

### A 26-year career from decoys to lifelike sculptures

# Artist strives to capture 'that one moment'

By TERRI WHITE

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If you're looking at a Paul Burdette sculpture you may have to touch it to make sure it's not real.

Mr. Burdette began his career 26 years ago when he sculpted his first decoy duck for hunting. His passion for the art grew, and today, after receiving many esteemed awards, he is one of the most renowned artists of his kind.

size, but the rest is up to the artist. He never does the same piece twice. "Every piece is an original," he said.

Mr. Burdette hasn't been competing lately, but instead is enjoying, "art for the sake of art."

"Competitions are a good proving ground and winning is the mark of your excellence," he said, however, "There's a point after which you say, 'How many times do I have to win?'"

Between the list of buyers waiting for his sculptures and running Burdette

Gallery Ltd., Mr. Burdette barely has time to judge the competitions that he used to compete in.

However, he does get a lot of help from his family. Working alongside him at the gallery is his wife, Dolly and two of his sons, Glenn and Mark. Other members of the close-knit family also help out from time to time.

Glenn, Mark and Mr. Burdette's other son, Brett, have all inherited his skills and create sculptures of their own. The Burdette Gallery Ltd. deals in many types of art, such as stone sculptures, paintings, and diamond point engravings. Original works of artists such as Trisha Romance and Robert Bateman adorn the walls of the recently-expanded gallery.

The gallery is 6,000 square feet, with the recent addition of an originals room.

Many artists deal exclusively with the Burdette Gallery, such as Paul Calle, Alan Sakhavarz and Audrey Casey. "We're looking at expanding on the originals market," Mr. Burdette said.

What attracts so many people to the gallery is its variety of florals, still lifes, wildlife, landscapes, silkscreens and lithographs, he said.

The Burdette Gallery also puts together packages of exclusive prints for corporations and offers incentive programs.

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-Paul Burdette

Mr. Burdette, who lives in East Garafraxa township, has won numerous awards for his bird sculptures, including the World Championships in 1974, 1976 and most recently in 1989.

Ten years ago he opened a successful family gallery in East Garafraxa and enjoys doing what he does best — taking a piece of wood and bringing it to life.

"I do the work for myself," Mr. Burdette said. "The real joy that I get is in creating the piece of work — taking it from an idea and developing it into the final piece."

The final piece takes a lot of hard, detailed work, he said.

The demand for Mr. Burdette's sculptures, which are displayed in homes all over North America, is more than he can keep up with. People who order a piece from him now will have to wait about seven or eight years for its completion, he said.

One sculpture takes the artist about three months, depending on its size and the amount of detail required to make it perfect.

Usually the detail in his work is painfully intricate. What makes his sculptures different from others, and special to the buyer, is the action, he said.

"I strive to have a lot of motion in my work," Mr. Burdette explained. "I try to capture that one moment in a bird's life."

Some of his work features spread wings, ruffled feathers, and detailed habitats such as ice, water, trees and snow. Because of the time involved in creating his masterpieces, one sculpture may cost about \$10,000, again depending on its size and detail.

Mr. Burdette, an elevator engineer until he became involved in sculpting, has done an incredible amount of research on birds over the years. In order to create an exact replica of a bird for the client, he studies books, photographs that he has taken, and skin samples from the Royal Ontario Museum.

That research pays off, as he says no one has ever expressed displeasure in his work.

Buyers may ask Mr. Burdette to sculp a particular bird in a certain

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Paul Burdette displayed this intricate sculpture of two birds perched on a tree branch at the Toronto Sportsman Show last weekend. Although the world champion hasn't entered a competition in two years, the judging at the show took place from his booth.

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