



Wiegardt's 'Oysterville Dike Road.'

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"I kept waiting. He kept coming into class. He knew I had got a painting in and he knew I got this award. Finally, I said, 'Pete, did you recognize the painting from class?' He said, 'Oh, it looked familiar.'"

The awards aren't Wiegardt's first honors. His accolades include the gold medal and Dolphin Fellow from the American Watercolor Society in New York — considered the highest honor in watercolor painting. Wiegardt has received numerous awards from other watercolor societies and publications. He also is featured in exhibits throughout the U.S. and China.

Pete Roberts, the student involved with Watercolor West, took his first workshop with Wiegardt in 2006. He is located on the Long Beach Peninsula.

"I am still taking lessons and critiques from him. When you get the chance to go to school and learn from one of the top artists in the country why would you stop? Eric is a master watercolor artist and I have had the privilege to study under Eric in many different teaching situations," Roberts said. "He is always prepared and genuinely excited to coach students to the next level."

Pick a canvas

Wiegardt is often inspired by outdoor scenes. He sometimes paints interior scenes too. Since his usual traveling has been interrupted by COVID-19 restrictions, Wiegardt has been finding inspiration close to home.

"It's been kind of fun. I've taken a subject matter that's really close to home," Wiegardt said. "There's a lot of beauty in our corner of the world that you don't have to look far. Like my instructor in Chicago said, 'You just have to have open eyes. Anything is paintable.'"

Wiegardt graduated from the American Academy of Art in Chicago. He started attending the school after earning an engineering degree, working for about a year,

and realizing he wanted to pursue an artistic career.

"I didn't think I could do that for the rest of my life. It's just not for me. I heard about an arts class in Chicago and wanted to find something I found interesting," Wiegardt said.

Wiegardt had always enjoyed creative things, like drawing and painting, but didn't delve into art until high school, when he took a shop class at Ilwaco High School.

"(My wife Ann and I) toyed with the idea of opening up a pizza place or cranberry farming but I just kept going back to that shop class and how I enjoyed working with my hands," Wiegardt said. "Once I was in art school, I found that this is what I was meant to do. I thank the Lord for that."

After he finished school, the couple moved back to the Long Beach Peninsula, where he started his gallery in Ocean Park, Washington — in an old family home. While starting the gallery, the couple adjusted to their new life while preparing for a baby on the way.

Together, the couple has raised five children while running the gallery. The couple still lives on the peninsula and operates the gallery out of the same home. Since the kids have grown up, Ann Wiegardt has taken on the business side, allowing her husband to focus on making art.

"She's been an integral part of all of this," Wiegardt said.

The couple also works with three employees, one of whom is Cristl Mack, who has worked for the Wiegardt's about 30 years.

"I really enjoy the creative aspect of being around an artist who really tries new things and doesn't just want to paint something because it'll sell. He could just paint lighthouses or sunsets but he doesn't," Mack said. "He has a very strong urge to try different things ... it's fun to see how he develops as an artist and how his style



Wiegardt's 'Oyster Shell Pile Relic.'

is constantly evolving."

Dedicated instructing

Diane Klock, of New York, is another of Wiegardt's longtime students.

"I have always found him to be inspiring. This year, he has taken advantage of online teaching via Zoom and it has been a fabulous experience for all of us," Klock said. "Watching him paint is like watching a jazz musician or a dancer. He has a rhythm which I find so inspiring, I try to emulate that when I pick up my brush ... I for one am very grateful for Eric's teaching and all he and Ann do to prepare and make these online classes a reality."

Wiegardt has taught more than 5,000 students during his career.

"I've thoroughly enjoyed teaching around the country and in Europe over the years. My wife has been traveling with me," Wiegardt said. "Then in March, all of this had to be canceled. We were thinking, 'What do we do next?'"

The classes have had a good response, he said. Some students have stuck with the online classes since March.

"I don't think it's something we're just going to do temporarily. We intend to keep teaching them and adjust my traveling schedule when that comes back," Wiegardt said. "When I'm done with my class, we all say goodbye and it's good — there's no plane for me to catch, there's no hotel. There's no travel involved. I really did enjoy that, it was a really rewarding part of my career but this is a nice change."

Working from home has also allowed Wiegardt to connect with more gallery visitors and art purchasers, since he is usually in the gallery or nearby.

"He strives to be fair to his customers and he strives to be a really good instructor because teaching his students is a really big part of what he does," Mack said. "At the gallery, we're so aware of that. It's important to have a good relationship with our customers, whether it be people who purchase a painting or students."

Wiegardt's classes are open to students of all experience levels. He teaches different formats of classes, all of which are described on his website, ericwiegardt.com.