



Albie Alliet walks in his backyard. He's one of 22 artists on the Naples Open Studio Trail.

THIS WAY

TO THE ART

Follow the Naples Open Studio Trail for a rare chance to meet artists in action.

STORY BY MARCI DIEHL

If you decide to go on the sixth Annual Naples Open Studio Trail, bring your sense of wonder, fun, adventure and curiosity. Think of it as a trail of discovery, not only of the rich culture of creativity within and surrounding the village of Naples but also of the part of yourself that still longs for a little magic and imagination. That part of me still feels invigorated, days after embarking on my own little sample tour. The idea is simple: The studios of 22 artists will be open to you from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the weekend of Oct. 6 and 7. You can visit as many as you want. And you'll have plenty to choose from, including glassblowing, sculpting, traditional fine and contemporary art painters, glass lampworkers, potters, furniture craftsmen, graphic designers, photographers—even a canoe builder is a stop on the trail.

PHOTO BY LISA HUGHES



PHOTO BY LISA HUGHES

A health scare led Albie Alliet to take up painting full time. Now he travels to several festivals around the country, including in Florida and the Hamptons.

Many of the artists will give demonstrations and share a rare view into their world, how they develop their art and what inspires them. You'll see pieces that are usually found in some of the best galleries in the area and state. And you'll have a chance to talk to the artists—something that is often difficult to do at an art festival. Many of the artists are regional or national award winners.

Admission to the trail is free. You're given a map, so how and when you travel the trail is up to you. But be forewarned! Finished pieces of art will be available for purchase, and you can expect to be very, very tempted. *Very*. Repeatedly.

Fresh from my own studio visits, allow

me to take you on a sample tour of what to expect and some of the artists you might meet along the way.

On the trail

I have an abysmal sense of direction. I go left instead of right, north instead of south—I could get lost in an elevator. If you, too, are directionally impaired, make sure you have a good navigator with you or at least someone with a good sense of humor. The Bristol Hills and lake country are full of glorious but distracting roads and woodland views. I don't want you to end up in Prattsburg or Cohocton. Not that I did...but close.

Fortunately, the home of fine-

art painter Albie Alliet and his Grape Moments Studio are easy to find, and it's a good place to start.

Alliet and his wife, Jo Anne, live on Main Street in Naples in a white 1870s Victorian home. Its colorful walls are covered in Albie's paintings.

His second-floor studio overlooks Main Street. Paintings and supplies fill the wall space, and a long hall to the studio serves as an art gallery. Stacks of CDs line part of a wall in the studio, and a guitar rests in a stand. "Music helps me think," Alliet says.

Out on the screened side porch, which will serve as his exhibit space for the trail, I learn about Alliet's path to becoming a

"I love doing demos and explaining the process. People are fascinated." BECKY CONGDON, artist



PHOTO COURTESY OF NAPLES OPEN STUDIO TRAIL

Alliet's subjects include sailboats, European villages and seascapes, painted in various styles.

working artist.

It began in high school, where an art teacher encouraged him to "never stop painting," Alliet says. "He told me I had 'something.' It was always there."

It was a long time before that 'something' could be expressed in full glory, though, and it took a near catastrophe to get him to artistic fulfillment.

In the 1980s, he was happily employed with General Electric's Conrail Project in Hornell, painting occasionally on commission and for the occasional festival, when everything changed. Heart disease forced him into permanent medical disability and out of the corporate life.

He was only 49.

"It was traumatic," Jo Anne says. "Albie loved his job." To heal, he turned to painting.

"His style of painting totally changed," Jo Anne explains. "It was like a whole new person emerged. It was a release for him, to have that work."

As Alliet explains it, "I was able to explore my love of sailing and nature." The art on his walls showcases his eclectic interests, from a large biker portrait to roses spilling over a picket fence at Cape Cod. His work is full of emotion, action and movement. As I peruse his paintings, I can almost feel the bite of the winter cold in his painting of a lighthouse, the



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BY DARRYL ABRAHAM; PHOTO BY LISA HUGHES

"Earl," a three-dimensional relief by Darryl Abraham. The artist celebrates what he calls the "unsung heroes" of rural America in his work.



