

THE SEED OF AN IDEA

Story of the Fall Art Tour - 25th Year Anniversary Special

Art fairs can be stressful for everyone concerned.

Art lovers who want to enjoy the work of talented artists must navigate their way through miles of crowded aisles and contend with conditions that are often chaotic and confusing. For artists, hours of packing (tables, chairs, table skirts, signage, cash, credit card devices, portfolio of work and more) is followed by travel time, show setup/takedown, and standing for most of the day...



Where does an idea come from?

Sometimes an idea is in the air and is ready to be born, which was the case with the tour of artists' studios. That is why 25 years ago a group of artists in Southwest Wisconsin got together to see if they could come up with an alternative to art fairs. Their goal was to provide an opportunity for sales and exposure of their artwork, which was enjoyable for everyone involved, rather than grueling.

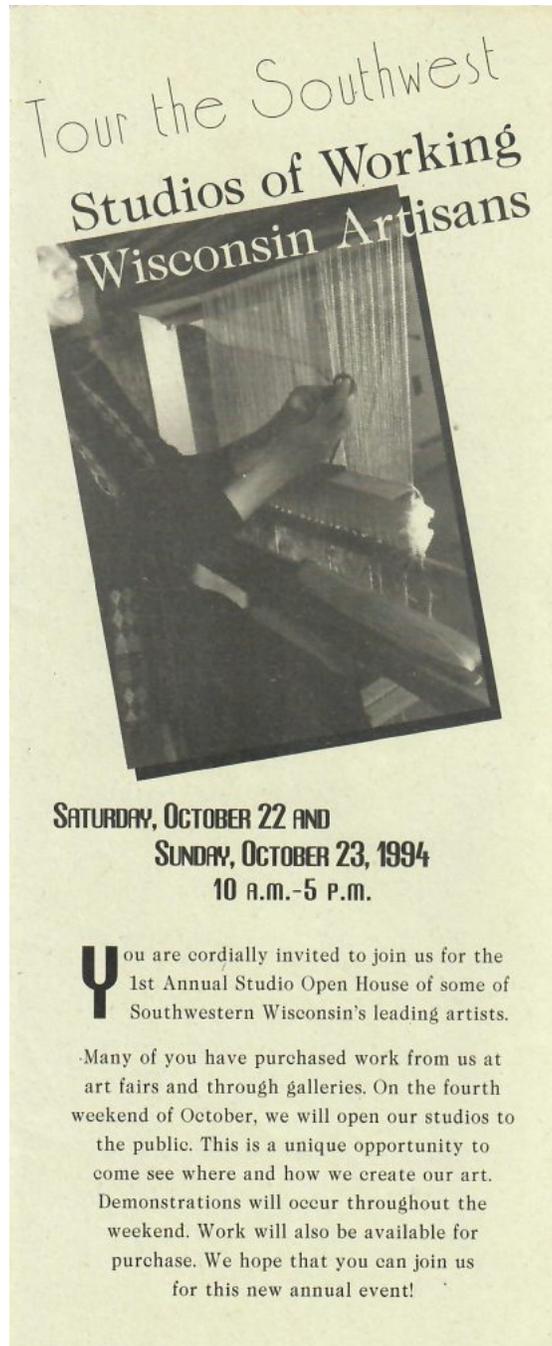
The initial group of artists who came together brought diverse and dynamic ideas to the table. The many discussions resulted in a cross pollination of ideas. Differences of opinion from the diverse group of people began to take root as a community was born. First and foremost, they made the decision to try a radically new approach – have artists remain in their studio and invite the public to visit and view their art there.

Many other decisions had to be made:

- What time of year to hold the studio visits
- What areas of the arts should be included
- What geographical areas should be covered
- What should the studio visits be called
- How would it be decided which artists would participate
- How to best publicize the Tour

LAUNCHING THE TOUR

Initially dubbed “Tour the Southwest: Studios of Working Wisconsin Artisans,” the first tour occurred in October 1994 and included 27 artists. Three distinct towns were identified: Baraboo, Mineral Point and Spring Green with nine artists from each area.



Tour the Southwest
Studios of Working
Wisconsin Artisans

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22 AND
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1994
10 A.M. - 5 P.M.**

You are cordially invited to join us for the
1st Annual Studio Open House of some of
Southwestern Wisconsin's leading artists.

Many of you have purchased work from us at
art fairs and through galleries. On the fourth
weekend of October, we will open our studios to
the public. This is a unique opportunity to
come see where and how we create our art.
Demonstrations will occur throughout the
weekend. Work will also be available for
purchase. We hope that you can join us
for this new annual event!

Check out this brochure from our first year in 1994!

BUT THEN...

The very next year, they settled on the official name, Fall Art Tour and lengthened the weekend to include Friday. Currently there are 46 stops with opportunities to see the work of potters, woodworkers, fiber artists, jewelers, photographers, painters, tile and mosaic artists, sculptors, printmakers, and mixed media artists all displaying a vibrant array of work.



PUBLICITY...

Publicity has evolved over the years, and we experimented with different ways of getting the word out.



Brochures, which were black and white in the beginning, have become sophisticated color catalogs with maps and directions. Along the way, we have morphed from a strictly print media campaign in the beginning to gradually switching to a more mobile-friendly website and an active social media presence.



Our first 25 years of brochures 1994 - 2018 (Note: 2019 - present year not pictured here for this article)

MEMORIES

Some of our founding artists share memories from the Tour's first year:

Win & Sandra Byers - Byers Studio - Baraboo, WI

In our first year we made just enough to pay for our track lighting, which we had installed the night before. I have this image of our children on the stage in the showroom, dancing with their shadows. We got our track lighting up, and our walls painted, but the next morning, our pots still weren't out on our display shelves. Some visitors arrived right on time, looked around and said, "We didn't realize that part of the deal is that we help carry pots from the downstairs studio up to the showroom!" So, one thing we learned early on was to get set up ahead of time.



