

# A SENSE OF PLACE

INSIDE SEVERAL LOCAL ARTISTS' STUDIOS

BY KATHI FERGUSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY LISA SHIRES

**A**s an art student, I remember vividly how I felt upon walking into my figure drawing class. There was something about the “feel” of the space that made it more than just another room. Black wooden saddle benches were lined up in a semi-circle and each of us would try to claim a spot that provided a favorable view of the model for that day. Student drawings and demo sketches hung on the walls, art mannequins and anatomy charts surrounded the model stand. Our instructor, Mr. Parks, dressed in his legendary blue artist’s smock, meandered around the room as he readied us for the day’s assignments. At the time, this was my studio, and everything about it inspired me.

The word “studio” is derived from the Latin, *studere*, meaning to study. Another familiar term comes from the French word, *atelier* meaning workshop. In contemporary, English language use, “atelier” can also refer to the Atelier Method, a training process for artists that takes place in a professional artist’s studio (usually a painter or sculptor) modeled after the historic private art studios of Europe.

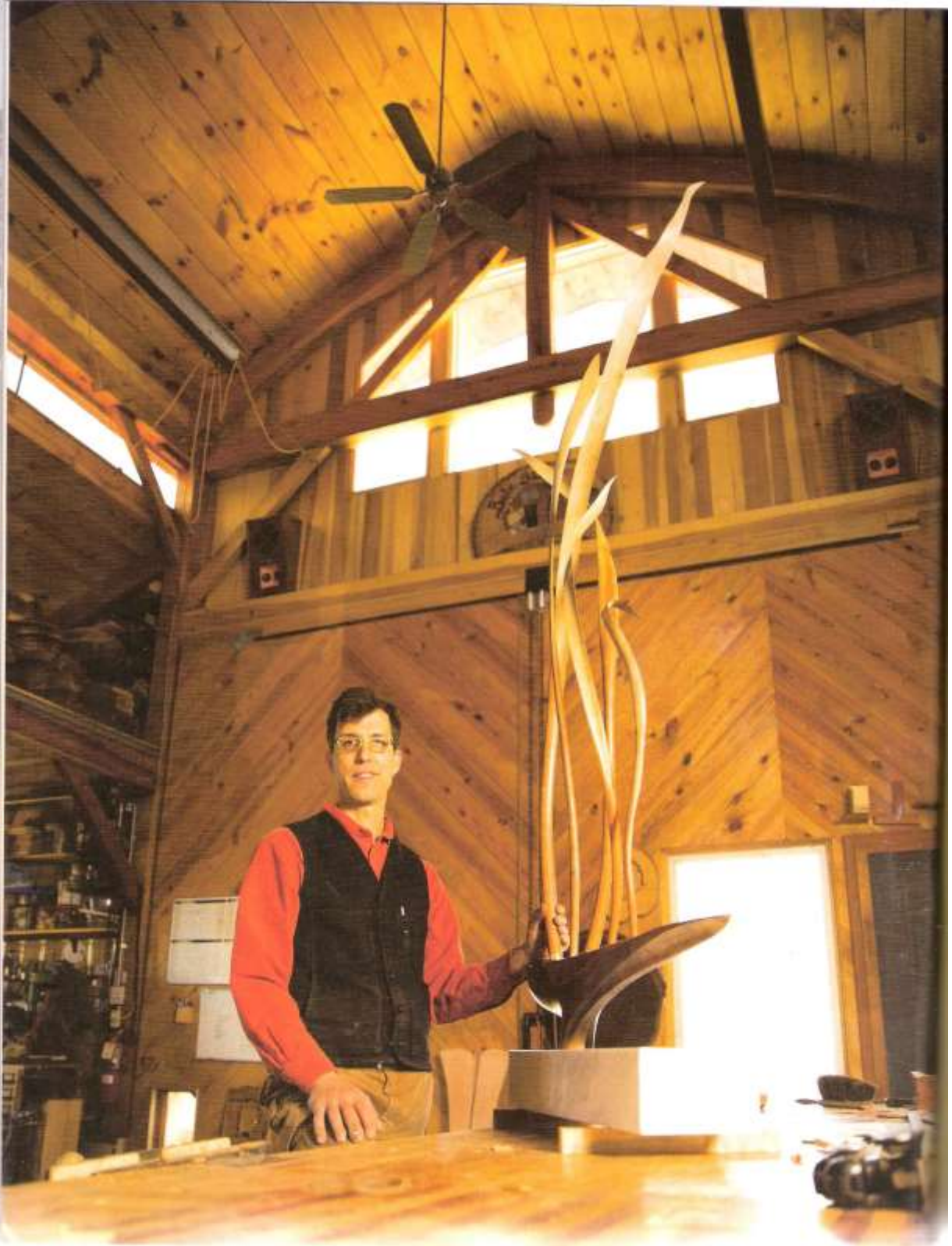
Artist studios, though similar in purpose, vary greatly in style, size and if you will, personality. Some are works in progress; others are themselves a work of art. Many can even