PHOTO BY LISA HUGHES

Darryl Abraham works on a railroad-themed piece inspired by his grandfather, who was a spike driver.

crashing surf frozen in place.

His life is full with a whole new direction, post-diagnosis. Alliet travels to Chautauqua and other fine art shows (including the Clothesline Arts Festival in Rochester and shows in Coconut Grove, Fla., and the Hamptons on Long Island). His work is sold locally in Artizann's in the heart of Naples, and he's the featured artist at Hammondsport Gallery this year. At this year's Naples Grape Festival, he'll be in the "King's Row" art area.

A working artist, indeed.

Multi-dimensional

My next stop, the studio of Darryl Abraham, is a simple left turn off Main Street in Naples at the end of a quiet lane of older, well-kept homes. A hand-painted sign announces the location of his studio off the side of what was once a farmhouse.

Dressed in a T-shirt, jeans and a baseball cap, Abraham greets me with apologies—he feels his studio should be cleaner and more organized. It's in what looks to be an old kitchen, with white walls, tools, cans of paints, two old logging saws on the wall, a band saw to cut out figures, pieces of art. Looks fine to me.

Darryl is listed as a sculptor and illustrator on the tour, but he "wears a lot

of hats," he says. His multi-dimensional pieces often portray the unsung heroes of farming and grape-growing who have lived in the valley for generations.

He works in oils, lithos, furniture and sketches. It's a very primitive, rustic style. "I guess you'd call it folk art," he says.

On the wall is a 3-D circus with painted crowds and circus acts in the background, metal and wood figures of jumping dogs, a tightrope walker and horseback riders. There's also a railroad piece inspired by his grandfather, who was a spike driver on the railroads.

Abraham is soft-spoken and almost shy as he confesses that he wasn't a very good student: "They probably wouldn't let me into college today," he says. "Fortunately, I was good in art." Yet he graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University and then UNC Chapel Hill graduate school with a fellowship in ceramics. And he has flourished as a teacher. He has taught in a state prison, at Finger Lakes Community College and at a private school. He's been a visiting artist at Wells College in Aurora and at Cazenovia College. Currently he's a visiting artist at Mansfield University in Pennsylvania.

His work has been exhibited at galleries in New York City and Washington, D.C., over the past 24 years, and at the Oxford

Gallery in Rochester for the last 15. He's also featured at the Susanne Gardner Kennedy Gallery at the South Bristol Cultural Center (see sidebar) and does commissioned work (check out his 14-foot-long and 18-inch-deep 3-D mural of vineyards at the Five Star Bank in Naples).

Raised here, his inspiration comes from everything that evokes the area—the trout streams, the hills. "I love farms and history...the scenes of a time gone by," he says quietly. "It's fiction, really. I guess I'm creating a fictitious moment in a time gone by."

Life in paper

Heading back north on Route 21 out of Naples, I make my way up the hill and find Jo Krajki's long gravel drive. Pulling into her driveway, I see two brightly painted wooden outbuildings and flowers everywhere. The view, overlooking the West River of Canandaigua Lake and the Hi-Tor wildlife area, is serene and undisturbed. This place could be a painting come to life, but Krajki actually specializes

Trail Head

The South Bristol Cultural Center is the headquarters for the Naples Open Studio Trail. Perched on a quiet hill overlooking Canandaigua Lake, the center is in a restored 1850s cow barn at 5323 Seneca Point Road and is host to many events, including classes in art, drama, dance, music, gourmet cooking and also one of the most photogenic wedding receptions I've ever seen.

The South Bristol Cultural Center also is the home of the Susanne Gardner Kennedy Gallery and Gift Shop, featuring works by more than 100 local authors, poets, musicians and artists (some of them on the trail). It's open 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays and 1–4 p.m. Sundays.

