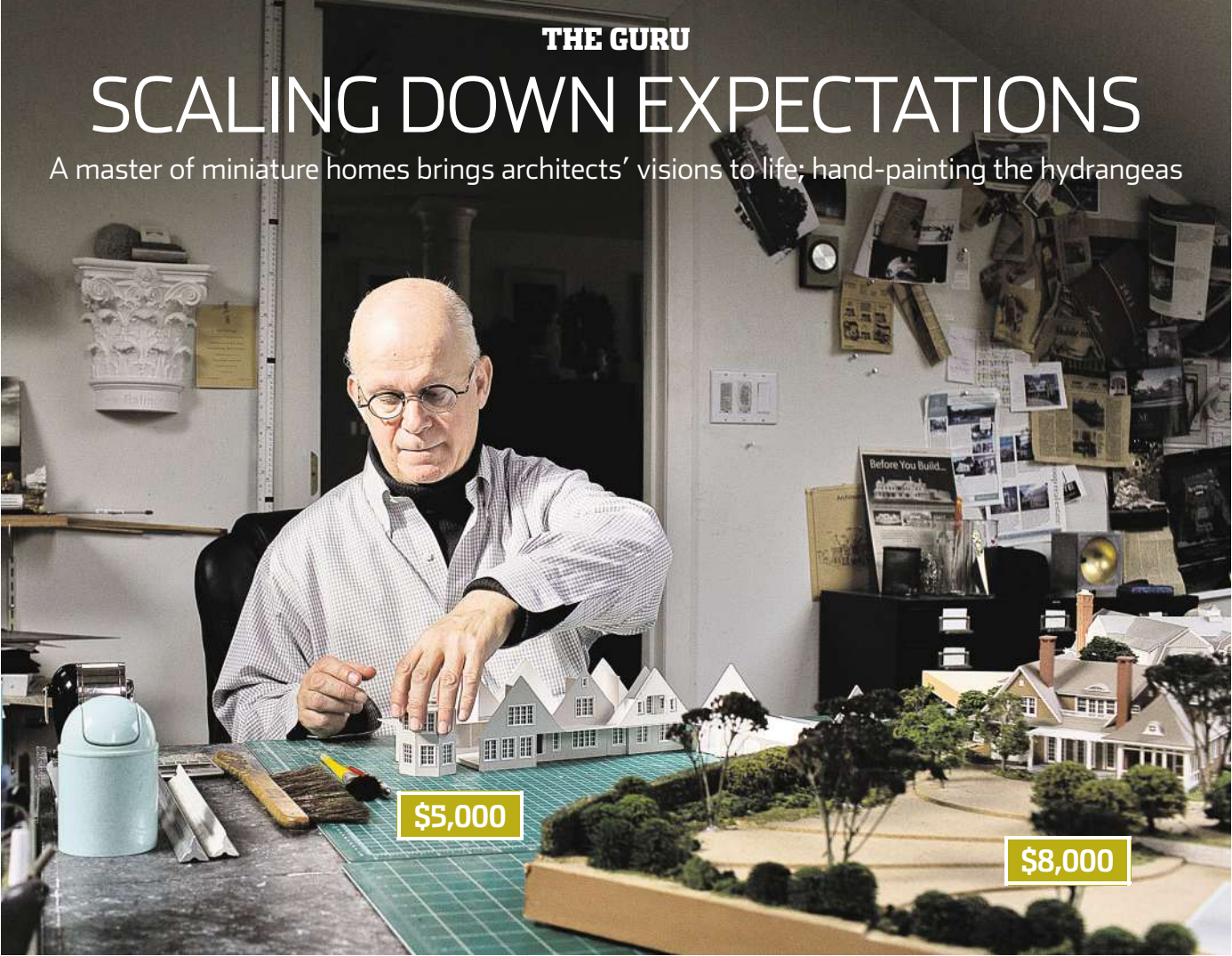


MANSION



MODEL HOMES Gary Lawrance, left, in his Stony Brook, N.Y., studio. His models, with estimated prices shown here, are noted for their intricate details, such as stonework, lattices, pool houses and landscaping.



BY SANETTE TANAKA

IT TOOK GARY LAWRENCE about six weeks to build a 2½-story, European-style home, complete with terraces, a swimming pool and two stone towers. It's an impressive 20-inches by 22-inches wide.

Mr. Lawrance is a master of miniature models, building tiny structures for architectural firms to help clients envision their plans. His company, Lawrance Architectural Presentations in Stony Brook, N.Y., creates two or three of these models a month.

He began making models as a student at the New York Institute of Technology in Old Westbury. After graduating in 1982 with a degree in architec-

ture, he took a job at Spector Group, an architecture and design firm located in Great Neck, N.Y., at the time.

At first, he was assigned to make models. But what some people considered grunt work quickly developed into Mr. Lawrance's true passion. He became known at the firm as the "go-to" model-maker and became director of the model department. Then, in the early '90s, he began his own model-making firm. One of the best parts of his job is showing homeowners his work: "I like giving the first tangible look at what an architect is doing," he says.



At first, his models were bare bones, made out of colored cardboard. Over the years, he honed his craft to create more detailed models and include intricate features, like pool houses, tennis courts, trees and gardens. A typical model of a 5,000-square-foot house measures 12 inches by 16 inches by 5 inches. Prices range from \$2,500 to nearly \$20,000, depending on the design and deadline.

"My materials are simple," he says, citing No. 11 X-Acto knives, metal straight edges and numerous bottles of Elmer's glue.

The foundations are made out of foam core, and the walls

out of colored mat board. He uses thin tape for window mullions and wooden or plastic dowels for columns. Structures are erected from the bottom up, "like you would start a house of cards," he explains.

For landscaping, Mr. Lawrance uses sheets of cork to contour the land. Sometimes he'll hand-paint details, like hydrangeas or azaleas. That's when it gets really messy. "There are pieces of green fuzz and foam everywhere, and you're covered head to toe," he says.

Mr. Lawrance, 55 years old, prefers to do all his work by hand and works alone. But when crunched for time, he will sometimes enlist other artists to make some of the more time-consuming elements, like chimneys, latticed

pavilions and spiral staircases.

Modern buildings are particularly challenging, Mr. Lawrance says. "If you're working with cubes and squares, you have to be perfectly precise. The colors are clear, stark and simple—any mistakes are obvious," he says.

Despite computer-aided-design programs that can generate 3-D models, Mr. Lawrance says, there is still a market for physical models. "They're architectural tools, but they really are artwork," he says. "They're architectural sculptures, in a way."



Philip Montgomery for The Wall Street Journal (5)

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