

# LIFESTYLES

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Section B

## Conversation piece

### CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF AN ARTISTIC KIND

By Marimar McNaughton • Staff Writer

Surprising, intriguing, whimsical and entertaining, public art creates a lively conversation piece, leaping out of the landscape, catching the eye of passersby, on foot, by cycle or from the window of a car speeding around the public back yard of greater Wrightsville Beach.

Millions of visitors each year cruise by Horace Farlowe's Vertical Encounter, a Cor-Ten steel sculpture planted in the courtyard of The Landing in Wrightsville Beach. Farlowe, a native North Carolinian, was born in Robbins in 1933 and lived until 2006. His 1980 sculpture was the winner of a competition administered by St. John Museum of Art (now the Cameron Art Museum) and supported by grants from the North Carolina Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts through the in-kind contributions of George and Mark Mitchell, who built The Landing.

Cor-Ten steel, developed for bridge building, and rail and marine transport for the construction of cars and containers, was first used in the 1960s by architect Eero Saarinen for the John Deere World Headquarters in Moline, Ill., and by Pablo Picasso for his Tête de Baboon at Daley Plaza in Chicago. Farlowe and his predecessors purposely selected weathering steel for its rusted patina when exposed to the elements over a period of years; in this case, 28 years of salt air, humidity and rain have crusted the towering colossus to the arts in public spaces.

"I think it's cool," Dumay Gorham said of Farlowe's piece. He said he had been driving past it ever since it had been in place.

Gorham, a well-known area sculptor in his own right, creates large-scale copper pieces inspired by figurative marine life.

"Some level of aesthetic is a major factor," Gorham said when he creates his pieces. "Something about it would appeal to most people on a certain level, whether



One of Andy Cobb's sculptures graced Sheila McCulston's courtyard on Harbor Island during the Harbor Island Garden Club's annual tour of homes.

they can appreciate the way it was put together or the sheer size of it or whatever it happens to represent."

He sees his artwork as a form of interactive entertainment and intrigue, that children can walk up to and touch, that families can pose their vacation photos in front of and take a piece of their experience home with them.

"My goal as an artist is to make bigger things ... and break into that next level of outdoor sculpture," Gorham said.

His flagship creation is the sea serpent on display in the lily pond at the New Hanover County Arboretum, and his angels are part of the permanent tribute to visionary artist Minnie Evans at the Airlie Gardens Bottle House Chapel installation.

Also at one of Airlie's fountains are Andy Cobb's outdoor sculptures of blue herons. Cobb has been creating larger-than-life-size copper fish, birds and frogs for a dozen years.

A Wrightsville Beach drive-by reveals some of his whimsical sur-

prises. In a private yard on Wayne Boulevard, in full view of passersby, Cobb's 6-foot frog sculpture is dwarfed by its 9-foot surfboard.

"Art's a funny thing," Cobb said. "It has to transcend, first of all, and it has to be affordable to the people who want to take it home. Nothing has quite touched people, from age 2 to 82, like the frogs. They're anthropomorphic, they're doing whimsical things, and everybody smiles."

When Cobb installs a show of his outdoor art, he said he sometimes hides his pieces in the landscape.

"There's nothing that makes me happier ... than to watch [people] call their friends over to see it. The element of surprise is a lot of fun if you can do it," he said. "They miss it at first ... and then they discover it; that's the best."

His 10-foot grouper hangs above the entrance to the Oceanic Restaurant, and an upright frog pushes an old-school rotary mower on the lawn at Lumina Station, where the developers, facilitated by Fountainside

Gallery, have invested in new bronze sculptures by artist Gary Lee Price, whose work has already been featured in Lumina Station's fountain and grounds. Price's life-size statue of Alina at the Eastwood Road entrance appears to be picking irises and watering others. Another of Price's pieces, a seated mother lifting a child, has been incorporated in the new shaded seating area, among rocking chairs, laurel oaks and fresh plantings.

It seems the tradition established by the Mitchell brothers so many years ago, committing art to the public arena, is a trend that bears imitating. Not only have the grounds at Lumina Station been refurbished after 12 years, but the developers of Autumn Hall have inked a deal with Creative Wilmington to position sculpture in the newest mixed-use community west of the oceanfront. The three-year contract, which begins in 2009, calls for three sculptures to be exhibited simultaneously, with new sculptures installed annually. Nine selected works



Staff photo by Joshua Curry  
Artist Brian Lawson painted the expressive and colorful mural found on the side of Roberts Grocery on Birmingham Street.



Staff photo by Joshua Curry  
Vertical Encounter, a sculpture made from Cor-Ten steel by sculptor Horace Farlowe, rests in the courtyard of The Landing office and retail building at Wrightsville Beach.



Staff photo by Joshua Curry  
Alina is one of two bronze sculptures by Gary Lee Price found at Lumina Station.

will represent artists from the greater Wilmington area, with each celebrated at annual events marking the new installations. The sculptures will be exhibited in Shannon Garden, a formal English-style park landscaped with ornate hedges, a fountain and reflecting pools.

Matt Dols, executive director of CreativeWilmington, said, "We recognize that Autumn Hall will be a tremendous draw for the local community and tourists. This is a great venue for public art and helps others see the value art brings to real estate."