerset a success, especially for John Kavanaugh for rounding up tyers and ramrodding the whole operation and to Al Ampe for bringing the table and chairs for our space at the show. Tyers included Tim Bartholomew, Darren Rist, Nicole Seymour, Bud Bynack, Hank Rope, Steve Fogel, John Bonasera, Joe Scarangelo, Elmer Hopper, Chuck Coronato, Len Ruggia, Ron Frost, John Losapio, Nick Rubicco and Tim Mahoney. Next year, consider volunteering to tie and help continue this tradition of representing the Catskill tradition to the over thirteen thousand visitors who come to the show.



Chuck Coronato tying Cinbergs at Somerset

Guild Membership Renewals were due in February. If you haven't renewed, this is your last issue of the *Gazette*. Your renewal date appears next to your name in e-mails and on hard-copy envelopes. To renew, send \$10.00 and any changes in contact information to: **Bill Leuszler, CFTG, P.O. Box 79, Wurtsboro, NY 12790.**



Classics Revisited
Conversations with the
Literature of Fly Fishing

John Atherton: Impressionism and Fly Tying, Looking Downstream

By John Merola

The current release of a new edition of *The Fly and the Fish* by Skyhorse Publishing, with a new foreword by Mike Valla, has inspired me to share some thoughts about the book and especially about its influence on fly tying—looking downstream from its initial publication in 1951. While this piece appears in the *Gazette*'s occasional "Classics Revisited" series highlighting some of the classic volumes of fly fishing and fly tying, this is not a book review. Many members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild are well acquainted with this book and the wonderful material it contains. Atherton says "I hope only to record a few observations, and if some angler may profit by them, it will add considerably to my pleasure in writing them," and that is what I have in mind here, as well.

In the introduction, by Atherton's wife, Maxine, she describes a visit to Edward Ringwood Hewitt's home in Manhattan, during which Atherton and Hewitt placed themselves upside down to view some dry flies in Hewitt's testing tank. The spirit of discovery and innovation must have been awesome in that room. I wish I could have been there. She also points out that Atherton's collective brain trust on matters such as this included Pinkie Gillum, John McDonald, and Alfred Miller (aka Sparse Grey Hackle). Imagine being at the long table of the Anglers' Club, participating in a discussion with that group. To quote Atherton from his preface, "It would be an unusual angler who could fail to profit from such an association." So it was with the help and critique of such an illustrious crew that John Atherton wrote *The Fly and the Fish*.

In the first chapter, entitled "The Birth of an Idea," Atherton lays down the relationship between impressionistic art and fly tying. I love the beginning of the chapter, where he describes a mayfly landing on his hand and his observations of it. He goes on to explain the broken-color principle of the Impressionists and why applying this theory to fly tying might result in a more lifelike imitation.

Atherton believed that it is important for trout flies to have the appearance of life. In *Tying the Founding Flies*, Mike Valla sums it up perfectly:

Atherton observed that a live insect such as a mayfly, one that a fly tier is attempting to imitate with an artificial trout fly, possesses coloring that is "impressionistic." Magnified, an insect's shade is composed of many tiny differences in tone. Variations in color, texture, and light reflections combine in living things to project "the appearance of life." Insects display a kaleidoscope of tones and shades. To best recreate the colors of their surroundings, the impressionistic artists studied how the natural world reflected or absorbed light. Atherton employed such impressionistic practices in selecting materials to craft his trout fly patterns.

Atherton was fond of using mixed-breed hackles for his flies. Imagine if he were to see what was available to us today. Charlie Collins's flock is a great example of the type of hackle Atherton would love. The various shades of grizzly and most especially cree give the breakup pattern and impressionistic look to a dry fly that suggest life to Mr. Trout. Many of Atherton's recipes call for cree. He also liked to rib some of his dry flies with oval gold tinsel to give the glint that might suggest life to



Atherton's drawing for Chapter 8, "Flies and Impressionism"

the fish. Atherton liked to use hackle-point wings as well as wood duck and Bali duck for the wings of his dry flies. These are Catskill-style flies at their traditional best. As far as body materials for the dry fly go, Atherton liked to hand mix his own dubbing mixtures to obtain the shade required for the fly. This paved the way for the later work of Al Caucci and Bob Nastasi in their *Fly-tyer's Color Guide*.

