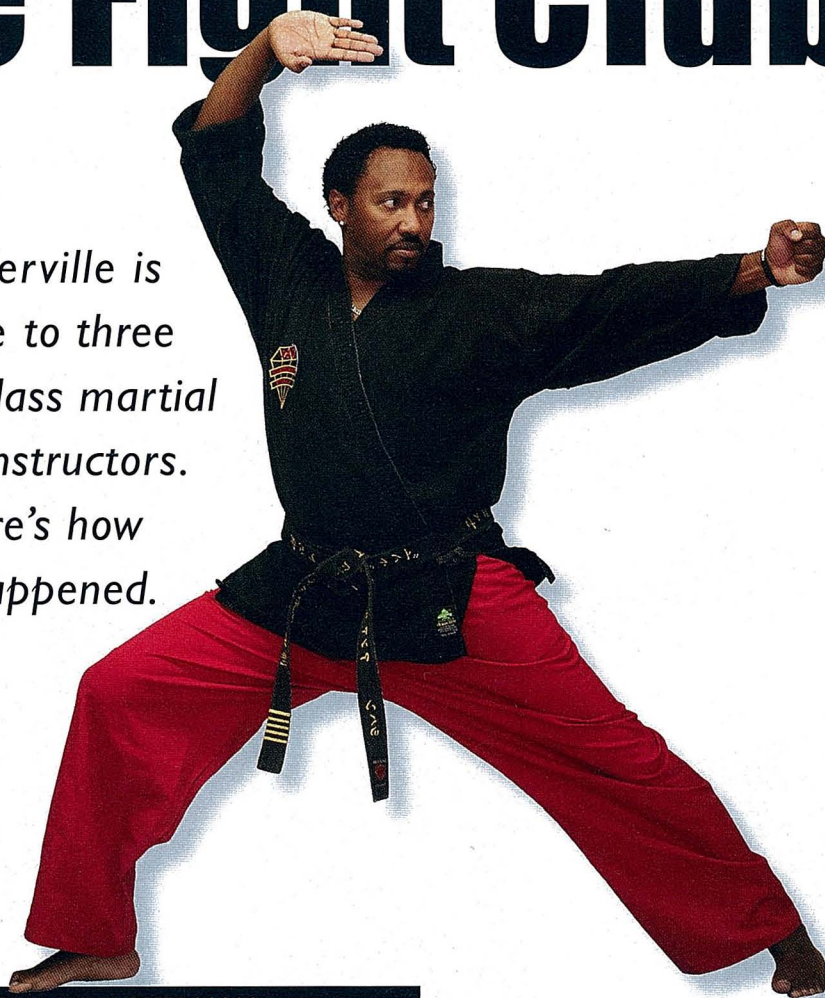


The Fight Club

Somerville is home to three world-class martial arts instructors. Here's how it happened.



BY MEGHANN ACKERMAN

Fighter #1
Mark DellaGrotte
Sityodtong USA
(100 Broadway)

Scott Meier, 43, and Anne McCullick, 41, are the proprietors and lead instructors of Itsera Fitness in Boulder, Colo., a gym specializing in a combination of muay thai and tae kwon do. On a rainy Tuesday morning in mid-August, they emerged from a taxicab on lower Broadway in Somerville and made their way

to a side door near the corner of Cutter St. The door was locked.

Minutes later, a black Range Rover parked on Cutter St and Mark DellaGrotte, 36, stepped out. After embracing his Colorado clients, who visit Somerville "a couple times a year" to practice with him, he unlocked the door to his hallowed academy for muay thai and mixed martial arts training. Down the redbrick steps we walked.

Straight ahead were the front desk and a collection of apparel ranging in price from \$20 to \$105. To the left were the ring and the training area. All over

there were fliers and posters and clips celebrating the accomplishments of DellaGrotte's fighters. "Scott, you start warming up, all right?" says DellaGrotte, but it is not a question. Within one minute Meier is stretching on a blue mat near the ring.

Ranked the seventh-best MMA gym in the country by *Fight* magazine, Sityodtong is a magnet for pro fighters, students and teachers like Meier and McCullick. But such prestige — and Sityodtong's fighters are a roll call of MMA all-stars — belies the nonsense vibe you feel upon entering the facility. This is no place for glamour boys. In fact, DellaGrotte's students are required

to clean the studio every night before they depart. It's humble-pie policies like that which elicit praise and cross-country homages like Meier's. "There's a lot of respect and a kind of loyalty to what martial arts is all about," says Meier.

