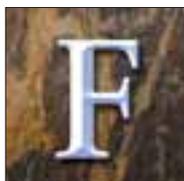


THE FOLK INLAY & MOSAICS OF ECOUNIQUITY



FOR MANY YEARS HARBY'S PIZZA AND DELI IN THE FOUNTAIN CITY AREA OF KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, HAS BEEN KNOWN FOR ITS GENEROUSLY CHEESY PIZZAS, FOOT-LONG SUBS, AND HOMEMADE DESSERTS LIKE BAKLAVA. NOW PEOPLE ARE SHOWING UP NOT JUST TO EAT, BUT TO GET A PEAK AT THE RESTROOMS.

Both the women's and the men's rooms at Harby's are decorated in an eclectic mosaic of found objects, mirror pieces, and cut tiles created by mosaic artist and stone mason Andy Whitaker.

"Andy is a master," said Al Harb, owner of Harby's. "His designs are truly amazing – more amazing than a photo can really show."

The women's room at the restaurant started with a ceramic fountain of a Celtic lady on a horse, which Harb already owned. With the fountain as a centerpiece, Whitaker added broken pieces of china and glass, smooth stones, small children's toys, and shapes he cut out of tile.

"I cut a hundred or so trees in the cedar shape for that job, and added all kinds of things – an owl, a raccoon, a chicken, a panther. It's a great place to play 'I Spy'," he said.

Whitaker's work can be seen in several homes and businesses in east Tennessee, but also as far away as California. Some of the work is subtle, such as the bird silhouettes, angels, and flowers inlaid into the brick build-



ing that houses Harby's and other businesses. These images blend with the surrounding wall, suggesting a faint presence of the natural world in an otherwise urban setting.

Other creations by Whitaker are not at all subtle, such as the elaborate courtyard and mosaic fountain behind Harb's residence, located just a few blocks from the restaurant. Harb was so taken with Whitaker's work, he asked him to create a sanctuary behind his house. A year and a half later, Harb had his sanctuary, though no one would guess what's hidden behind the unassuming house on the tree-lined neighborhood street. Cloistered within the walls that surround the backyard is a whimsical collection of birds, dogwood flowers, trees, and fish, all inlaid in stone. There's a large stone fountain surrounded by mosaics and glass blocks with lights behind, several stone arches and benches, a mosaic patio with an inlaid dolphin, a mosaic of a tree, cobblestone walkways, and steps inlaid with pink marble and dark granite.

"You would never guess this was back here, would you?" said Terry Nell Morris, who works



Tile artist and mason Andy Whitaker finds the beauty in everyday cast-off objects like old bricks, stone fragments and broken tile, and incorporates them into new works of subtle beauty and whimsical humor.

by Liz McGeachy

PHOTOS BY TERRY NELL MORRIS AND LARRY HOOD

with Whitaker on some of his projects. "It's like another world."

Whitaker's journey to becoming a folk artist in stone and found objects is also a bit of a mosaic. He enjoyed art while in school but didn't pursue art as a career. Instead he salvaged things – old tiles, scrap metal, bottles, pieces of china, bricks, stone. He worked with a friend hauling away debris from demolition sites of old buildings, seeing beauty and history in many of the items, where others only saw trash. He also worked with his brother laying stone.

"I've got a background in masonry," he said. "I'm not a true mason; my brother was a journeyman mason. We used to work for a top-notch masonry company working on arches and things like that in a lot of the buildings in the area, so basically I learned a lot of techniques from that."

Whitaker worked on many demolition, salvage, and construction projects. He also worked with a friend who installed granite countertops.

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