

LIFE AT THE RIVERHOUSE

BY TERI BORING

From the windows of her art studio, Ann O'Mohondro sees horses, geese, fish, bald eagles, and minks, each delighting in the abundance of the Williamson River. This is the site of, and part of the inspiration for her Riverhouse Gallery. Open now for one and a half years, the Riverhouse Gallery showcases the work of 40 local artists, including wearable art and her own original totem and impressionistic art.

The variety of media used – wood, fabric and precious metals – are all part of the Riverhouse Gallery's individualistic spirit. "Everything is always changing and it's always a challenge. That's what makes it fun and keeps it interesting," says gallery owner and artist Ann O'Mohondro. This isn't the usual fancy-frame, glassed-in, paint-on-canvas gallery. She denounces the arrogant philosophy of "if you have to ask the price, you can't afford it." Art displayed at the Riverhouse Gallery is welcoming, not intimidating. Edifying, not confusing. Rich, not overpriced.

Opening the Riverhouse Gallery was a big step in combining two important elements in O'Mohondro's life. Her art and her family. "I am a mother of three kids, first. I have a husband. We're raising a family. I wanted to try to market my own work," she explains, "but because my three kids are all in elementary school, I'm not in a position to gather up my wares and travel around to different parts of the country and put my work in lots of galleries." The Riverhouse Gallery intermingles family, artistry and inspiration.

choice. "The character and grain in the maple burl is just outstanding, so I'm going to stick with this while my supply lasts. The burl on the outside already frames the piece. I have a lot to work with before I even start to work on the subjects that will be on the surface."

After O'Mohondro burns the images on the burl, she goes over the surface with a pigment. "I take Watco oil, a pure natural Danish oil, and universal pigment or stains, and blend my own colors, mix my own paints and then apply them so that I don't mask the character or grain of the wood. I still get a transparent image."

Sometimes the characteristics of the burl, such as color, grain directions, and placement of knots, determine the painted image. "It's my own interpretation of what the wood wanted to be. And if somebody is interested in the piece even if they don't see that, they'll see it someday."

For custom-designed pieces, she chooses her burl according to what her burl subject is – a trout, bison, an otter, a human face. "Maybe the shape of the wood (grain) is the



Ann O'Mohondro-Rodgers working in her studio/gallery/home.



O'Mohondro's best known craft is original totem art which she creates on hardwood burl by engraving and painting. A totem is, by definition, a figure or representation of some animal, less commonly a plant, or other natural object after which a group is named; also applied to the animal or natural object itself; sometimes considered to be ancestral or paternally related to the clan.

O'Mohondro visually totem animals that she has extensively studied, and whose significance in nature she's begun to understand. Many of her painted images are accompanied with a wood-burned, poem-like interpretation of her totem. For instance the bison's: "This bison carries totems of his existence, having travelled over the plains and prairies, experiencing the many cycles of the heavenly bodies, leaving only his tracks behind and the myths and legends of another time."

Another technique she uses besides totem, is what she calls impressionistic images. The beholder sees the animal in its natural environment, dimensioned further with a misty, dream-like sensation.

Many different types of wood have served as the canvas for both her original totem and impressionistic art; currently, maple burl is her wood of

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actual shape of the figure I'm painting on the surface." She enjoys doing custom orders because it helps her to branch out, and explore previously unfamiliar, but interesting subjects.

It hasn't always been possible for O'Mohondro to actively pursue a career in art. "It wasn't until I had already gotten the so-called 'real job' and worked for a paycheck that I

allowed myself the time to really tap into my more creative side." Right now, with a place to create, offering refuge and freedom at the same time, she doesn't see the hours of designing and painting as a mere job. "To me this is not work. When you look at the wood and you already see things happening – shading and patterns – it charges that inspiration to make something beautiful out of the wood."

"I think my work looks so unique because it's an art form that I've worked out by trial and error." With limited formal art education, O'Mohondro's artistic fine-tuning stems from sheer persistence, while the

images themselves are directed greatly by her past, including travels to South America, Europe and Hawaii as well as childhood inspiration from her Makah Indian foster brother.

Her will to create, and the means to do so, fountain from her children and, in more ways than one, her husband, Ed Rodgers. "When I've wanted to throw in the towel, he's been there to encourage me."

How committed is he? "My husband built this house ten years ago. This is the hot tub room we're in right now. When I needed a studio, we elected to change this whole setting and gave up the hot tub." Her art supply and work area are, in fact, on a platform that covers the hot tub.

O'Mohondro is establishing an artist's network. "I'm trying to establish a listing (of artists) and then two or three times a year we get together socially. It's a chance to come with the kind of artwork you do, to display that and get to know other people and compare notes or encourage each other." The network is also useful for practical reasons such as finding out a good place to get business cards made, learning about new avenues to market work, or learning how to put a price tag on your own art.

"As artists go, I think

be Marketer and Creator interchangeable. I think it's an injustice to ask artists to price their own work. It's much easier for me to have somebody close to me, like my husband, who knows how much time it takes me and all the processes I go through to create a piece. He can help me establish a price. It's such a personal, creative product that setting it to monetary value is hard." She's hoping that the through the artist network people can find solutions to some of their own challenges.

O'Mohondro is actively involved with Chiloquin Elementary students, painting murals and signs. The children learn how to use paints and color and certainly feel a sense of accomplishment when each project is done. "If they can grasp the concepts when they're young, they're going to carry that through," she says, remembering her own limited, but concentrated, art instruction as a child.

Her community work with children, the opening of the Riverhouse Gallery and the inspiring, unspoiled beauty that draws so many to our stronghold Ann O'Mohondro's as a Klamath Basin artist.

"I'm very happy here. It will be here for quite a while. It's right."

For more information, work stop by the South 5th Street 2961



4 ft. Maple Burl Private home * over fireplace (horizontal presentation)