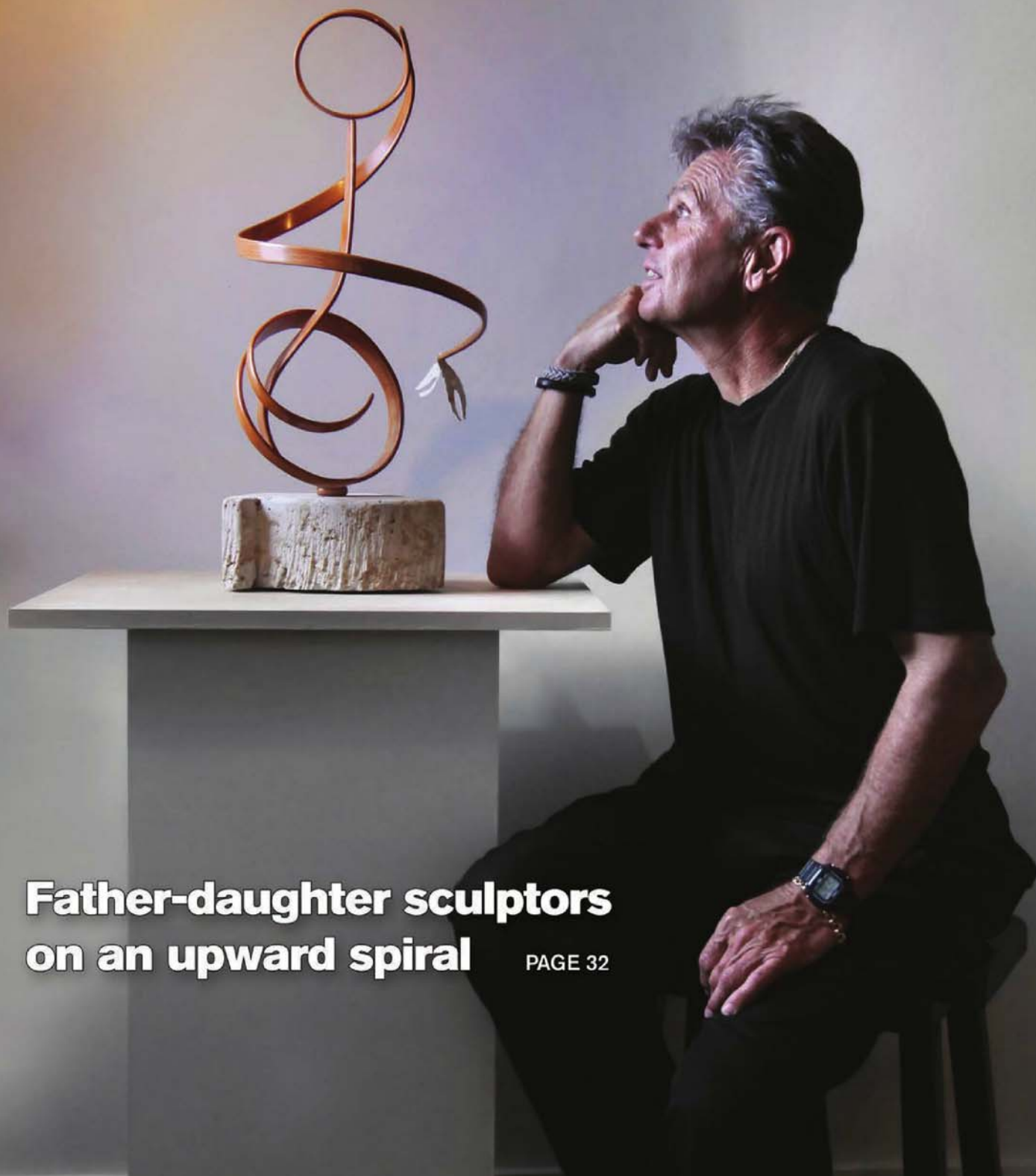


32963

Arts & Theatre



**Father-daughter sculptors
on an upward spiral**

PAGE 32

ARTS & THEATRE

Father-daughter sculptors on an upward spiral

BY MICHELLE GENZ
Staff Writer

Like the curving wooden pieces in their constantly moving sculptures, Darlene Davis and Ed Uttridge revolve around each other of late, collaborating on sculptures though they are 800 miles apart.

Davis lives in Virginia with her husband and two sons; her father Ed lives with his wife Jill in Vero's Old Orchid neighborhood. Every few weeks, they visit each other and every day they talk – not once, but as often as a dozen times. The subject is not Ed's grandsons ages 11 and 14. The calls aren't parental at all, in fact. Father and daughter speak artist-to-artist about the sculptures they co-produce: how to design them, make them, and market them, and how to keep their mutual inspiration alive.

