

TO THE CENTER AND BACK



Like Robert Ferré's life—and this story.
It's a lot of turns and twists.

To walk a labyrinth is to follow a path of discovery, full of

BY SALLY ANN FLECKER



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK FERGUSON

ONE UNEXPECTEDLY STEAMY AFTERNOON IN ST. LOUIS LAST May, master labyrinth artist Robert Ferré '66 was giving me an impromptu lesson on sacred geometry—elegant ratios and forms found in nature that inspired the builders of the great medieval cathedrals. We were at a Blimpie inside a Wal-Mart, drinking lemonade. It's quite pleasant to listen to Ferré talk. He speaks with authority and thoughtful fascination for his subject. His voice is distinctive—at once musical and rough, silk and sawdust—and his words flow as though they're winding their way downstream. All the while, in counterpoint to Ferré's soft exposition, two counter clerks were shouting a running

conversation to each other as they wiped down the work surface and refilled the soda dispenser. On whether sacred proportions might be found in a fast-food joint inside a mecca of mass consumption, Ferré didn't opine.

Talking about sacred geometry is second nature to Ferré. He's given lectures on the topic at the Labyrinth Society, which he co-founded in the late 1990s. He talks about it when he teaches weekend-long seminars in his studio at Labyrinth Enterprises, which he and his late wife Ruth Hanna founded 12 years ago when drawing the labyrinth turned from an obsession for Ferré into a viable business. The principles of sacred geometry are what he uses to design labyrinths, so he tends to mention it in passing the way someone else might mention data spreadsheets or e-mail. A conversation with Ferré about sacred geometry will touch on the history of mathematics in the Western world, the tools of a 12th-century artisan, an appreciation for a world tottering on the cusp of the Renaissance, and, of course, the labyrinth.

The labyrinth is a beautifully intricate form of concentric lines or circles. Labyrinths turn up in many cultures and ages as a powerful symbol. One of the definitions for labyrinth in *The American Heritage Dictionary* is "maze." People in the labyrinth community take umbrage at this. Both labyrinths and mazes feature pathways that are organized in complicated patterns. But there's an important difference in function. Mazes are meant as a puzzle, a left-brain challenge, replete with misleading pathways and dead ends. (Mazes are trickery, one woman told me.) For sure, mazes are something to find your way out of.

In a way, a labyrinth is simpler—a journey to the center and back. When you walk a labyrinth, the paths fold in on themselves in ways that make it hard to predict where you are heading at any given moment, and in that sense a labyrinth is a brainteaser. But all that is required of you is to stay on the path. Besides, where you are going isn't the point of a labyrinth. The point of walking a labyrinth is walking a labyrinth.

Sally Ann Flecker is a writer and editorial consultant from Pittsburgh. She wrote about Mark Dowie '62, "the most famous journalist you've never heard of," in the Spring 2006 issue of this magazine.

"Why did they take a one- or two-ton piece of stone, carve it in this incredibly intricate way, haul it all the way up to the top, and fit it all together?" he asks.

"What they were doing is so far from the modern mindset that it doesn't even make sense to us. Why would you even bother? Why would you do that? But bothering was what it was all about."

IHAD ARRIVED IN ST. LOUIS EARLIER THAT DAY ON an assignment, an opportunity, and a quest. The assignment—to see Ferré at his studio and to walk a few of his labyrinths. The opportunity—a chance to have some time to reflect. The quest—a personal and ongoing one for me—defining what I believe.

I have children—which means continually confronting what I think I know and exploring what I don't know. "What do I believe?" has become a pressing question—because, after all, the kids will eventually quiz me on it. But the only opportunities for stillness and contemplation in my life are the odd thirty seconds when I'm not catching my four-year-old before he tries to stick a landing from the fourth step of our stairs or admiring the twenty papers my five-year-old has proudly scribbled in less time than, per his request, it will take for me to tape them onto the wall. Spending a few days in Robert Ferré's world of labyrinths had sounded like a chance not only to meet someone fascinating but to breathe deeply.

