



Gifted

By Vickie Mitchell

*D*an Neil Barnes, Keith Chambers, Rachel Savané, Amelia Stamps, and Cindy Wolf are talented local artists who invent, engineer, and innovate as they work their fingers and brains in modest basements, single- and double-car garages, and at six-foot stretches of workbench.

Central Kentucky Artists Find Diverse Expressions for Their Talents

For them, art is as much a passion as an occupation. Barnes is a Meriwether Lewis among glass artists, always exploring new ground. When Chambers talks about the complexities of his wooden gear clocks, the cogs in his brain seem to turn. Behind the counter of her Lexington jewelry store, Savané's quick hands play with rocks and wire, her jewelry's main ingredients. For inspiration, potter Stamps walks through her bungalow, absorbing the intricacies of the antiques that surround her. When sculptor Wolf needs to get in touch with her muse, she simply pets one of her baying Basset hounds.

The following profiles reveal more about these intriguing artists.

Dan Neil Barnes' monumental glass mosaics have become his signature. This three-dimensional stained glass sculpture measures 36 x 42 and hangs from the ceiling of a Louisville home.

COURTESY OF DAN NEIL BARNES



JONATHAN PALMER

Dan Neil Barnes wears loud Hawaiian shirts for a reason. Without his eye-catching outerwear, no one would notice the glass artist who creates mesmerizing, undulating glass towers built of 3,000 tiny squares of glass.

The three-dimensional mosaics, which make Technicolor seem dull, stand in hospital lobbies and hang from ceilings of private homes. They sum up where Barnes hoped to go when he plunged into glass art 15 years ago.

Back then, not long after he completed his first piece, a 1,700-piece stained-glass lamp, and began to win awards in small local competitions, friends urged him to study Louis Comfort Tiffany and other masters of glass. Barnes refused.

"I wanted to find my own direction," he says. "And, I knew if I was going to make money, it was going to have to be something different."

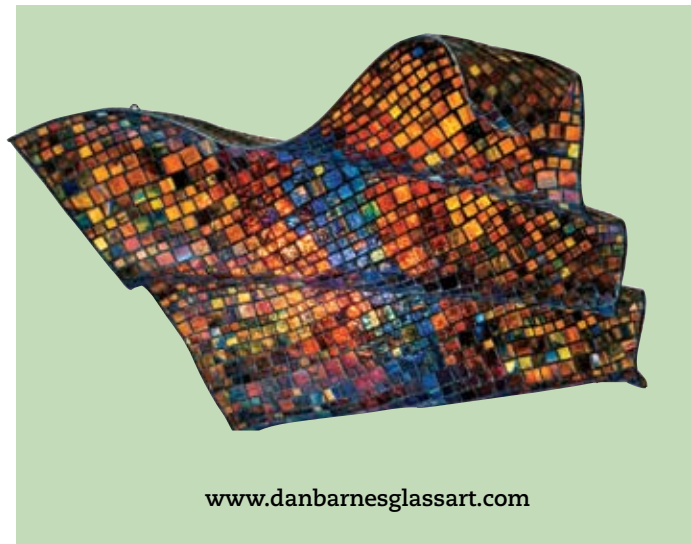
Today he has found both a path and profits, proving that making art and making a living aren't mutually exclusive.

Confirmation is a stairwell full of awards and his best year ever after exhibiting at more than a dozen juried art shows. He does commissions and custom pieces, many of them functional items such as lamps, sconces, fountains, and decorative doors. The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and the Kentucky Arts Council have commissioned him to create awards.

His monumental mosaics have become his identity piece. Each takes months to build, as each square of glass is cut, smoothed, wrapped, and fused with 700-degree solder. The pieces cost in the \$20,000 range.



Right, this three-dimensional glass sculpture stands 7-foot-3. Says Barnes, "Fluidness is what I'm really after."



COURTESY OF DAN NEIL BARNES

www.danbarnesglassart.com

Smaller budgets can afford Barnes' fused glass bowls, handfuls of colorful glass that seem to melt together, or his mixed media pieces, blends of fused glass, wood, and metal.

