

Chance Encounter At Mall Leads Farm Woman To Art Career

BY JOYCE BUPP

York County Correspondent

DOVER — Farm woman Ailean Detter laughs at her secret wish.

"Someday I'd like to be in a finger painting contest," she chuckles. "I figure I've had lots of practice."

And so she has. Ailean Detter is a country artist, a creator in oils, acrylics and pastels whose paintings to date number over 300. More than half of those hang in the homes of delighted customers.

Most of the rest are on display in her studio-gallery, located on the Detter's family farm on Old Carlisle Road. But unless they look carefully at the sign on the decorative windmill outside the pole barn, casual passersby would never suspect the wealth of talent reflected by the paintings inside the metal structure.

Until 12 years ago, Ailean spent her time raising their four children, assisting her husband, Lorne, with the farm chores, and volunteering in church and community activities.

That was until the day she was shopping at a nearby mall and spied an exhibit of tole painting by Yorker Maxine Shaffer. Intrigued by the artwork, Ailean asked what tole painting was all about and promptly requested to sign up as a student.

After two years, Mrs. Shaffer felt she had taken her student about as far as possible with tole technique. While shopping for a picture frame in Carlisle, Ailean again spotted an artist at work, stopped to talk, and enrolled again in art classes.

When she asked to begin studies under Jo Pucci, Ailean had no way of knowing she would be with the

Carlisle teacher for a total of eight years, interrupted after five years when the teacher moved for about a year to California. During that interim, Ailean pursued her art studies at the York Academy of Arts.

"I would never have thought this would happen," she reflects, standing in the middle of the studio where, last October, Ailean Detter began her first art class as the instructor. "It's all due to Lorne."

Lorne Detter saw the possibilities of the farm's relatively new metal pole building. Half of the building had been in use previously by a son-in-law as an auto body shop, with the other half utilized for farm storage.

For over a year, they worked at cleaning, redesigning, and remodeling. From high atop a scaffold on a farm wagon, to hours spent on his hands and knees, Detter redid the building, from overhead beams to carpeting.

A corner where automobiles were once spray-painted has become the studio area. Carefully-placed lighting prevents shadows at any spot in the room which has adequate space for up to six students, plus paintings Ailean has underway. A small, but complete, kitchen is opposite, and the remainder of the large building is open for a gallery-supplies-work area. Lofts at both ends of the gallery add a relaxing living room corner, and additional storage and display.

But it is the paintings and related decorative artwork that stars in the innovative gallery. They cover one broad wall, floor to ceiling, with bright images and brilliant color.



One of Ailean's paintings in progress is being personalized with her client's specifications to include pigs, a dog and cat, his antique automobile, and even a Conrail train.

Landscapes are numerous in the display, many with the old barns and outbuildings which Ailean favors. Snowy, winter scenes hang next to floral still lifes. Hawaiian sunsets, European castles and picturesque farms in the shadows of mighty Alps are tasteful testaments to Ailean's travels overseas with brush and palette in hand.

Scattered through the studio are clippings from magazines, calendars, photographs, and publications on painting, a cornucopia of ideas and items that Ailean hopes to "get to" with a paintbrush someday.

As it is now, several classes each week and an increasing list of commissions has her working almost full time. Most work comes through satisfied customers, students and word-of-mouth. However, a display at the downtown York restaurant Granfaloons and a showing during May of her paintings at the Dover library have given Ailean's talent further local and newspaper exposure.

While Ailean has studied watercolors, acrylics, and pastels, oil paints remain her favorite medium.

"I like oils because they dry slowly; you can work the colors, and blend shadings," she explains. And, quite often, to get just the right shading tones, her favorite squirrel-hair brush is put aside, and her fingers instead go into the moist paint.

"My fingers are never clean," she confides, holding up hands marked with tracings of color. "And I seem to end up with paint spots on all my clothes."

Her best critic, Ailean claims, is Lorne, an avowed non-painter.

"He can look at a painting and immediately spot a mistake. And he's finally comfortable enough with a brush to take one in hand and show me what needs corrected."

Teaching has brought a new dimension to Ailean's artistic accomplishments. Her first classes were as a leader of the Create-A-Project, with members of the Davidsburg 4-H Club. First year students begin with textile painting, generally personalizing a favorite T-shirt or jeans. The second year and beyond, they paint on any item they choose.

Ailean's studio classes are limited to six students at a time, so she can give individual instruction as necessary. Students paint whatever they choose; there are no structured "steps" in her methods. Her goal is to maintain a schedule



The pole building which once housed automobiles to be repaired and repainted has become a unique art gallery for Dover farm woman and artist Ailean Detter.

of nine classes weekly, three each on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Progression of her students gives Ailean immediate positive feedback on her techniques; and she enjoys the pleasure novices find in learning they, too, can capture a mood on canvas.

"One of my students came in and said that her husband looked at her painting and asked her why she was still driving a school bus," Ailean relates.

One class is specifically for youngsters, ages 10 through 14. And, all seven of Ailean and Lorne's grandchildren are already accomplished artists.

"If someone is around here more than a day to visit, they'll be painting," promises Ailean.

Nearly all the lovely paintings in Ailean's gallery are priced, except for a few that the family has especially requested her to keep.

"It is really hard to part with some of them, sometimes. I'm not always ready to give them up right away," confesses this artist, of her attachment to certain paintings.

A special favorite that hangs in the gallery is not by Ailean, but a valued reproduction of a country scene by famed landscape artist Robert Wood.

The Detter's made this "find" at an auction, and because of the texture of the canvas had held out slim hopes that it might be an original. Further investigation, however, proved it to be a reproduction on graphic paper.

"Robert Wood is probably my favorite artist," Ailean says. Several prints of his famous scenic paintings are on hand in the gallery for students to study for painting detail and technique. She's also a fan of York artist

William Falkler.

Currier and Ives win Ailean's admiration, too, and she paints reproductions of the famed lithographs, carefully notating on each canvas that it is a reproduction.

Several York and Adams county farm families proudly display Ailean's decorated milk cans and rural paintings, won as grand door prizes at dairy princess pageants. Lorne's employer, William Sprenkle of Spangler and Sprenkle Feeds in York, has for many years purchased dairy-related artwork from Ailean, and donated it annually to the dairy princess committees of the two counties.

Along with her almost full-time professional art career, Ailean serves as the secretary-treasurer and membership processor of the York County Farmers Association. Her gallery office also does double duty, since Ailean is the Dover area aide to 199th District Representative John Broujos. She continues as a 4-H leader, and she and Lorne have been active church leaders for many years.

The four Detter children are all grown, and three of them are pursuing ministerial careers. Judy and her husband, Walter Brandenburg, are both ministers and teach at the Mt. Vernon Bible College in Ohio. Sharon Gross lives in York and is employed by the Granfaloons restaurant. Susan and her husband are associate pastors in Lorraine, Ohio; and David and his wife, Lavonna, are presently studying for the ministry at Life Bible College in Los Angeles, Calif.

The Detter's also keep in touch with a former daughter of sorts. Masayo Matasuhama, a foreign exchange student from Japan,

(Turn to Page B4)

Homestead Notes



Ailean and granddaughter Holly Gross blend shades of oils, a job Holly adamantly claims is not her favorite part of an art lesson.