be considered rudimentary. What they all have in common is a retreat from the daily world to where work is produced and the creative spirit is fully embraced.

On any given day, Nancy Hammond can be found in her studio “fooling with color.” Trained as a painter, Hammond has become well-known for her series of silkscreen prints pulled from hand cut stencils, lithograph posters, limited edition giclees, and fine art prints depicting nature and life near the water and on the Chesapeake Bay.

Large windows above the garage are what first come into view when approaching Hammond’s home, leaving no doubt that an artist resides here. Located deep in the countryside of Queen Anne’s County, Nancy’s studio (built by son Richard’s company, Richard Hammond Builders) was designed not only for what Nancy loves but for who she is. “I am where I want to be when in my studio,” Nancy explains as we ascend to the second floor to see the space. The room is large, open, and drenched in light. A set of doors to a walkout terrace reveal a view that seems to depict a perfect example of where this artist gets her inspiration. Admittedly a hopeless daydreamer, Nancy immerses herself in the environment. “I just let my eye wander across shapes. What I’m often looking for is the repetitive nature of those shapes, patterns in nature—trees, and leaves mostly—just love them. Being here, it’s all around me.”

Left: Centerville-based woodworker Vico van Vaele





**"NO MATTER WHERE I AM IN THIS SPACE, I AM CONSTANTLY REMINDED OF WHERE MY RESOURCES COME FROM." —VICCO VON VOSS**

Born in Kiel Germany, Vicco is gifted with a combination of talents from both his maternal and paternal grandfather. His maternal grandfather was a forester and woodcarver who inspired Vicco's deep love of nature, understanding of trees, and introduced him to the craft of woodworking. His paternal grandfather was an architect who worked in conjunction with Frank Lloyd Wright to re-build structures in post-war Hamburg, Germany.

Named Bolz Shop after the estate his father grew up on in East Germany, the studio sits on a hill at the end of a winding gravel drive surrounded by Vicco's beloved trees. Despite the "wow" factor of this amazing space, every square foot of von Voss' shop is utilized. Massive doors to the 2,400-square-foot shop open widely to reveal a true example of form and function. The entire building is a reminder of where his resources originate. Wood is the star here and there are no nails used; rather mortise and tenon, 100 braces, and 1,000 wooden pegs hold the structure together. Key to its design was to allow for as much open space as possible and Vicco clearly has accomplished that.

Vicco points out that working in wood often requires the assistance of others, but that is not always possible. To account for that, he designed and built a huge overhead crane system in the center of the shop. Like the rest of the building, it was made from salvaged beams as well as other components. "The crane basically acts as my back, allowing me to be self-sufficient. I can move pieces of furniture or lumber and hoist things on to the truck for delivery." Vicco utilized



the structural area above for wood storage in order to have more working space on the ground. "It's all about efficiency," he says with a smile. Fitting with the design, a graciously curved roof gives the space the look of a cathedral. Clerestory windows were installed on each side of the building, not only to bring in light but to break up the vast amount of roof. "Before I added the windows the magic wasn't there. The moment I put them in, the place came alive making it look as though the top section of the roof was actually floating!"

There is no showroom here, just works in progress. When the one-of-a-kind pieces are complete, they quickly leave the shop for their final destination. A spiral staircase in the back of the shop leads up to the roomy loft-style office, flooded with natural light. "No matter where I am in this space, I am constantly reminded of where my resources come from," Vicco reiterates. I have an obligation to my trees, and that is to build a piece that will last as long as it took the tree to grow. The same goes for this shop. It must withstand the test of time and must be representational of what I am capable of doing. I think I have accomplished that."