“If we would draw on our successful experiences using illusion and impression and apply them to color we would make significant strides,” Caucci and Nastasi write there. They also give credit



where credit is due and quote at length from *The Fly and the Fish*. Using just three colors, red, yellow and blue, mixed with white, they give recipes to obtain “spectrumized” colors for fly imitations, and their Delaware River Club distributed spectrumized dubbing assortments. These work well, but as Caucci and Nastasi note, they might not look correct up close and dry. When they get wet, they darken and suggest the coloration of an insect that is alive.

If you don't have a copy of the *Color Guide*, you can see the basic fur colors by looking at a tricolor inkjet cartridge. The three dots on the top are the exact colors originally distributed in their Spectrumized Dubbing Kit. (Try finding one of those!) It's fun to experiment

Photo by Jill Merola

with this concept. My friend Dave Goulet tied flies with spectrumized bodies for his former shop, the Classic and Custom Fly Shop, and I can attest to the effectiveness of these flies on the fickle fish of the Farmington River, particularly for larger mayfly duns such as the *Isonychia*. As the imitation gets smaller, I think the spectrumized dubbing gives less of an advantage.

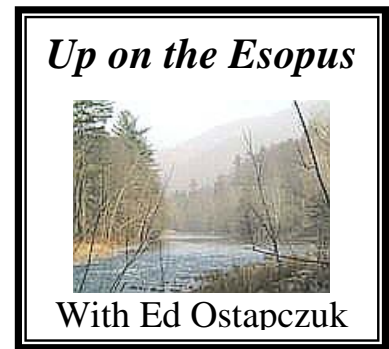
Chapter 3 of *The Fly and the Fish* is entitled “The Rise and ‘Light Pattern.’” Atherton proposes that rising fish become accustomed to the light pattern of the hatching insect on the water and maybe even rise selectively to it: “Let us look at the means of achieving good light pattern,” he writes. “If the hackle were wound on with a lateral motion to spread it fore and aft, the light pattern it created on the surface would be more natural and the fly would ride better.” A. K. Best also is an advocate of that method of hackling, as well as a huge fan of hackle-point wings for dry flies. Did Best have the 1951 *Fly and the Fish* on his nightstand a long time ago? I bet you he did.

Atherton goes on to state the three basic criteria necessary to imitate light patterns properly: size, shape, and color. He notes that imitating the size of a light pattern can be achieved by the choice of hackle size, instead of hook size. He was a fan of using variant flies. My friend Jim Slater and I like to use a small dark-brown variant to imitate the journey of early brown stoneflies across the water to the bank, and it has been very successful. This variant looks nothing like the fly at rest, but appears to suggest the living fly. There are many other examples.

Atherton took the logical approach to classifying his dry-fly and nymph patterns by numbering them from 1 through 7 (hardly news to some of you I'm sure). While he also lists some classic flies in the recipe sections of the book, the concept of organizing flies in sequence from the lightest to the darkest in a selection of sizes offers a chance at achieving some simplicity, something I have been trying to achieve and failing at for over forty years. The Atherton Number 1 dry fly demonstrated by Mike Valla in *Tying the Founding Flies* is the lightest. It is a beautiful fly, with all the best attributes of the Catskill tradition.

As I finish writing this short tribute to the fly-tying aspects of *The Fly and the Fish*, I'm looking at a Spirit River UV2 brochure lying on my fly-tying desk. I can't help but wonder what Atherton and Hewitt would have done with all the new materials we have. Out with the product microscope . . . tie a fly . . . put it in the tank . . . down on the floor . . . take a look up through the aquarium!

