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Home & Garden

A LOS ALTOS TOWN CRIER PUBLICATION • FALL 2022



PRIZED POSSESSIONS

The baby grand pianos and Victrolas that tell our stories in the home

FAMILY PHOTOS

Organize stacks of snapshots

CONQUERING CLUTTER

Sort those sentimental items

GARDENING

Make a planting plan



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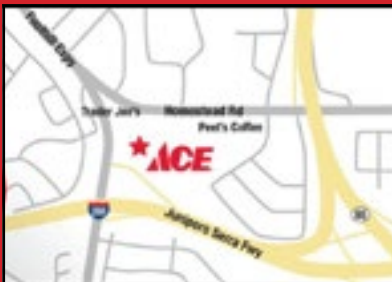
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Circulation: 16,000. Mailed directly to households in Los Altos, Los Altos Hills and select areas of Mountain View.

Hundreds of subscribers receive the Town Crier in neighboring communities as well as out of state. The Town Crier can be purchased at newsstands in Los Altos, Mountain View and Palo Alto.

ON THE COVER:
Los Altos residents David and Vicki Reeder's 1930s-era baby grand piano is among their cherished items, evoking childhood memories.
PHOTO BY S.M. LIEU



BY JENNAH PENDLETON
STAFF WRITER | JENNAHP@LATC.COM

PRIZED POSSESSIONS

Vintage heirlooms tell stories in the home

Homes are intensely personal spaces that expose our most intimate facets – color schemes can show our temperaments, decor reveals our tastes, organization methods unveil our varying neuroses and junk drawers display the parts of ourselves we would rather keep hidden.

As much as we follow the latest decorating trends or fill our homes with Ikea furniture or the latest West Elm pieces, it will always be those few prized possessions that make a house a home.

Such items rarely come from a catalog – or at least not one from this century. The treasures that mean the most to us aren't purchased new at all, but are instead vintage pieces imbued with decades of character and meaning that are unique to us and our families. These are the items an outsider may

look at and think, “Oh, neat,” but communicate warmth, familiarity and historical significance to their owners. They may or may not be worth a lot of money, but they are certainly priceless.

MEANINGFUL MUSICAL MEMORIES

Longtime Los Altos resident Vicki Reeder's prized possession is the Krakauer Brothers baby grand piano in her living room. While the piano has only been in Reeder's home for a year or so after she inherited it from her late uncle, the instrument inspires some of her earliest memories.

The piano once belonged to her grandfather, James McEllin Reilly, who bought it in Seattle in 1937, though the circumstances surrounding its purchase are a bit hazy. Reilly, who was very poor at the time, worked on and off as a bandleader in addition

— *“I feel like somehow these genetics have benefited me, and I don't think we realize that they're kind of a gift that you get from your ancestors”*

Vicki Reeder

to other work he did to make ends meet, but he was never considered a professional musician by trade.

“He was known for making rash purchases, and I'm not sure his children always had shoes,” Reeder laughed. “They probably did have shoes, but I think things were rough and he did make some inappropriate decisions – and that piano may have been one of them.” >



Vicki Reeder and her musician friend John Sylvester enjoyed playing music together at the piano until his death last December. PHOTO COURTESY OF VICKI REEDER.

“We loved sitting around here while he played the piano – that seemed to be his way of relating to his kids and grandkids.”

– Vicki Reeder

Reeder was first introduced to the piano when she would visit her grandparents’ house but became closer to it when her grandfather moved into her family home after his wife died.

“We loved sitting around here while he played the piano – that seemed to be his way of relating to his kids and grandkids,” she recalled.

One of her household duties growing up was to dust the piano, but Reeder often would get distracted by what was inside the piano bench.

“I was taking band in school, so I could read music enough that I could play the melody line and plunk out songs on the keys,” she said. “The Rodgers and Hart music is what really caught my ear. I’ve always loved the song ‘Manhattan’ — it always makes me think of him.”