**"IT'S MY WORLD. I CAN BE IN TOUCH WITH WHAT IS AROUND ME AND THAT IS ULTIMATELY WHAT DRIVES MY WORK." —NANCY HAMMOND**



Hammond works using acrylic paints, crayons, glue, and an abundance of colored cut paper. She makes a point of bringing attention to a squared-off space located near the top of the stairs she fondly calls her "wet room." "I can really let loose in here," she says. "It's the perfect place for mixing and throwing paint around." The plywood floors are painted white and are covered with paper scraps. "I never had a final floor put on since I knew I would wreck it!" Nancy says laughing. Every so often there is a need for Hammond to clean up and get things back to where they belong so she can start fresh. "I actually love the mess," she tells me. "But when things are not going well art-wise, that's the perfect time for me to get organized. It can be refreshing to have the room have that clinical look, like a laboratory. Then I can get out colors and start all over again!" Must-haves for Hammond are her collection of tables—some stationary, others on rollers—that can be found scattered throughout the room. "These were designed to be a specific height since I look down so much to do my work," Nancy explains. "And I simply could not be without this crazy looking chair or my spring-loaded Fiskars scissors!"

For Hammond, hers is a studio that provides the isolation she needs. "It's my world," she says. "I can be in touch with what is around me and that is ultimately what drives my work."

When custom-furniture designer and timber framer Vicco von Voss enters his Centreville shop he feels as though he is actually inside one of his creations. And that is just the way he wanted it. There is no doubt, as von Voss states, "the space defines what I do." Designed by Vicco to resemble a Maryland barn, everything about this structure and what is inside was passionately thought through before a single step was taken to construct it.

For years Vicco rented a shop in town and was quick to discover what worked for him and what did not. "When it came time to build my own shop, I knew what to base my design on and exactly what my needs were," he explains. Those needs were not only functional, but spiritual. "When I look at a tree, I see beyond its outer form. Multiple layers beneath the bark reveal a history recorded in the outline of the grain and color of the wood. It is important that I'm using every part of that tree, bringing that energy into the space and to my work, and ultimately to my clients."







**"I REALLY HAVE SEVERAL STUDIOS—AT HOME, IN THE CLASSROOM, AND OUTDOORS. EACH ONE OF THEM FEEDS MY CREATIVITY AND IS, IN THE MOMENT, MY 'SECRET SPACE.'"** —JEN WAGNER



In contrast to Hammond and von Voss, mosaic artist and instructor Jen Wagner can work pretty much anywhere, but her main base of operation is an extra room in her St. Michaels home. The space is bright, open, and furniture minimal. "It's a bare bones kind of space. Pretty much what you see is how I found it," Jen says. She is also a self-proclaimed "floor dweller"—able to pick a spot, sit down, and get to work.

Self-taught, the art of mosaics came to this Eastern Shore native by accident. She always loved the colors and patterns found in the vases her grandmother had, and made up stories from them as a child. "When grandma passed away, I got her vases and kept them in boxes. Over the years, they all broke but I could not bring myself to throw them away, so I began to play around and started doing mosaics." One thing led to another and she began to get commissions.

Since the thrust of Wagner's work is breaking glass apart and reassembling it to create something beautiful, this no-nonsense kind of space is ideal. Broken glass and other working materials are arranged in an organized clutter kind of way, and several works in progress reveal themselves throughout the room. Photos of her kids dot the walls along

with printouts of inspiring quotes. "I need to see all of my little treasures, my touchstones" Jen says. "And, yes, I know exactly where everything is!"

The studio being part of Jen's house fits this busy artist's lifestyle. "I go back and forth from not wanting anyone around to craving that interaction, and this gives that to me. It's also about survival. I can leave the studio, get my kids ready for bed, fix a meal, and jump right back in without losing a beat. In fact, the kids will come in to work with me sometimes and it is stimulating for all of us," she says smiling.

When not in her studio, Jen can be found teaching classes at the Avalon, working on-site with clients, or installing an outdoor wall mosaic. "I really have several studios—at home, in the classroom, and outdoors. Each one of them feeds my creativity and is, in the moment, my 'secret space.'"

Visiting these artists in their studios opens up a world beyond what we enjoy when viewing a painting, sculpture, or any form of art. Behind the end product there is a place that has been designated not just for inspiration, but for organization, management, and methodology. At the end of the day, it is a magical space artists can call their own. ♦