You'd never mistake Robert Ferré for someone else. He's tall and thin with toughened arms and skinny legs and a quiet sweetness to his expression that masks a sharp intellect and shrewd business sense. His hair and

moustache could probably be described by one of the nine words Eskimos have for snow. Before I met him in person, I had seen pictures of him on his web site. When I drove to the studio the first time, I was driving almost slowly enough to see addresses but not so much as to induce road rage in the cars behind me. Although I missed Ferré's building when I went past, I did catch a glimpse of white hair inside a fenced parking lot. That was enough to make me turn around. When I saw Ferré up close, I was surprised to find that for something so brilliant and iconic, his crowning glory is really quite fluffy, like a handful of dandelion wisps.

Labyrinths have roots in ancient times, but thanks, in some good measure, to Ferré, they're not history. Labyrinth Enterprises has turned out almost a thousand walking labyrinths to date. These are, in fact, heady times for what Ferré sometimes refers to as the labyrinth movement—particularly in the United States where there are so many golden opportunities to heap one's plate high with stress and anxiety. People walk the labyrinth as a personal meditation, as a way to reduce stress, or as a spiritual practice. Ferré calls it a body prayer.

Ferré's first labyrinths were portable—hand-drawn and painted on canvas, and they continue to be a thriving part of his business, but he's branched out. He has created permanent labyrinths for churches, hospital courtyards, retreat centers, colleges, parks, private homes, and run-of-the-mill suburban backyards. He can make labyrinths out of concrete, paving bricks, limestone, mulch, grass, snow, stones, wooden blocks, and masking tape. Once, with a class of ninth-graders, he made a labyrinth by lining up cans of Spaghettios.

The day we met, Ferré and his studio manager, Judy Hopfen, were cleaning out the trailer—a small, well-traveled appendage to his big white truck. Ferré had been pulling things out of the trailer since seven o'clock. He had returned the week before from Murray, Utah, where he and a five-person crew had spent nine days in the shadow of the Wasatch Mountains building a labyrinth for a new medical center.

Now the sun was straight overhead, casting a harsh light on the piles of tools and equipment scattered around the trailer—safety glasses, shiny black rubber gloves, big plastic tool boxes, scraping tools, rolls



of yellow caution tape, a grinder, a measuring tape, screwdrivers, and a metal mallet. Ferré starts every installation with a fully stocked and organized trailer. By the time the job is done, though, he and his crew are so tired and ready to sleep in their own beds that they don't so much pack the trailer as stuff all the tools and equipment back in. "What's this?" Hopfen asks, pulling a flat concrete hand out of the pile. "We poured concrete into a rubber glove," Ferré answers. He looks, for a moment, like a 10-year-old boy who has done something he knows he shouldn't have but who still can't suppress how hysterically funny he thinks it

is. "That's what happens when you have artists on the job," he shrugs.

Art and spirituality notwithstanding, labyrinth making is dirty, industrial work. Ferré and Hopfen both dress lightly, in well-worn clothing. Hopfen has two Sharpies neatly clipped onto the neckline of her tank top. Ferré wears an old pink, blue, and grey tie-dye t-shirt tucked into neatly belted blue-jean shorts and white socks with black Z-coils—athletic-looking shoes that make contact with the ground via a two-inch coil that looks like a bed spring. They are unapologetically geeky shoes—the kind that would have caused you no end of grief in middle school. The springs give his knees a break, he tells me later. Otherwise the long stretches of kneeling on a concrete slab to draw or score a labyrinth would be near impossible for him.

One of the boxes on the ground holds green tennis balls and white ropes. The balls cushion the long compass of one of Ferré's inventions, the Lunar Lander. The Lunar Lander is part scooter, part compass, part saw. It's a second-generation tool, an improvement over his original Lunar Rover. The name is Ferré's sly nod to the half-moon detail, called a lunation, which encircles the 12th century labyrinth that he makes replicas of. The lunations are because of the lunar calendar, Ferré tells me. And also, he adds, you have to be kind of looney to spend a whole day cutting lines into concrete.