In the mid-’50s, Grandpa Reilly and the piano moved down to her uncle Dean Reilly’s apartment in San Francisco, where it would remain until her uncle’s death last year. The piano sat comfortably among a stack of music paraphernalia Dean held onto as a career music collector. When not >

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NATIVE PLANTS TALK

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A vintage Krakauer Brothers piano serves as the focal point of the Reeders' Los Altos home. TOP PHOTO BY S.M. LIEU | ABOVE PHOTO COURTESY OF VICKI REEDER

their home. It currently sits in the corner of their living room, serving as a daily reminder of her family history.

“When you’re a child, you don’t really appreciate the grown-ups in your life. They’re just there. Not only was my grandfather this talented, brilliant man and musician, but his wife, my grandmother, had a sister who was this really excellent artist,” Reeder said. “And I feel like somehow these genetics have benefited me, and I don’t think we realize that they’re kind of a gift that you get from your ancestors.”

Reeder’s family history and heritage are evident her life – she is the first in her family to graduate from college. She earned a degree in fine art, an education she now uses as president of the Los Altos Stage Company Board of Directors and a producer, director and writer of the long-running “Follies” fundraiser. She is also a trained singer, continuing the musical legacy in her family.

Having the piano in her home reminds her of her family history and the people who made her who she is, and how that history fits into her life now.

A vintage Victrola accompanies the baby grand piano in Reeder’s living room, an heirloom passed down by husband David’s family. Also acquired in the 1930s by his grandparents, he too associates the Victrola with good times with his family and a rich history of music appreciation.

Together, the two vintage musical items tell stories of decades past, but in their current context, they tell the story of two families coming together and making one. ♦

covered in records, the piano bench was the only place to sit in his living room for nearly 50 years.

Dean left the piano to Reeder both because she had always expressed appreciation and sentimentality for it and because she and her family have the space for it in

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FAMILY PHOTOS

Thanks for *The* memories

THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF SORTING FAMILY SNAPSHOTS

BY MARY LARSEN
STAFF WRITER | MARYL@LATC.COM

*W*hile preparing for a recent move, the last thing I had time for was sorting through hundreds of family photos.

I decided to simply box them up, whether in frames, albums or envelopes from where they'd been developed. There were even plastic bags full of old photos we'd

taken from a secretary desk in my grandmother's house when we sold it years ago.

I figured I'd have time to go through them all at my leisure once I was settled into my new abode. I had already displayed a number of favorites on shelves conveniently built into my main hallway, and had >

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hung or displayed a few cherished ones here and there around the apartment.

But the boxes containing the bulk of them were occupying considerable closet space, increasing the incentive to get started as soon as possible.

A box at a time, I spread everything out on the living room rug, generally discarding the frames to save space, unless they were photos of my ancestors in antique frames, in which case I generally let them be and added them to my photo shelves.

As anyone who has gone through family photos knows, this is a time-consuming and emotion-filled process. Each one triggers memories – of the person (or animal), the occasion it was taken, the mood, etc. Mostly happy times, hence the photo, but occasionally someone is frowning – what brought that on? Ah, remember that trip to Oaxaca? And there are Mom and Dad in Alaska. Look at Chris as a baby, and Mom as a little girl!



A built-in shelf or bookcase may be the ideal place to display favorite family photos. PHOTO BY MARY LARSEN

STACKS OF MEMORIES

Reluctantly, off they go, into their piles. There are separate stacks for each person, except for old friends, which get lumped into one pile, and distant family members, which share another. There are piles for trips (greatly edited – too much scenery and not enough people qualifies them for the recycling pile); piles for places we’ve lived. Often there are duplicates (those

photo shops often had “second set free” specials, which was great when we wanted to share, but now it’s time to part with the extras we hung onto). As long as there are good ones of a particular person, it’s OK to discard the really unflattering ones – who would want to be remembered that way? >

