Made in Haliburton - Rooted Artists in the Haliburton Highlands by Dale Lindsay

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One of the Haliburton Highlands' greatest and best crops is its cultural and artistic community. Here you can find a dazzling array of artists, poets, potters, dancers, musicians â€¦ the list is seemingly endless. The area has a variety of â€˜Tours' where recognised artists are joined together for open studio days while masses of art afficionados and collectors peruse them one at a time . Not only are there many artists but the excellent level and quality draws plaudits, awards and recognition from all around the earth. Some of these proficient people move here, others are brought up here.

Two excellent examples of this are the artists â€˜Chuck' O'Neil famed amongst other things for his wire sculpture artistry; and Susan MacDonald, a multi-talented artist that is setting new boundaries in style with her felted fabric products. Each have signed up for the new online artists online market , www.MadeInHaliburton.ca, a ventureoffering juried artists from the area with a international storefront.

Following health issues he delighted in expressing himself with sketching and painting. His paintings and drawings of life studies won awards at juried shows. Many of his works found their way into galleries and his reputation grew.

Charles' satisfaction of his new media took him artistically further than he had been before, from the commission to create a screen inside a house to run up alongside a stairwell (from the basement to the roof itself inside a gutted house) to being approached, at a specialist show in Philadelphia for gallery buyers, to making a series of display shoes for an elite shoe chain across the USA. The screen featured in the Canadian National press, home improvement magazines and even a TV show.

Commissions to build for the Haliburton Sculpture Forest were huge projects where scale was not a problem. He started with a large figurine of Eos lifting his arms to the rising sun, and followed this up with a spectacular reprise of one of his shoes.

â€˜It's the balance. Nature. People. If you need time out, to think, to get inspiration â€¦ it's just a short walk away. The lakes and trees, the birds, the animals. It's a community and a place like no other.'

And the www.MadeInHaliburton.ca website, what does Chuck think about that?

â€˜Exciting, innovative. It will let me concentrate on sculpting, now that is a wonderful idea.'

Sue brought a few things back with her from Australia, besides the family. One was the name, SueMac, which not only was the name that she was called in Australia, but one of her favourite Canadian trees, the sumac. She kept this name when creating her website suemacdesigns.com.

Another was a â€˜got to have it' scarf that she saw in a shop there. Silk with felted alpaca wool. Sue has an allergy problem with regular wool, but not with alpaca or merinho. From owning this, Sue was driven to understand how it was made, the felting process. She recognised potential.

â€˜Looking at that scarf now I can see how the quality is not that good, but I love it because that is what started it all. It doesn't look much but it keeps you warm when it's cold, it stays cool when it's hot. It's natural products, and the colours are just amazing.'

Sue has created a dazzling array of possibilities. Not only does she have fourteen basic styles of

scarf, from a simple wrap to the snug warmth of a tubular snood, developed but she has also taken time to build relationships with her suppliers.

The scarves are based around a substrate of silk. Light, strong and colourful.

â€˜My supplier keeps me in touch with this season's colours on the silks â€¦' she says, proudly showing her collection of lengths of material, â€˜ â€¦ and then my wool supplier sends these â€¦'

The skeins of wool are multi-coloured, light and brightly hued. And so, so soft. This leaves no doubt about the supreme quality of the materials that she has chosen. Placing a skein against one silk after another you realise what a spectacular range of combinations are possible. There are contrasts and supportive combinations almost beyond measure here. There can even be different colours on either side or variation in the thickness.

â€˜It has surprised me how fast it has all taken off. In the 2010 Tour de Forest I was a little shy as I had never done anything like that before. I had 200 people through the studio, I got loads of supportive comments and compliments but did not sell a thing. In 2011 things just went crazy.'

How crazy? Sue has several stores in Toronto and another in Bancroft that stock her scarves, the sales that she had from the 2011 Tours were enough to make her sit down and gulp. In 2012 Sue is taking part in four Tours, she has increased demand from the stockists and hopes to add a few more, and is now selling online via MadeInHaliburton.ca

â€˜A global marketplace for the wonderful art of Haliburton. That's something long overdue. The whole area of the Highlands deserves far more recognition, both for itself - the beauty of the place - and the sheer richness of the culture and arts.'

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