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Ohio State

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HIP-HOP NATION

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Set in stone



Somewhere in midlife, successful executive Mark Yale Harris turned into successful sculptor Mark Yale Harris. **ANN FAZZINI** talked with him about how and why it happened.

Half the people living in Santa Fe identify themselves as full-time artists. Creative people from all walks of life have found a niche in the colorful New Mexico desert landscape.

Mark Yale Harris is one of them. After a long and successful career as a hotel developer and real estate investor, Harris left the business world to pursue a life-long dream of creating art.

Working in media including alabaster, bronze, marble, sandstone, and even onyx, Harris creates figures with smooth curves and angular postures, many with a flavor of the American West. His works have appeared in galleries and shows from Oregon to Ohio to New York. He has been honored with prestigious jury selections and has won critical acclaim from his peers.

And he's particularly thrilled about his current show at Ohio State's Faculty Club. "It's almost a reunion, and I'm very honored and excited," he says. "I have a lot of friends at Ohio State, and I'm very anxious to see the reactions to the work and curious to hear feedback."

Harris was in his 50s when he began his journey to become a full-time artist; but even as a child, he says, "I was always making things with my hands." Although he received an art scholarship to college, his family encouraged him to pursue a more traditional—and stable—career path. Harris opted to study business at Ohio State.

A decade later, his career took off when he co-founded the Red Roof Inns hotel chain. He later developed the successful AmeriSuites Hotels franchise, a revolutionary venture that specialized

in affordable suite-sized accommodations.

Even while his business career flourished, Harris' love of art was always in his back pocket. He took classes in clay modeling, pastels, and bronzing, and became an avid collector.

Years later, after selling his business, Harris learned to carve alabaster. That's when his passion for sculpting was reignited. He contacted his old friend Bill Prokopiou, a sculptor whose works Harris collected, and the artist agreed to mentor Harris in Santa Fe.

More one-on-one mentorships with Native American artists followed, and Harris began to think seriously about a future in art. "When I immersed myself in it, it was an emotional experience," he says. "I had to pursue this."

Harris' artwork began to reflect his other interests. He found inspiration while boating, hiking, cycling, and horseback riding. "You can make many observations when you're on the back of a horse for a few hours," Harris says.

In fact, a riding trip through Big Bend National Park led him to create *Texas Stonehenge*, a series of earth-toned alabaster carvings depicting longhorn cattle. Animals are a favorite subject and appear often in Harris' works. The beasts exhibit human and humorous qualities that have made the works among the most popular in Harris' catalog.

Figure drawing and modeling also help trigger ideas. "I get inspiration from poses, and use creative visuals and drawing to cast in bronze and stone," Harris says. "I like relationship-oriented designs: people's actions and

reactions to life and circumstances."

Harris' works—typically of "moderate size"—usually take about 80 to 100 hours to complete. He plans to tackle larger, monumental pieces in the future: "12, 15, 20 feet tall—and I think I'll get there," he says. Time and commitment are a must with such projects. "They don't take months, they take years," Harris says. He anticipates working upwards of 300 hours on a large piece.

So far, the hours have paid off. "I went through a period where I didn't want to show my work, and didn't know if I was good enough," he says. "But I let go, and it was fine. I'm told I'm extremely well-received."

The same tenacity that brought him success in the business world has earned Harris respect and praise from his fellow local artists. "The personalities are so different on a creative level from the Type A's in real estate development," he says.

"Santa Fe is phenomenal; they are very supportive of the visual arts."

Harris is content with the rewards his second career has brought him. "There's personal satisfaction from connecting with people emotionally," he says. "And you can't put money on that." ■

Works by Mark Yale Harris are on display at the Faculty Club through Dec. 15.

For information:

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Learn more:

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