The fighter

Respect is one word that keeps coming out of DellaGrotte's mouth when you ask him about the cleaning. "Respect for the dojo, respect for the teachers, respect for the students," he says rapidly. DellaGrotte himself was reared in the art of respect by his early mentor, Guy Chase. This was in the early 90s, when MMA was still a fringe sport and muay thai was even further from the mainstream. Chase, a legendary instructor in his own right, taught in Revere at the time. Eventually DellaGrotte became a teacher at Chase's studio.

Prior to working with Chase, DellaGrotte's martial arts mentor was his uncle Joseph. A world traveler and student of philosophy and martial arts, Joseph "was someone who always intrigued me. I looked up to him in the family," says DellaGrotte. It was Joseph who inspired a teenage DellaGrotte to turn from baseball and hockey to tai chi and shotokan karate. Under his uncle's tutelage, DellaGrotte even-

Above: Andrew Haynes of Corpbasics.

Right: Mark DellaGrotte of Sityodtong USA.

tually took on additional styles of fighting like tae kwon do. At age 17, DellaGrotte decided he wanted to pursue more combative styles. That led him to Chase. And Chase led him to Thailand.

In Thailand he studied muay thai – a style of fighting relying on hits and kicks. Fighters often use their knees and elbows to deliver blows. Clinching techniques are involved too.

It was in Thailand that DellaGrotte got his first real fighting experience and immersion in Thai culture. DellaGrotte studied the language and learned to appreciate the lifestyle of the Yodtong boxing camp where he was staying and training, even though there were “tarantulas crawling around me,” he says.

The business

After opening Sityodtong in 1996, DellaGrotte began working with students of Brazilian jujitsu. They taught him the ele-

ments of jujitsu while he was instructing them in muay thai. As the years went by, DellaGrotte became a true mixed martial artist, combining the elements of many styles. DellaGrotte and his instructors train students of all levels in various styles including muay thai, judo, wrestling and boxing.

Some of DellaGrotte’s instructors are his former students. John Johnston, 40, a Malden native, spent five years training with DellaGrotte before becoming a teacher in 2007. Many of Johnston’s trainees – Rob Font, Jimmy “Jimbo Slice” Davidson – have thrived in the ring. Not that Johnston’s letting it get to his head. He still considers himself a student. “And I still clean,” he adds, while keeping his eyes on his six-year-old boy, Evan, who is goofing around on the mat with a plastic sword. In mid-June, Johnston made his MMA debut at the American Fighting Organization’s Summer Brawl 2 event. He defeated Sandor Binkley via TKO in Round 1.

Why Somerville?

DellaGrotte lives in Woburn with his wife, Marie, his four-year-old son, Dante, and his one-year-old daughter, Giovanna. As you might have guessed by those names – and his – he is part of a big Italian family from Somerville. His mother and father both grew up on Pennsylvania Avenue. Though his family moved to Everett when he was young, his father’s law practice remains at 100 Broadway in Somerville, up the stairs from DellaGrotte’s facility. When DellaGrotte was thinking about opening a martial arts school, his

father offered him a space in his building. Today, the building is one of Somerville’s best-kept secrets, seemingly more known across America than in its hometown.

Pop culture points

If you’re both a Kevin James fan and an MMA fan, you might recognize Sityodtong from the film *Zookeeper*.

Fighter #2 Andrew Haynes Corpbasics (73 Bow St)

