

Awash with color: Escondido artist's open house offers a brush with nature

By: **RUTH MARVIN WEBSTER** - Staff Writer

Cathy Carey is crazy about color. Take just a glance at her brilliant landscape paintings and that much is obvious. It's also clear from a look at the interior of her Escondido home and its hilltop backyard.

"When we moved here in 2001, everything was white --- the carpets, the walls, the drapes, the lino; it was a daunting task," she said during a tour of her two-story home, the walls of which now sport rich shades of terra cotta, turquoise and periwinkle. "The painters loved painting with all these colors, too."

The public can see all the colors next weekend, as Carey, 46, an accomplished artist, hosts her seventh annual free home and garden tour (see accompanying box).

The author of an art book called "The Philosophy of Color," Carey often describes the exact color of something by its label on the paint tube. She says the fruit on a bush called Buddha's hand will turn cadmium yellow when it is ripe. She painted the branches of a struggling coral tree ultramarine violet. Cobalt blue glass pebbles are scattered among the succulents and agave. Lemon yellow irises have burst out in the middle of the stream that flows from the top of the hill down to the patio beside the house.

Elsewhere, the fruit trees sprout pale pink blossoms, and the magenta iceplant strains toward the late afternoon sunshine.

"The garden is like my paintings," Carey said. "They're constantly changing with the seasons and the time of day."

She said she fell in love with Impressionism in elementary school when her class went on a field trip to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the city where she grew up.

"They took us through the Impressionist paintings on the way to the religious art," she said. "And there was a Mary Cassatt painting of a little girl seated in a chair, with her feet that don't reach the ground ("Little Girl in a Big Blue Armchair"). I just loved that picture. And I love the little dog (in it)."

Carey's constant companions are her good-natured golden retrievers, Sazi and Suni. They lie beside her while she paints or walk ahead of her along

the cobblestone path leading to the top of the hill.

There, Carey and her husband, Brian Sinofsky, an engineer with Kodak, have built a glass conservatory and installed a shaded patio with an outdoor firepit and wicker furniture, and a putting green. "I don't mind it," Carey said. "It's green."

From the rosemary and three varieties of lavender to the scented geraniums scattered along the paths and under the towering eucalyptus, everything in Carey's garden is not only colorful, but scented.

"When the dogs come out here and play, they smell like roses," she said, pointing to heaps of rose-scented geraniums dotted with pale pink flowers.

When her father passed away, she said, she used her inheritance to take a two-week painting course at Art Studies Giverny in France, at the house and gardens of famed Impressionist Claude Monet outside Paris.

That trip, she said, inspired her to create her gardens in a similar style and form.

"I wanted to make a garden like that --- it's living art," she said. "When I first saw his gardens, I felt like I was in a living painting. His landscape and his paintings are reflective of each other."

So are Carey's home and gardens, which she opens to the public every spring for an open studio weekend where visitors can purchase her art, or simply stroll the grounds.

"I send out about 3,000 postcards and invite the neighbors, friends and art lovers to come and see my paintings. They come out and enjoy the views with a glass of wine, hors d'oeuvres and music."

Above her home is a hill that was a dirt lot when the couple moved in. From it, views stretch out in all directions. Carey says she loves to observe and paint the landscapes in different lights.

"In Santa Fe, (where she still teaches painting) everything is sharply defined, and in Washington, D.C., it was blurred and soft," she said. "But here, we have it all. There off in the distance, the hills look soft because of the coastal air that comes from the west across Lake Hodges. And right up close, the flowers are sharply defined because there is no moisture in the air."

Carey teaches painting classes in the conservatory, or “glasshouse” as she calls it. With glass walls and windows that open, plus a skylight, it’s also equipped with a fireplace and microwave. “Some people don’t like to paint outside because it’s hot or cold or rainy or breezy,” she said. In the glasshouse, “they can learn plein air (open air) painting inside, where it is comfortable.”

Carey’s paintings cover every wall of her home. They’re all landscapes, but she said they convey messages about personal relationships even though people are never portrayed in them. “What people look like is superficial,” she said. “And folk or ‘naive’ art, if it is done well, has a whole depth of feeling.”

Color is amazingly effective at conveying feeling, she said. “Color speaks to emotion. Color can tell a story very quickly. So can line, but it isn’t nearly as compelling.”

She said people often tell her they wish they could have bright colors like hers in their own homes. “I think society has shifted from pale, muted colors to bright ones,” she said, seated beside the outdoor fireplace.

“Bright colors used to be garish and low-class, but that’s not true anymore. People think that the ancient Romans decorated with white and beige, but those statues were painted with color, and their frescoes were brightly painted, too. Even the real decor in Williamsburg was bright. But the colors are muted colors now, because they have faded.”

She likes to think of her art and her home as happy. “I’m not into gloomy,” she said. “I have always loved working with color. I think color is the emotion that drives art.”

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Escondido artist Cathy Carey with her dogs Zuni and Sazi in her brightly painted home. She is hosting a home/garden open house.

JOHN KOSTER
For The North County Times



Escondido artist Cathy Carey home entry with large paintings. Carey is hosting a home/garden open house of her home.

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Escondido artist Cathy Carey walks with her dogs down a path she calls "the road to Ensenada" on her one acre garden.

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