

Rob Gwynn starts a new painting in his barn studio. "Painting here in the winter is great with the stove going and the snow blowing outside."



At top, two blue bills wing their way over a lake in late fall. In another Gwynn watercolor, directly above, a wood duck swims in a pond.

# After 8 years, artist realizes dream

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Photos: DAVID FRANK

A year? Two, maybe — but five years getting ready for one party? Rob and Peggy Gwynn of Metamora did just that and they can hardly wait for the big event the weekend of Sept. 13-14.

Gwynn is the popular Michigan watercolorist who formerly had his studio and showroom over his father's store in downtown Birmingham. Peggy handled a lot of the business details in addition to doing matting and framing. Opening the studio and becoming a full-time artist was a courageous move for the young man (he's now in his early 30s) who gave up a job as a designer with General Motors to pursue his first love, painting.

But, courage didn't stop there. Five years ago the couple moved from a pleasant, comfortable lifestyle in the suburbs to a 10 acre farm on Dryden Road. It had a large barn that had been in use for many years, outbuildings and a house which the Gwynns considered bull dozing. Together Rob and Peggy Gwynn began to convert the barn into a studio and exhibit area and the house into the charming, habitable home it is today.

All this was done with the goal of having a party for several hundred friends, outdoorsmen and collectors and an open house for the public in one grand weekend.

"This first show," said Gwynn, "is really to commemorate the new studio. There will be 20 new paintings and a retrospective made up of those on loan from area collectors."

**THE NEW EXHIBIT.** "Waterfowl Mist," will surprise many who associate Gwynn with wildflowers, barns, and bits and pieces of a passing rural way of life. Almost every painting he does these

days is of waterfowl and upland game birds. "I haven't done a barn for so long," he said, "all I've been doing is wild life and waterfowl."

Gwynn is an avid duck hunter who can't remember quite when or how he started. He thinks it was while he was in high school. But, it has caught hold of him to the extent that he is continually involved in the sport itself on Saginaw Bay, and he's also an active member of Ducks Unlimited and Michigan Duck Hunters.

"I'm also actively pursuing federal and state duck stamp and grouse stamp competitions," he said, "but, these are heavy competitions. The best of the professionals enter. You have to be accurate. You're up against these guys who have been doing it for 50 years." And accurate means down to the last little tail feather. Consequently, Gwynn works from mounted, stuffed specimens as well as color photographs he has taken himself. A single painting, he said, may take several weeks, working eight to 10 hours a day to complete. Once they bought the farm, the Gwynns cleaned, rebuilt and remodeled both the barn and the house, repaired and repainted the outbuildings, put in gardens and a patio.

"We couldn't afford to hire anybody to help," said Gwynn, "so we did it all ourselves. If you don't have the money, you use your imagination."

**THE BARN FLOOR** was so heavily covered with manure that Gwynn didn't even know there was a cement floor until he got down about a foot. The floor is now covered with thick, chocolate brown carpet. The stanchions where the cows were kept remain, a reminder that it was once a working barn.

Many walls, particularly in the lower barn, had to be replaced because of dry rot. For wall covering, Gwynn chose

plush off-white carpeting, ideal for hanging pictures and an excellent insulator. All of the windows were replaced, stairs to the second store rebuilt, new doors constructed and a fieldstone wall added.

Gwynn's studio in the barn is heated in winter by a wood stove which is backed by the fieldstone wall, made of stones which he hauled in from the hedge row. The stair railings were made from horse jump poles, the doors, the bar in the exhibit area and trinn were made from lumber found around the farm. The rats and field rodents,

Gwynn said, departed quickly once the place was cleaned and renovated and the food supply cut off.

**HIS STUDIO,** WITH four large, north windows facing the house, was completed about two years ago.

"Painting here in the winter is great with the stove going and the snow blowing outside," he said. "This was my dream when I became a professional artist eight years ago. I love it out here so much. But it took Peggy about two years to adjust to it."

She smiled in agreement, and said now she finds it unnerving to return to

the crowded metropolitan area.

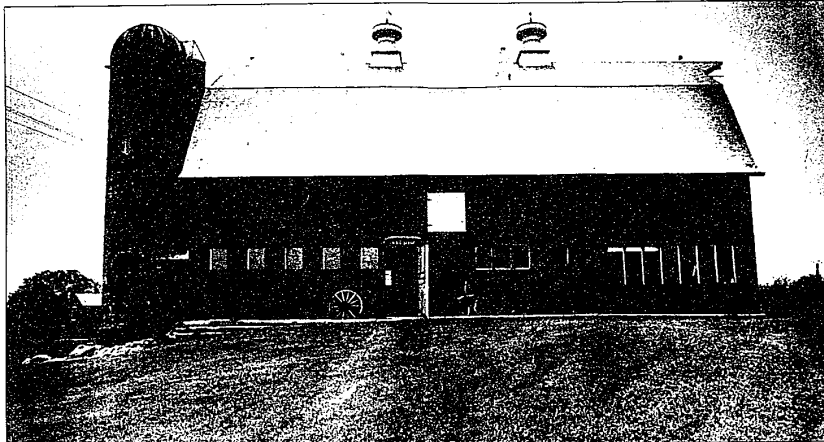
The house and outbuildings are all painted yellow and brown. Clumps of marigolds add touches of brilliant color. The fences are mended, the lawn green and tidy, a vegetable garden is tucked neatly behind the patio near the kitchen. A skeet shooting range is set up facing an open field. Wildflowers dot the fields. Three-year-old Bobby Gwynn can run easily from the house to the barn to see what his father is painting in the studio.

Gwynn watched the youngster come across the lawn and up the gentle in-

cline to the barn entrance. He looked out at the results of his five years of hard work and said, "When your heart's in it, it doesn't seem like work," he said.

His paintings sell for an average of about \$700, some quite a bit less, others more. The price he said is based on the time it takes to do them rather than size. All paintings in the show are originals.

The exhibit will be open to the public Sunday, Sept. 14. To reach Gwynn's barn studio, take I-75 to M-24 to Oxford to Dryden Road. The studio is at 1840 Dryden, one mile east of Metamora.



The Gwynns spent nearly five years converting this barn into a studio. The open house is Sept. 14.

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