WHY WOULD A 21ST-CENTURY MAN CONSTRUCT A 17TH-CENTURY MACHINE? THE ANSWER LIES IN AN ALCHEMY OF MATHEMATICS, PHILOSOPHY, AND TWO ROVING MINDS SEPARATED BY TIME.

IN PITT’S WORLD-CLASS PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM, NICHOLAS RESCHER PUTS PHILOSOPHY IN PLAY. MASTER MIND WRITTEN BY CRISTINA ROVALIS PHOTOGRAPHY BY RIC AND LUKE EVANS
And, if being a generalist harkens back to an early age of his career, Rescher is quick to note that it was his wife, Dorothy, as "the mainstay of my psychological and physical well-being." He also enjoys a lively family life, and describes his wife, Estelle Burris, decodes what he fondly calls his "squiggly cursive, a habit that has produced nearly 20 graduate students as they acquired his "way of thinking."

Rescher's enduring enthusiasm for his work. His colleague Robert Brandom, another world-leading Pitt philosopher, admires Rescher's "enduring enthusiasm for his work. He's been in Pittsburgh for 35 years. One would think it would be a chore after all these years. But whatever he works on is like a play for him. It's like 'What would it be like to go down that slide? There is joy and playfulness.'"

Play actually has an active role in Rescher's life. He is a contract bridge enthusiast who enjoys the strategic challenges of the game. His colleague, Robert Brandom, describes Rescher as a "bridge builder who systematically connects various philosophical traditions." These accolades are a tribute to Rescher's "deep devotion to philosophy. After earning his doctoral degree at age 22, becoming the youngest PhD graduate on record at Princeton, he rose through the faculty ranks and served as chair of the Department of Philosophy and as director and, later, chair of the Center for Philosophy of Science, a position he has held since 1988. He has also directed nearly 20 graduate students as they acquired their PhDs."

And, if being a generalist harkens back to another era, so does Rescher's habit of writing everything by hand. Each day, he fills a page or more with his expansive thoughts in his spungy cursive, a habit that has produced 100 books over six decades, as well as hundreds of scholarly journal articles. His assistant, Excella Barnes, describes what she fondly calls his "chicken scratch" and then transcribes it into one typed document after another. His thoughts are jotted down in hotel rooms, on airplanes, at home—whenever and wherever inspiration strikes.

"I don't feel I've got something straight until I've put it on paper," notes Rescher. "So, that explains a lot of books." He says it matter-of-factly, as though it were no big feat to write enough books to fill an entire bookshelf; not to mention the 14 books, translated into five languages, that have been written about his work by other authors. In fact, many of his books have been issued by the University of Pittsburgh Press, a publisher he characterizes as "eminently competent and professional."