The Whirling Blue Dun: The Evolution of a Dry Fly



For as long as I can recall, I've thought of the Whirling Blue Dun as George La Branche dry-fly pattern. However, I've come to learn that not to be the case. With input from Ed Van Put and a search of the literature, I discovered that this dry fly has many Catskill connections, but maybe is not Catskill bred. Several celebrated Catskill fly fishers and tyers provide recipes for the pattern. The name is the same, but the dressings vary slightly.

Emlyn Gill's *Practical Dry-Fly Fishing*, published in 1912, was the first American book on dry-fly fishing, but as it says, it relied heavily on the efforts of Frederick Halford and "other English writers." Gill's introduction begins with the following: "No excuses or apologies are necessary for offering to American anglers a little treatise . . . on dry-fly fishing." However, the introduction continues (using the spelling of British English) by singing the praises of "expert writers who have lived in the home of the dry-fly, England, and who have spent many years of their lives in practising this most delicate, artistic and fascinating of sports on the English chalk streams." Later, Gill writes that because "we have no American fly-fisher's entomology, anglers have been compelled to select patterns from lists of Mr. Halford or other English writers. . . . I have received a complete set of the latest Halford patterns. . . . I have no doubt that no American need hesitate to go upon our streams with these and no others." Clearly, the foundation of Gill's work rested in England. The book's appendix does provide a dressing for the Whirling Dun and other dry flies.

Gill's introduction also names "Mr. George M. L. La Branche" as "in the author's opinion one of the very best of all-around anglers, and the most expert of American dry-fly fishermen." Both Gill and La Branche fished the Willowemoc and were members of the Anglers' Club of New York. In 1914, La Branche's *The Dry Fly and Fast Water* was published. La Branche was an expert fly caster who believed foremost in presentation, moving away from the school of anglers who fished only to rising trout in glassy pools. Theodore Gordon would note this about La Branche's work: "His point of view is original, and there is not a dull page in this book." La Branche also included a dressing for the Whirling Blue Dun.

The *William Mills and Son Fishing Tackle Catalog* for both 1921 and 1927 listed the Whirling Blue Dun in the "English dry or floating flies" section with the following remark: "The flies we import and offer are in pattern and quality to the highest English ideals and should not be compared with the ordinary quality of floating flies, sold both here and aboard." The 1927 catalog supplied pattern information almost identical to that listed below. So much for Catskill the fly's Catskill origins.

Similarly, this pattern was already listed as a "popular fly" in *The Complete Fly Tier* by Rube Cross. In fact the "Tying the Fly" chapter, originally in Cross's first book, *Tying American Trout Flies*, published in 1936, takes the reader through steps necessary to tie a Whirling Blue Dun.

Fast forward to 1955. Ernest Schwiebert's *Matching the Hatch* included a Whirling Dun with components somewhat similar to those in the dressing given below. While Schwiebert made historical reference to this dry fly and its association with Hendricksons, he recommended its use as a female dun for the mayfly species *Leptophlebia cupida*. Then, in 1965, *McClane's Standard Fishing Encyclopedia* listed the dry among its "popular fly patterns," illustrated with flies tied by Elsie Darbee. But here, the dressing has morphed slightly to include use of light dun hackle and a flat gold tinsel rib, becoming analogous to a dry fly known as the La Branche, first tied by Theodore Gordon in 1912. Ed Van Put gives the dressing for a La Branche dry fly in his fine book *Trout Fishing in the Catskills*.

In an October 24, 1914, *Fishing Gazette* article that appears in *The Complete Fly Fisherman: The Notes and Letters of Theodore Gordon*, Gordon wrote: "I have seen so many Whirling Duns that I made a little collection from a number of dressers. All were presumed to be the same. We all know the dressing in Ronalds', but now we have a fine assortment of Whirling Duns to choose from, and I think I have seen four different dressings from the same shop." Gordon, too, was pointing back to England

and to Alfred Ronalds's *The Fly-Fisher's Entomology*, first published in 1836. Ronalds's recipe is almost identical to the one provided below, but the body contains a mix of yellow. The pattern Emlyn Gill listed in his book is also almost identical to Ronalds's, calling for "water-rat's fur, tinged with yellow." It seems that Gordon reflected on the past and present while foretelling the future of the pattern.

