

'My Little Pony: The Movie' delivers nostalgia, colorful manes.

STARLIVING

Quirky 'Lucky' is a love letter to the fans of the late Harry Dean Stanton.

HOME DESIGN



A world of weird

Austin-inspired home tour opens doors to outlandish habitats

By Alyson Ward

WHEN Kelly Gale Amen relaxes in his high-backed armchair, a chrome-covered mannequin hovers behind him like a devoted robot assistant. Cold and shiny, stiff and faceless, it could pass for C-3PO's cousin — but its arms reach out gently, as if to massage Amen's shoulders.

Light and open with a view of Minute Maid Park, Amen's apartment is full of such offbeat artwork and uncommon detail — from floor to ceiling and every inch of the walls.

Faces peer from paintings; soft, suggestive sculpture hangs overhead. And a woman's body, bright red and smooth as a department-store dummy, peeks in from the bedroom, leaning through a cutout in the wall.

"I wanted to have mannequins



Kelly Gale Amen's loft is filled with art and furniture he's either made or collected in his travels.

Photos by Thanin Viriyaki Photography

Weird Homes Tour

When: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday (VIP party 6-9 p.m.)

Price: \$30 (children 13 and younger free). VIP tickets, \$50, include access to an additional home and an afterparty.

Information: weirdhomestour.com

at random," Amen explains with a sly smile, "just so if I'm here alone, I don't feel like I'm alone."

Amen's apartment — an old loft on the northern outskirts of downtown — is a stop on Saturday's Weird Homes Tour, which offers a peek at some of the most creative, outlandish décor in Houston. The self-paced tour opens the doors to 10 houses, lofts and studios — most inside the Loop, with a couple of homes out west near the Beltway.

When the **Weird Homes Tour** *Weird continues on D2*

COMMENTARY

Why concerts are about more than just music

By Joey Guerra

What happened in Las Vegas this past Monday makes my heart ache. And it makes me angry.

A lone gunman, positioned on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino, unleashed a storm of terror on an outdoor country music festival. He fired round after round of bullets, killing more than 50 people and injuring hundreds.

People who were there to do nothing more than enjoy some music, and possibly some communion.

As the Chronicle's pop music critic, concerts and music festivals aren't just work for me. They're part of my everyday existence — an integral and intrinsic part of who I am. They bring me joy. They foster togetherness. They exemplify pure emotion.

Some of my most vivid memories are at concerts: singing along with thousands of people, dancing in the aisles with strangers, waiting for the lights to go down, the curtain to go up and those feelings of happiness and excitement to swell in my throat and in my chest.

The hiccups in my concert history have been minor. There were weather delays and cancellations during Free Press Summer Fest. There was a fire outside the gates during the 2007 Austin City Limits Music Festival. There was a brief evacuation during an "American Idol" tour stop due to a small backstage fire.

I can't imagine the horror music fans endured in Las Vegas. And it's heart-breaking that a space meant for celebration was invaded so ruthlessly by cowardice.

The first concert I ever attended was with my dad to see Whitney Houston at The Summit in 1987. She looked like a goddess in an ankle-length, seafoam green gown. She sounded like a queen on "I Wanna Dance with Somebody." I was in awe. *Concerts continues on D2*

FILM

Bringing 'Blade Runner' back to life after 35 years

By Lindsey Bahr

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — It was dawn on the set of "Blade Runner 2049" and Harrison Ford and director Denis Villeneuve were swimming back to the shore together after an all-night shoot in a million-gallon water tank.

It was cold in the water.

It was cold outside.

And it was just one night out of a dozen that they'd be spending their sleeping hours soaking wet to try to execute a set piece that even Ridley Scott thought too ambitious.

"What we are doing now is insane," Ford told Villeneuve. "It's insane."

He might as well have been talking about the whole project, which is, by one metric, a \$150 million art house



Warner Bros. Pictures

The makers of "Blade Runner 2049" have cloaked the film in secrecy.

sequel to a 35-year-old sci-fi film that flopped on release. In 1982, Ridley Scott's neo-noir dystopian mind-bender based on Philip K. Dick's story "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" made a mere \$27.6 million on a \$28 million budget. For comparison, the year's top film, "E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial" made \$359.2 million.