But it is his mosaic sculptures that push and challenge Barnes. In developing those pieces, he leans on lessons learned at the elbow of his father and uncles, who built houses in Henderson, Ky., and on his longtime career as an upholsterer.

Experimenting with structure, he's learned to make those sculptures freer and more flowing. "I have an inner drive to push the envelope and this three-dimensional work is a part of pushing it further. I want it to look free, light, and airy. Fluidness is what I'm really after."



JONATHAN PALMER PHOTOS

Keith Chambers makes clocks "the old-fashioned way."

Keith Chambers will never be accused of letting time slip away unnoticed. The Lexington woodworker has made a name for himself as the man who builds clocks worth watching.

An article in a 1987 issue of *Fine Woodworking* nudged Chambers to make his first wooden gear clock, an open-Mission style grandfather that stands tall, ticking away in his small living room.

Since then, Chambers has made and sold wooden-gear and other handcrafted wooden clocks at juried art shows throughout the region.

His clocks sum up the myriad skills of a man whose favorite classes were those that involved hand and eye — woodworking, drafting, metalworking, and photography. Even as he worked a full-time job as a senior design engineer, he worked with wood, making wooden sleighs for his daughter, bookcases for his house.

Of the various styles of clocks he makes, the wooden gear clocks are the most difficult to make and at a cost of \$2,700, the hardest to sell.



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The movement of the gears mesmerizes customers, but few have the resources to buy one. "I have a lot of people say, 'When I win the lottery, I'm going to buy this clock,' " says Chambers. "There aren't that many lottery winners."

He considers them heirloom pieces, built of a flattering combination of Kentucky hardwoods with exotic woods — such as black African ebony, for example — used for accents such as markers and hands. In all, each clock has more than 200 pieces, 170 of them custom-made. Chambers uses no high-tech tools or even nails. "They are glued up, the old-fashioned way," he says.

His less expensive lines of wall clocks, small desk clocks, and remote secondhand clocks become affordable ways to own a handcrafted piece. All share the same clean look inspired by Mission design. "I put a lot of effort into the style of my clocks. If it doesn't have aesthetic quality, it won't sell."

Rachel Savané cannot do the same thing the same way twice. Were she a chef her inability to follow a recipe would be disastrous, but as a jewelry designer it is her strength, an unwritten guarantee that each of her silver and stone pieces is one of a kind.



"One-of is my nature," Savané says. "Repeating a task the exact way I did it before is boring. I much prefer the evolution."

Her store, Savané Silver, sits like a sparkling jewelry box in what once was a nondescript office at Broadway and Short Street. When Savané is not greeting customers, she's busy at her workbench behind the front counter, where she "plays, plays, plays" with the two ingredients of her jewelry — sterling silver wire and polished stones.

Each piece of jewelry designed by Rachel Savané is one of a kind.



www.Savanésilver.com

COURTESY OF RACHEL SAVANE

In her designs, silver enhances but never overpowers stones that live up to their exotic names: ocean jasper, Bali coral, green druzy, Picasso ammonite, cosmic obsidian, manifestation quartz, among others.

Savané handpicks stones at gem shows for their color, patterns, and their power. “Stones are my starting point,” she said.

Elegantly simple yet edgy, her jewelry is also imminently functional. The long curved back wires of her earrings are art as well as anchor. Her men’s cuff links are one streamlined piece; a simple turn assures they stay in a shirtsleeve.

Reviewers have described her style as Scandinavian, and Savané doesn’t doubt that being of Danish heritage (she speaks Danish) and studying in Scandinavia have influenced her. “It is so pleasing to me,” she says of Scandinavian design.

New ideas — her own and her customers’ — have inspired new lines, including Metro Mod Man. The men’s line features Savané’s favorite stone, Kentucky agate, whose blacks, reds, and yellows add masculinity to rings, medallions, money clips, cuffs, and cufflinks.

Being able to design with a native stone is nice; having one that is so striking “blows me away,” Savané says. “If it was the only rock I was allowed to use, I’d be ok with that.”