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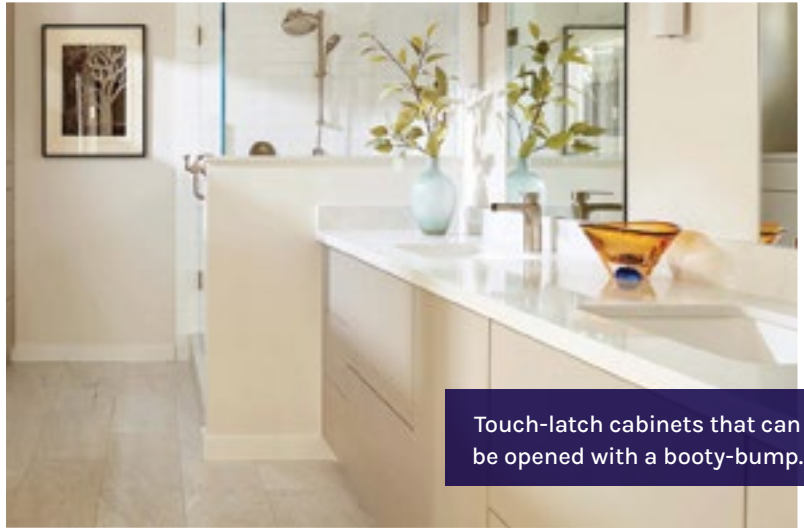
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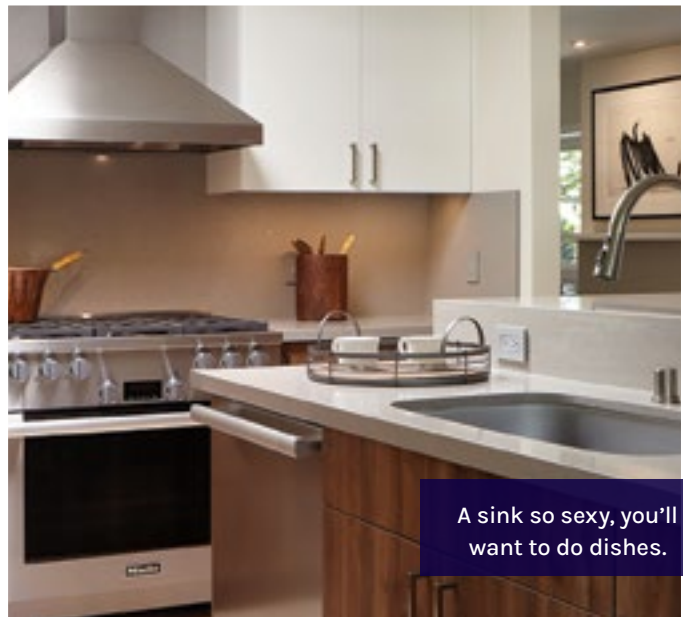
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*I want to see all of my loved ones
as I walk down my hall, or look up
from my computer, or wherever else
I've placed them.*

— Mary Larsen

I also made piles for my brothers to look through – baby/childhood photos; photos of them with our parents and grandparents – the ones they chose not to take went into the piles I was saving.

I framed several more favorites for the shelves and put the rest into smaller boxes, organized as much as possible by category. Those boxes are now easily accessible under the bottom shelf of the photo unit.

Don't have a built-in photo shelf? (I never did before, either!) A similar concept would be a dedicated bookcase,

a room-divider screen (some are made specifically to hold photos) or large multiple-picture frames (there are some attractive handmade wooden ones available on Etsy). Or simply frame your favorites and hang them in a hallway or stairwell.

While I have scanned some photos over the years, mostly as a safety measure in case of fire or natural disaster, many people choose to scan them all. You can have someone else do it through companies like Legacybox or DigMyPics, or you can laboriously do it yourself. The thing is, how often will you look at those scanned photos? (Probably as often as you look at the ones stored on your phone or sent to the Cloud.) As a backup, scanning is a great idea, but I want to see all of my loved ones as I walk down my hall, or look up from my computer, or wherever else I've placed them.