During the troubled production, Ford and Scott famously disagreed on even the nature of Ford's character Rick Deckard and whether or not he was a "Replicant" (aka an android), and neither liked the theatrical release which included a tacked on happy ending and a forced voiceover narration. Then came all those other versions. Seven are said to exist, five are still available. Both Ford and Villeneuve *Soviet-era continues on D3*

FILM REVIEWS

‘Mountain Between Us’ almost like being there

By Mick LaSalle

“The Mountain Between Us” is the story of a man and woman stranded in the snowy mountains, following a plane crash, and the ensuing cold and panic, mixed with the boredom and despair. To watch it is like being there — it is almost possible to feel the freezing cold.

So that’s the achievement of “The Mountain Between Us.” It’s also the problem.

Do you want to be stuck in the freezing cold, without much hope of rescue? Probably not. But how does the prospect sound of watching fictional characters in the same predicament? OK, well, that might have possibilities, so long as the situation were exciting, not just agonizing and bleak; and if the interaction of the characters were so compelling that the movie began to seem more like a story about these particular individuals and not



Kate Winslet and Idris Elba star in “The Mountain Between Us.”

Twentieth Century Fox

just their situation.

Ultimately, “The Mountain Between Us” tries to pull the audience’s interest in a relationship direction. It’s a difficult task, despite two charismatic leads, Idris Elba and Kate Winslet. Winslet is Alex, a photo-

journalist on the way home from a photo shoot, and Elba is Ben, a neurosurgeon traveling across the country to perform an operation. Both need to get to Denver, but their commercial flights have been delayed, and so Alex

approaches Ben — to this point a stranger — and asks him to go half with her in chartering a plane.

The charter pilot, played by Beau Bridges, turns out to be a breezy, confident older fellow, so breezy he doesn’t bother

‘The Mountain Between Us’

Rated PG-13: for a scene of sexuality, peril, injury images, and brief strong language

Running time: 103 minutes
★★★

to register a flight plan, and so old that ... well, put it this way: If the Academy had a category for best simulated stroke while flying a small plane, Bridges would be a shoo-in for the Oscar.

The plane crash interrupts the characters’ projected story lines, which are agreeable. So that when Alex and Ben find themselves stranded in the snow, it’s not just disappointing for them, but for the audience as well.

From then on, it’s just a story about two people trying to stay alive, although the movie would have us experience “The Mountain Between Us” as something else, as a story about two people

getting to know each other — and coming into a deeper understanding of themselves — as a result of this crisis. The only problem with that is that the audience doesn’t quite receive the events of the movie as a crisis, but rather as a calamity, which shoves aside all other considerations besides survival.

In pushing for emotional effects, the film ends up flirting with sentimentality. That’s not good in itself; but even worse, it provides something of a sappy frame for the scenes of physical hardship, such that some moments that are supposed to seem harrowing actually end up unintentionally funny — kind of like a piano falling on Oliver Hardy.

It’s also worth noting that “The Mountain” finishes strong, with the film’s best stretch coming in the last 20 minutes.

mlasalle@sfcronicle.com

‘My Little Pony: The Movie’ delivers nostalgia, colorful manes

By Katie Walsh

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Perhaps it’s unfair, but one has to wonder for whom the animated feature film “My Little Pony: The Movie” has been made.

Ostensibly, it’s for young kids, who count for double the ticket money with their parents in tow. But there’s also a large market to be found in the “bronies” and “pegasisters,” young adults who have developed a cultish fandom around

‘My Little Pony: The Movie’

Rated PG: for mild action
Running time: 99 minutes
★★

the animated series “My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic.” No matter who you might encounter in the theater, “My Little Pony: The Movie” signals that the unrelentingly positive pastel ponies have hit the big time.

My Little Pony is a brand that has been somewhat ubiquitous

since the 1980s. A toy line from Hasbro, My Little Pony was the more popular younger sibling of the hard plastic full-grown My Pretty Pony. Girls of the ‘80s will remember the soft, rubbery My Little Pony dolls for their resplendent and colorful manes and rump tattoos, aka “cutie marks.”

