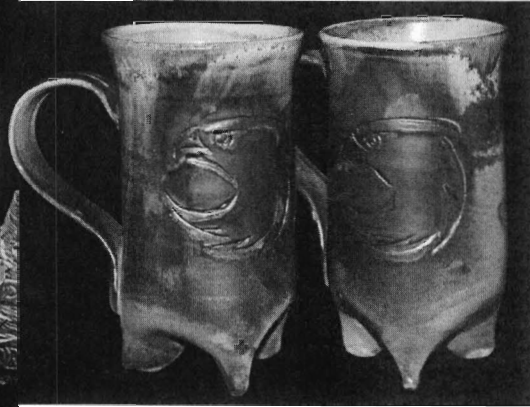


Photos courtesy Larry and Dee Aguilar



QUALICUM BEACH ARTISANS' MARKET: FROM "WHAT IF?" ... TO "CAN-DO!"

by David Morrison

In April, Susan and I moved into the dream home we've worked for our whole lives. Slowly but surely we've been getting everything set up, building towards applying the finishing touches. By this I mean adding the icing and cherry via the deliberate process of siting each piece in our collection of mainly local art exactly where it looks its finest. We will walk around with each painting, sculpture, carving or whatever, trying it in every feasible space, for as long it takes, until agreeing that it is where it needs to be. We will take this action very seriously, because our appreciation of art runs deep, because our art considerably enhances the quality of our lives. It lives with us, inspires and amazes us, its presence contributing to who we are.

Someone who will implicitly understand this approach is potter Dee Aguilar, who, with her husband Larry, founded the Qualicum Beach Artisan's Market (QBAM). The Aguilars live and breathe art every day of their lives, so much so that when times got tough they felt moved to

do what they could to provide local artists with a venue to promote and vend their wares.

"Back six years ago, when the recession in British Columbia really started, nobody was buying art and a lot of artists were really struggling," Dee recalls. "It was a situation beyond their control, of course. It (QBAM) was my husband's brainchild; he said to me one day that we needed to find a creative venue for the artists to go to so they had an opportunity to make money. We started to think about every possible scenario and having some big chats with town council, eventually putting a proposal to the council."

Held outside The Old School House (T.O.S.H. - 122 Fern Rd W) on summer Friday evenings, the QBAM is going from strength to strength year-on-year and providing not only a much needed additional platform for a wide spectrum of local creative talent, but a fun event for the community and tourist

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traffic alike. Although a simple idea borne of the desperation of challenging economic circumstances, the market serves not only the artists, but the wider arts community, the town, and Vancouver Island's touristic reputation. It is a win-win-win-win situation!

"The artists come, they set up," continues Dee, "and are given opportunities to show their art, make new connections – whether it's collaboration or sales – and also to be able to introduce to the locals and tourists where their work can be found, whether they have their own home gallery or are shown at a particular gallery. It's a great opportunity for people to meet the artists firsthand and have a discussion with them, maybe create a friendship with them, look at their art, ask questions, and even bring their children to ask questions on how they got started. It also gives T.O.S.H. (because they're open for the same hours we are open) the opportunity to see new artists and invite them to do their own shows, or else their art can be added to the gift shop, which is another valued asset to the artist."

The QBAM will be held from 3:00pm until 8:00pm, each Friday between June 28 and August 30, with a core group of permanent artisans and others that appear for part of the season. "The artists come and go; everybody has commitments in the summertime, so it's an open door plan," Dee explains. "Once they've been juried in by my husband and I they might say they can only do four weeks out of the ten, but that's fine."

So, although visitors to the QBAM may encounter a few different artists from week to week, in itself an enticing reason for locals to attend regularly, those appearing will include QBAM founders and master potters, Dee and Larry Aguilar; Wendy Joy (Beads of Joy; handcrafted glass beads);

Qualicum Woodworking (from furniture to kayaks); Dave Kasprick (Red Cod Forge; metal sculpture); Jessey LaFontaine (ornate handcrafted gourds); Ruth LaFontaine (metalsmith); Jeremy Humpherville (Coastal Carvings; wood carvings); Dave and Tamaki Friesen (Crossed Heart Forge; Japanese-inspired craft knives and metal art buttons); Shatisha Mararie (Manga-inspired art); Jessie Senecal (metal art); Del Mark (stone carvings), and glass artist, Ted Jolda. Also appearing, is "digitographer," Linda Tenney, publisher of the fine magazine you hold in your hands! What is digitography? Attend the QBAM and all will be revealed!

Besides the visual arts, there is also art of the musical variant at every QBAM event. The line-up is to be confirmed as we go to press but, like the artists, the musicians are juried, so of high quality and chosen to provide suitable ambience and a melodic soundtrack to proceedings.

Dee was very excited about QBAM 2013 as the first Friday approached, telling me of her efforts to make the events more 'guy friendly.' "If you're a people observer like I am," she continues, chuckling, "what I have noticed is while there's a lot for women, there's not been so much for men, so we added a lot more of what I call – don't laugh – the 'manly arts' – things that would interest guys! People giggle when I say 'manly arts,' but it's a way of saying men are not forgotten!"

As a man I am intrigued, but as an art lover I am as delighted to gaze upon a piece of painstakingly crafted filigree silver jewellery as I am a rough-hewn dugout canoe, as long as I can appreciate the skills that have gone into creating it. My own interpretation of what constitutes art is a broad church, but if Dee wants to bring in more geared to males, I say bring it on!

The QBAM is a prime example of what can be achieved with a little bit of determination and initiative, by like-minded individuals pulling together for the common good. As I said earlier, it's a deliciously simple concept but, as Dee reveals, it seems to have inspired and captured the imagination of folks far and wide.

"I get people from right across Canada and around the world saying that they like the concept and asking how we got started, why it was important to us, what kind of hoops did we have to jump through, and so on. I just tell them to start with their local town council and asking, 'What if?' They are the two strongest words in the English language that can make anything happen."

Susan and I will certainly pay a visit to the QBAM this summer. Budget permitting we will likely pick up a piece or two, perhaps with places in the house in mind for them, or else we will take them home and go through our tried and tested routine to site them. They will inspire us and we will fully consider the talent that has gone into their creation. Dee will like that, as she is keen to express that when people buy art they fully understand "the skill, determination and dedication" that has gone into it, even when times are hard. She is an artist that puts on events for artists, so this is an entirely expected appeal, and one that even as a non-artist I can entirely relate to.

For further information about Qualicum Beach Artisans Market, please visit: artisansinqualicumbeach.shawwebspace.ca

Editors Note: Yup, it's true. I'll be sharing an artist booth this summer with fellow photographers, Dave Graham (88.5FM The Beach), and Randy Hall. We hope you'll stop by!

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