The dusting may be a bit daunting, but it will be worth it. ♦



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CONQUERING CLUTTER

BY LYN ROGERS
SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

HONORING THE PAST

Sorting sentimental items requires careful consideration

Grandma's cookbooks. Your dad's tools. Love letters from high school. What do they all have in common? They are considered priceless treasures with memories that almost beg to be kept forever, but should they? Is it possible to honor the gift or the inheritance while not creating overwhelming clutter at the same time?

We often feel pressured, perhaps by family or even our own guilt, for holding onto items, even if we barely have enough room for our own possessions. What would Great Aunt Alice say if she knew we didn't keep her rusty egg beater? Would Grandpa Fred >



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have felt annoyed that we recycled his schoolwork from kindergarten? Do we need to keep all of the furniture that our parents inherited from their parents?

Think about your personal decorative or utilitarian preferences in your own home: Would you purchase any of these items right now to complement your current way of life? Do you have extra room to accommodate furniture that duplicates what you already

own but is far less useful? What about appliances that made sense for someone who had a different dietary preference than you do?

Are you someone who never wears jewelry but now has possession of countless pieces of costume jewelry that you've been told are family heirlooms and you also think are really ugly? What about the doll collection that scared you as a child? Do you have an obligation to keep them all?

The simple answer: No. You can both honor the person who gifted or bequeathed them to you while setting boundaries for yourself. This doesn't mean you have to reject everything that's offered to you, just that you need to make careful decisions about what makes sense for you to keep. Rather than keeping all 12 fancy teacup sets, you can hang onto the one set that brings you the most joy. Everything in your dad's tool chest may be too much to store, but saving the handful of tools that you both used to put together your go-kart can bring back happy memories.

You can honor the past by taking lots of pictures for a photo album (physical or digital) or a scrapbook. Costume jewelry, fancy ball gowns, suits and hats can be donated to a local theater company. Furniture and kitchen items in good condition can be gifted to families in need. Books and other forms of media are always welcome by the library for its next fundraising sale.

By passing on those items you don't actually need to others who do, you



Many people have jewelry boxes full of pieces they will never wear but hold onto because of guilt or sentimentality. ADOBE STOCK/COURTNEY

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Consolidate your photo collection into physical or digital albums that you can access handily. ADOBE STOCK/IRINA

honor the memory of the person who loved you. It doesn't mean you love them less, it means that their gifts will expand to bless so many more people than they could ever have imagined. That is the legacy we want to leave behind. ❖

Los Altos resident Lyn Rogers is a professional organizer and owner and CEO of Lyn At Your Service. For more information, visit LynAtYourService.com.

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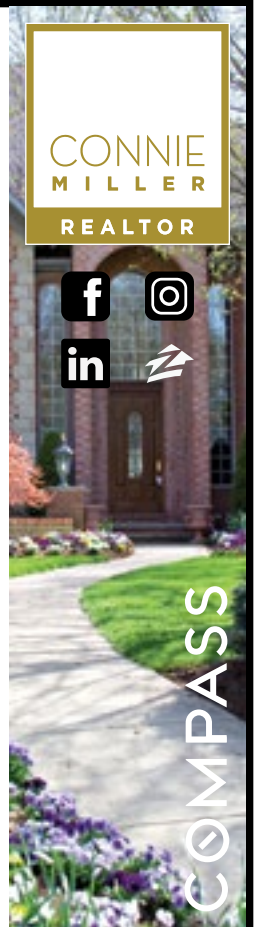
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FUN AND FUNCTION

Painting projects boost creativity at home

SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

With the hectic pace of a new school year beginning, now may be the time to grab your paint brushes and rollers, and take time to create fun, creative and functional spaces for the entire family.