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coverstory

**“This is what we always wanted to do—
to work and live as artists.”** PAUL FRAZER, artist

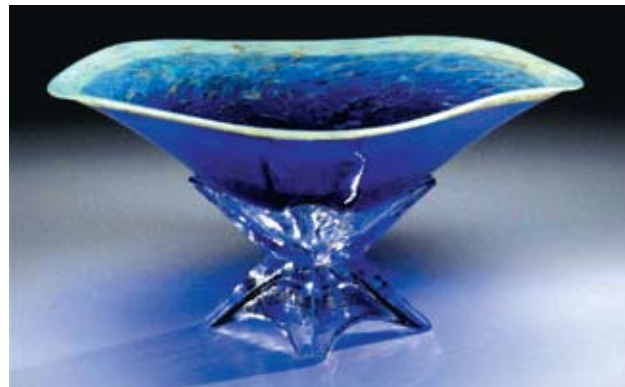


PHOTO COURTESY OF NAPLES OPEN STUDIO TRAIL

A glass bowl by husband-and-wife team Paul Wilsea and Carol O'Brien—a stop our writer didn't get to make but one you can.

in traditional paper-cutting.

Inside her 1880s home, art is everywhere—hers and that of artist friends. Visitors will feel like her friends, too. When she opens her home and studio to visitors on the tour (which she helped originate with friends like Carole Battle and Toni Moore), anyone will be welcome to sit and relax with the view, she says.

Most likely, they'll make a beeline to her second-floor studio in a former sleeping porch, with an even better view of the unspoiled hills and countryside.

Krajki came here from Maryland, where she worked for the government and the Navy. She met her late husband, Bill, in Corning and originally looked to move to the Southwest—until she found that art shows there were “few and far between.” Then they came to Naples, where she discovered so many shows within a four-hour drive that she felt “it was meant to be” to settle here.

She used to do 27 shows a year with her husband, who was a woodcarver. She still has some of his unfinished work in the studio, which they shared. These days she does 10 shows a year, including ones in Massachusetts, Sonnenberg's Arts at the Gardens and Rochester's Corn Hill Festival. She sells in shops (Artizann's in

Naples) and on-line.

The inspiration for her intricate paper works comes from everyday life, she says: “Rabbits in my garden, a line of chickens at a friend's hen house, children playing... my cat. I've always loved antiques and silhouettes, the simplicity of black and white...think of them like children's illustrations—like telling a story.”

Day Two

It wasn't that glass lampworker Becky Congdon gave me bad directions. She's one of the six artists new to the Open Studio Trail this year and the farthest west, on Honeoye Lake. But that's no excuse. The directions were fine. It was me.

When I finally arrived, Congdon was waiting for me in her driveway with one of the sweetest, most patient smiles around. Perhaps she learned it working for 20 years in corporations and with the military, where she worked in graphics. She put her master's degree in computer science to use as a systems analyst at Corning, Inc., where she fell in love—doubly.

“One of my first dates with my husband was at the Open Studio at Corning,” she explains. “I blew an ornament and got smitten with glass as art as well as science,” she says.



coverstory

Patrick Smith, of West Hollow Boat Company in Bristol Hills, fashions canoes from carefully selected trees—some from his own land.

PHOTO BY LISA HUGHES



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Counter-clockwise, from top left: Glassblower Kurt Carlson does the hot sculpting while his wife, Lynda Pownall-Carlson, paints with enamels. One of Patrick Smith's hand-crafted canoes; he says he approaches each "as a work of art." Furniture maker John Dodd, too, makes art out of functional pieces such as benches and shelves.

She took classes for nine years and ended up building a studio in back of her home on the lake. A year ago, she took the leap and resigned from Corning to work full time as an artist. For her, it's all about the glass.

