

Hoffmans Retire To Cultivate Artistic Abilities

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DOVER (York County) — Stepping through the front door of Mary and Wayne Hoffman's home is a lot like walking into a folk art gallery.

Set in a giant loop formed by the Conewago Creek in northwestern York County, the Hoffman farm is a small private world untouched by urban sprawl. At the end of a long, scenic lane, the couple's spacious farm home serves as a perfect setting for artistic talents both have cultivated in their retirement.

Mary's oil paintings and decorative artwork mix and mingle through the cozy rooms with the handcrafted furniture and natural-life carvings created by Wayne. Both have a flair for turning the old and unwanted into items of useful and artistic beauty.

Mary Hoffman retired several years ago from a career in the real estate business. Following knee surgery in 1980, she signed up for a fall semester evening class in beginner tole painting at the Dover High School.

"I wasn't sure how good my knee would get and I wanted to try something different," she says of her reasons for joining the art class. "And, I had an old tin pan here I wanted painted. After six weeks, I was addicted."

That Christmas, one of their daughters gave Mary a beginner's set of oil paints and two books on painting. Though she had started with acrylics, Mary soon preferred the flexibility of the oils.

"I like to be able to walk past a painting and fix my goofs; with slow-drying oils, you can do that. Everything is an experiment for me. I get a lot of books, and read a

lot about how to do different things, but I've taken some classes and attend seminars," Mary adds.

Many of Mary's oils feature flowers and birds; some are of landscapes and picturesque old country buildings. A painting of the Hoffman's barn, a building dating to 1743, hangs near a window with a view of the classic, red structure. There's even a portrait of Wayne, done by Mary in a class for which Wayne agreeably consented to pose for the students.

Some of Mary's painting is of the decorative type, ornamenting picnic baskets, milk boxes, trays, cheese boxes — even garbage cans.

"I like to paint big things," she explains, with a grin. "My daughter saw a painted garbage can and told me about it; it was the first big object I ever tried."

It turned out so well that each of the Hoffman's nine children eventually got their own decorated garbage can. Mary frequently paints them for wedding gifts. She prepares the new, galvanized, 20-gallon size cans with a base coat of metal primer before adding trailing vines and flowers or perhaps a whimsical rabbit or raccoon.

In 1982, Mary joined the Keystone Painters, a regional artists group which she now heads as president. The more than 100 members travel from as far away as State College and Lebanon as well as the states of Maryland and Delaware to the bi-monthly meetings, usually held at the Hoffman's own Salem Union Church near Dover. One meeting is held each year in Maryland.

"We often have a seminar or paint-in between the six regular meetings. Keystone Painters has members at all levels of ability;

ability doesn't have to stop someone from joining," Mary says. "At every meeting, someone teaches some technique or idea, and we usually have 'show and tell' of things we're working on."

One thing Mary does not paint are the beautiful carvings crafted by her husband.

"She's not allowed to do those," teases Wayne. "Carvers do their own painting."

"I wouldn't have time anyway," counters Mary, adding that she already has more painting projects than she can complete.

Wayne took his first carving class in 1984, after retiring from his carpentry trade of more than 30 years.

"I thought he should try it; I sent a check in for the class so he'd be obligated," chuckles Mary, explaining her persuasive tactics.

The graceful shorebird he shaped led to another, and another; the "flock" now numbers 35, each different. Wayne has also added ducks, swans, loons and songbirds to the array of delicately carved birdlife. In many, each feather is etched in such detail and the acrylic colors so lifelike you expect them to chirp or quack.

Favorite carving of the couple's grandchildren is a rattlesnake, the curves of its body fashioned from separate blocks. Joints in the three-foot wooden reptile are so carefully fit they can hardly be seen.

A wooden chain carved by Wayne is another attention-getter. The chain of about a dozen connecting links is crafted from a single block of wood. And a sleek wooden replica of a Corvette sports car is carved from several layers of walnut, glued together to give a striped effect to the finished, highly-polished auto model.

Carving the sports car brought Wayne somewhat full-circle in a lifelong love affair with woodworking.

"When I was a kid, I would run to my grandfather's shop. Probably one of the first things I ever made was a bird house," he reminisces of his early efforts with a drawing knife. "In 1934, Chrysler came out with an air-flow car. I built a model of one out of two curved pieces of wood, cut windows out and put a couple of wheels on it to play with."

Native Pennsylvania pine boards salvaged from the barn

granary have proven a treasure trove of material for Wayne's woodworking skills.

A keyholder inside the front door is fashioned from a section of one of the 18-inch wide granary boards, and is a tribute to the Hoffmans combined sense of humor. Rats chewed holes through the section, leaving behind telltale teethmarks. On a piece of plywood for a backing, Mary painted a family of raccons peeking out through the ratholes.

"I wanted to paint a rat," Mary explains, "But I couldn't find a good picture of one."

Like Mary, Wayne always has a couple of ideas waiting in the wings. A green-winged teal duck is the project under way in his current carving class with Manchester teacher Joe Kline.

Since Christmas, he has worked

several dozen hours on the white pine carving of an eagle with outstretched wings, which will be perched on a piece of log or limb. To add the fine detail of texturing each feather, Wayne peers through a free-standing magnifying glass while using an etching tool that burns tiny lines in the wood.

Claws are fashioned of copper wire, then coated with a putty-like material that can be shaped, textured and colored to create a life-like bird's leg.

Numerous pieces of furniture in the Hoffman home are testimony to Wayne's woodworking talents. Tables, shelves, storage and toy chests and stools made from an oak tree that had fallen along the Conewago Creek are scattered throughout their cozy home and

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Outstretched wings, carved separately, will be fitted to the body of the eagle. When completed, Wayne will mount the finished carving on a log or piece of tree limb.



Calling herself a "dab" painter, Mary touches up the swan she painted on an old wooden box.



Colorful paints and Mary Hoffman's talent combine to turn ordinary household items — garbage cans, old wooden boxes, trays, a wood saw—into lovely works of art. Her Christmas gnome remains from the holidays.



Wood artist Wayne Hoffman crafts the frames that add the finishing touch to Mary's oil paintings. A wooden rattlesnake he fashioned in sections winds through part of his "flock" of 35 different shorebird carvings.



A reverse-glass painting of geese decorates the Hoffman's transom. For this unique type of art, Mary uses waterproof ink to outline the design, then fills in the color, adding finished details first and background colors last.

Homestead Notes