

The Artists Connection

By Katie McElveen

Painter and designer Lisa Boykin Adams is standing in her Camden studio, gazing at her painting of a grove of silvery-trunked trees. "I've passed these trees just about every day of my life," she says. "You probably passed them on the way here today. To me, they are just so South Carolina. They are so much a part of me and my life."

Adams' passion is infectious: the more she tells you about her work the more you want to hear. And, hopefully, the more apt you'll be not only to purchase a piece of her art, but to cherish it for the story it tells.

Sharing the art experience is the point of the Olde English District Tourism Commission's Artists Studios program, which invites visitors into the studios of select artists in Chester, Chesterfield, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster,

Commission. "It's amazing to see a piece of art created before your eyes, to see the work that goes into it."

Hickory Grove potter John Myers worked hard to get the program off the ground after seeing the success of a similar plan in Iowa. "It builds a very rich relationship," he says. "It is very rewarding to us to have people visit, but it is a wonderful way for visitors to learn about an artist. You see the experimental pieces, how he or she keeps the studio, it really creates a connection between you and the art you're buying."

But it goes even farther than that. John and his wife Jan, also a potter, have enjoyed having visitors to their studio so much that they've started a program for children. "They seem to love coming here, learning, and leaving with a

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Union and York counties to see the creative process unfold. To date, more than 25 artists, including painters (realistic, abstract and everything in between), potters, ironworkers, sculptors and even furniture makers have joined.

Marie-Helene Ryder-Cook is an abstract painter in Rock Hill. "We like to buy from people we know ('I wish we would have known Monet,' she laughs) and it is mostly people we know who buy my paintings," she explains. "It gives me a chance to tell them what I was feeling when I painted the piece, what I'm trying to convey." Marie-Helene enjoys working with customers so much that she'll often let them choose the name of a painting before they purchase it. "It's surprising how often their idea is similar to what I was thinking," she says. "It makes it mean more to them."

The public loves having an "inside look" at the artistic process. "We are delighted that so many outstanding artists are willing to open their studios so visitors can watch them at their craft," says Jayne Scarborough of the

little something. For us, it's all about helping children enter adulthood with those special memories that can only come from unique experiences. We're happy to help create them."

For art collectors, there's something very special about knowing the story behind the piece they've chosen. In Winnsboro, painter Linda Dye has had such success with visitors that she now keeps her gallery open late the third Thursday of every month. And by displaying the work of other local artists, she's creating even more interest in local art. "Our Thursday nights have become an event," she smiles. "Y'all come!"

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