In *The Dry Fly and Fast Water*, La Branche provided dressings for eight dry flies he "commonly" used. And, he wrote: "I give the dressings of eight patterns, although I rarely use over six. If I were compelled to do so, I could get along very well with one—the Whirling Dun." In the book *Limestone Legends*, Norm Shires and Jim Gilford report that La Branche's "favorite fly is a #14 Whirling Blue Dun."

The Whirling Blue Dun from *The Dry Fly and Fast Water*

Hook: Mustad 94840, size 14
Wing: Starling or duck
Tail: Ginger or light brown hackle
Body: Mole or water rat–muskrat dubbing
Tag: Two turns of flat gold tinsel at the end of the body
Hackle: Ginger or light brown hackle



Photo by Ed Ostapczuk

La Branche was the only tyer discussed above who suggested the use of mole as dubbing and a gold tag. The others either ignored the tag or in some cases ribbed the body with gold tinsel. La Branche also recommended that it was "advisable" to tie each of his eight patterns on hooks from size 10 down to size 16.

Thanks to Ed Van Put for information used in this article.



The "Kill Series" and *Just Fishing*

One of my favorite books, and likely one of the most popular fishing books of all time, is Ray Bergman's *Trout*. With millions of copies sold, it sits on bookshelves all over the world and has been a source of inspiration to anglers of all levels and ages. But Bergman wrote other, less popular books, and I have always felt that anything he wrote is worth reading. That includes his *Just Fishing*, first published in 1932.

As I have mentioned many times, the Catskill-related flies I am most fond of are stream-specific patterns—"local patterns," as they are called—that are thought up and tied out of a desire to deal with a certain situation or to match an insect that the angler comes across. The Hendrickson was conceived in just that way and later became one of the most common and important patterns that a Catskill angler can carry.

The flies I'll talk about here were likely conceived in this manner, but for some reason, they never became popular. In fact, I could find no mention at all of a single one of them in any book or Internet search. These are certainly "forgotten" flies, but I will bet that they brought many fish to the surface when they were fished in their day.

I came across them while browsing through *Just Fishing* a long time ago, but didn't give them much thought until recently. While listening to a couple friends talking of some patterns related to the



Photo by John Bonasera

Neversink, the stream name “Pinekill” came up, and I remembered a pattern in the *Just Fishing* dry-fly plate called the Pinekill. When I returned home, I checked the book again, and sure enough, the Pinekill was in there, as were four other beauties named after other Pennsylvania and New York streams where Bergman fished. Just to be sure, I reread the dry-fly section, but found no mention of these or many of the other flies represented in the plates. So I dug out my brightest lamp, magnifying glass, and pencil and paper to write down what I thought were the dressings in an attempt to recreate these flies. This is something I really enjoy doing. It is very interesting to try to bring patterns to life from a picture.

I call these five flies the “Kill” series. As you probably know, many streams in New York are named using the Middle Dutch *kille*, meaning “riverbed” or “water channel.”

Wallkill

Wing: Wood duck flank
Tail: Cream spade hackle
Body: Light green rabbit fur
Hackle: Medium ginger

Bataviakill

Wing: Wood duck flank
Tail: Ginger spade hackle
Body: Gray muskrat fur
Hackle: Dark green

Pinekill

Wing: Wood duck flank
Tail: Wood duck fibers
Body: Medium brown floss with amber thread rib
Hackle: Medium ginger

Basherkill

Wing: Wood duck flank
Tail: Yellow spade hackle
Body: Light green floss
Hackle: Yellow

Paulinskill

Wing: Wood duck flank
Tail: White spade hackle
Body: Cream fox fur
Hackle: Light ginger

Let me reiterate that these dressings are my interpretations from the pictures in the *Just Fishing* plates. These things are always subject to debate, but I am listing them the way I see them. All are tied on Nyack Brand Ray Bergman “Gold Label” light-wire dry-fly hooks, size 12.