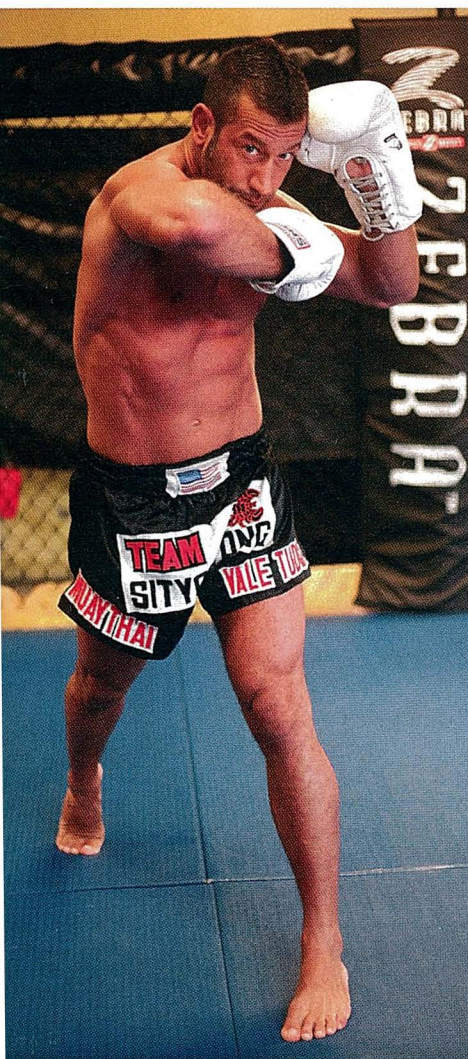
It’s pretty common for kids to take martial arts classes after school or on the weekends, but when Andrew Haynes was growing up the sport wasn’t as popular and his classmates would tease him for his participation. “When I was young, my

father enlisted me in martial arts. People used to make fun of me. ‘Haha, you have to go to karate,’” he says.

Despite the teasing, Haynes became passionate about martial arts, spending more than 25 years training, which earned him not only inclusion in the World Martial Arts Hall of Fame but also the Silver Life Achievement Award.

Haynes is a 6th degree black belt in karate. Although Haynes employed karate during his fighting career, the Corpbasic fitness system he developed combines karate, kickboxing and aerobics.

As a teenager, Haynes often was paired against older men who had more experience and size. At the time, fights weren’t set up based on weight or age so Haynes developed a more aggressive style to compensate. “You’re not supposed to go full-on, but I would go full-on because I was scared,” he recalls.



PHOTOS BY KELLY MACDONALD

• continued on page 22

• FIGHT CLUB | Continued from page 21

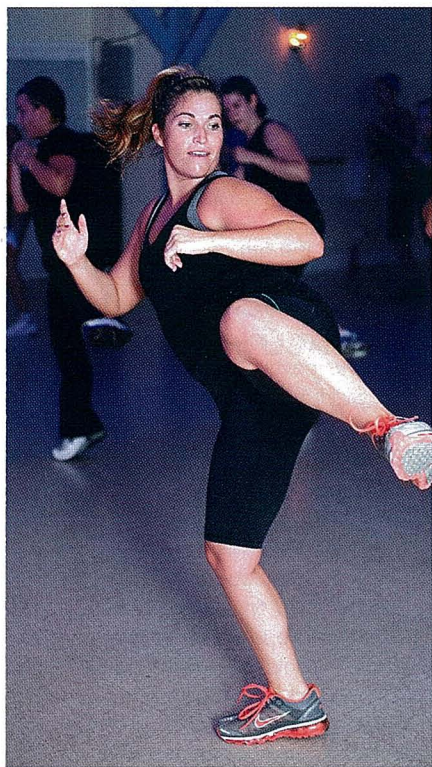
Haynes also frequented the now defunct Somerville Boxing Club and would incorporate punches and jabs with his kicks and blocks. "A lot of the guys fought karate; they did the basic karate," Haynes says. "I used to mix up boxing with my karate. Not necessarily what I would teach my students, but that's what I would do."

Haynes was recognized as a skilled fighter, but sometimes ended up disqualified from fights for "excessive contact" or causing injuries to his opponents.

The fighter

Aside from disqualifications, Haynes was a good fighter. As he advanced, he grew cocky. "Back in the day, I had an attitude problem because I was winning all the time," he admits.

Right: William Gleason of Shobu Aikido. Below: One of Andrew Haynes' students at Corpbasics.



In the early 90s, Haynes spent three years as the Extreme Fighting Champion and participated in some underground fighting rings. "It was one of the ways of promoting the school," says Haynes, who had opened Diamondback Karate School on Somerville Ave. "I would go and teach classes during the week and fight on the weekends."

As he continued to win, he got more arrogant. During practice for a tournament, Haynes broke his thumb going above and beyond to show he could beat the rival team's best fighter.

During another fight, Haynes decided to add an extra obstacle when he was faced with an opponent he didn't think was challenging enough.

