

Graphic artists Jon and Karen Wippich of Hillsdale switch to fine art

PORTLAND OPEN STUDIOS

By KC Cowan
The Southwest Portland Post

For two weekends each October, local artists open up their homes and studios to perfect strangers in the hopes of sharing their talent and perhaps making a sale or two.

Portland Open Studios especially provides a way for emerging artists, who are not gallery-represented, to get some visibility. However, even artists who do show in galleries participate.

Although the majority of artists tend to be on the east side of the Willamette River, in Southwest Portland there were many studios

for art lovers to visit, and see artists in their natural environment.

Artists Jon and Karen Wippich, just outside of Hillsdale, were first time participants.

"I guess because some friends have done it," explained Jon Wippich. "We've done some shows around town and just thought it might be another avenue to get our work seen."

Jon and Karen Wippich have always been artists—they run Dotzero Design, a graphic arts business.

Some of their clients include Coca-Cola, Mississippi Studios, and Pendleton Woolen Mills. Doing *fine art* is something they've just tackled seriously in the past five years.

"Our kids are grown and I am now able to have some time to get really focused on it," said Karen Wippich.

"So I'm pretty new to this part of it."

For Portland Open Studios, the Wippichs set up their still-not-quite-completed studio they're adding on to the back of their mid-century home.

It gives them a dedicated space to devote to their art. It's a large space, which allowed both of them to hang dozens of paintings for guests to see. They paint primarily figurative, with a loose, somewhat impressionistic style.

Jon Wippich's style is colorful, yet he wants the faces to be a bit shadowy. He uses an unusual technique – reductive. He applies paint and

then removes it to develop his image.

"For me, I like drawing more than painting; painting seemed a little more uncomfortable to me," explained Jon Wippich.

"So I usually wash on a color and wipe it off with rags, or a paper towel or Q-Tips [cotton swabs], and then I'll put on another color and wipe away. And so it's more like I'm drawing with my fingers or a paper towel."

Jon Wippich often gets his inspiration from vintage photographs, including old yearbooks. Karen Wippich also enjoys using very old photographs, such as from the Civil War, as her starting point.

Karen Wippich often layers images on top of each other and lets her painting “tell her” where to go. This, she added, is very unlike her usual introverted, structured attitude in life.

"I like things to be perfect and in order," said Karen Wippich. "But then my paintings are the opposite. I like things to happen when I paint. I learned to let go of everything. And I've learned to paint without thinking about it."

On the first Saturday of Portland Open Studios, they had a steady stream of visitors. One small piece of Jon Wippich's sold, and two other people said they'd bring their



Karen and Jon Wippich show off examples of their art on display for Portland Open Studios. *(Post photo by KC Cowan)*

spouses back to approve a possible sale.

But it isn't just about sales. Jon says it's been good exposure and fun to interact with people. It was also a lot of work entertaining for seven straight hours.

"Last night, we were just, let's grab something [to eat] somewhere and come back and go to bed," said Jon Wippich. "It's pretty exhausting. But it was fun."

Since moving forward with their fine art, the Wippichs have been featured in a couple of local galleries.

The Wippichs can't afford to give up their day jobs yet, but Portland Open Studios is perhaps just one more step for them on the road to being full-time creators of fine art.

Jon and Karen Wippich will participate in People's Art of Portland's Big 500 show – opening December 13. Every painting sells for \$40.



Marilyn Palma chats with artist Karen Wippich at this year's Portland Open Studios. (Post photo by KC Cowan)

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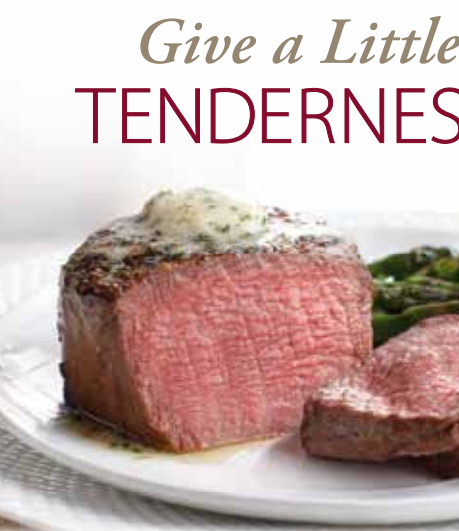
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