Since there are no commercially made tools to aid in the construction of labyrinths, he's contrived quite a few of his own. In the days to come, he'll be at his bench inventing new tools to rout perfect labyrinth lines and

curves into the tiny deck floor he's already built to experiment on. He enjoys saying things like, "Today I'll be inventing a new tool to rout labyrinth lines into decking." His ability to define a need and devise a mechanical solution is one of the things he admires in himself.

Hopen and Ferré begin to reload the trailer. Rows of neatly labeled plastic bins line the back wall. Ferré hands her a package wrapped in a grape-colored corduroy shirt. "This is a precision scale," he tells me. "Literally. It's from the Precision Scales Company." He's unapologetic for his corny sense of humor. Hopen begins to wrap the scale more befittingly in plastic bubble wrap. "You can have your shirt back," she tells him.

Labyrinth Enterprise occupies the second floor of the former Carriage Works building, a solid structure built in 1885 to repair horse-drawn streetcars. Some of the equipment used to hoist the trolleys remains. It's been painstakingly restored and its warm red brick sandblasted. Its South St. Louis neighborhood has seen better days though. The parking lot is enclosed with a high chain-link fence and a gate that is locked at night. More than once, someone—Ferré is sure it's kids—has come into the parking lot in broad daylight and stolen a license plate right off a car. The police just shrug. Ferré has proposed, half seriously, buying a paintball gun and tagging trespassers bright orange. He imagines the thieves going home and having to explain the mark away. On the up side, the neighborhood is in transition, Ferré says. "Two new art galleries have opened up right around the corner," Hopen says. Ferré tells me they have six or seven years left in their lease. "By that time," he says, "the neighborhood might be downright genteel."

"Our universe is made of geometry. Atoms are made of geometry, and geometry has numbers and proportions. So it's not just that the number three came to have this symbolism because of the Trinity or something like that. It's because numbers are us."

THE PATH THAT LED ROBERT FERRÉ TO Labyrinth-making runs through the renowned Cathedral of Chartres in northern France. Ferré had visited the cathedral when he was still in college and then again during the 1980s when he lived in the Pyrenees Mountains. When he began a sideline in 1989 taking groups to France, he included a stop at Chartres as part of the tour. There is no way for a visitor to miss the 40-foot stone labyrinth set into the floor of the nave, but it hadn't yet taken hold of his curiosity.

In 1995, Ferré's wife Ruth clipped an article she thought Ferré would find interesting. An Episcopal priest in San Francisco was using a portable canvas labyrinth for people to walk, as a tool for meditation and renewal. What caught their attention was the fact that it was modeled after the Chartres labyrinth. Had it been another labyrinth, they probably would have never given it a second look. Ferré didn't know it yet, but the direction of his life had begun to shift. His next tour group already was scheduled for late June. Ruth learned that on the summer solstice, the chairs that usually cover the labyrinth at Chartres are removed and people are allowed to walk it. Ferré rearranged the trip. That June 21st, for the first time, he walked a labyrinth.

Something about the experience caught his fancy. That summer, he sat at his drawing table, night after night, trying to discover the geometry of the Chartres labyrinth. In front of him was a postcard with a well-known photograph of the labyrinth, taken from above looking down. He would try to take measurements at that miniscule scale to figure out the proportions of one part to another. It left a lot to be desired, he says. For one thing, he learned later, the photograph had been shot from the keystone, which is slightly to one side. Whenever he got the north and south quadrants of the labyrinth worked out, the east and west would be elliptical. But he kept at it. He wanted to be able to draw the labyrinth the way the master builder at Chartres had, with his only tools a compass and a straight edge, not even a ruler. The times that his drawing went in the right direction, he would get so excited that he would stay up half the night. When he talks about the experience now, he says that it was almost mystical.

