

# PROFILE

| By Peter A. Smith | Photographs by Nathan Eldridge

## Coco + Gil Corral

Music curators, artists, family

The Hog Farm Studios Annex, a musical speakeasy, is at the end of a long hallway in the old Woolworth's building on Main Street in Biddeford.

Since 2007, the Corrals have been sharing their deep appreciation for music inside an old barn behind their house, introducing musicians from Boston, Baltimore, and even Biddeford

There have been accordions, fiddles, and banjos. A Cuban boy has sung falsetto about a man who washed ashore on an island. A nostalgic folksinger has talked in rhythms about a traveling salesman. A group of Brooklyn punks has stomped out Appalachian hillbilly songs.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Gil Corral says. "Tonight..."

Not a single whisper. Not a single bottle pops open. All eyes forward. Then, the sound of a Super 8 film projector starts up. The projectionist, Phi Lee Lam, illuminates the band—a bearded singer, a bass guitarist, a keyboard player, and a woman standing upright thumping on a bass drum.

Tonight, there are actual films of ice-covered trees and thoroughbred harness races displayed on the back wall of the annex. On other nights, the bands that Gil and Coco book make music with such sincerity that it alone transports listeners far outside of Biddeford to imaginary places, places where old wooden ships sail, full of youthful, tattooed Vikings waving flags, covered in seaweed and sand, drinking, and belting out passionate songs about being young and inspired.

Coco and Gil met in Albuquerque in 1990 and moved to Portland, Oregon, where they lived for 12 years. Coco grew up a faculty brat, and when her father worked as a professor at the University of New England, she and Gil would come to visit Maine. "I really had no preconceived notions about the area," Coco says. "We came to hang out with my parents and we'd drive through downtown Biddeford. We just thought it was cute as sin. All the old buildings, it kind of reminded us of Portland, Oregon's Pearl District before it got gentrified."

Eventually, they came looking for a home—a classic, white New England farmhouse with an attached barn, close to downtown, the grocery store, and the library. They found an old house on a former hog farm on the outskirts of Biddeford with a little backyard and a barn dating back to the 1880s. They bought the hog farm and started making art.

Upstairs, Gil paints and draws. The couple's daughter, Chloe, 6, has set up an easel and

plays guitar in a band she calls Sparklefive. Downstairs, Coco keeps her oxyacetylene torches and welding gear for her jewelry business, Loving Anvil. The barn has a couple of couches, and handmade posters for music shows dot the walls. Two bunnies hop around.

"When we moved out here, we would go up to SPACE Gallery in Portland because there's nothing to do here," Gil says. "Then, we were like, 'Let's just have a couple of house concerts here.' We had a couple get-togethers and somebody was playing guitar and it just sounded really nice. Warm. It was just one of those things. It wasn't really planned out. It was just a matter of, 'Wouldn't it be cool to have someone play acoustically here?'"

The first shows were spontaneous. They didn't advertise. Promotion was all word-of-mouth. Friends told friends. Neighbors came. Things happened. They did about 18 shows altogether. And to be inside that old barn in the middle of the winter, with the woodstove cranked, to hear the harmonizing vocals, the acoustic instruments, it really felt like a refuge from the busy, modern world.

**"People are paying attention—it's not like going to a club or a bar or whatever, where people are going to socialize. But more than that, Coco and Gil are really amazing hosts and they foster the whole idea that the space is for listening."**

— Ron Harrity, *Peapod Recordings, Portland*

The wooden barn is still available as a recording studio (the couple will even let you use their kitchen and their car during the sessions). This summer, Ron Harrity used the barn to record an album with Brown Bird. Because the house shows were so successful, they renovated a vacant space tucked between a shuttered textile mill





Opposite: In Biddeford, Gil and Coco Corral stand outside their home studio, where they first began hosting informal music shows. The barn spawned Hog Farm Studios Annex, a coffeeshop, cafe, and music venue the two opened in an old Woolworth's downtown (above) this summer. "We work very hard to curate things that really excite us," Coco says.

and Main Street and opened the Hog Farm Studios Annex in July. The downtown space looks like the cover of an Herb Albert album: one part Vaudeville; one part cantina. Gil put up a velvet curtain. There's a slightly tuned upright piano and a couple of mismatched chairs and tables. "Hopefully, it will inspire people to let their freak flags fly," Gil says.

Before the show, Coco makes hummus and cheese plates for the band. She serves Goya juices, Negra Modelo and Dos Equis, sangria, and Stumptown Coffee. An older man from Kennebunk bellies up to the bar and says, half under his breath, "I can't believe I found it." Then, the music starts. Everyone sits and listens.

"It just seems countercultural to have these kids coming in and playing folk songs," Gil says. "We just love it and want to do anything we can to support that passion and fortitude of looking at life a different way. We really want to help keep that going."

After the show, Coco goes up and thanks the projectionist, the singer, the drummer, the keyboard player, and the bass player. Not only that. She gives them all hugs. +

**Hog Farm Studios Annex | 140 Main St. | Suite 107 | Biddeford | 207.282.1583 | hogfarmstudios.com**