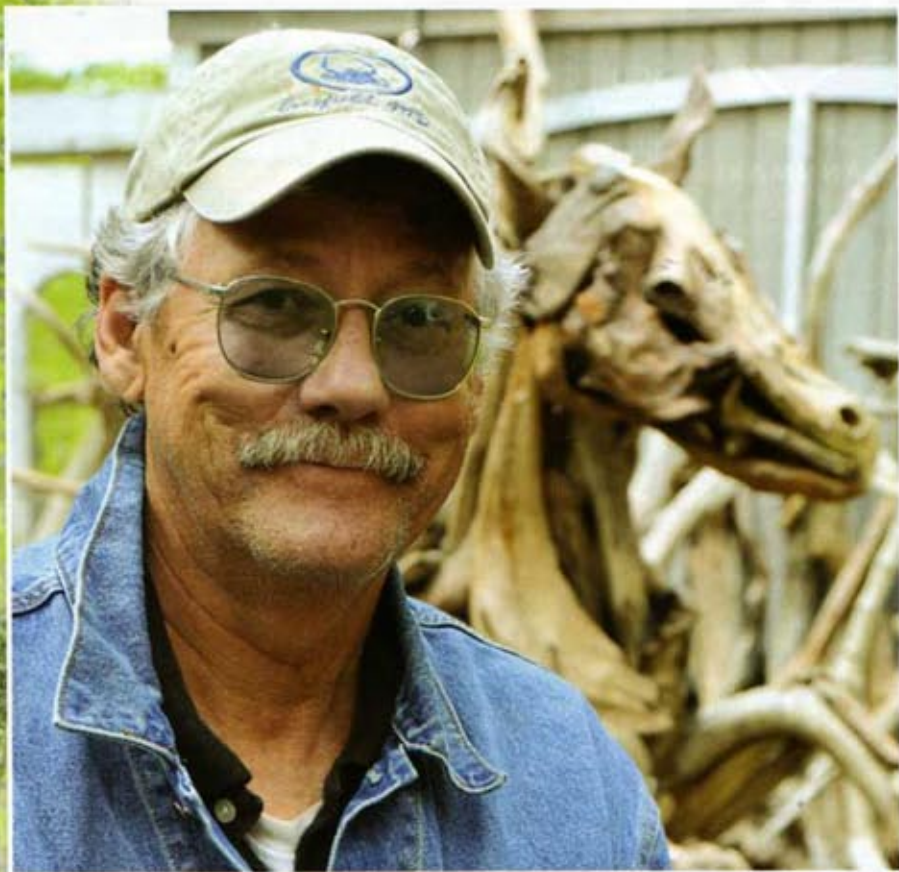


"My first major tool in the shop was an ancient Parks planer from the '40s that I still use."



Artist Larry Ringgold creates whimsical animal sculptures from driftwood he finds on the beaches near his Calvert County home.

A Renaissance Man at Work

Story by Judy Colbert and Photography by August Selckmann

An ill wind – actually two of them, called Hurricane Irene in late August 2011 and Tropical Storm Lee barely two weeks later – has proven to be good for Chesapeake Beach resident Larry Ringgold.

"They opened the Conowingo Dam [on the Susquehanna River] and vast amounts of wood came rushing downriver, into the Chesapeake Bay, and then up on the shores," says Ringgold. The driftwood was just waiting for him to collect as he made his nearly weekly walks on the beach. He uses the pieces to fabricate horses, lions, deer, dinosaurs, elks, a great blue heron, and even a mythical Hippocampus.

The Kent Island native studied art at St. Mary's College and was a carpentry and industrial arts instructor for the Calvert County school system for 34 years. When he retired, Ringgold was contemplating what to do next when his beach walks started producing the raw material for his next career. From there, the teacher returned to schooling as he

bought models and illustrations of various animals so he could study their musculature. He's now combining art and woodworking while putting more form than function into his work under the name of Turtle Point Driftwood Sculpture, L.L.C.

In his home and workshop overlooking Fishing Creek, the large stationary animals keep company with Ringgold's wife, Melanie, their four miniature schnauzers, a cat and five peacocks.

Sometimes the pieces, such as the mare Sassafras and the foal Barnacle, are inspired by the ponies on Chincoteague and Assateague islands. At other times, the individual pieces of driftwood are selected for effect, coloring and design so the sculptures are amazingly realistic. Each piece takes several weeks to con-

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The sculptures are meant to be displayed indoors or out, so the wood is assembled using rust-resistant screws and treated with a preservative to prevent decay.



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WHO'S CREATIVE

(Continued from page 37.)

struct, depending on its size and complexity. Ringgold has a penchant for giving his creatures such whimsical names as Madagascar (a pop culture cartoon movie character) and Rocinante, Don Quixote's horse.

Ringgold says, "I have a complete woodworking shop. I use some tools that have been passed down to me from my father and others that would be considered antiques. My first major tool in the shop was an ancient Parks planer from the '40s that I still use. I do need to improve my dust collection since this work requires massive sanding."

The pieces are sanded, power washed, bleached (to kill unwanted critters that may have taken up residency in the wood), assembled using rust-resistant screws, and then treated with at least four coats of a rot-prevention wood preservative so the statues can be displayed outdoors. Even so, Ringgold recommends that outdoor statuary be placed on a concrete or synthetic surface and retreated with a sealer every couple of years. "If properly cared for," says Ringgold, "they should last for many years, unless, of course, you have beaver issues."

Should the wood have barnacles on it, they stay on the piece. The intact barnacles are sort of Ringgold's signature, he says. The pieces take several weeks to finish, so a visitor to Ringgold's studio usually will see a half-dozen animals in various stages of completion. They weigh as much as 250 pounds and stand nearly as tall as the 6'1" artist.

If you stopped by the Chesapeake Beach Town Hall in March, you would have seen a display of Ringgold's work. Or, you can see it at Carmen's Gallery in Solomons. Carmen Lee Nance Gambrill, who's been in business since 1982, says the work is "pretty amazing. The pieces are in the yard of the gallery because they're large. We had several horses and deer in front around Christmastime and it seems everyone stopped by to take pictures. Nothing gets as much attention as his sculptures," she says. Citing the mythological and literary names Ringgold gives his works, she refers to him as a Renaissance Man.



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Ringgold accepts commissions. Officials from the Saudi Arabia government stopped by Carmen's and tried to order some pieces for the palace. Unfortunately, there's a problem with exporting the pieces from the United States or importing them there. More fortunate is the alpaca farmer in Lusby who's requested an alpaca statue. ♦

Ringgold will be showing at several festivals throughout the area over the next several months. For more information, visit www.turtlepointdriftwood.com. Ringgold's work is also available at Carmen's Gallery, 14550 Solomons Island Road, in Solomons.

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