In the years since he unraveled the Chartres labyrinth, he has measured every aspect of the real labyrinth. He's made 50 trips there, all told. He's spent so much time in the cathedral that he's been permitted to explore parts of the cathedral not seen by the general public. Once he clambered around to the back of the uppermost walkway and looked behind small latched doors into tiny gables that can't be seen from the ground. Some of the spaces were being used for storage. But when Ferré went into one of the empty rooms and looked up, he found a tiny vaulted ceiling with 12 ribs,

which gave him pause. He knew the history of the great European cathedrals well enough to know that ribbing, which would allow vaulting to become very ornate, was

only being developed when Chartres had been built. "Maybe they were experimenting with ribs," he says. "Or maybe they just cared about their storerooms."

This last notion is something he thinks about a lot. High up in the cathedral he found a huge piece of stone that changes directions four times. It has tenons that fit into other pieces of stone, and mortises that other pieces of stone fit into. "They could have made it out of little pieces of stone. They could have used bricks. Why did they take a one- or two-ton piece of stone, carve it in this incredibly intricate way, haul it all the way up to the top, and fit it all together?" he asks. "What they were doing is so far from the modern mindset that it doesn't even make sense to us. Why would you even bother? Why would you do that? But bothering was what it was all about."

And that's the lesson of Chartres for Ferré. Sometimes he daydreams about going to the cathedral and just sitting there for a month or two. No reading books about it. No trying to figure anything out. No making calculations. "Just seeing if I can get simple enough, basic enough, to restore the kind of vision they had in the Middle Ages.

IN THE AFTERNOON, I ACCOMPANY FERRÉ WHILE he runs errands to restock the trailer. At the Home Depot, we can't find the white paper painter's hats he's looking for, but Ferré manages to fill the cart with five-gallon buckets, paint rollers, and sheets of plastic. At the checkout, he counts them out for the clerk. Whether by design or happenstance, he has placed seven of each item on the counter. "Well, seven is a mystical number," he says to the expressionless teenager, who fails to take note. The comment drifts in the air like a feather that has nowhere special to go.

At Wal-Mart, we are only nominally successful in our quest. We buy just one item on the list, a hand mixer that Ferré will use to mix pigment into four-pound batches of a concrete compound—part of his proprietary technique for his concrete labyrinths. Then we saunter over to cool ourselves off with a soft drink. Which brings me back to the conversation about sacred geometry.

I ask Ferré the question the Home Depot clerk ignored: "Why is seven a mystical number?" Seven, he tells me, stands out mathematically from the other numbers one through ten. You can't multiply two single-digit numbers together to get seven, like you can with four, six, eight, and nine. And you can't multiply seven to make a number less than ten, like you can with two, three, and five. You can't divide a circle into seven equal slices. "Seven did not begat any other number nor was it begotten by any other numbers," Ferré tells me. "Historically, it was called 'the virgin'—a number that was pure. It didn't have any fun."

And why, I want to know, does this matter? For at least an hour, while a steady stream of people pass through the nearby checkout, Ferré tries to answer my question. He is giving me the CliffNotes tour, in a way, of his intellect, the number of arcane things he knows, and what he brings together to make sense of the pre-Renaissance world.

Sacred geometry, I learn, is about using numbers meaningfully and in relation to each other. The great builders of Chartres weren't using mathematics. Their number system was based on Roman numerals, so they could count but not calculate—at least the way we can today. But they used a proportion called the Golden Mean that you can find by drawing a circle that

Sacred Geometry 101

ROBERT FERRÉ ON THE QUALITY OF NUMBERS

1
2
3
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6
7

ONE A dot on a paper—no dimensions. The uncreated universe—all that is primordial, undifferentiated. God.

TWO A line. The creation of a physical universe, duality. This step from one to two was the greatest mystery that ever happened. The footprint of Chartres Cathedral is a rectangle that is one by two—an expression of the great mystery of creation.