I am looking forward to trying these patterns on some Catskill waters this year, and I am really hoping they don't fall into the “gone and forgotten” category of flies.

Book Review

Production Fly Tying, 3rd edition

By A. K. Best. Published by Stackpole Books, 2015; \$39.95, softbound.

I confess that I never bought the previous editions of A. K. Best's *Production Fly Tying*, despite being sorely tempted. It was clear from leafing through copies at fly-fishing shows that there would be plenty of interesting ideas in the book, even for an occasional tyer like me, who had no intention of trying to make a living tying flies. But it also was clear, when I browsed through the books, that Best, who at one point in his career was tying as many as 3,000 dozen flies a year, had very strong opinions about a lot of things, an impression confirmed when I heard him talk at some of the same shows. And of course, Best had become a prominent figure in the fly-fishing world, in part through his frequent appearance in the writings of his friend John Gierach, who contributes a foreword here. All of that provoked in me a response that has been growing stronger over the years—a reaction against what has seemed like an increasingly pervasive phenomenon in angling publications: the rise to predominance of a figure I'll call The Expert.

The figure of The Expert is in some ways just a product of the genre of how-to books—after all, you buy and read them because you expect their authors to be really good at things you’d like to learn. But some authors implicitly or explicitly claim privileged knowledge about how something should be done, and attempting to make such claims seems to have become an essential part of the business plan for survival in the small pond that is the fly-fishing industry. And that’s where I start to balk.

Claiming that something always has to be done one way and not another flies in face of one of the most important, frustrating, and engrossing characteristics of fly fishing—contingency: the way in which there are no absolutes, and almost everything depends on particularities that change from hour to hour, day to day, river to river, person to person . . . the list pretty much covers every aspect of the sport. Some variation of “You shoulda been here yesterday” is fly fishing’s real motto.

It should follow that a really knowledgeable writer, as opposed to The Expert, would premise his or her work on that fact, and I was therefore delighted to find that despite his strongly held opinions about how to do things—and in fact, because of how he arrived at those opinions—A. K. Best does exactly that. In the preface, he writes: “What I want to emphasize is that nothing that follows is carved in stone—but then, neither is a lot of what has been written in the past. If you can use some of what you learn elsewhere and some of what you learn here, you’ll become a better tyer.” And he frames the book with a similarly modest claim in the afterword:

I don’t pretend to think I know all there is to know about tying flies. I just tie a lot of them (and for a lot of very nice people) and have tried to make the job even more fun than it is by its very nature. In approaching it that way every day, I constantly look for new techniques, materials, and ideas that just might make a small difference both in the fly’s effectiveness and in its tying. It seems like I learn something new every week—tiny things; tiny things do catch trout.

This really is a book about contingencies and how Best has learned to cope with them. In fact, in addition to new photos in this edition of the book, some of the textual revisions involve Best’s responses to the changing availability and nature of the materials he uses—the ways in which the perfection of genetic hackle has eliminated some of the imperfections, such as webbiness, that Best had used to improve the look of the hackles and thorax area of classic dry flies, for example, making lemonade out of lemons and then having to come up with a new recipe for lemonade when things changed.

What he presents here, then, is what has worked for him and, just as important, the reasoning that led him to do it that way and not another. As he writes of the book in the afterword, “I don’t expect anyone to blindly accept all of it, but it is my hope that you will at least make an attempt to understand the reasoning behind the ideas and opinions and perhaps even try some of them.” What works for you may vary, because people and their needs and their resources and their tying and angling practices differ.

It’s the reasoning behind Best’s frequently strong and strongly expressed opinions that’s most helpful in deciding whether you find his methods palm-to-the-forehead, why-didn’t-I-think-of-that brilliant, or just useful, or not really for you. However, they are always interesting. He really doesn’t like the sort of horizontal-axis rotary vise I’ve tied on since I graduated from a Thompson Model A, for example, because it interferes with the placement of the heel of your hand. And it does. It’s never bothered me, but he’s right, for sure.

