

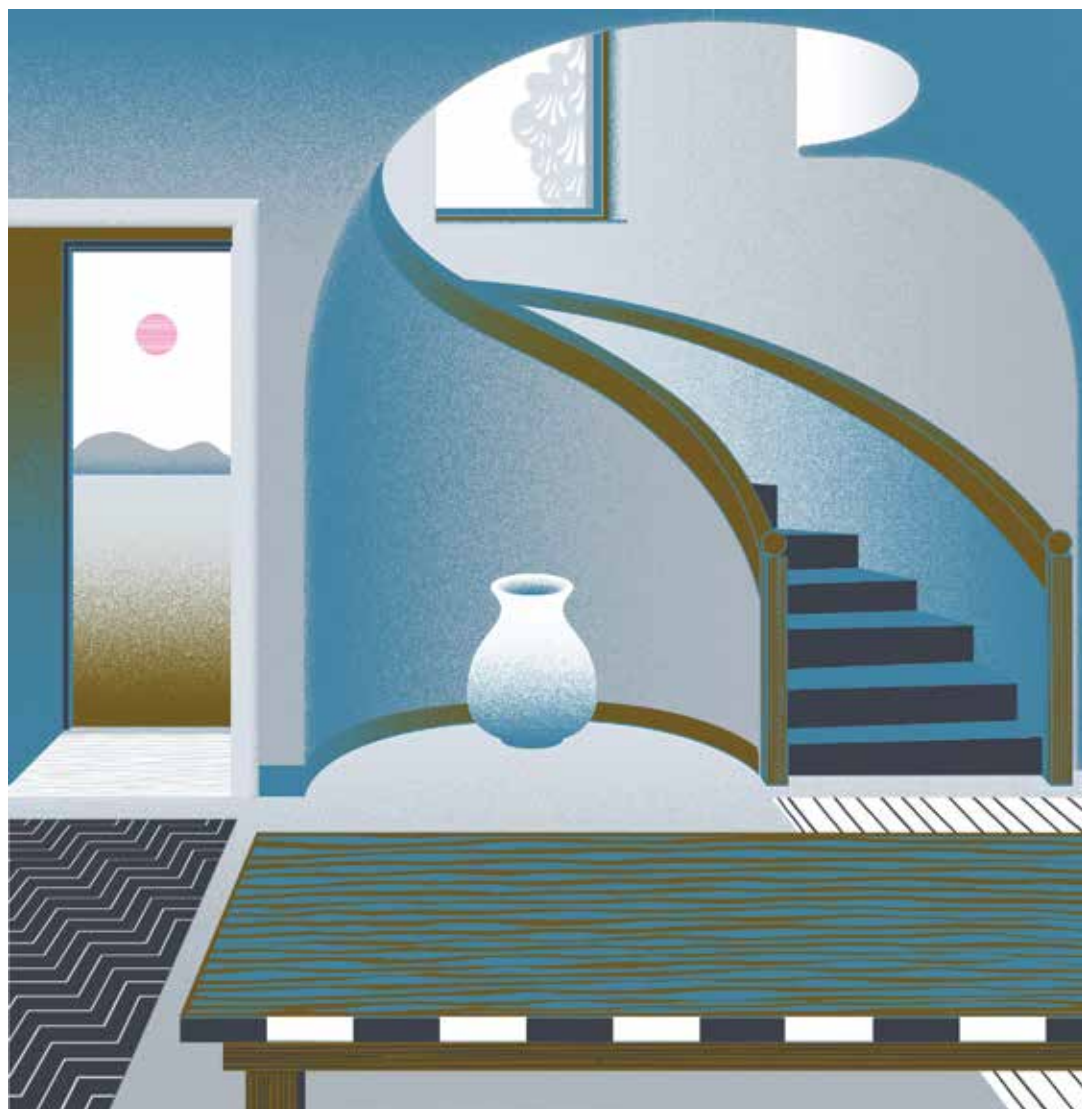
## Craftsman

WHEN GREG HANNON was a graduate student at Case Western Reserve University, he liked to hang around the civil engineering department. Friends there would let the young molecular biologist use the department's wood and metal shops.

He learned to run a milling machine and operate a lathe. He built a wine rack, bookshelves, and gel boxes for his lab. Then one day, in a dusty back corner of a wood store, Hannon found what he believes was some of the last Cuban mahogany imported into the United States. "I spent more than a month's grad student salary on it," recalls Hannon, who looked at the raw mahogany and saw a dining room table. "I'd never built such a substantial piece of furniture, but I just jumped right in."

Hannon had the foresight to choose a trestle design: the table's structure was supported by four wedges that could easily be knocked out, allowing it to be disassembled and transported. When he left Case Western in 1992 and headed east for postdoctoral studies at New York's Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Hannon brought the table.

At Cold Spring Harbor, Hannon would pioneer the study of RNA interference: harnessing for research or therapeutic purposes the nucleic acids used by cells to regulate gene expression and protein synthesis. He also



built benches, more tables, cabinets, a dresser. He added a room to his house.

There's some overlap between his avocational and vocational pursuits. Woodwork and applied molecular biology are both exercises in problem solving – handling inevitable confrontations with the unexpected.

A skilled builder "has a thought process geared toward that and can think ahead any number of steps," says Hannon. "Thinking about how you build things on a molecular level, the process is the same."

In other ways, though, he finds building a release from the lab. It requires total, measure-twice-cut-once focus. "I'm not a meditation kind of guy, but I imagine it's something like that," Hannon says of pottery-throwing, another of his

manual pursuits. "The clay knows what your mood is."

Both woodworking and pottery also offer more immediate gratification than his work usually provides. "You make progress every day," says Hannon. "That's not always the case with science, which is punctuated by periods of insight followed by the long, hard slog of making things work."

Last fall, after 23 years at Cold Spring Harbor, Hannon began to relocate his laboratory to the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, with a full transition expected in June of this year. It was a daunting shift. He went from postdoc to full professor and HHMI investigator at almost literally the same bench.

But as difficult as it was to move, Hannon is finding in

Cambridge a needed change of pace: a chance to do more applied research, exposure to new ideas, a jolt out of intellectual complacency.

It also offers a wealth of home projects. He and his wife are renovating a 110-year-old country house. They're putting in new floors, redoing the bathrooms, and building chicken runs and goat pens for what may well become their own home dairy.

Hannon is also rebuilding the house's main staircase. He approaches this new challenge with some trepidation; completing the restoration could take years. But he knows the results will be enduring. In the dining room of the house stands his 25-year-old mahogany table. —*Brandon Keim*