THREE Some geometers thought that three was the first number. You can't draw anything until you have three. One and two are almost more like principles than numbers because you don't have anything until you have three.

FOUR With four dots you have three dimensions. Four represents the physical universe because that's what it takes to get a physical universe. Four winds, four elements, four corners of the earth, four directions. It takes four points to create a physical universe, so it's not just symbolic.

FIVE If you divide a circle into five equal parts and connect the five points on the circumference you get the five-pointed star or pentagram. When you examine the relationships between the parts, it is always 1:1.62—what's been called the Golden Mean.

SIX A perfect number—it can be created by adding or multiplying the factors. ($1 + 2 + 3 = 6$. $1 \times 2 \times 3 = 6$). An extremely easy number to make—walk a compass around the perimeter of a circle to divide the circle into exactly six segments. Connect those six segments to draw the Star of David—an upward-pointing triangle and intersecting downward triangle. The Egyptians called the symbol "as above so below."

SEVEN The 'virgin'—a number that is pure. Two single-digit numbers can't be multiplied to make seven, and seven can't be multiplied to make a number less than 10. If three is the number of the spirit and four is the number of the physical, then seven represents the integration of fully spiritual and fully human.

Before I begin, I ask Ferré what I need to know about how to walk the labyrinth. Walking a labyrinth in his presence seems strangely intimate. Just walk, he tells me. Get in touch with your body and maybe your thoughts. Most people, he says, don't see fireworks or hear voices or anything like that. And so I walk through the opening and begin following the path, still feeling self-conscious...

is divided into five equal parts. Connect the five points on the circumference and you get the five-pointed star or pentagram. When you examine the relationships between the parts, it is always 1:1.62. Think DaVinci's famous illustration of a man circumscribed by a circle and a square, or the nautilus shell that grows in proportions of 1:1.62. The leaves on the stem of a flower. Us—fingers to hand, hand to elbow, trunk to whole body—all 1:1.62.

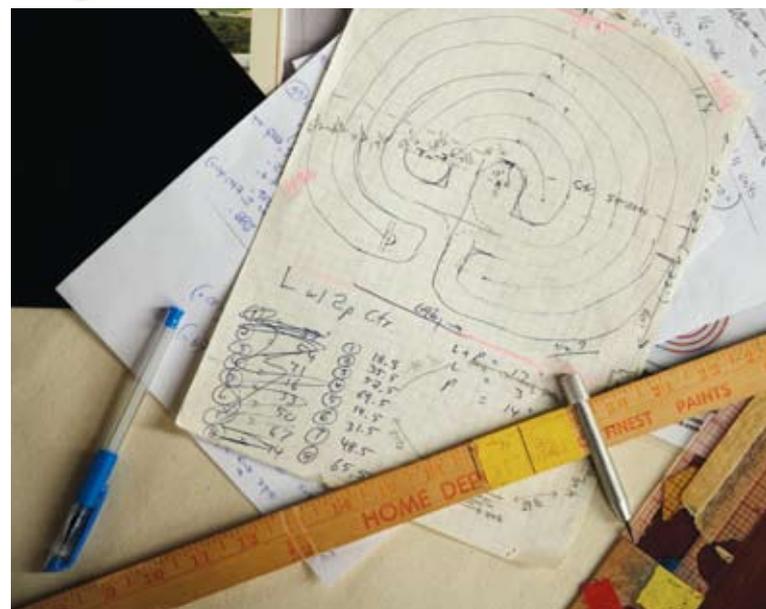
That proportion exists in the Chartres labyrinth, too. The builders used the Golden Mean, for instance, to determine the size of the center of the labyrinth. "This isn't just symbolism," says Ferré. "Our universe is made of geometry. Atoms are made of geometry, and geometry has numbers and proportions. So it's not just that the number three came to have this symbolism because of the trinity or something like that. It's because numbers are us.

"If you're creating Chartres Cathedral, you would say, 'This is going to be God's home and we want to use the same geometry that God used in creating the physical universe. Let's look at the universe. Let's figure out the laws of geometry in nature, and then let's use that for the cathedral because that's what God did.'"

