

The NATURE of Passion

by jami blaauw-hara

Stephen Kostyshyn '76 loves his commute.

All he'll see on the well-worn trail to his studio are his dog, a cat, deer, chickens, hawks, rabbits, or hear the sound of a loon calling. Here in the woods of northern Michigan, there are no annoying drivers, traffic jams, or road construction.

Stephen graduated in 1976 with a BFA degree, and his years of hard work as a potter and mixed-media artist are beginning to pay off. Not only does he spend up to 14 happy hours a day in his studio during the busy season, but he has the satisfaction of knowing that the nation is beginning to notice his work.

Nearly 6,000 entries were received from more than 35 countries for inclusion in the upcoming "Fiberarts Design Book 7," to be released by Lark Books this spring. He made the cut—an event indicative of the significant national recognition his work has received.

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As he travels to national art shows, Stephen's new mixed-media vessels are drawing attention. Incorporating a mixture of traditional materials has allowed Stephen to explore textures, forms, and styles that weren't possible when he worked in clay only.

Stephen started his career by following the advice of Adrian professor and mentor, Joe Stallone: "Make pots...lots of them, and don't stop." For 15 years, Stephen worked as a potter, interning at Brumm's Studios and Todd Warner Studios in Charlevoix.

He has been a full-time professional artist since he graduated, working odd

jobs to support his art only in the early years. Recently, he yearned to move in new directions. "I had a desire to make forms that were not attainable with only clay. So I started playing around in the evenings while still making pots by day. I had to support myself, so the pottery became my day job, so to speak. In the evenings, I delved into my passion."

This passion has brought forth a series of amazing, knobbly, wood, clay, and fiber baskets and vessels. Using natural fibers gathered in the Michigan woods and fields during the spring, Stephen weaves art that combines textures and shapes for work that seems at once modern and ancient. His unusual style is gaining recognition beyond publications. He has won prizes in

juried art shows, including the renowned Lake Front Festival of Arts in Milwaukee.

Going to art fairs across the country means leaving his peaceful commute for long freeway trips in a van full of art. However, on art fairs, Stephen is quite positive. "The friendships you make with other artists are life-long and quite wonderful. We are a sort of subculture, living these creative, innovative lives while the rest of the world seems to conform to the normal going-to-work and taking-vacations lifestyle. I absolutely love it!"

He usually works five or six shows a

year, and spends the rest of his time gathering materials and creating art. Some pieces can take up to a week simply to complete the weaving! However, his studio time flies. "[It's] time well spent for me. It keeps me centered and focused." His wife, potter Lynn Fisher, also works on their Bellaire property. Along with an aging pack of cats and a dog, the two are busy and happy.

Where will Stephen's work lead him? After three "career changes" (he started at Adrian in the printmaking department), Stephen is reluctant to make plans. "I never question the creative process, nor do I dwell on it. I let it flow in a natural way. I trust my heart to direct me."

His heart has directed him well. This Adrian graduate is harnessing the fruits of northern Michigan to aid his creative vision—and the results are impressive.

Visit www.StephenKostyshyn.com for more.



Stephen Kostyshyn '76 has fashioned his own style of art, and lifestyle, from the woods and fields of Michigan.



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