

INSIDE LOOK

Artist in Residence

Stephanie Wheeler finds her muse in a century-old Smyrna house

by LISA MOWRY

STEPHANIE WHEELER'S PAINTINGS are purposefully abstract, allowing viewers to add their own interpretations. "You don't need to say it all in a painting," says Wheeler. "As an artist, I put it out there and let the mind fill in the blanks." Her own backyard studio is perhaps a metaphor for that philosophy, since its simplicity enables her to step inside and become an ever-changing artist. Some days she might work on a cityscape of a European village, others days, a vase of peonies.

When Wheeler bought a 1930s cottage in an older section of Smyrna, she was attracted to the tiny, 100-year-old outbuilding in the back of the property. Believed to have originally been a three-room family home, the little place had lost any historic luster, with a metal carport roof and a crumbling foundation atop four rocks. "It looked like it was going to fall apart," Wheeler recalls. After bringing the structure up to code, she realized its rough-around-the-edges charm was perfect for a painter, whose work can be a messy business. Plenty of windows and a vaulted ceiling mean natural light is plentiful.

Wheeler grew up in Atlanta and attended the University of Georgia, but her paintings capture images from her travels all over the world. Sometimes she paints outside—en plein air—like her Impressionist predecessors, but often Wheeler creates larger paintings in her studio based on quick studies done on-site. A common denominator is vibrant light, with intense colors that convey just enough information. "I've always been drawn to color," she says. "Good art comes down to color on so many levels."

Her work surface belonged to the original owner and was probably used as a kitchen table. "I love this studio . . . It's a place to be free," she says. "And best of all, I don't have to worry about cleaning it; it's okay if paint gets on the floor." *stephaniewheeler-gallery.com* ■



Locally, Wheeler's work is shown at the Nicholson Gallery (404-848-9553) and the Mercantile (404-816-0060).



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