



Dickinson artist Sue Bown works in her studio with lots of window lighting.

Photos by Kim Christensen

## Dickinson artist's house reflects her style

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DICKINSON — Art imitating life is evident at Sue Bown's studio in Dickinson, which is on five wooded acres, which also include her main residence, smaller cottages, a chapel, a tree house, a reading alcove and a bird deck along Dickinson Bayou.



Bown, born and raised in Corpus Christi, said her parents were her creative mentors. “My father was a renaissance man,” Bown said. “He could paint, cook, sew, design and build houses.” Her mother had a taste and flair for decorating.

By the time she was in college, Bown had painted a portrait of everyone in her family, she said. Later, she turned to impressionist art and drawing.

Bown, who refers to her style as “painterly,” said she prefers to call her art style simple and architectural.



After college and marriage, she began teaching and counseling the hearing-impaired, all the while painting and drawing and raising two sons.

### **Village-like Haven**

In 1975, Bown and her husband, Rod, found their utopia while driving the back roads of Dickinson. There sat 5 acres thick with overgrown brush and a rundown house built in 1900 with a collapsed roof.

Something about the property resonated with Bown and she said, “I’ve got to have this place.”

After years of remodeling and adding more buildings to the property, the village-like haven took on a personality of its own. Bown’s collection of antique lighting fixtures, leaded and stained-glass windows, doors, shutters and columns now had a home. All of the original windows were restored, and lumber from an old church in La Marque became flooring.

The art studio once functioned as a children’s tea room but now houses easels, canvasses and works in progress. The studio also is used for art classes and creative retreats where the coffee is always hot and the aroma of fresh-baked scones fills the air. Sunlight floods the room through multiple windows. Manuals on painting techniques fill every bookcase.

### **‘Icing On The Cake’**

Bown teaches art in her studio one day a week and also has artist friends convene weekly to hone their skills and partake of those homemade scones.

Bown also takes a life drawing class from Mark Greenwalt at College of the Mainland. “My art style is realistic,” Bown said.

She works mainly in oil and sometimes acrylic. Her subjects include people engaged in activities, but she also enjoys still life painting. “I like the steps that lead to the end result,” Bown said. “Adding paint to the canvas is just the icing on the cake.”

Her use of neutral tones lends a transparent feel to most of her work. Many of her paintings are of the objects in her house — a vast array of treasures she has been collecting for more than 45 years.

### **Place To Reflect**

The Bowns in 2005 built a small chapel toward the back of the property. It’s made from recycled materials, including windows, antique Mexican courtyard doors and pine floors. The “retablo” (saint) paintings were created by Bown, and the Stations of the Cross were drawn by her younger son when he was in grammar school.



Bown's father encouraged her to build the chapel, but he died before its completion.

"I feel his presence here," she said.

She also feels his presence at a peach tree he gave her to plant when she first moved to the acreage 35 years ago. Each year, when the tree is full of pink blossoms, Bown looks out her kitchen window and watches the petals fall in the garden before they become fruit.

"It's a nice reminder of him," she said.

Bown is represented by Buchanan Gallery in Galveston and Blair House Gallery in Wimberley. Her art also is on display around Galveston and in private homes.