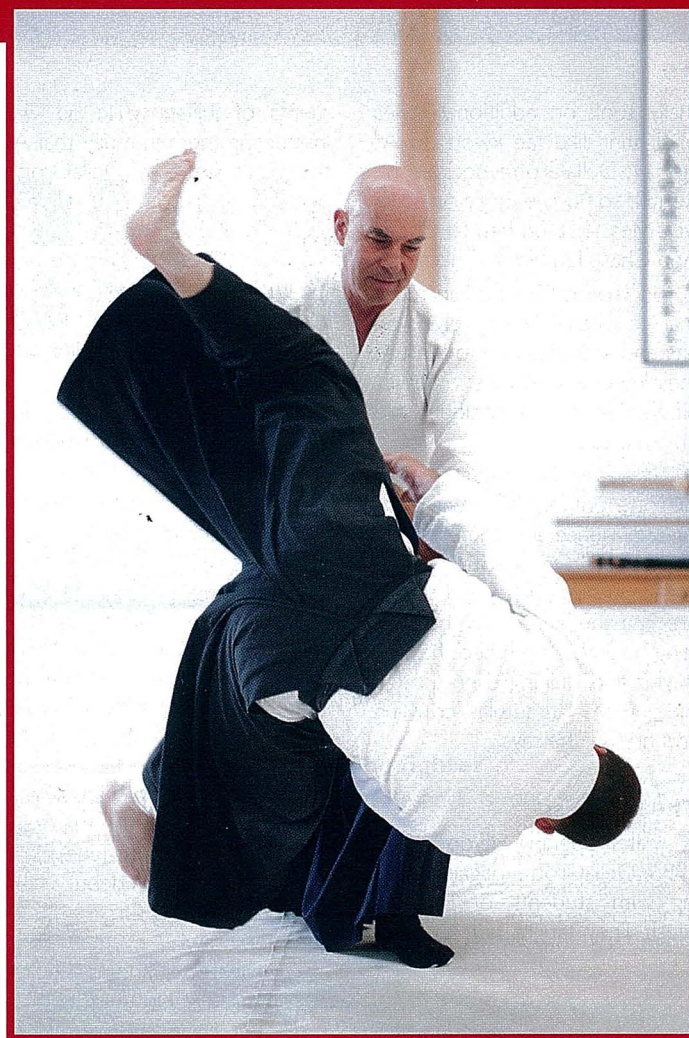
Having recently tried a Pearl Harbor — a tropical cocktail — Haynes asked for his fighting partner to bring him one before the match. "I put it in my drink I had in my corner; just to see. I was looking for a challenge; I didn't feel like he was a challenge to me," Haynes says.

"By the time I started fighting, I had a buzz on." He started taunting his opponent, who struck before the referee officially started the match. Caught off-guard, Haynes received a broken arm. Talk about hubris and nemesis.

His focus then shifted from fighting to fitness. "It's not about what I can do, it's about what I can do for you," he says of his new outlook.

The classes Haynes taught at Boston-area gyms became popular; students would even follow him when he went to work for a new gym or was sent to another location. Haynes realized he could develop his own system, Corpbasics, and train others to teach it at gyms around the country.

Thanks to his days as a fighter, Haynes had a leg up when it



came to training and teaching fitness. "I had to study my opponents to see how their bodies worked and what their weaknesses were," he says.

The business

Most Corpbasics clients are women. Some have been taking classes with Haynes for more than 10 years and followed him when he opened his own fitness business. He also has a group of students working on being certified to teach the Corpbasics program.

Recently, Corpbasics was certified by the American Council on Exercise, giving it clout and status in the fitness world. Through his contacts in the fitness world, Haynes has gotten Corpbasics into several gyms, including some Boston-area Ys. This fall, he'll travel to Florida to

demonstrate and promote the program.

Although his fighting days are over, Haynes combines the discipline and movement of karate with aerobics moves as a part of Corpbasics. Students might move from karate blocks to boxing punches with a "happy clap" thrown in to keep the class lively.

Haynes likes to emphasize mind over body in his fitness routines. Often, he says, it's a client's nervousness, not inability, that keeps her from achieving a goal.

Consistent with this attitude, Haynes is reluctant to reveal his age. He told *Scout* but insisted that he did not want it published. He's hoping to use it as a trump card one day, when a client thinks she is too old to tackle an exercise. (Suffice it for us to report that he looks younger than his numerical age.)