Amelia Stamps If Alice in Wonderland went looking for a teapot for her next party, she would turn to Amelia Stamps. There’s a touch of whimsy wherever you look in the suburban garage that is Stamps’ studio. Teapots with loopy handles and chubby spouts seem ready to curtsy from their perch on asymmetrical platters. Crenellated tops make vases look like tiny fortresses. Tall boxes perch on tiny stubs that peek out beneath flared bottoms.

While her detailing and designs change, Stamps’ colors are constant — a soothing sea foam green, creams, buttery yellow, and a range of browns — so that each piece, no matter its pattern or its shape, agrees with the other. In a way her pottery is like fashion’s five wardrobe pieces worn in 150 combinations.

The look of Stamps’ pottery is inspired by home life, although not necessarily a toddler daughter enamored with Cinderella.



Home life inspires the pottery of Amelia Stamps.

It’s the antique furniture and glassware she admires and collects that inform her work.

“I look at a lot of antiques or older pieces,” she says. “That’s what I like about them. There is so much detail. It keeps your attention.”

The nubs that dot bowls and cups? Probably a subconscious link to the hobnail ice cream bowls in her cupboard. The oval shape and perky feet of her lidded boxes? Old oval clocks “that seem to stand on tiptoe.” The repeating flower pattern on a platter? “Someone told me it reminded them of a quilt,” she says.

The young mother of two markets her work in a number of



COURTESY OF AMELIA STAMPS

www.ameliastamps.com

ways. Originally from Asheville, N.C., she's also had a studio in Arkansas when she and her husband lived there. Those ties have given her retail clients outside the state as well as in, including Completely Kentucky in Frankfort. She also does the art show circuit and has had sales at her home.

Her pottery appeals to women. "It is so feminine," Stamps says. "I sometimes think about attracting a new audience with a more rich glaze."

At the same time, she has achieved what many in pottery aim for, with pieces so lively, they seem to dance.

"In the pottery world the trend is that we want to show that clay has movement, that it is alive."

Cindy Wolf's strength as a sculptor comes from her hands-on care of horses and dogs.

When she sculpts bronze replicas of famous steeds, Wolf can close her eyes and remember her champion Saddlebred, the gray mare Rambler's Wild Rose. As she works on small statues of Cavalier King Charles spaniels or pendants of proud Aire-



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Sculptor and jewelry maker Cindy Wolf has horses ingrained in her fingertips.

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dales, she can rest her hand on the head of one of her seven devoted basset hounds.

The California native learned to ride not long after she learned to walk, but Wolf didn't start sculpting until a friend urged her to give it a try 35 years ago when she lived in Colorado. Her first piece was a horse's leg. After working with horses so long, their features seemed ingrained in her fingertips.

"With my gray mare, I did everything. I trained her. I groomed her. I cleaned her stall," says Wolf. "So when I started to sculpt, it was just like rubbing my mare. I could feel where the muscles needed to be."

Her work caught the attention of the Thoroughbred industry, and in the 1980s Wolf was commissioned by the Thoroughbred Racing Association to sculpt multiple Horse of the Year honorees, including John Henry, as well as Eclipse Award winners. Her life-sized sculpture of Cigar stands at Gulfstream Park. The London gallery Frost and Reed has long represented her work.

With the market for large bronze works limited —"to produce a large three-dimensional bronze costs thousands of dollars and then you have to wait and hope someone wants it," she says — Wolf has begun making bronze jewelry.

Her horse-head medallions hang on handsome chains that she personalizes with beads that complement the patina she

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has chosen for the particular piece. Although foundries in Lexington and New York cast her work, she does all of her own patinas.

A number of Central Kentucky shops, including those at Keeneland, the Kentucky Horse Park, the American Saddlebred Museum, Artique in Lexington, and Raintree Gallery in Versailles, carry Wolf's work.

She's also begun sculpting similar medallions of various breeds of dogs, from terriers to retrievers.

Wolf worried that her innate understanding of horses and dogs might not be transmitted through the metal-working tools she must use for small pieces. "I work with my fingers," she says.

She's been pleased to discover though that her touch can be translated through her tools. Her pendants, like her sculptures, are accurate depictions, and her love for her subjects continues to shine through.

"I have always been so passionate about the horse," she says. "You get to know the wonderful personalities that they are." **K**