"Our minds are too complicated now," he says. "I think that the geometry of Chartres Cathedral is so basic that we miss it. It's not so complex that we don't understand it. It's that our minds are soaring beyond it."

TO WALK A LABYRINTH ENTERPRISES LABYRINTH, you have to go somewhere else. Ferré and Hopen never walk any of their labyrinths before their clients have. So when all the errands have been run and the sun has begun its downward descent, we head to the Mercy Center, a half an hour from downtown, where Ferré created, in a meadow on the 70-acre site, a labyrinth out of mulch and white stones.

Some things have changed in the eight or nine years since Ferré covered an 88-foot circle of ground with landscaping cloth and painted the lines and turns of a labyrinth on it. Back then, volunteers placed white rocks along his painted lines and then wood mulch between



the lines. But in the ensuing years wood mulch gave way to rubber tire mulch—a relatively inexpensive material for labyrinth-making. It never biodegrades or needs to be replaced, and the darker color provides a nice contrast to the rocks. The Sisters of Mercy maintain the labyrinth. They've added flowers and plants in the turns of the paths, saplings around the perimeter, and a tree in the center. The tree has grown enough to provide a little shade if you want to rest or reflect on one of the crude stone benches in the heart space of the labyrinth.

Before I begin, I ask Ferré what I need to know about how to walk the labyrinth. Walking a labyrinth in his presence seems strangely intimate. Just walk, he tells me. Get in touch with your body and maybe your thoughts. Most people, he says, don't see fireworks or hear voices or anything like that. And so I walk through the opening and begin following the path, still feeling self-conscious—as if I'm going to be graded on my performance. On my third turn, I find myself not on the outer edges where I expected to be. Instead I was only one ring away from the labyrinth's center. I look behind me to see if I can get back to where I should be. I'm failing the test. "What did I do wrong?" I finally call out to Ferré, who is sitting on a bench just outside the

labyrinth circle. He answers me like a Zen master with a bemused smile: "Did you cross a line? No. Then you didn't do anything wrong."

Sure enough, the circuit moves me in and out of the labyrinth's four quadrants, sometimes with tight turns near the center, sometimes with long loopy swings to the outside. When I give up wondering how much further there is to go or how long it's going to take me, I begin to breathe differently—slow and deep. Ferré begins his walk. Every now and then, his turn brings him toward me and then turns him away again at the last minute. One time our paths were parallel for a while. Another time, we passed each other on the same path, going different directions. But I'm feeling self-contained, in my own world. I smell the honeysuckle growing nearby. I hear the birds chattering away, the locusts droning, a plane cutting through the air in unexpected harmony overhead. Over in the bushes I can see a gardener's wheelbarrow tucked away, and it makes me inexplicably happy—like everything is as it should be.

I notice that it feels really good to breathe, as if with every breath I'm getting back a little of myself. Kurt Vonnegut once said that the only proof he needed for the

existence of God is music. Right now, birdsongs, blue skies, trees, and the smell of grass are working just fine for me.

HAT EVENING OVER DINNER, FERRÉ TELLS me his story. Labyrinth-making is only the most recent chapter for Ferré, but you don't have to squint hard to see the labyrinth as a pretty good metaphor for how he has lived his life. He's followed along, one step after the next, turning when the turn in the path presented itself. And there have been many switchback turns.

During the Vietnam War, Ferré was a professional antiwar protester. Later, he made wire jewelry that he sold on the streets of Austin. He built hand-crafted harp-

sichords for a living. He managed a restaurant. He sold commercial real estate. He retired once, when he turned forty in 1984. He hadn't managed to get rich enough to retire, but since that was one of the things he had always said he would do, he retired anyway and spent a few years living by himself in the Pyrenees restoring an old French farmhouse. On July 21, 2010, the day that Ferré

turns sixty-six, he intends to give retirement another go. Not that he'll slow down any. He intends to use the time to write several books, including what he says will be *the* book on labyrinths and labyrinth making.