"I love talking about glass!" she says and is almost apologetic to be so passionate. "I love doing demos and explaining the process. People are fascinated. I love that glass gives you depth. There's a strength in glass."

Her one-room studio, built by the Amish, has a large window looking out beyond gardens and pines to the lakeshore. Inside, her table is an orderly garden of jars full of colorful rods, twists and slices of glass, all sitting like flower stalks.

On display are pieces for sale: grape pens, wine stoppers, jewelry, bookmarks, a mug with glass handle, candlesticks, flower beads, aquarium beads, undersea scenes in glass. Beyond her studio, you can find her work at festivals, Artizann's, the Smith Gallery in Geneva, the South Bristol Cultural Center's Susanne Kennedy



PHOTO COURTESY OF NAPLES OPEN STUDIO TRAIL

Becky Congdon's aquarium bead was selected to appear in *The Glass Bead*, a respected glass journal.

Gallery and on-line.

First things first: a live demo. She hands me safety glasses, puts hers on and fires up her torch. "Glass is a nice marriage of the technical and the artistic," she begins. "It requires knowledge of glass properties and annealing." My private lesson begins.

After 15 minutes, the glass has taken shape in perfect layers—and I'm mesmerized.

Monumental

Paul and Suzanne Frazer's home and ceramics-sculpture studio are at the southernmost point of the studio trail. I find the road, but still I manage to get lost. I look for the dirt drive, get to the top of the hill, drive back down, start over, turn and find...camper trailers?

Little do I know that Paul is observing me through the woods surrounding their property. No matter: The Frazers and their gorgeous little son and daughter are busy unpacking from their first trip to the Berkshires for the sixth Annual Arts Festival, organized by the American Craftsman Galleries, who represent their work in New York City. Locally, the Frazers' work is at Vagabond Gallery in Canandaigua and the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester—and on Web sites.

The Frazers moved to Naples two years ago, into Paul's mother's old house after his father passed away. "In the past we



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always looked forward to coming to Naples to visit my mom,” Paul says. “We love it here. We weren’t aware of the community of artists here until we moved and got into the Grape Festival and then got involved with the Artists Trail. It’s such a wonderful array of artists.”

Paul and Suzanne met at Buffalo State University, in the ceramics studio (“He used to throw balls of clay at me,” Suzanne says. Paul responds, “Isn’t that what boys do to get a girl’s attention?”)

Their work goes from traditional pottery to contemporary sculptural pieces. “We’re trying to capture the eye of a younger-age generation. But it’s a challenge...They’re more focused on and distracted by technology.”

But their own little ones sit happily in the barn-turned-studio, creating clay pieces and drawing, while dad and mom show me piece after stunning piece. Suzanne’s haunting ceramic masks line the outer wall of the barn. Her motivation is in “the metamorphosis of a woman as she goes through transformation and transition... Her emergence is a never-ending cycle.”

Paul’s work reflects his influences from the classical, the figure (he uses his wife’s face and body in casting), Egyptian monument *steles*.

“I’ve always loved monumental pieces—obelisks, the Statue of Liberty,” says Paul. Lately he’s been into science fiction-inspired vessels and *raku*, the 400-year-old Japanese firing technique.

“This is what we always wanted to do—to work and live as artists,” he says. What’s his inspiration? He looks around. “The kids,” he says. “Being alive.”

There are many more interesting artists to visit on the trail, but I’m out of time.

The ones I did meet were people who could be—well, my neighbors. Warm, inviting, down-to-earth, interesting and often self-effacing. Easy to talk to. And they’re excited about having people stop by on the trail. I’ll be there, for another round of inspiration. ■

Maps for the trail (free and open to the public) are available at the South Bristol Cultural Center, 5323 Seneca Point Road, on-line at www.naplesopenstudiotrail.com or www.southbristolculturalcenter.org, or by calling (585) 374-6563.

Paul and Suzanne Frazer and their children, all hard at work—and play—as artists.



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