“By the time I started fighting, I had a buzz on,” says Haynes.

Why Somerville?

Haynes was born in Somerville and has lived in the city his whole life. Somerville may not be known as the fitness capital of America (though recent programs like Shape Up Somerville may change that), but Haynes has had success running both Diamondback and Corpbasics in the city.

Haynes has also been very involved in the community. When Good Times was still in Assembly Square, he held fight nights that allowed family and friends to see local fighters in action. He also held events that benefited local groups, including RESPOND and Somerville’s Council on Aging.

After high school, Haynes studied criminal justice at North-

eastern. He used those skills to moonlight as a private eye – often having to investigate divorce cases.

Pop culture points

If you look closely during a few scenes in the vampire movie *Blade*, you might catch a glimpse of Haynes. He did a few stunt scenes for Wesley Snipes.

Local access junkies may have caught Haynes sharing information about martial arts on his program “Karate Action TV.”

With his background in criminal justice and investigating and his fighter’s body, Haynes sometimes was hired as a bodyguard for celebrities in Massachusetts. During one gig, Haynes was Evander Holyfield’s media bodyguard. Yes, he was the guy who kept reporters away from the boxing legend.

Fighter #3

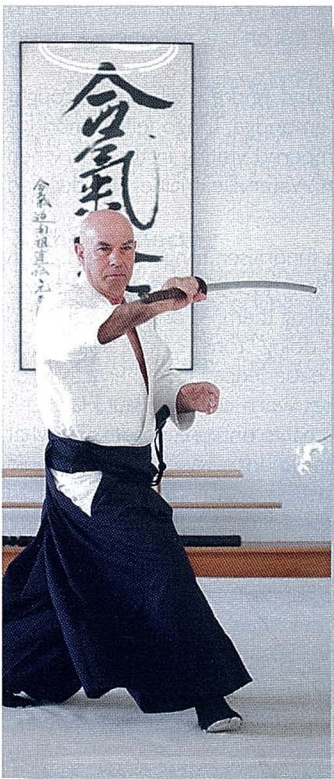
**William Gleason
Shobu Aikido
(34 Allen St)**

William Gleason was studying Eastern philosophy in the 1960s when he decided he wanted something more. “I was looking for a way to make the philosophy I was studying a real thing,” he says.

So, in 1970, Gleason decided to go to Japan to study the ancient art of aikido. The original three-year trip turned into a decade-long stay. Although one does not have to travel to Japan to study aikido, Gleason wanted to immerse himself in the culture – to study aikido the way it was originally taught. “Their approach to learning is kind of adverse to intellectualism,” Gleason says. “The Japanese have a proverb: ‘It’s better to get used to things than to learn them.’”

Every morning, Gleason trained at his dojo for a few hours before teaching English

• continued on page 36



Yoga Meets Martial Arts at Shobu Aikido

Aiki-Yoga is a low-impact, easy-to-try, Yogi-friendly practice that creates an internal power like that used in martial arts for fighting and self-defense.



**1 Hour Classes / \$10 Drop-In
Tuesday & Thursday, 5:30 pm
Saturday, 10:00 am**

Shobu.org • Find us on Facebook @ “Aiki-Yoga”
Shobu Aikido • 34 Allen Street • Union Square • Somerville
(Off Somerville Ave between Target & Dunkin Donuts)

SOMERVILLE OCTOBERFEST

NOON TO 6pm SUNDAY OCT 2nd

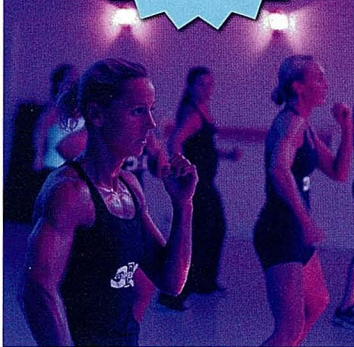
**BRATWURST BRASS BANDS BEERGARDENS
DANCING**



