

Creative Living

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In her studio in her Farmington Hills home, Andrea Striewski has her own art and that of others to inspire her and a lot of materials to use for her collages.

On the road with house collage artist

By Debbie Wallis Landau
special writer

IF ANDREA STRIEWSKI HAD pursued her original goal of teaching physical education, art fair goers wouldn't have been able to enjoy and buy her detailed architectural collages of Victorian homes.

But Striewski trusted her instincts at Michigan State University years ago. She sensed her love of sports didn't translate into a love for teaching them. So she turned to crafts. And eight years ago she read an article that changed her life.

"It was a piece in House Beautiful which profiled a man who constructed wooden replicas of houses. They were very primitive. But I was enchanted with the idea because I had always been fascinated with my own homes in Ferndale and Birmingham, where I grew up," she said.

She bought herself a hand saw and made a rendition of her own house out of wood. As she became more adept and started exhibiting her work at various art fairs, people commissioned her to replicate their homes.

It was at the 1980 Meadowbrook Art Fair in Rochester that Striewski met her husband, Ted. Their booths faced each other, and they were intrigued with each other's work, thinking a bracelet might be a good trade for a collage.

TODAY, THE FARMINGTON HILLS artist's creations are exhibited in about 30 art fairs across the country each year. Striewski has certainly enlarged on her early understanding that "one's home can be one's castle."

No longer are her homes simple wooden edifices. Visitors to the Birmingham art fairs, the Shalom Aleichem art fair in March or the Charlevoix summer art fair are familiar with the whimsical mixed media collages which blend textures such as copper, lace, handmade paper scraps, mesh from real screens and wood Striewski hand-paints. Doll house furniture has been utilized for pillars and porches. Paper cutouts of rosy flower pots soften the starkness of a black wrought-iron fire-escape.

Each time one peers at an intricate collage a new figure is

glimpsed — on one, it might be a sombre-eyed girl in a middy blouse shown in brown tones; on another, it could be a lazy cat or white owl perched on a chimney or sill. Wispas of antique lace seem to curl in an imagined breeze.

Striewski says being a regular exhibitor at art fairs has been a boon to her career. This year, she has expanded her previous itineraries of Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana and Ohio to include Florida. Shows in Boca Raton, Miami and Key Biscayne are scheduled later this winter.

"I enjoy them all, particularly the Birmingham and Charlevoix markets where the customers are sophisticated in their knowledge and their recognition of what goes into a piece," she said.

One misconception Striewski would like to dispel is that art fairs don't attract serious-minded business people.

"My thought is that some people still feel art is a hippy business, the way it was portrayed in the '60s and '70s. Art fairs were supposed to be a way for certain crafts people to manage to live out of their vans. Would you believe me if I told you some artists earn as much as \$100,000 a year, or \$10,000 from one show?"

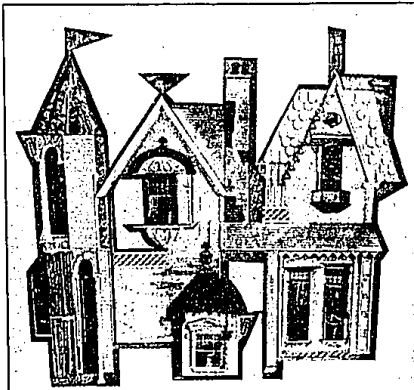
SHE SAID MOST artists work a five-day week and then do a weekend fair, sometimes hundreds of miles from home.

Striewski uses a van for transport. She and Ted try to participate in the same fairs as often as possible and are comfortable relieving each other and selling the other's work.

Striewski takes about 50 pieces, ranging in size from 44 by 40 inches to 14 by 18 inches. She's usually in a 10 by 10 foot booth and always includes unframed smaller works which she calls her "multiples" — houses which are not bordered by a mailbox covered wooden outline of the individual house design.

"It would be great to sell just large pieces, because, let's face it, you enter art fairs to earn money. But, variety is part of the art fair game. Not everyone has the wherewithal or the interest in spending a lot of money. I understand that," she said.

Her prices range from \$29 to about \$800 for the largest collages,



"Fragmented Townhouses" is an example of one type of art which Andrea Striewski does.

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—Andrea Striewski

but she said, "I find the pricing of your own work is so arbitrary. For me, it's one of the most difficult aspects of exhibiting and selling. I'm willing to listen to what people have to say. I can usually tell if they're negotiating from genuine need or just to test me."

She said she admires the resiliency of the artists she meets at fairs. "At each location, the parking is different, the community is a strange one, the weather varies greatly. All the work has to be both weather-proofed and people-proofed. And, of course, there are occasions where you just break even with expenses."

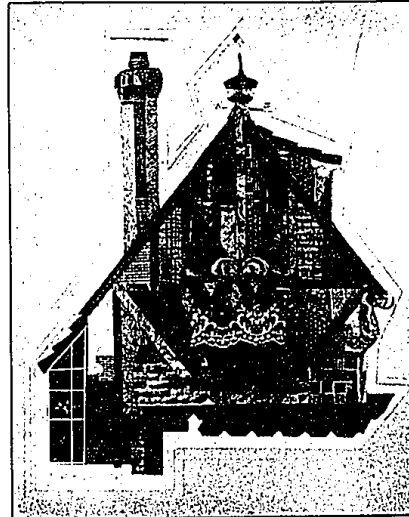
Though she says one can never predict the outcomes, past successes and the reputations of good markets influence her's and Ted's deci-

sions to apply for participation in various fairs.

"Michigan Council for the Arts publishes a list of the year's forthcoming art fairs," Striewski said. "I send in an application fee, usually slides and jury fee. It can get expensive."

LAST YEAR, SHE won purchase awards at the St. Clair and East Jordan fairs.

"Unlike cash prizes, these were situations where a corporation or business entity appropriated fixed



"Contemporary Tudor" by Andrea Striewski incorporates unexpected materials such as lace and some surprising images which surface on close inspection.

amounts to actually purchase a piece for permanent display in an office, or art center or community building," she said.

Although she hasn't actively entered any competitions, she doesn't discount that in the future. Currently, about one-third of her work is by commission.

When she's not doing the art fair circuit, she completes two or three sizeable pieces each week. The cutting and matting assistance she gets from her daughter, Shelley Bouwens, and another helper, Donna Hamilton, have enabled her to

maintain a good production flow.

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Considering that she began the larger, mixed media pieces just over two years ago, Striewski is extremely pleased to say she hasn't experienced any real setbacks. "Whether you have terrific sales or just hold your own, it's a terrific feeling to know you might be selling a person his or her first piece of art," she said.

Staff photos by Randy Borst

Opera Lite recreating that old Mozart magic, 12E