

in great taste

THOMAS ARVID

Story by **Pam Parker**

Photography courtesy of **Thomas Arvid Fine Art, Inc.**



IF YOU LIKE the taste, smell and feeling you get sharing a glass of wine with friends, Thomas Arvid captures it for you. It's not in a bottle but on canvas – some 6-foot-wide – pieces that look like photographs.



"WINDING DOWN" ©2008 Thomas Arvid. All rights reserved.



ARVID WITH HIS LATEST WORK OF ART, "WINDING DOWN."



"LABOR OF LOVE" ©2008 Thomas Arvid. All rights reserved.

It's paint, all right. And, the Detroit native has a waiting list for the paintings that come with six-figure price. Though he's famous for using wine as the star of his paintings, his style started with a simple red palette.

"And wine fell into that category," he explains to *Lake Erie LifeStyle*. "I painted tennis shoes, Radio Flyer wagons and other things in their natural state – how they are used. Similarly, I like to capture the feeling of being around a bottle of wine."

Lake Erie Arvid fans can get a peek at his latest paintings Oct. 16, 17 and 18 in Cleveland at Fleming's Prime Steakhouse and Wine Bar and Piccadilly's Fine Arts. Arvid's trip will include a stop in Erie, Pa., where Thomas and family will visit his wife Vanessa's aunt and uncle – Kathe and Tom Rafferty – during a reception. (See accompanying story on page 14 to see a canvas in a home setting.)

Arvid developed his style after a few trips to Napa, Calif., vineyards where he discovered that most artists painted vineyards and grape clusters. No one captured the ambiance of family and friends enjoying wine. So the self-taught artist came up with a style that poses a bottle of wine, glasses, the cork and sometimes a corkscrew – all in a natural setting viewed from a natural angle.

"I like to paint it just as you see it on a table or counter, not from eye level," he says.

Arvid developed his style cautiously, and

after he met wife, Vanessa, the couple quickly turned art into a family business.

"When I met her, she understood, even before I did, really, that my style is different, and she gave me the confidence to keep going," he says.

The style is as close to a photograph as anyone can imagine, but it's paint and it's gaining in popularity on a global level.

"The Japanese and Chinese really love everything about U.S. wines," he says. "And, they appreciate the craftsmanship and dedication of our art. The Europeans, however, are very fond of their own wines."

THE LAKE ERIE - GEORGIA CONNECTION

Arvid maintains ties to his Detroit roots and family there, but in 1984 he decided to



"THE COLLECTION" ©2008 Thomas Arvid. All rights reserved.

ride along with a friend headed to Atlanta on a business trip.

He met Vanessa in Georgia, and he remembers the early days of painting when every small step seemed big.

"When I moved from painting in a café to a tent at a festival – that was a step, and then we'd sell out and we'd be so happy," he recalls. "Then, when galleries started to call, that was a head-spinner."

Since that time, galleries lined up to exhibit his work, and then a posh restaurant chose to hang only Arvids in its décor. Fleming's, a world-renowned steak house, negotiated with Arvid to outfit its 64 locations.

Now, no more painting in tents and cafes. In his studio, Arvid has controlled lighting towers above the canvas, and enjoys radio stations and CDs, but he often takes a break for his own music – strumming on his ukulele or guitar. The artist tells us he's a morning person and likes to get in the studio at 5 a.m.

"My mind is so alive then," he says.

While the magic takes place in the studio, the artist has accommodated numerous charity requests to paint during an auction or on site at an event – even while wearing a tuxedo.

DETAILS DOWN TO THE PRINT ON THE CORK

When asked how he gets such incredible detail in his work, he says he's been doing it for so long that he sees color and knows how to build it. He has a true passion for his art.

The illusion of the wine bottle features incredible reflections of windows and outdoor views – but no self-portraits in those reflections. "You can see my hands in one of the paintings, but I'm not in them," he says.

As Arvid's work continues to gain popularity, artists have started to copy his style, but the original Arvid isn't worried.

"When I first started this, no one did anything like this, so I had years on everyone," he says. "I'm very passionate and focused, so when people started to imitate me, I just put more and more of myself into my work."

While Arvid has a penchant for red wine and Napa wines, he's also painted a few whites – but he selected a colorful champagne bottle with a red crest. He isn't hung up on any brand for his art, and fans send him wine selections as ideas for paintings.

Like most artists, he doesn't have a favorite painting because he's always very involved with the new piece. "After a few years I look back at my favorites, and I start seeing things I might do differently," he says.

When asked when he hit it big, Arvid answers simply, "I haven't yet."

But he's well on his way, with one published book and another in the works plus a television pilot that discusses wine, travel and friends. Arvid knows travel. He treks to U. S. galleries nearly every weekend.

With all this wine on canvas, does the artist have a favorite brand of wine to enjoy? "I've had a lot of wine, but the 1997 Harland Estates – it's unfair to call it wine," he says.

Just as he wrapped the interview with Lake Erie LifeStyle around 3 p.m., the writer suggested it was happy hour.

"Exactly," he says. "It's time for a glass of wine." ■

LAKE ERIE VISIT

Thursday, October 16

Thomas Arvid Dinner
Fleming's Prime Steakhouse
28869 Chagrin Blvd, Woodmere, OH 44122
216-896-9000

Friday and Saturday, October 17 and 18

Gallery Appearance
Piccadilly's Fine Arts
2253 Professor St., Cleveland, OH 44113
216-344-1800



LAKE ERIE ARVID FANS CONNECT AT PICCADILLY'S

By **Pam Parker** Photo courtesy of **P. J. Campbell, Piccadilly's**

HOW DOES THE NAME of an English circus connect to nationally-renowned artist Thomas Arvid, regional art collectors and Edinboro, Pa.?

