



Roger Thayer, owner of Thayer's Hardware & Patio, standing in front of the store with his daughters, Lauren Thayer Weiss (LEFT) and Erin Thayer Dickson.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The original Thayer's Hardware & Patio store, in the 1960s, on Main Street in Bridgehampton.

RETRO FAVORITE

A HAMPTONS INSTITUTION FOR ALMOST 70 YEARS, **THAYER'S HARDWARE & PATIO** EVOLVES BY BRINGING THE FAMILY'S NEXT GENERATION INTO THE BUSINESS.

BY CAROLINE TELL PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOUG YOUNG

In 1946, N.T. Thayer and his wife, Grace, moved from Queens to their summer home in Bridgehampton—and they never looked back.

That same year, N.T. (short for Nathan Townsend) established a hardware store specializing in World War II surplus inventory, such as flashlights, old car parts, and hammers, as well as seeds, fishing equipment, and general tools and supplies. What he couldn't have imagined then was that Thayer's Hardware & Patio would eventually grow to become a multigenerational family business, first passed down to his son N.T. Jr. and now run by his grandson, Roger.

Thayer's is a trusted institution in the Hamptons. "We work with everyone from celebrities to people who've lived in the neighborhood forever," says Lauren Thayer Weiss, one of Roger's two daughters, who also works at the store. "Whether it's someone coming in looking for just a nail to doing an entire installation on a brand-new renovated house, no job is too big or too small; it's really an all-hands-on-deck kind of operation."



CELEBRATING 70!

Anticipating its upcoming 70th anniversary, the store has evolved from primarily hardware to a full-service lifestyle shop, catering to every outdoor need—and in the Hamptons there are many—from tabletops to décor to furniture, now the store's primary specialty. To wit, Roger "hired" Weiss and her sister, Erin Thayer Dickson, three years ago to help move Thayer's, quite literally, into the next generation.

But Thayer isn't just a name on the sign. The family is one of the oldest, most influential bloodlines on the East End. On the maternal side is Roger's wife, Lisa Duryea Thayer, whose family acquired land on Gibson

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE THAYER FAMILY



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Falcon enamelware mugs, cups, and prep set shown with pieces from the Q Squared Talavera melamine collection; Farmhouse Pottery organic milk board and Windrow berry bowl, all handmade in Vermont; Kingsley-Bate SeaLife pillow on a Cape Cod Collection wicker settee; Farmhouse Pottery mini bottles and Pehr Designs' citron napkins.



Introducing three generations of the Thayer family (LEFT TO RIGHT): Dr. Elliot Weiss, Lillie Weiss, Lauren Thayer Weiss, Lisa Duryea Thayer, Georgia Weiss, Roger Thayer, Louis Dickson, Erin Thayer Dickson, August Dickson, Ted Dickson, on the porch of the family home in Sagaponack.

Lane in Sagaponack in the 1870s from then-Secretary of State William Seward. She grew up in Cold Spring Harbor and vacationed at the family's summer home on Gibson Lane until marrying Roger. Currently, she serves as a trustee of the Village of Sagaponack, working to preserve farmland, open spaces, and the traditional character of the village. Roger has been working at the store since 1963, when, as a young man, he managed the fishing and gun equipment and plant seeds for farmers. After the couple married, they built a house in Sagaponack for their new family. Weiss and her family now live in that very house on Daniels Lane, and when Dickson and her family come back from Baltimore, where her husband is a portfolio manager, they stay at the (historic) Gibson Lane house around the corner.

Both Weiss and Dickson gave up high-profile careers to return to their hometown and the family store. In doing so, they've been able to identify the areas in which they can provide their expertise, such as expanding the stores offerings, sourcing new vendors, and lining up cool collaborations, as well as building out its digital platform, including e-commerce and social media. A former public relations executive who specialized in luxury-product branding, Weiss is spearheading the digital side of the business and its messaging and advertising, while Dickson, a former corporate lawyer, sought to flex her creative muscles by focusing on the aesthetic side and products.

"We all came together about three years ago, and we've really enjoyed working as a family," says Dickson. For Weiss, returning to the Hamptons with her two daughters and husband, a dermatologist, has its perks. "I love that my little

girls can be at the library on Main Street while I'm working," she says. "It's nice to have the community feeling where everyone is close and we get to work with people we've known, literally, forever."

Returning to the store wasn't without its trials and tribulations, however. According to both daughters, Roger put them through a grinding orientation of sorts. "He said, 'You can work here on an hourly wage and learn from me,'" recalls Weiss. "At first we were put off, but it's totally true. The more time you spend on the floor, the more you understand the market."

THE FOUNDATION OF EXCELLENCE

The slow evolution of Thayer's started about 20 years ago, just before the daughters joined the store, when Roger saw an untapped market for more upscale outdoor furniture. At the time, most of his clients had the same old-fashioned wicker chaises and tables, but, slowly, the store began carrying such luxury lines as Gloster, Kingsley-Bate, and Caravita. This era also saw the rise of big-box hardware-and-home stores like Lowe's and Home Depot, so it was paramount that Roger stock items that were exclusive to the store.