Ferré didn't plan such a peripatetic life. His aspirations, at the start, were conventional. He expected to go into the family business—his father, grandfather, and several uncles were American Baptist ministers. All his aunts married ministers. "We were a really holy family," he likes to say. When he graduated from Denison in 1966, he was offered a scholarship to theology school. But because he had been an Air Force ROTC cadet, and the draft board wasn't giving deferments for theological studies, he went directly into the service. This didn't sit too badly with Ferré. It was his patriotic duty, he thought, to go to Vietnam to stop the communists and make the world safe for democracy.

In the Air Force, he was assigned to train as an air traffic controller. That wasn't the only training he received, though. After he had been in for a year and a half, his unit was sent to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida where they were given ground training—how to survive if they were shot down over the jungles in Vietnam. One day, they were taught how to sneak up silently on enemy sentries and kill them before they can make a sound. Now, Ferré had been thinking long and hard about moral issues and what his own principles were, prompted in part by an ongoing correspondence with the Christian anarchist Ammon Hennesy, whom he had heard speak at Denison before he graduated. That night, sitting around the camp-

fire, he said, "I'm not going to use these skills. I'm not going to kill someone." When he said this, one of the other airmen cocked his head and asked, "So, man, what are you doing here?" It was like lightning shot through his body, he would say later, "What am I doing here?" He went in the next morning and told his superiors that he didn't think he belonged there. "They whisked me away lest I infect any of the others with this kind of attitude," he says. In the end, his request to be discharged as a conscientious objector was denied. When he refused to go to Southeast Asia, he was court-martialed and sent to Fort Leavenworth for a year. By then, the war was a raging issue—and he was a changed man.

THE NEXT MORNING, SINCE THERE'S NOT ROOM for three in Ferré's truck, I drive him and Hopen out to the suburbs to take a look at a privately owned labyrinth that he had designed six months earlier. The labyrinth is remarkable for its location in the middle of an everyday-looking backyard—grass, trees, some flower beds. Ferré had built the labyrinth on an octagonal concrete slab by scoring the design into the concrete (compliments of his Lunar Lander). Then the lines were filled in with a pigmented aggregate (the polymer compound he whips up using the GE hand mixer). Some of the aggregate is popping out, the owner says. Hopen walks along, scrutinizing the lines while Ferré thinks out loud about how to best touch it up. The owner, a woman in her early 40s, is a writer, motivational speaker, and president of a company providing disability education programs for schools. She is quadriplegic, so Ferré designed the paths of the labyrinth to accommodate her wheelchair. She saw a spinning vortex of light, she says, the first time she went on a labyrinth. Her home labyrinth, she says, is magical. When she's working in her home office and gets worked up about something, she comes down to the labyrinth, puts her wheelchair on high speed, and practices the three Rs. Release. Receive. Return.

The skies had been beautiful that morning. Now, on the way back into town, menacing grey clouds suddenly displace the flawless blue sky. We are sitting at a traffic light a few blocks away from Ferré's studio, and I am thinking about how great it would be to have a labyrinth in my backyard. I imagine life as a tranquil person. I picture myself introducing the labyrinth to my five-year-old son and him following the path like it's a treasure map. (And I picture the four-year-old trying to get his attention by tackling him.) My reverie is interrupted by the sudden blare of fire sirens coming from a fire station across the street. Not one but two enormous fire trucks hurtle out of the station and hover for a second or two in front of the car, waiting for the intersection to clear.

It always seems like such a waste, I tell Ferré and Hopen, to see fire trucks or trains or bulldozers when my boys aren't with me to get excited about them. "We can get excited for you," Ferré surprises me by saying. "Sure," says Hopen. And for one very full moment, they whoop and holler and cheer for the fire trucks with abandon. I laugh. Their ebullience hovers in the air for me like a benediction, and at that moment, I can feel my feet are right on the path.