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Mix It Up
CRUNCH
Pop-Secret
The Big One 2

Marshall Mini Storage
STORAGE

AS IS

FACIA

Our Progress After 2000

Strawberry
Soy Dream
STUCK
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Nutrition



ART IN AMERICA

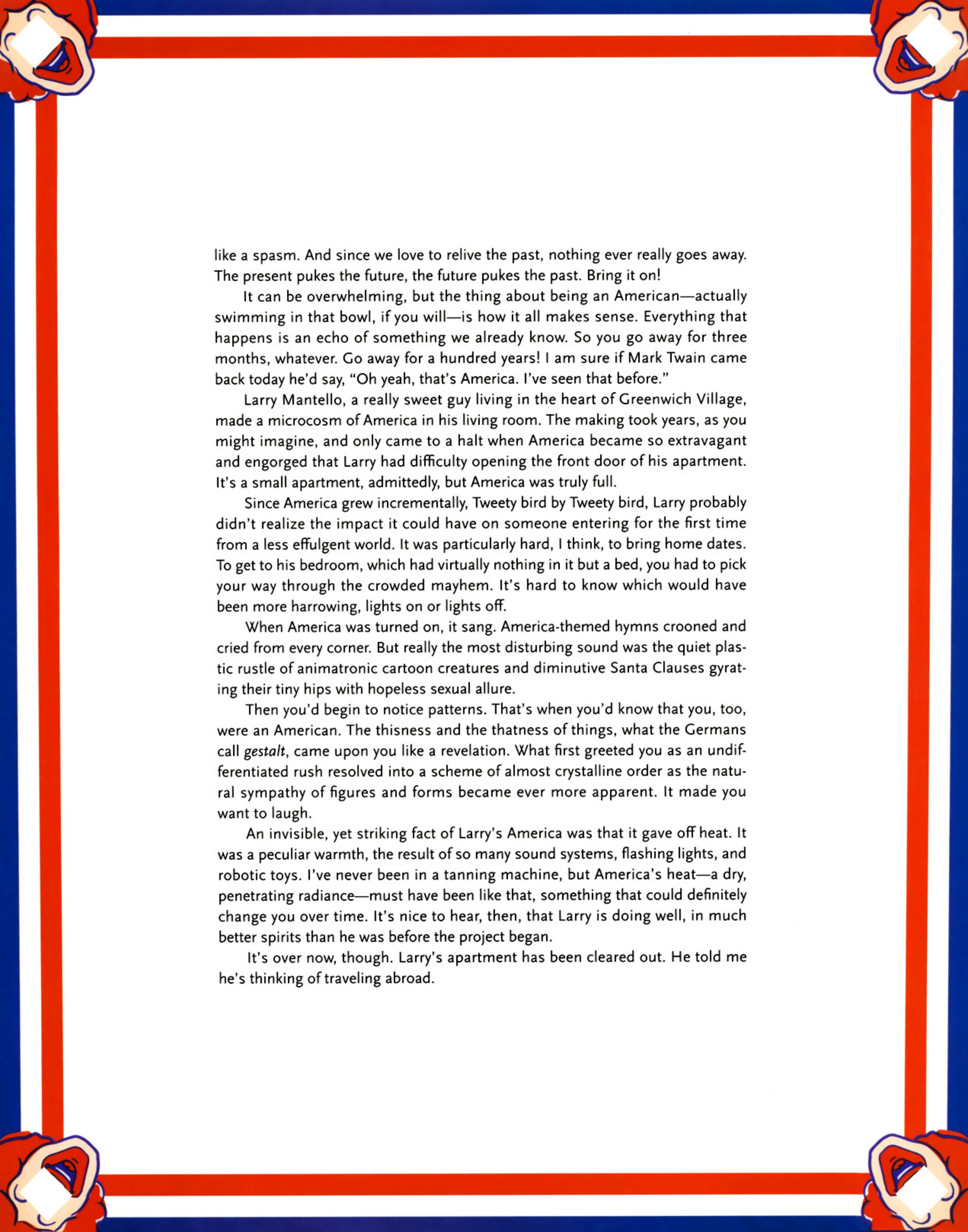
**LARRY MANTELLO CRAMS TWINKLING TWITTERING AMERICA INTO HIS
GREENWICH VILLAGE LIVING ROOM.**

Text LAWRENCE RINDER *Photographs* HISHAM BHAROOCHA

Returning to the United States after several months abroad, you feel like a goldfish plopped back into the old, familiar bowl after a couple of hours gasping for air on a dusty floor. The rigid but somehow reassuring plastic seaweed, the fetching bubble-spewing waterwheel and tiny arching bridge, the pink-and-blue gravel all say "Welcome home." The cool, wet water is not just around you, it is *of* you.

There's something about this country. It's so happy, for one. Unrelentingly happy. Our national seal shouldn't be a pyramid with an eye peeping out, it should be a smiley face. "Look on the bright side," we say. If you're a rich American, you're happy for obvious reasons. If you're poor, you can always go to McDonald's and eat dinner for a dollar in a clean, bright, and cheerful setting. As the Shaker tune says, "'Tis the gift to be simple." Look on the bright side.

Then there's the so-muchness of America. There's so much of America and so much in it. What generosity of goods! Forgive the metaphor, but there's something rather like regurgitation in the way this culture is daily born. It's uncontrollable,



like a spasm. And since we love to relive the past, nothing ever really goes away. The present pukes the future, the future pukes the past. Bring it on!

It can be overwhelming, but the thing about being an American—actually swimming in that bowl, if you will—is how it all makes sense. Everything that happens is an echo of something we already know. So you go away for three months, whatever. Go away for a hundred years! I am sure if Mark Twain came back today he'd say, "Oh yeah, that's America. I've seen that before."

Larry Mantello, a really sweet guy living in the heart of Greenwich Village, made a microcosm of America in his living room. The making took years, as you might imagine, and only came to a halt when America became so extravagant and engorged that Larry had difficulty opening the front door of his apartment. It's a small apartment, admittedly, but America was truly full.

Since America grew incrementally, Tweety bird by Tweety bird, Larry probably didn't realize the impact it could have on someone entering for the first time from a less effulgent world. It was particularly hard, I think, to bring home dates. To get to his bedroom, which had virtually nothing in it but a bed, you had to pick your way through the crowded mayhem. It's hard to know which would have been more harrowing, lights on or lights off.

When America was turned on, it sang. America-themed hymns crooned and cried from every corner. But really the most disturbing sound was the quiet plastic rustle of animatronic cartoon creatures and diminutive Santa Clauses gyrating their tiny hips with hopeless sexual allure.

Then you'd begin to notice patterns. That's when you'd know that you, too, were an American. The thisness and the thatness of things, what the Germans call *gestalt*, came upon you like a revelation. What first greeted you as an undifferentiated rush resolved into a scheme of almost crystalline order as the natural sympathy of figures and forms became ever more apparent. It made you want to laugh.

An invisible, yet striking fact of Larry's America was that it gave off heat. It was a peculiar warmth, the result of so many sound systems, flashing lights, and robotic toys. I've never been in a tanning machine, but America's heat—a dry, penetrating radiance—must have been like that, something that could definitely change you over time. It's nice to hear, then, that Larry is doing well, in much better spirits than he was before the project began.

It's over now, though. Larry's apartment has been cleared out. He told me he's thinking of traveling abroad.

