

Vancouver Mini Maker Faire®

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Meet Your Speakers: Wendy Tremayne, The Good Life Lab and Swap-O-Rama-Rama



Mikey and Wendy, photo (c) Wendy Tremayne

Wendy Tremayne is an [Alpha Maker](#) with multiple identities: forager, builder, herbalist, engineer, welder... just to name a few. She also former creative director of New York marketing firm Green Galactic, [conceptual artist](#), [yoga teacher](#), and fearless DIY homesteader in a former trailer park in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico.

But one of the most interesting things about Wendy is that she creates value out of garbage.

- That old washing machine? A big colander for washing harvests.
- Camp cooler? A fermenter.
- Caution tape? A dress!

...say what?!

A strong voice in the maker community, Wendy will be speaking at this year's [Vancouver Mini Maker Faire](#), where she'll share ideas on how to live a decommodified life while improving one's connection to the self, the land, and to other people.

Wendy's forthcoming book, *The Good Life Lab: Radical Experiments in Hands on Living* lays out her inspiring principles and offbeat ideas. Part memoir, part DIY manual, the book tells story of how Wendy and her partner Mikey Sklar moved from NYC to Truth or Consequences, N.M., where they bought a one-acre abandoned RV park and remodelled a 40-year-old mobile home using mostly materials from the waste stream. You can read all about it on their blog [Holy Scrap](#).

Her book offers tutorials on everything from making your own toothpaste to hacking your appliances, and is a must-read for anyone interested in developing their self-sufficiency.

In addition, Wendy created [Swap-O-Rama-Rama](#): a community clothing swap where people get together, exchange used clothes and deconstruct them to make new duds using sewing machines and crafting tools. People are encouraged to explore their creativity, cover up branding, and make new works of art from the mix. These workshops based on her model now happen in [one hundred cities](#) across the continent, with one held [here in February](#).

As an avid [clothes swapper and alterer](#) myself, I am really excited by this idea! In fact, a lot of Wendy's ideas appeal to me. She's interested in living less like a consumer and more like a creator, which is really inspiring – particularly for anyone who feels burdened by the never-ending quest for accumulating stuff.

I caught up with Wendy over email about her book, her projects, and what she plans on bringing to Maker Faire, and here's what she had to say:

What's your book *The Good Life Lab: Radical Experiments in Hands on Living* all about?

WT: The book is part memoir and part tutorials. It begins with my story and my partner Mikey's, of leaving the career track in NYC by quitting our jobs and moving out to rural New Mexico to find a life that has less to do with money; a decommodified life as a maker of things instead of a buyer of things. We made pledges that lead the way. These include: to not make decisions based on money, to live from the waste stream and from nature, and to make everything ourselves. We share how we addressed fundamental things like the cost of living, how we created a [cottage industry](#), home manufacturing, and rediscovering our connection to nature.

In your book, you teach the art of making biofuel, appliances, structures, gardens, food, and medicine. What's the strangest or most interesting thing you learned in the process of making all your own stuff?

WT: We tried to solve problems based on the best knowledge available in the moment, so our solutions were unusual. For months we towed a homemade mixer around the neighborhood. Each day we filled it with phone books and newspaper, and water. A blade inside the mixer chopped the paper into a pulp when it was pulled by our truck. We poured the mix into slabs and made a 300+ foot privacy wall that we then mortared with another paper mix. We learned that the local prickly pear cactus had been used by natives to make a water resistant finish, so we threw that in the mix too. Of course there was other experimentation as well: a paper couch, hundreds of blocks that when drying in the yard looked like a cemetery, a paper building. In no time our property was a kind of spectacle to tourists. I've found that once I begin making something I'm immediately captivated and everything else fades away. Once connected to a problem to solve, we are in the present moment and it's exciting.



Wendy and the paper concrete mixer, photo (c) Holy Scrap, excerpted from The Good Life Lab (c) Wendy Jehanara Tremayne. Used with permission of Storey Publishing.



Wendy and the paper concrete wall, photo (c) Holy Scrap

You also present reasons for makers to share their innovations and ideas through open source and creative commons licenses. Why is it important to share knowledge?

WT: Copyrights, patents, the model of franchises are examples of ways that civilization promotes the idea that there is not enough to go around. Capitalism requires consumption and consumption is based on a belief in scarcity. If we believed there was enough of everything, we wouldn't bother trying to possess things or ideas. These artificial modes of securing ideas have creative people believing in the concept of a last good idea. After all, if we believed we were full of great ideas we'd easily give them all away. If we buy into this model and hoard ideas and knowledge, then we spend our lives defending and protecting ideas instead of having them. Alternatively, when we give our ideas away, we become evidence that there is enough to go around. When knowledge is set free, humanity becomes abundant. When it is hoarded, a few become wealthy.

Can you tell us what attending a [Swap-O-Rama-Rama](#) is like?