The following projects – suggested by Ace Hardware, which has a location in Mountain View – are easy and economical. >

Chalk paint can turn any wall or cabinet into a fun DIY project. ADOBE STOCK/OLEG KOHOHOB

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A kitchen pantry message board proves functional for parents and fun for kids. WESTLAKE ACE HARDWARE

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The creamy white flowers of St. Catherine's Lace age to russet tones. PHOTOS BY TANYA KUČAK

A PLAN FOR PLANTING

Summer and early fall prove season of drama and subtlety

BY TANYA KUČAK

SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

From approximately June through September, most California native plants that are drought-adapted need little care other than occasional water if they are not yet established or if a heat wave is anticipated.

Gardeners' goals determine their maintenance routines. If survival of the fittest is the rule, the gardener plants during the rainy season, waters well, then leaves the plants alone. For a more manicured look, plants might be installed with drip irrigation and monitored regularly so they look their best at all times. Whatever the gardening regimen, summer and early fall can be both the most dramatic and the subtlest season in the native garden. >



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Although spring bloomers look more delicate, plants that are floriferous in late summer and fall are some of the most tenacious, even aggressive, perennials: California fuchsia, goldenrod and showy milkweed. All four of these can take over a garden bed, so they are best planted where they cannot overrun more well-behaved plants. Most of the year they are in the background, but once they begin to bloom, they command attention.

Garden designers strive to create contrast in gardens by pairing cool



Cow Parsnip
As the cow parsnip plants die back by midsummer, the dry stalks and interesting seedheads remain.

and hot colors, but California fuchsia achieves this goal all on its own. Many of its cultivars have leaves in shades of blue-gray to pale gray, paired with hummingbird-attracting flowers in saturated reds and oranges. Goldenrod sports intense yellow froth at the tips of its narrow stems, inviting tiny pollinators. And showy milkweed dies to the ground in winter, emerging in midsummer from spreading roots or seeds.

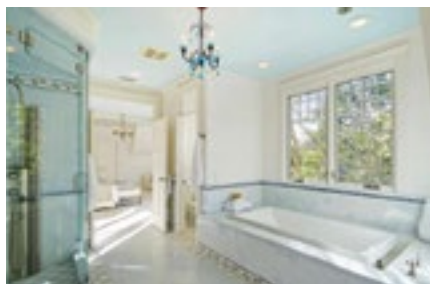


Showy Milkweed
Showy milkweed blooms in midsummer and produces large pods of fluffy seeds. It's best grown in informal gardens, where its tendency to roam about the garden and elbow less robust plants aside can be accommodated. Native grasses make good companions.

Other flowering perennials and shrubs are more subtle. As summer proceeds, native buckwheats retain their flowering stems. But as the flowers age, they slowly turn from shades of cream, pink or yellow to muted russets. Gardeners schooled in the practice of deadheading might prune back the stems, but another option is to appreciate the slow color changes and allow the plants to go to seed, attracting more birds to the garden. >



California Fuchsia
Most cultivars of California fuchsia start blooming slowly, with a flower here and there. Once they are in full bloom, the plant is covered in flowers until winter. Once frost nips the plants and the foliage starts to die back, it's best to prune California fuchsia an inch or so high to keep its growth more compact.



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California buckeye trees are the most prominent summer-deciduous plant. For sheer sculptural beauty, a buckeye that has lost its leaves is hard to beat. Its soft, thin leaves come out in winter and dry up by early summer, in contrast to winter-deciduous trees that leaf out in spring and lose their leaves in fall. Other natives have adapted to long stretches without rainfall in different ways. ❖



Rose Hips
Often clusters of bright-red rose hips appear while native roses still have flowers.



Mountain Mahogany
The featherlike seeds are the showiest feature of mountain mahogany. This tall shrub blends into the background in other seasons. Backlit by the sun, the profusion of plummy seeds makes the plant glow.

Strategies that enable SUN-LOVING PLANTS to keep their leaves during summer include the following.

