



IN SEARCH OF THE ARTIST WITHIN

BY AMANDA C. MITCHELL / TOM ROSHKIND PHOTOS

Artists possess a unique ability to see opportunity in the mundane. They recognize and embrace the extraordinary in the ordinary. A friend's discarded earring is transformed into a charm for a vest. An ordinary strawberry ice cream cone becomes a study in light and color. Most artists will insist that what they do is not all that unusual. They seem to believe there is an artist in each of us just waiting for a vehicle of expression.

Hundreds of books sit on bookstore shelves offering guidance on how to

discover the artist within. So what's the big secret? What is it that provides an opportunity for that "artist in each of us" to come forth into the world and CREATE? Cordillera Living turns to three artists in the Cordillera community to explore the making and maintaining of an artist.

Although their backgrounds, inspirations, and motivations are as varied as their personalities and artistic creations, they do share some common artistic traits: time and space, process, and personal initiative.

HAZEL MURRAY

WALKING THROUGH THE HOME of Cordillera members Matthew and Hazel Murray, it is clear that an artist lives here. The French countryside and colonial America mingle in the soft hues and artistic décor of the house. Paintings hang on every wall. The house is light and airy and flows like a piece of art should. Hazel's appreciation for color, blending, and light are felt from the moment one steps into the foyer. Hazel's artwork covers most of the walls in the house. In a combination of impressionist-inspired watercolor and oil paintings, there are images of children, boats, gardens and still-life subjects. We seem to watch the Murray children grow into young adults as we move from room to room. Hazel describes days of dressing the children in sun dresses and sun hats, driving to find the perfect garden, and then freeing them to walk through the garden until she had snapped a nice collection of photographic images for a future painting.

The question soon surfaces. How does someone like Hazel get started? Perhaps a bit of her artistic talent was in the genes. Her mother was a knitter, seamstress, and cook. Hazel's father played the piano by ear. She was born with an inclination to create. "I always loved when my parents went out and bought a new box of sharp crayons!" she recalls. Parental encouragement certainly played a role in her artistic pursuits. Her mother encouraged her to take art classes and enter contests, and she even won a sled in one contest. "I was always designing elaborate covers for book reports and inscribing mugs that my mom fired in the kiln," she adds.

Throughout her life Hazel has sought out artistic opportunities. "In college, I used to copy paintings from magazines and send them to Matthew's mother. I designed cards. I've always made my own Christmas cards," she explains. Attending workshops and



FACING PAGE:
Hazel Murray at
work in her
Cordillera home
studio.

AT LEFT:
Hazel poses
alongside one of
her early
watercolor
paintings.



TOP LEFT: Matthew and Hazel Murray with guests (left to right) Nancy Kreidler, Brenda Weiss and Maurie Flanagan. BELOW: Samples of Hazel's artwork from her extensive collection.



art shows and reading art books are all ways that Hazel seeks artistic insight from other painters. "I love workshops," she says, "because you get inspired by other people's work. A teacher will say something in a class that catches you. I'm inspired by other people's art.... I say sometimes that they'll find me dead at the foot of a great painting."

THE MURRAY HOUSEHOLD provides a space for creating that would make any artist jealous. Hazel's studio boasts an unobstructed view of Bellyache Ridge and boundless natural light. It is the scenery that most inspires her. She explains the attraction that she and Matthew immediately felt to the lot: "There will be so much to paint! I love the view of Bellyache Ridge, while Matthew prefers the view from the other side of the house. I look forward to painting the shadows the clouds cast on the mountain. The trees out here are silvery-yellow with great shapes. And the snow!"



NANCY BLUMENTHAL

"IF YOU CAN'T BE INSPIRED in Colorado, then you can't be inspired," proclaims Nancy Blumenthal. It is pure aesthetics (and a love of golf, of course) that brought Nancy and her husband, Jack, to Cordillera in 1993. She explains, "It's a piece of heaven on earth. It just doesn't get any prettier." With an easy smile and friendly demeanor, Nancy is surprisingly bashful about her work. Although she may have a difficult time showing off her talent, it is obvious that she has a natural gift for painting. Beginning with oils in the '70s, she moved on to watercolor about six years ago. "I like watercolor, because I like the effects of the medium. It's easy and clean. I like the backwashes and what happens with water ... the transparencies."

An animal lover, her favorite piece is a watercolor of a small deer in which she used a special "lifting" technique. "It's as lifelike as I could make it," she says. With a studio bursting at the seams with art books and a schedule filled with art classes, Nancy constantly seeks inspiration and education on new methods of painting.

As for subject matter, she leans toward landscapes and still-life subjects. Nancy prefers painting from photographs taken while travelling. Although she might like to try "on the spot" painting, she fears she would be distracted by the world around her. A photo enables her to focus. Her husband, Jack, would like her to focus on a piece of landscape that he finds inspirational. "Jack has pictures of hole 13 on the Mountain Course that he has wanted me to paint for five years now. But I'm outside enjoying it instead," she exclaims.

Nancy wraps her vision of herself as an artist into a few simple yet powerful sentences, "Art is a big part of me. When you take up an art, I think that you begin to see everything from a different perspective. You notice cloud shapes and shadows on mountains. It gives my life another dimension that I might take for granted normally."



ABOVE:
Nancy Blumenthal puts the finishing touches on a watercolor painting in her Cordillera home studio.

LEFT:
Nancy with one of her favorite pieces in her Alcazar home.

RIGHT:
Amy
Rowley
poses
with one
of her
more
playful
pieces.



AMY ROWLEY

WHAT DO PEELING BILLBOARDS, construction site debris, discarded jewelry, and the junk found in parking lots have in common? They are all potential material for a piece of art. Just ask Amy.

"I like my work to be approachable. I strive to create pieces of artwork that are a visual adventure. I want to bring a playful sense to the viewer, and I want my viewer to feel comfortable with the art. For that reason," she explains, "I use familiar materials and manipulate them into artwork that hopefully brings out a childlike response in the viewer."

When we entered the Rowley household to snap a few photos of Amy in action, our eyes were immediately drawn to the dining room table piled with a diverse array of materials of all colors and textures. Referring to herself as an "everything out" type, Amy explains that she needs to see, touch, and feel the materials she's using.

A creative process in harmony with the time and space to create appear to be critical elements in the making and maintaining of an artist. Is it true that an artist exists in each of us? Our Cordillera artists feel that it is. However, developing as an artist takes work. A lesson learned from them may be that in order to grow artistically, artists must treat their hobby as a business. Be committed. Self educate. Always push the barriers of what is possible.

Although this creative woman began her artistic journey with the medium of collage at Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass, she quickly expanded her artistic horizons. Describing her artistic process, she says, "I constantly collect materials...I hunt for treasures. Next, I surround myself with the collected materials and let them inspire me. I usually start with one item; a ball of yarn, an ugly necktie, an interesting twig, a clipped graphic, and then begin an assembly process." Amy takes ordinary objects and plays with them until they become something else.

A spunky woman with inspirational energy and an obvious creative flair, Amy attributes her artistic zest to her placement in the family. The oldest of five children, it was her job to help make order from chaos. "I was an adult before my time. For that reason, my artwork incorporates a need to be childlike. I play with the materials, daydream and imagine, until I create a new order out of the materials. The process is childlike and meditative. My creative process provides me with serenity," she says.

One of Amy's more playful creations is a piece of carry-on luggage that she painted red, yellow, and green with the phrase, "Smile, you're on candid camera!" inscribed on the side. And don't think for a minute that it doesn't turn heads when she takes it travelling.