

Capturing Home

Exeter artist sketches families' treasures

From the time she could hold a pencil, Sandy McDermott drew pictures. Although she didn't take a formal art class until college, she continued drawing, eventually becoming a natural science illustrator, then an art teacher. Along the way, she developed a strong affinity for the town of Exeter, her home for the last eight years. As her career transitioned from natural science illustration to creating house and garden portraits, McDermott decided to donate a portion of the sales from select home portraits to the Exeter Historical Society.

"What inspires me is the notion of giving back to the community," says McDermott. For every house portrait ordered by an Exeter Historical Society member, McDermott donates 15% of the commission to the historical society.

"We were thrilled when Sandy approached us with her idea for a partnership," says Laura Gowing, programs manager at the Exeter Historical Society. "In addition to creating beautiful artwork, she is documenting our historic Exeter community, while supporting the society's programs through her donations."

McDermott's portraits are more than straight-on views of a house. Using watercolor, as well as graphite pencil and pen and ink, she tries to capture a home's unique features, as well as its surroundings; for example, a garden, a gazebo, even a patio.

McDermott started painting house portraits nearly ten years ago, but "it was by accident," she says. For 17 years, she preferred to depict the natural world, drawing plants, flowers and animals. Most of her work – reproduced in books, magazines and laboratory manuals – was in black and white. "I wanted to get into color and I like putting architecture in my work," she says. "My first house portrait was bought immediately." McDermott started with more traditional

house portraits before taking a commission for a homeowner who let her paint whatever she wanted. McDermott ended up painting six different views of the woman's garden and then decided she'd found a new niche for her work.

Constantly Drawing

Although McDermott drew constantly as a child, she didn't take a formal art class until after high school. "You reach a certain age where you need something more than experimenting with art," she says. "You get self-conscious and that's when many people think 'I can't do this.'" Between high school and college, McDermott was inspired again after taking a continuing education class in art. She was also passionate about the natural sciences and combined her interests at Salem State College in Salem, Mass., where she received a bachelor's degree in graphic design with a minor in biology. She later earned a graduate degree in natural science illustration from the University of California at Santa Cruz.

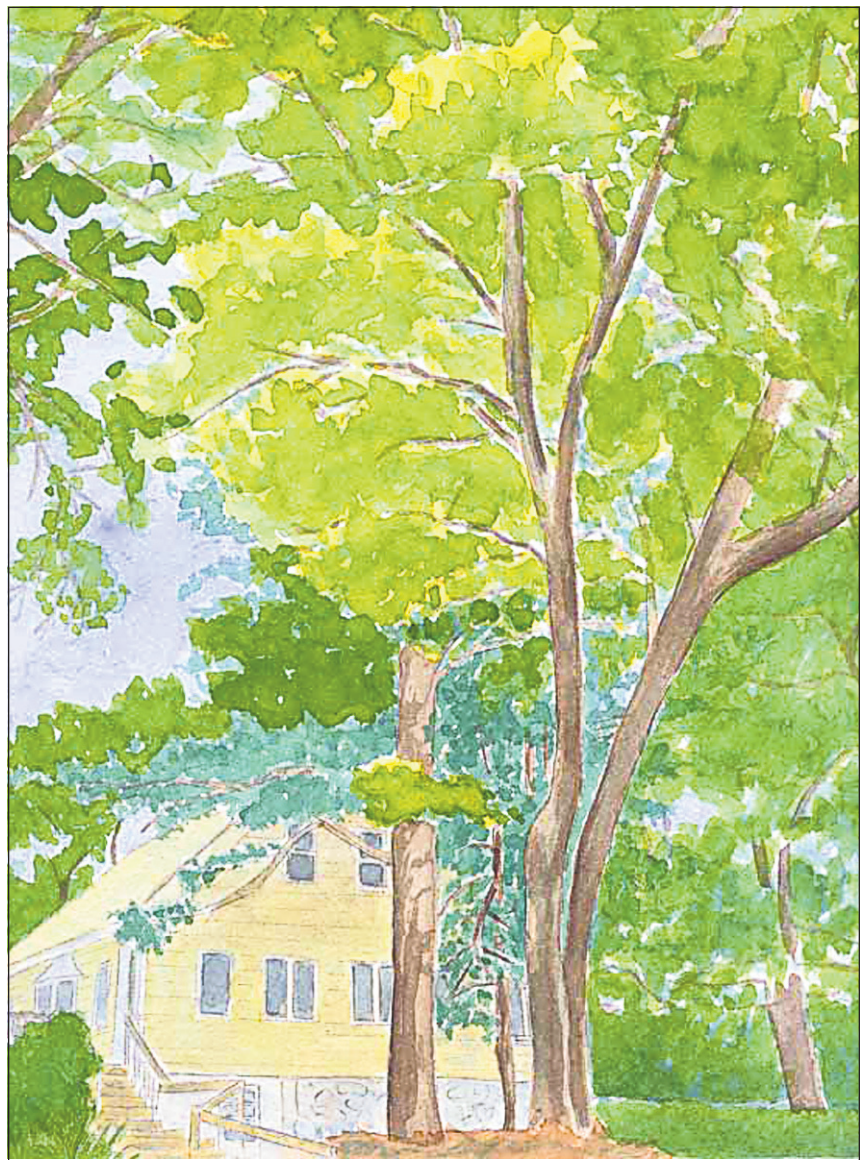
McDermott discovered she enjoyed teaching after starting her own classes for teens and adults. For the last five years, she has taught basic drawing with an emphasis on natural science, including color theory and field sketching, to teens and adults, taking the students outside to interpret the natural world. McDermott has run 10-12 week classes from her studio space at the Exeter Center for Creative Arts (and also works there as the art school's part-time office manager).

"I love doing this with kids and teens and making them aware of what's really around them – not a coffee shop, mall or friends," says McDermott. She often draws along Exeter's Swasey Parkway overlooking the Squamscott River. "We have migratory birds in downtown Exeter from South America," she says. "I want people to be aware that all of this is here."

Now that home and garden



By Debbie Kane



Images courtesy of Sandy McDermott

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portraits are the focus of her work, McDermott applies the same attention to detail that she did as an illustrator. She works with clients to identify what's special about their homes and spends at least a day on site deciding what views to paint, though she's been known to return more than once to capture

the best scene. "I went back to one property owner 12 times to get it right," she says.

McDermott hopes other area historical societies will be interested in a fundraising program similar to the one she's established with the Exeter Historical Society. "I believe a community-based non-profit would benefit from this association," she says.

Sandy McDermott can be reached at 603-772-0761 or birchtreestudio@comcast.net; www.birchtreestudioart.com; www.birchtreestudio.blogspot.com.