A chapter on tools begins the book, and then he just works through the techniques and materials for the different parts of a fly, starting with tailing the fly, then ribbing it, constructing bodies, creating and mounting wings, and hackling the fly. He adopted that order because, contrary to the “traditional” way of tying a classic dry fly, beginning with mounting the wings, when he started out, he thought it logical to begin at the back and work forward, and he still does, even if Rube Cross and the Darbees and Dettles did it differently. And that’s a constant theme — substituting what makes logical sense for what we’re told that others always do.

There will be things that for any serious tyer will leap off the page, but—contingency again—this will vary from person to person. He covers techniques for everything from size 22 dries to bonefish and tarpon flies, and since I don't tie bonefish and tarpon flies, my attention went elsewhere, but yours might go there. Efficiency is one of the things that, as a commercial tyer, he values most, so he doesn't like whip finishers, for example, because it's a tool you have to find and pick up, when instead you can learn to whip finish by hand—which of course *is* the way Rube Cross and the Darbees and Dettes did it. And he also values economy. Rather than cutting off a length of chenille or flash and then trimming off several inches of waste, he ties from the card, hank, or spool—a neat idea, even if you're just a cheapskate duffer.

He's a proponent of natural fibers for dry-fly tails and dubbing, partly because they are multicolored, as natural insects are, not a single color, as most synthetic materials are, partly because they float better and don't wick up water via capillary action, and partly because, as Best emphasizes, mayflies don't have shaggy bodies, and natural materials can be dubbed really tightly. Repeatedly, he advocates actually looking at the insects themselves, not at the fly patterns alleged to imitate them, and then devising ways actually to imitate the bug in question. Hence his declaration that “sparkle emerger tailing is just plain wrong,” because it imitates what a railing shuck looks like out of the water, not under it. He recommends duck-flank fibers — incidentally, another “traditional” choice— for such an application.

He also advocates applying dubbing wax not to your tying thread, where it just clumps up, but to your index finger and thumb. I'd heard that before—from Glenn Overton. To that end, he advocates melting the wax out of the tube it comes in and pouring it into a plastic box, where it can be touched more easily. Since in some circles you're not really a real fly tyer unless your tying desk sports the holy-grail green tube of Overton's, procured for big bucks on eBay, I guess you could still show off the empty tube there.

A. K. Best is known for his hackle-point dry-fly wings, and there's an extended discussion and how-to about procuring them and mounting them. Likewise, there's an in-depth discussion of his theory and practice of hackling classic dry-fly wings, which produces a hackle and thorax that are the exact opposite of the traditional Catskill-style hackle. Instead of a hackle that is rigorously vertical, he wants the hackle to splay forward and back, like the legs on a real insect—and similar to the way that Vincent Marinaro advocated for his thorax-style dries.

It's often said that there's nothing really new in fly tying, at least in its fundamentals. After all, there are only so many ways to wrap stuff on a hook so that it looks like a bug. But some ways are better than others in order to achieve some ends, which, however, may differ, too. What's best for me may not be what's best for you, but what's proven to be best for Best is worth considering, not because he's The Expert, but because he's thought long and hard about things that matter if you tie and fish.

—*Bud Bynack*

Bob Osburn. As the *Gazette* was going to press, we learned that honorary lifetime member of the Catskill Fly Tyers guild Bob Osburn passed away early last week in Vermont. Bob mentored generations of Catskill fly tyers and fly fishers, and we mourn the loss of this kind and generous man. Information about memorial services is not available at this time. An obituary will appear in the May issue of the *Gazette*.



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Without the articles, information, for-sale or want ads, cartoons, newsworthy information, and whatever else is interesting and fun that members submit, this newsletter simply becomes a meeting announcement. Send submissions to Bud Bynack, budbynack@verizon.net or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.