

Looking for art in all the small places...

by
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Art is an intangible. Most of us never bother to analyze whether the artist succeeded in breaking new ground, we react on a more basic, emotional level... either we like it or we don't. That said, you should know this area probably has more artists per square mile than, say, plumbers, each with styles as varied as Northern New Mexico terrain. Some chose to make their living off the beaten path, and if you're willing to take a drive, it's worth it!



Bennett Strahan

Buffalo Nickel Poster, Postcard and Pickle Company

Many mornings, before the sun has peaked over the eastern edge of the prairie to illuminate the Sangre de Cristo mountains rising from Cimarron's edge, Bennett Strahan and his partner, Cheri Miranne, will drive out of town to watch the sun rise.

"I love sunrises," Strahan says. "Some of the most brilliant colors come from sunrises."

The experience, he says, is "fleeting. You've got to suck 'em up quick."

In his travels as an architect, Strahan will watch the sun rise — or set.

"Sometimes it's just sitting and watching a sunset and implanting that in your brain."

Strahan may decide to take a picture, but only as a reminder, a string-on-the-finger to remind him of the moment.

"Cameras never catch the image," he says. "But the picture refreshes my mind to where I was and then I can pull all those colors back.... Oh yeah, *that* was a great sunset, now let's recreate it."

Strahan captures that image with monotype prints he creates by applying oil paint onto Plexiglas "then I come back on top of them with heavier oil paints."

With monotypes, each print is unique because of the gradual lift of layers of paint from the plate, although

several prints can be pulled from one application of paint onto the plate.

Strahan sticks with landscapes, unadulterated by humanity.

"I paint what I see. I'm very much enamored by sunrises and sunsets here and all over the world. Landscapes. I don't paint people. I like the things people have either left alone or not been introduced to."

Strahan has lived all over — Hilton Head, S.C., Vail, Santa Fe... even Nashville, where he wrote western music (and had two top-five hits in Europe!). But he was raised in ranch country in Wyoming. He enjoys flyfishing on Cimarron Creek.

Strahan is a 1966 graduate of the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Ariz., and it is his architecture career that has enabled him to live in Cimarron.

"As an architect, I have not been listed in the phone book for nine years," he says. "It's all word-of-mouth. That's a real privilege, to have done a good enough job for someone to recommend you to someone else."

Strahan works in a huge studio at the back of the Buffalo Nickel Poster, Postcard and Pickle Company on Cimarron's 9th Street in a space he improved.

Summer 1996, a tornado tore through Cimarron and "ripped off part of the back of the building. I was going to put a door back there and didn't want to tear out the wall to do it. It showed us where we had to put our doors."

Miranne selects the gallery's art and merchandise, saying, "The gallery is very eclectic, which is really the goal. The only prerequisite is that it's quality — from Bennett's pickles to T-shirts to fine art — it has to be excellent. That's my only requirement."

Art styles range from realistic Western art to contemporary minimalist sculpture; hand-blown glass vegetables to unusual gold and silver jewelry.

The gallery also features works by local artists Martin Pavletich, Elliot Norquist and Letitia Litrell, whose father Bill was longtime manager of Philmont Scout Ranch. ☺

Bear Necessities

Walk up to Bear Necessities on Thermo Drive in Eagle Nest and the first thing you'll notice is bears — lots and lots of chain saw-carved bears.

Some carry skis, some hold welcome signs.... Each has a different pose and expression — in other words they are all unique.

Inside the shop, though, it's another story. The bears are there, as are chain