And while the store cites Restoration Hardware and Pottery Barn as its main competitors in the space, it's those chains that are responsible for driving the entire market with their glossy catalogs, advertising, and product placement in magazines. Thayer's, however, can offer unparalleled personal service. "If someone comes in and says, 'I have this new house... I'm not



Lauren Thayer Weiss sets up the display for the Gloster Vista Collection furniture and gray, custom-made Farmhouse Pottery table. BELOW: Roger Thayer as a young child in 1955 in front of Thayer's Hardware & Patio in Bridgehampton.

using a decorator... and I'm not sure what will fit,' the first thing I ask is, 'Where do you live, and when can I come measure?'" Weiss says. "We do exterior-design consulting for [free]."

Another perk is that Thayer's can deliver purchases within a few days. It stores inventory in an on-site warehouse and can provide stock well under the typical six-week wait time. "The outdoor furniture market is very short, about two and a half months," says Dickson. "No one wants to wait a month or more if they want to update something."

PROCURING PROJECTS

When it comes to celebrity clientele, the store is tight-lipped, though Truman Capote used to wander off the train and into the store asking for a ride home. Regardless of the customer, Thayer's prides itself on accommodating even the most demanding New Yorker. And in the Hamptons, where the poolside and backyard is as important as any interior space, the store has heard and seen it all. "Someone recently came in for 75 beach lounges that they needed for a beach party the next day," recalls Weiss.

Some of the women's favorite projects, however, aren't the megamansions that line our most beautiful beaches, but the smaller-scale jobs, like a surfer's renovated trailer on Ditch Plains Beach in Montauk. "He was a super-cool client, a big surfer and wanted to outfit the exterior in a casual-living sort of way," said Dickson. "We set up chic, low-lying couches and found these European hourglass tables with a teak top that flips off, and it's actually an ice bucket. That's an example of something you can find only at our store."

When it comes to trends, Dickson identified furniture featuring clean lines with a



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE THAYER FAMILY (HISTORICAL IMAGE)



FROM LEFT: Marine-grade stainless steel lanterns and hammered wine bucket; Thayer's custom-designed, Belgian-style Farmhouse table, dishes, and gray Vermont wood stump end table, all from Farmhouse Pottery.

more contemporary style, particularly in muted tones such as tan, gray, and canvas. The store also provides faux-leather chairs and couches that have proven very popular among homeowners, as well as anything mid-century or mod-inspired. "Everyone wants something they haven't seen before," says Dickson, who also cites the mismatched-patterned look as a top requested style.

ALL THE EXTRAS

Thayer's only recently delved into tabletops and accessories—with lines by Farmhouse Pottery, Kim Seybert, and Pehr Designs—but is already seeing a massive interest in the offerings. It specializes in items in melamine, enamel, and wood, as well as handblown-glass items and unique objects, like beautiful colored candles or super-cool stainless steel tiki torches. "Now as bigger companies and grocery stores sell basic plumbing and hardware, we have to offer really unique things," says Weiss. "We have to set ourselves apart. We can't sell the same items as Kmart."

As for the future of Thayer's, the women say the family joke is to ask, "Where is this store going?" And as often as Roger mentions retiring, his daughters say he loves being on the floor and talking to customers. "He is always looking for the next thing and has a young mind," Weiss says. The women have identified the ways they see Thayer's progressing—namely by doing more collaborations and designing its own furniture. Case in point: Dickson went to Indonesia last year to see how furniture is made and how the trees are harvested. "Down the road, I'd like to use that knowledge and start doing something we can call our own," she admits. "That, and just continue to make ourselves unique." 2434 Montauk Hwy., Bridgehampton, 537-0077; thayershardware.com **H**

PERFECT PICKS

The Thayer sisters reveal the store's best-selling items and top gift recommendations. By Sabrina Evans

What have been some of your top-selling items this summer?

The St. Tropez chaise lounge, **Kingsley-Bate** (\$830). "This chaise, combines comfort and durability in its deceptively simple design. All hardware is stainless steel or aluminum to assure years of quality poolside lounging." Vista lounge chair, **Gloster** (\$1,639). "Inspired by the sleek yachts on the French Riviera, this outdoor lounge features horizontal lines that highlight the chair's negative space, creating a visually light, yet comfortably sturdy silhouette."

Bells side table and ice bucket, **Gloster** (\$998). "Featuring a removable teak top with ice bucket storage inside for bottle service, this side table/ice bucket combination will add a classy contemporary touch to your next summer soirée."

What products would you recommend for Hamptons summer homes or as host/hostess gifts?

Melamine trays, **Thomas Paul** (\$28–\$90): "Adorned with nostalgic seaside images, these durable trays are made to last long after your latest dinner party and are available in a variety of sizes, colors, and patterns." Blackline serving boards, **Blackcreek Mercantile & Trading Co.** (\$175–\$235): "These subtly stunning white-oak pieces are created using a time-tested process that dyes the tannic acid in the wood, producing a deep black finish that will last."

Windrow berry bowl, **Farmhouse Pottery** (\$75): "An art piece based in practicality, this bowl, hand-thrown in Vermont, is oven-, dishwasher-, and microwave-safe and is perforated so it's also a strainer."



FROM LEFT: Lounge chair (\$1,998) and Bells side table and ice bucket (\$998), Gloster.