**DAVIS SQUARE
RAIN DATE Oct 16th**

WINNER

Best Kick Boxing Class
2011 boston.com



More Sweat

More Fun

More Results

Join the cutting edge fitness party at
Andrew Haynes’ Corpbasics

73 Bow St in Union Square
617-628-8400 • corpbasics.com

**A
B
J**

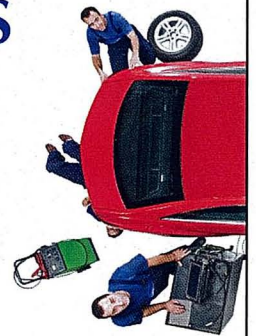
30+ YEARS

of reliable service at a price you can count on!

read our reviews online

ABJ Auto Repair

foreign and domestic
91 Marshall St, Somerville
617-625-6632



during the day, which is how he supported himself. In the evening, he returned to the dojo for three more hours of training. Gleason explains the traditional method as "training from the outside to inside." As students build up physical strength and master the motions of the art, they also tend to develop their minds and a sense of balance.

The fighter

Gleason explained that aikido evolved through Japanese culture since around 600 A.D. Aikido focuses less on physical strength and more on using your opponent's moves to your advantage. "It's a way to remain completely neutral and balance all beings around you," he says.

The martial art also incorporates swords and staffs. Beginners learn the basics barehanded, and then they take up swords and staffs. When a student reaches the advanced level, she will return to practicing barehanded. Because aikido is less about sparring and physical strength, it attracts both men and women and students of all ages, he adds.

"The movements of aikido put your full force into them without injuring the person," he explains. Now 70 years old, Gleason has been studying aikido for 40 years. His training is focused on solo work now. In aikido, competitive sparring is banned because competition requires rules – and rules alter reality. "When

you don't have reality what you have is sports, not martial arts," he says. "It's not spiritual."

The business

Upon returning to America in 1980, Gleason focused on not only aikido, but also the precepts that go with it. Over the years he has watched martial arts and its students change. "In the 80s, the majority of people were in better physical condition," he says. "Society in the last 30 years has changed. As society becomes more tight, people find it harder to justify spending time on something that is not necessary."

Shobu Aikido offers beginner classes and hybrid classes like Aiki-Yoga. In addition, Gleason focuses on training teachers. In this regard he is something like a martial arts grandfather: that is to say, one of his student's students recently opened a dojo.

Why Somerville?

Over the past three decades, Shobu Aikido has had several homes around the Boston area. It came to Union Square two years ago, thanks to lower rents.

Pop culture credit

Gleason literally wrote the book on aikido. After 15 years of research, he published *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*. Finding records of early aikido was tough. Gleason often found himself translating ancient Japanese texts as part of his research. ♦



Steve Ortolani, coach of the "C" team in Somerville Pop Warner, stresses the art of ball protection.

for parents who can't afford it. "I don't turn any kids away," he says. Currently two-thirds of the PW kids play for free. Desrochers credits his corporate sponsors for the funding, as well as two annual "canning" drives, where players stand outside stores holding cans and asking for contributions.

After practice, the Militia met up at Dilboy Stadium (110 Alewife Brook Pkwy), where they were being fitted for championship rings. It was no ordinary ring-fitting: In defeating the San Diego Surge, 34-19, on July 30, the Militia established themselves as the premier woman's team in the U.S. Their 2011 crown came in the ultra-competitive Women's Football Alliance (WFA)

– a step up from their 2010 Independent Women's Football League (IWFL) title.

At Dilboy to witness the festivities and meet the champs were a few PW girls, including Jocely Pierre Louis – a sixth grader at the West Somerville Neighborhood School (177 Powderhouse Blvd) who at first went to Foss Park to be a PW cheerleader. She was reluctant to play football because she was "scared I was gonna get tackled." But at the persuasion of West's mother, she gave football a try. "I liked it when I started playing," she says. Now she especially likes defense. "Because I get to tackle people." ♦



CLEAN HOMES, LLC

FROM THE INSIDE OUT WE HAVE YOU COVERED!

Clean Homes, LLC ■ 166 School St. ■ Somerville

Office 617.764.1461 ■ Fax 617.764.1462

www.cleanhomesllc.biz

ONE CALL DOES IT ALL!

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Junk Removal | Snow Removal |
| House Cleaning | Landscaping |
| Office Cleaning | Landscape Design |
| Move In & Move Out | & Construction |
| Cleaning | Painting |
| Carpet Cleaning | Handyman |
| Clean Outs | Plumbing |
| Property Maintenance | Carpentry |