Win & Sandra Byers in 2018

Maya Madden & Wayne Farra

No Rules Jewelry - Dodgeville/Spring Green area

The first year we set up jewelry in our living room. We were drinking coffee in our pajamas when the first customers arrived. We had no idea how to do anything. Also in the first year, the pig farm down the road was clearing out the manure from their barn and hauling it away in a dump truck. The back of the truck opened and dumped piles of pig poop along the road in front of our place!



Maya & Wayne in 2018



Jewelry made by Maya Madden & Wayne Farra

Diana & Tom Johnston - Brewery Pottery Studio - Mineral Point, WI

In the first year, one of the things we remember is that we showed everybody the entire building. So many local people came out that first year—they were curious to see what we were doing. We were so excited that we showed them around our home studio and didn't even think about our pottery or the sales aspect of the Tour.



Diana & Tom Johnston in 1994



Diana & Tom Johnston in 2018



Pottery made by Diana & Tom Johnston and a watercolor painting painted by Diana

Sharon Nicholas - Paper Loon Studio - Spring Green/Dodgeville area

When I first began, I was a weaver. What got me started making boxes was wanting something nice to put my sales slips, money and pens in. So, I made my first decorative box to hold them. I found that everyone asked about the box, and said, "I want one!" That box took me in a whole new direction



Sharon Nicholas in 1994



Sharon Nicholas in 2018



Miniature Architectural Building & Keepsake Boxes made by Sharon Nicholas

Char terBeest Kudla & Frank Kudla

Helen's Daughters Studio & A Different Angle Jewelry - Baraboo, WI

The thing I remember most is that on Sunday night after the first Tour, because we were so hyped and excited, all the Baraboo artists went out to dinner together. We didn't want to leave each other; we wanted to keep our arms around each other because it was so exciting. We were starting something brand new!



Frank & Char in 1994



Char & Frank in 2018



Handbag made by Char (Helen's Daughters Studio)



Ring made by Frank (A Different Angle)

REFLECTIONS FROM OUR PIONEERS

What makes the tour special?



Just what *is it* about Fall Art Tour that makes it so magical?

- In the fifth year we became a non-profit. This mandates an educational component, which takes the form of demonstrations: artists taking part must show how their work is created throughout the weekend.
- People love seeing how work is created. Everyone is searching for stories. When they can have a story with their art, it makes it so much better.
- Somehow, coming to our studio makes the bond so much stronger.
- We keep it fresh because there are 46 stops and it's not possible to visit all in one year. Also, some artists take sabbaticals from time to time, allowing new artists to take part. And there are guest artists at a number of studios each year.
- Generations of families returning over the years. We are seeing the children of the original visitors bringing their children.
- People come back a year later after watching our process, and say they took a class as a result.
- Customers from the beginning have returned, many with special order requests
- Visitors still come for the experience, even when they don't make a purchase.
- The experience appeals to people of all ages, 20 to 80, even younger, even older. Creativity knows no bounds.
- During the Tour, we have more time to talk with customers. I love talking with people, and sharing stories.
- People are amazed at the lifestyle. They say, "I love your house. I love where you live." I enjoy the compliments. I think it's important for people to know how things are made, and how the process and place are intertwined.
- A bonus to the viewing of exceptional artwork is the experience of driving through the Driftless and River Valley regions, breathtaking bluffs, rolling hills....



- ...oh! And cookies! We are happy to share a recipe from Sandra Byers: “One of the things we got known for early on was very good cookies. Here is a recipe that I have probably baked every year of the Tour. It came from my family and was one of my childhood favorites. Our visitors seem to enjoy them.”

Sandy's Family Coconut Bar Recipe

Can be enjoyed at stop #12 on the 2018 Fall Art Tour

½ cup butter
½ cup brown sugar, packed
1 cup sifted flour
2 eggs, unbeaten
1 cup brown sugar, packed
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 tablespoons flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
1 cup chopped nuts
1 cup shredded coconut

Beat butter, 1/2 cup brown sugar, and 1 cup of flour. I often cut in the butter with a pastry blender. Press firmly into a greased 8 x 12 baking pan, or 9 x 13. Bake at 325 degrees for 10 – 15 minutes. Do not brown.

Combine the eggs through baking powder, beating well until light.

Stir in the nuts and gently blend them in. Spread over crust.

Sprinkle coconut on top. Bake at 325 degrees 20 -25 minutes or until lightly browned. Cut into bars while still slightly warm. Cool in pan.

THE FUTURE!



As we look forward...

Just look at how we have grown! At the first Fall Art Tour, when Tom and Diana Johnston launched Brewery Pottery, they had very little inventory and now their studio is brimming over with treasures. The beauty of the Driftless Area has changed and inspired us, and we are changing the area through the economic and cultural impact we have on the region. The Fall Art Tour has brought thousands of visitors to the region and as a result, many people have made southwest WI an annual destination. Still others have been inspired to move here.

We hope that more and more young people will turn to making art so that the Fall Art Tour can carry on for many years. The groundwork has been laid. Help us continue with this tradition by following Diana Johnson's advice for young artists:

“It's harder to get the money together to launch a business these days, but go for your dream, go for your happiness. Find a way, do it part-time, start with a cooperative, stick with it. Get in your studio and do it!”



Please follow [Fall Art Tour](#) on [facebook](#) & [instagram](#) for all the insider details up to date tour info!