"It really is a small world," says P. J. Campbell, co-owner of Piccadilly's Fine Arts in Cleveland with his wife, Barbara. Married 34 years, the Edinboro University graduates have made some connections over the years. The couple owned a flower and gift shop, Pots and Pansies, in Edinboro, and then in 1988 they relocated to Cleveland to open Piccadilly's.

The name Piccadilly's goes back to Barbara's parents, Alfonse and Wanda Filipiak. Alfonse worked for Piccadilly's Circus in London after his family fled from Poland to London en route to the United States.

"Alfonse would tell us of those times in London, and he always had a smile on his face," P. J. recalls. "We named it Piccadilly's Fine Arts in honor of Barbara's dad. He couldn't share in this with us while he was alive."

The world gets smaller but sprawls out to Florida for these gallery owners. They met

Stephen and Judy Taylor of Erie, and while the crew was in Naples, Fla., the Taylors, Campbells and Tom and Kathe Rafferty shared tales of an artist named Thomas Arvid, who was married to Kathe's niece, Vanessa.

"We found out how incredibly talented Thomas Arvid was about three years ago, and we had an opening here for him that brought in about 300 couples," P. J. says.

Since that time, Arvid has become even more popular. When he returns to Piccadilly's in October, P. J. says it will be even more special. The visit kicks off with a Friday night dinner at Fleming's in Woodmere with a charity event and seven-course wine pairing. Saturday night, Arvid will be at Piccadilly's with an open reception. The gallery plans to give away "remarks" – 11-by-14- inch Arvid sketches matted and framed that will accompany Arvid sales.

The former Edinboro couple added that they look forward to seeing all their Lake Erie friends again and making some new ones. ■



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THOMAS ARVID, WIFE VANESSA, AND THEIR TWO SONS.
Photo courtesy of Thomas Arvid Fine Art, Inc.

At home with ARVID

By Pam Parker

TOM AND KATHE RAFFERTY know a rising star when they see one. For the Raffertys it's all in the family because their niece, Vanessa Rafferty, married Thomas Arvid, a world-renowned artist.

“His art is really incredible,” Kathe says. “So many people think it's a photograph. It's so realistic.”



TOM AND KATHE RAFFERTY. Photo by Ryan Randolph/Erie Times-News

The Raffertys purchased a number of the paintings long before Thomas Arvid became a household name. The paintings adorn several rooms in their beautiful Spanish home in Erie, Pa. When they shared the artist's information with friends, Arvid's style caught on around Lake Erie. Friends started picking up paintings, and sharing stories of meeting Arvid when he and his family visited Erie and played golf at the Kahkwa Club.

Steve Taylor has played golf with Arvid, but Steve and his wife, Judy, discovered Arvid by chance, and far from their lakefront Erie home.

“We had seen his work while we were ducking out of the rain in San Diego,” remembers Steve. He and Judy were attending a conference and walking around town when they popped into a gallery during a storm. They were impressed with the detail in the paintings. Right then and there, Steve decided he would buy a painting for an upcoming wedding anniversary.

“I was so surprised when it was delivered,” Judy says. “It was incredible.”

The Taylors built a room around their first Arvid with a lower-level wine room that Judy calls their winter getaway. “When it's snowing and blowing outside, we come down here,” she says.

The wine connoisseurs built a bar with a clever décor, including wine-bottle fabric-covered bar stools and plenty of embellishments – all wine-related. They also visited Piccadilly's Fine Arts in Cleveland,



above: PHILIP AND ALMA GALLAGHER.



left: STEVE AND JUDY TAYLOR

where old friend P. J. Campbell hosted a showing three years ago. They purchased another Arvid that now graces their Lake Erie home's dining room with natural light pouring in off the lake.

Steve calls attention to the details in the painting. "When we met Thomas Arvid, he told us that the shadows were the most difficult part of this painting," he marvels.

This month the Taylors will be returning to Piccadilly's and the art event to buy another Arvid.

The Taylors are pals with Philip and Alma Gallagher, who also became fast fans of the artist's style. The Gallaghers pointed out a couple of interesting details in a few of their paintings.

"You'll rarely see the entire bottle," Phil says. "Or, if you do, it may be only part of the label that you see."

Alma said the details are what draws people into the works of art. The Gallaghers discovered a very unique Arvid while in California visiting their son. Their purchase was a crate with an bottle of wine and glass depicted on it. Phil

noted that reflections in the bottle often reveal where Arvid painted.

"In this one, he was painting in a man's home," Phil says. You can see the reflection of the window and the gardens outside that window. We've never seen anything like this, and it's so refreshing."

The Gallaghers display Arvids in their Fairview, Pa., family room, where the rich brick fireplace acts as a perfect setting for the displays. The artwork, Phil says, reminds him "of good times."

The Raffertys, Taylors and Gallaghers are all quick to point out that Arvid has autographed wine bottles and other paraphernalia that they also exhibit in their homes. Many Arvid owners display the bottle depicted in the painting right alongside the work of art.

For Tom and Kathe Rafferty, it's thrilling to have an artist in the family, and Arvid calendars, paintings and coffee table books are among the memorabilia the Raffertys cherish.

For friends and Lake Erie residents, it's easy to be at home with Arvid when the clever artworks blend easily into any environment. ■



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