- ❖ Some manzanitas hold their bright-green leaves perpendicular to the sun.
- ❖ White sage and showy milkweed have white or gray leaves that reflect sunlight.
- ❖ Thick leaves of coffeeberry or toyon hold moisture better than soft, thin leaves.
- ❖ Leaf hairs on fremontodendron leaves minimize evaporation from the leaves. Late summer is a good time to look for the subtle – or sometimes dramatic – beauty of seed pods and berries.
- ❖ Native roses can have prodigious clusters of bright-red rose hips.
- ❖ Desert willow pods have engaging curlicues.
- ❖ The fuzzy tails of mountain mahogany seeds catch light and give the entire shrub a dramatic presence.
- ❖ Large milkweed pods are stuffed with bits of white fluff attached to small dark seeds.

*Tanya Kucak gardens organically.
Email her at tanya.garden@gmail.com.*

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Prevention and preparedness

How to protect your home from wildfires

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We are facing another active wildfire season this year, with heat waves and drought conditions hammering the West Coast and several fires already triggering evacuations. As wildfires continue to burn more intensely, it's important to remember that preparation is key.

In the current climate, proactive home maintenance can be the difference between mitigating small problems or tackling more costly problems down the line. Nearly one in three homeowners reported damage from severe weather or climate-related issues in the past year, and only two in five made updates to their homes to protect themselves against these types of problems, according to the Homeowners Preparedness Report from Hippo, a home insurance provider.

While many of the elements causing wildfires are out of people's control, there are important things homeowners can do to protect their homes and their families. Hippo recommends proactively maintaining your home and its surrounding areas to create a clear, defensible space to prevent wildfire damage.

🔥 Create defensible space. Move or store all patio/outdoor furniture, trampolines, woodpiles, barbecue grills, etc., outside the defensible space.

Landscape your home and entire property with wildfire prevention and safety in mind, including selecting fire-retardant trees, shrubs and building materials.

The local fire department can always guide you with best practices catered to the area.

🔥 **Maintain the critical structures** on your property. Clean the roofs and all of the gutters of your home and outbuildings on the property.

🔥 **Have the tools** in your toolkit if a wildfire occurs. Have a garden hose long enough to reach anywhere around your home and any other structure on your property.

If you live in a two-story house, purchase collapsible ladders for each upstairs bedroom. Typical ladders measure 15 feet and cover two stories of your home.

Homes should include wildfire preparedness in their emergency plans, and the first step is assembling a wildfire readiness kit.

For a downloadable template, visit hippo.com/blog/emergency-preparedness-checklist.

🔥 **Install smart smoke and carbon dioxide detectors** outside each bedroom and on each level of your home, including attics, basements and garages. A smart detector provides alarm notifications on your smartphone, unlike other smoke detectors. You can connect it to your home security system so that it can easily alert the fire department of any problems within your home, even when you're not there.

🔥 **Create an evacuation plan.** Plan two evacuation routes in each room of your home. Keep a whistle in each of your bedrooms to wake up your family members in the night if there's a fire. Teach your family >



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how to feel the temperature of the bottom of doors, and avoid opening doors if they are too hot.

Keep the plan in a safe place, where anyone can access it, such as your refrigerator.

Keep a few fire extinguishers in the home and garage.

If you do experience a wildfire and evacuation, it's important to conduct a thorough inspection of your home upon returning. ❖

*For a post-wildfire checklist, visit
hippo.com/sites/default/files/content/WildfirePost.pdf.*

*To read Hippo's preparedness report, visit
hippo.com/blog/homeowner-preparedness-report.*

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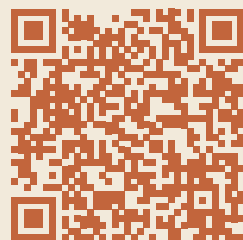
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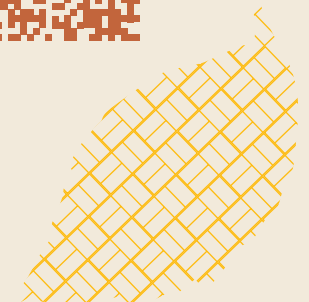
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