“My Little Pony: The Movie,” directed by Jayson Thiessen, has a remarkably retro vibe. The film is done in the classic 2-D animation style and embraces the

flat, colorful, Saturday-morning cartoon look and feel. If part of the appeal of the My Little Pony renaissance is the nostalgic warm-fuzzies about childhood cartoons, then this film fully delivers. All we’d need is a bowl full of sugary cereal to complete the experience.

Storywise, the stakes start out quite low. Princess Twilight (Tara Strong) wants to throw the best Friendship Festival in Equestria, and her pony friends support her by singing about it. But all too

soon their happy kingdom is invaded by the Storm King (Liev Schreiber), an ape/ox hybrid beast, his army led by fallen pony Tempest (Emily Blunt), a unicorn who lost her horn many years ago.

The Storm King is essentially a corporate fascist overlord, and he wants to steal the ponies’ magic so he can control the weather, and everything else. Little Princess Twilight is the only one to escape, and so she sets off with her pals to ask for help from the Queen of the

Hippogriffs (Uzo Aduba).

The approach to animated features these days is to create technological spectacle, line up an all-star cast of voice talent and pack the script with jokes for the accompanying parents to enjoy. But “My Little Pony: The Movie” zigs where others zag, throwing it back to the old school with its traditional animation and musical structure.

It might not be everyone’s cup of tea, but for those who already love it, it’ll be just right.

Weird home tour proves that not ‘every house needs a farm sink’

Weird from page D1

started in Austin in 2014, it was a way to celebrate the “Keep Austin Weird” aesthetic — the kind of taste that, in free-spirited neighborhoods, inspires homeowners to paint murals on their garage doors or turn shipping containers into tiny houses. It branched out to Houston last year, and next month it’ll expand to offer a tour in New Orleans.

The Weird Homes Tour got started “because reality TV would have you believe that every house needs a farm sink and boring shiplap on the walls,” said David J. Neff, the tour’s founder and CEO. “We want to fight that trend. People come to our houses to be inspired — to go home and paint a wall yellow, instead of Eggshell No. 09864.”

A ticket to this year’s Houston tour will offer a peek at Selia Qynn’s “secret garden” in Spring Branch, a certified wildlife habitat full of hidden nooks and arty treasures. It’ll open up Anne Reese Hernandez’s door in the Heights, a home filled to the brim with folk art and her vintage clothing collection. And in her Memorial-area townhome, Sue Shefman will show off her “Hippopotamus” collection — more than 2,000 pieces of hippopotamus decor, including statues, stuffed animals and a bright red hippo-shaped art car.

For \$20 extra, a VIP ticket offers an afterparty and a tour of the Lester Marks home in West University Place. The Marks home holds a spectacular collection of serious art — Warhol, Basquiat, Anselm Kiefer — and its share of idiosyncrasies, too, with entire rooms devoted to art installations.

Amen’s own art collection is a combination of the important and irreverent. An artist and interior designer, he has combined his work — fabrics, furniture and sculpture

— with pieces he has collected over decades of work and travel.

Near the chrome mannequin hangs a Donald Roller Wilson painting of Jesus Christ and a rabbit. On a table near the window sits a Frank Fleming sculpture of three frogs and a snake. And on a mirrored wall near the bedroom hangs a portrait by the Salvador Dalí-trained artist Nall; it’s of Amen himself.

“I went to Monaco for the unveiling of it,” Amen recalls.

Every piece of artwork carries a story. A number of framed Jay Branson photographs, for instance, offer turbulent images of a fire. “That’s my furniture on fire,” Amen says. He and Branson set some of his custom pieces ablaze in the name of art, and those images became a Fotofest exhibit in 2002.

The open living room can be sectioned off with fabric curtains from Amen’s own KGA Collection, and a woven rug softens the gleaming wood floor. “My mother did that in the ‘50s,” he says, assembling it from garments she collected at home in western Oklahoma.

