



WATER WORLD WONDER

UNIQUE ARTISTIC
COLLABORATION INVITES
WATER INTO A STUNNING
LAKE WASHINGTON HOME

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Swivel Interiors founder Kathleen Glossa surrounds herself with creative people with the same intensity that a wren lines its nest. Like the wren, her motives are both capitalistic and communistic. She survives on a Rolodex of battle-tested talent. As an unrequited artist, she can't resist birds of a feather.

In this spirit, Glossa lured five innovative local artists to the home of Shan Song, who was looking to put her stamp on a newly purchased vacation property perched on the northern edge of Lake Washington.

With hand-hewn floors and elegant woodwork installed in a 2005 remodel by Bellevue architect Chesmore Buck for a prior owner, the home needed little more than updated lighting, a new interior/exterior paint scheme, durable furnishings, fabrics, and perhaps most important, distinct artwork that would bring the richness of the water into interior spaces. Glossa and Swivel focused on a fresh space plan while the artists were hard at work in their studios working to express a relationship with water.

Despite the fact that the initial meeting to discuss the project was held at the height of the pandemic, mixed-media artist Jen Chambers was eager to participate. So were Hernan Paganini, Meghan Urback, Laura Van Horne, and Shannon Wallack.

"It's pretty rare for artists to collaborate like that, but Kathleen is very much an art enthusiast, and supports artists' work to the nth degree," Chambers says. "She's a pleasure to work with."

Glossa's project on behalf of Song serves as an excellent example of innovation in the face of the pandemic by the Seattle arts community, which embraced new technologies and unconventional spaces to push the boundaries of their creativity.

"The pandemic fostered a sense of solidarity among Seattle artists," says Paganini, whose work is prominently featured at the University of Washington's new Behavioral Health teaching facility. "Collaboration projects, support networks, and community initiatives blossomed, creating a strong sense of unity within the artistic community. This newfound camaraderie continues to thrive."

Glossa's two-fold challenge on the Song project was as ancient as the existence of beach homes — bring the ocean in, but leave the water out. Create setting-appropriate custom artwork that stands the test of time, and a "paws friendly" interior that stands the test of Song's large family and seafaring Golden Retriever, who "loves water more than food," Song notes.

"Before I bought this home, we had only visited it once and were deeply attracted to it," says Song, who admits that the 4,400-square-foot, four-bedroom, four-bath home was an impulse purchase. "The entire kitchen area gives you the sense of dining on a cruise ship."

Humans have struggled for at least 40,000 years to express the bipolarity of the sea, which spits up mermaids and monsters with equal indifference. Water has long been a metaphor for purity, fluidity, tranquility, spiritual nourishment, salvation, freedom, and adventure, but also terror, destruction, impermanence, unreliability, and dissolution.

On this subject, the homeowner is more New Age than Old Testament.

"Some of the art is calm, some has a playful energy, and others have a passionate vibe," says Song, who favors midcentury design. "Each piece of art has a force that gives the whole house new life."

The design challenge was well-suited to Argentina-born Paganini, who traffics in self-discovery, empathy, personal growth, and limitless expression. Paganini operates out of a SoDo studio, where he reserves the right to juxtapose, stagger, scrap, enrage, approach, deny, affirm, construct, and reconstruct the fragments that comprise his collages.

He sought to play off the serenading whispers of calm waters with delicate paper strokes and gentle layering, resulting in a re-creation of the timeless stillness of a tranquil lake.

"Each cutout became a ripple, a reflection, a serene moment frozen in time," he says. "It was a reminder that amidst life's chaos, there exists a tranquil oasis where the soul finds solace."

Another piece seeks to embrace the wild side of water, its ceaseless energy and fervent dance.

"In the realm of art, there is profound beauty in the way water moves, its ever-changing forms and the emotions it stirs within us," he says. "It is a dance of tranquility and dynamism, a poetry of motion that captures our hearts. In the spirit of artistic exploration, we embarked on a journey to pay homage to water's eternal grace."

Urback, a Seattle-based web engineer with a preference for textiles and the outdoors, used her preferred medium of wool on the project. She created four pieces for the Song project, including a large felt installation above the living room sofa.

The wave-motion work incorporates many handmade wet-felted pieces marbled with blue silk thread, floating over a rugged, needle-felted industrial foundation. Urback employed the coarse fiber of Corriedale wool to further strengthen the piece.

The work was 85 inches by 42 inches, which pushed the limits of what Urback can do: "It stretched the limit of my studio space and my felting processes."

The project also stretched the infrastructure of ceramic artist Shannon Wallack, who borrowed space in a friend's kiln to accommodate his large format vases. Even so, he had just an inch to spare as the lid closed.

Add narrow height and volume tolerances, the unpredictability of shrinking clay, and the peevishness of languidly curing porcelain glazes, and Wallack endured an anxious couple of weeks completing the project.

It was time well sweat.

"There was a lot of stillness in the air with Covid and a lot of long days in the

Left: Meghan Urback contributed two felt collages to the design. Below: Hernan Paganini created two large paper collages.





studio,” he recalls. “You definitely had to look within, to see what you’re about as an individual. Covid actually helped me knock away the outside world distractions, the controllable and the uncontrollable, and focus on my work. I feel fortunate to have that art in my life.”

Northwest native Chambers, who contributed an acrylic panel for the master bedroom, found her true passion as a mixed-media artist in 2005 and never looked back. Her work is varied but always highly textured, sometimes considerably more than an inch deep. Her entry evokes raindrops on water.

Chambers’ work appears in several venues, including Gray Sky Gallery, owned by Laura Van Horne, who works in encaustic, acrylic mixed media, ink, resin, and collage.

“Pioneer Square was hit really hard by Covid,” says Van Horne, who like Glossa nurtures the careers of many local artists. “Foot traffic by the gallery slowed down, and that’s when I pivoted to working with designers like Kathleen, because they’re still working a lot.”

Glossa commissioned Van Horne to brighten an area of the home that had no sight of the water. Her piece, “On Earth,” sought to create a secret portal to the view. It’s a convex piece, very blue-like water. It’s acrylic mixed media with a sandy, almost pumice-like texture.

Glossa herself used her science background on the project to master the exciting and rapidly evolving field of solution-dyed acrylic fabric. Easy-care rugs and fabrics made of extruded liquid fiber allow for a wide variety of looks, ranging from chenille to velvet. They are extremely dog friendly and impervious to sunlight damage.

“It used to be a million-dollar process and very difficult to obtain,” Glossa says. “Now, it’s affordable and easy to arrange.”

The overall result? Completeness, strength, peace, and serenity. ■

The home’s design reflects the richness of water in its interior spaces.