WT: Swap-O-Rama-Rama is a stunning bazaar of irregularity. At a swap there is fastening, unknitting, grommeting, zip tying, painting, sewing, silk screening and things you just can't imagine. Glue guns, seam rippers, looms, and blow dryers mingle with board game pieces, shoes, snaps and feathers. It is a textile wonder world that produces beautiful hybridizations made from waste.

Swap-O-Rama-Rama also produces stories. What people make themselves contains memory, experience, a reminder of a friend made, echoes of laughter from a moment that led to a creation. For this reason what is made at Swap-O-Rama-Rama does not get kicked to the curb like the donated goods that are the foundation of the event. Little tricks embed in the structure of the event prod people in the right directions.

For example, there are no mirrors. This encourages everyone to turn one another and say, "how do I look?" Swap-O-Rama-Rama's are remarkably diverse. In the default world we have grown accustomed to being divided by brands which segregate us by socio economic status and lifestyle. People of all ages, both genders, and every ethnicity attend Swap-O-Rama-Rama where brands are covered over and everyone identifies by what we all have in common, our creativity.

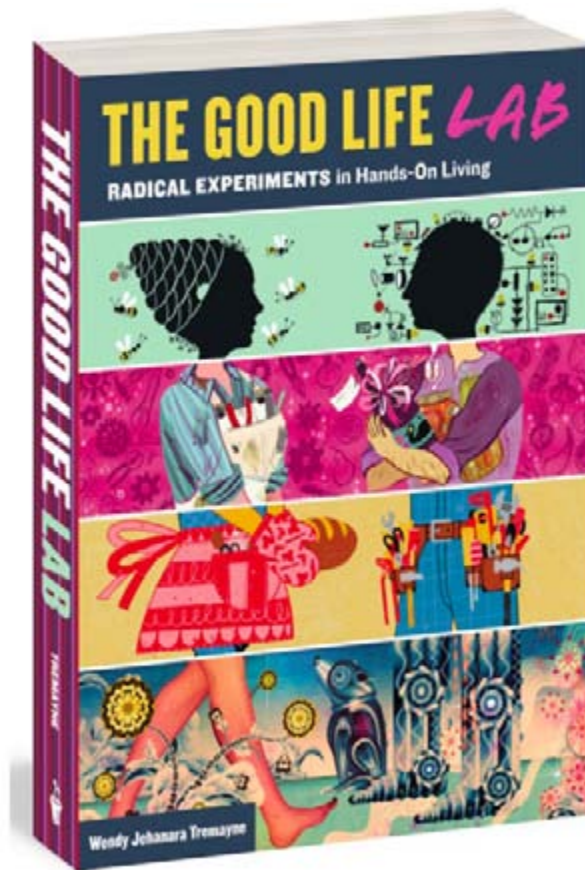
What will you be discussing at Vancouver Mini Maker Faire this year?

WT: I'm excited to tell folks about my book [The Good Life Lab](#) coming out on June 5th. Our decommodified lifestyle has led our kitchen to be more like a lab, and so we thought we'd share that by making and sharing yummy popsicles made on a DIY anti-griddle that "cooks" using dry ice.

Mikey and I will also share stories, tell what we got right and did wrong, give tips, and also invite contemplative questions to be considered. For example, it's time that we all ask questions like, "what is the cost of these jobs?" and "is there a life that can be lived without making money a priority?" We'll also share our conclusions, and what we've learned from living seven years as full-time makers of things without standard jobs. Mikey won't be on the whole tour, so this is a great opportunity to meet him. We hope to see you!

So check out Wendy's talk at [Vancouver Mini Maker Faire](#) on Saturday, June 1.

Also, her book [The Good Life Lab](#) will be available at Maker Faire, on [Amazon](#), and in stores June 5th. It's got a ton of valuable resources for the homesteader, builder, crafter and philosopher alike. Not only is it the manual for life in a post-consumer age, it's peppered throughout with the most *beautiful* artwork contributed by a community of artists and illustrators.



The Good Life Lab

By Wendy Jehanara Tremayne

\$22.95 CAN

Storey Publishing, June 2013

Distributed exclusively in Canada through Thomas Allen and Sons

With the advent of fast fashion more than 68 pounds of clothing and textiles are disposed of per person per year in North America. Let's try to turn this around from the ground up by using creativity and innovation! Drop by [Charcoal Couture](#) at Vancouver Mini Maker Faire with an unwanted T-shirt or two from your closet for their donation box and receive 10% off a purchase from their up-cycled kids clothing, eclectic button and jewelry selection.

Haven't got your Vancouver Mini Maker Faire day tickets yet?

Stop by [The Hackery](#) and [Lee's Electronics](#) for a special promo code. The Hackery and Lee's also still have paper ticket weekend passes available at EarlyBird prices. Get 'em before they're gone!

[Lee's Electronics](#) — 4522 Main Street

[The Hackery](#) — 304 Victoria Drive @thehackery

Written by Lena Ross on May 15th, 2013



Tags: [Holy Scrap](#), [Swap-O-Rama-Rama](#), [The Good Life Lab](#), [Wendy Tremayne](#)
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