Amen had to edit his collection when he moved into this 2,000-square-foot loft six years ago. Before that, he owned 12,000 square feet in Montrose, a collection of buildings known as “the Compound.” Amen had pools and fountains, four kitchens and six bedrooms — and he’d regularly host parties for 400 people.

“Pretty much everybody in Houston” knew about the Compound, Amen says, and the parties were legendary. But after 28 years of living there, Amen had entered his 60s, and “one day I just said ‘I don’t want to do it anymore.’”

That’s when he started eyeing the Dakota Lofts, an old paint factory that

developer Randall Davis converted into lofts in the early ‘90s.

“I said, ‘I want the largest corner loft on the upper floor with the best sun,’” Amen says. “I waited a year for it. But it’s fabulous.”

Amen had to downsize his décor, sending some pieces to storage and others to showrooms. He rotates it out so that his home always holds what he truly loves, right now.

He looks around: “This is more interesting than the other one was, actually.”

In the bedroom, Amen’s Shel Hershorn-designed bed sprawls in the center of the room, allowing more wall space for art and framed photographs. A portrait of his beloved old dalmatian, Fire Hydrant, hangs on one wall. On another, there’s a portrait of Amen surrounded by naked, clay-covered models.

Amen runs an awareness campaign he calls “Cancer Below the Belt.” A prostate cancer survivor, he wants to remove the stigma from the types of cancer people don’t like to talk about. So it’s fitting that two of Amen’s signature vagina pillows — which look exactly the way you’d imagine — hang from the ceiling in a prominent spot near the window. That’s part of his story and a piece of his art. He doesn’t entertain here the way he used to at the Compound, but Amen’s loft is a showpiece. Every bit of art and furniture is arranged thoughtfully; the warmth of framed mementoes is balanced by the mannequins’ chilly, sleek shine.

“Weird is the new normal,” Amen declares, and his loft — every inch of it — is “really a collection of who I am and what my spirit has been.”

alyson.ward@chron.com
twitter.com/alysonward



Thanin Viriyaki Photography

“I wanted to have mannequins at random, artist and interior designer Kelly Gale Amen says of his loft. “Just so if I’m here alone, I don’t feel so alone.”

Concerts — no matter the genre — provide unifying experiences

Concerts from page D1

And for a 12-year-old boy whose middle school experience was a daily maze of classroom bullies and finding new, safe ways to walk home, that concert was a moment of respite. It was a brief pause for happiness. And it let me know that my dad, so often silent and wary of emotion, loved me enough to buy the tickets and share the experience with me.

Since then, the shows I’ve attended likely number in

the thousands. I’ve traveled to Washington, D.C. and Las Vegas to see Madonna, whose artful performances combine a traditional concert experience with fashion and theater. It’s a balance that continues to influence every female pop artist that has followed her.

I remain inspired by so many others. Kanye West’s absolute unwillingness to compromise. Adele’s contrast of astounding vocals and nervous, normal-girl chatter. Solange’s continual evolution as a vital, important

artist. Beyoncé’s balance of regal, refined power and H-town charm. She literally seems to glow.

My heart went on, and on, the first time I saw Celine Dion. When she belted “The Power of Love” in 1996 at The Woodlands Pavilion, it sent what felt like an electric charge through the crowd. I’ve rarely experienced that type of wholly unified emotion.

I also hold close, for different reasons, the most recent shows I’ve attended.

The AAA Girls — “RuPaul’s Drag Race” faves Alaska, Courtney Act and Willam — at Fitzgerald’s was a no-holds-barred night of turning pop clichés on their heads. And for so many gay men in attendance, it was a safe space. A place to not just be tolerated but to celebrate and be celebrated.

I attended the Luis Fonsi show at Smart Financial Centre at Sugar Land with my mom, my frequent concert date who still gets excited at every sing-along. Singing along to “Despa-

cito,” the Spanish-language song that has shattered records all over the world, was the perfect kickoff to Hispanic Heritage Month. With my mom. With mi gente.

Both of these shows exemplified pride in communities that have so often felt persecuted. And that’s what the best performers do. They makes us all feel like we’re all in it together.

Fear and terror — and terrorism — have no place there.

joey.guerra@chron.com