Patera Kori Studios – Greek for “father” and “daughter” – create a specific form of art with a specific theme: kinetic wooden sculptures representing the cycles of life.

“We’re video-conferencing every morning; then we email videos back and forth to work on either technical problems or designs.”

“He doesn’t ever treat me as a daughter,” Davis says of their work time together. “He treats me as an artist who has insights he doesn’t have.”

The pair has built eight works to date. They range in price from \$4,800 to \$8,600, each consisting of a winding band of solid wood affixed to a stone



PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN HAGER

base, and a second free-floating arm, balanced on the other band, and spiraling around it. Poised on a tiny ball bearing, the spiral rises and descends with the faintest puff of air.

There are no gears, no screws, no glue even. Only the forces of nature nudge the pieces into motion.

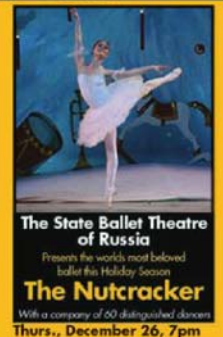
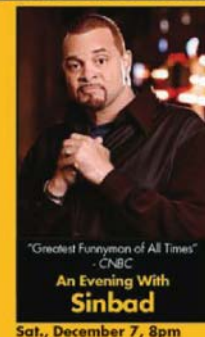
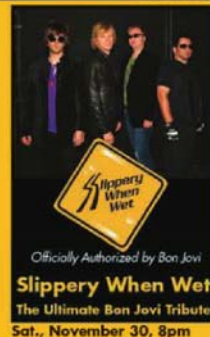
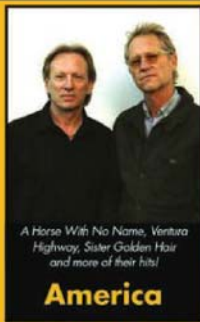
As the spiraling strip encircles the fixed piece, the spaces between them expand and contract. Light and shadow further transform the work. The longer the viewer stares, the more the spiral's cycle becomes mesmerizingly predictable.

Beyond their meditative value, Davis and Uttridge believe their sculptures represent an essential truth: that like the spiral, the stages of life itself rise and fall, reaching a peak only to descend and inevitably rise again.

Uttridge works in his nearly pristine garage; Davis works in a studio in her home. After deciding on a design, one of the two will create the bent ribbons of wood by shearing strips off a plank of hardwood, then soaking the strips to make them pliable. With their hands, they bend the strips into curves, using clamps, tape or cord to secure them, often around wire forms.

After the strips dry, they are released from their bonds, then sanded, and sealed with layers of polyurethane. That preservation process allows the artists to incorporate the balanced arm without it changing over time; the slightest expansion or contraction, and it might tumble off or at minimum, spiral off-kilter.

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Davis has had a fascination for tools all her life, dating from when her father briefly had a furniture-making business at the farm where they lived.

"His whole workshop was full of tools. They lined the walls, big machines and drill presses," she says. "Today, I go down to my studio when my boys go off to school. It's my little sanctuary. I don't know if it brings me back to when I was a little girl and my dad was making tables, but just the smell of cutting wood puts a smile on my face."

Uttridge's brief foray in furniture-

"But those were not my interests," he says.

So after the stint changing fuel rods in nuclear-powered subs, in 1970, he quit and went back to school for a business degree. The rest of his career was in ship financing, then went residential remodeling and real estate development.

By 48, he was able to retire. "I just got lucky," he says.

He sold his business, but had two commercial buildings left over in the Olde Towne area of Gaithersburg, MD. With Darlene just graduating from col-

terior house paint to adorn the stucco wall around the pool.

Then last year, his daughter came to visit. Over a glass of wine, the idea came to them to create art together.

"Of the three children, Darlene and I are the most alike," Uttridge says. "We're always flying off in a million different directions."

"I've always been a tomboy," says Davis, who five years ago, joined a Roller Derby team.

Davis is competitive in other ways: she wanted to sell the art they made. Uttridge on the other hand, had al-

ways shunned marketing his art. "If I had an idea that could make money, I would immediately stop thinking about it. I didn't want to be in that mode, answering phone calls and having a schedule," he says.

When the two came up with the kinetic sculptures, Uttridge fell into step with his daughter and is determined to make Patera Kori profitable.

With eight pieces built and more in the pipeline, last month Uttridge brought a sculpture into the Darby Gallery downtown. Owned by beachside residents George and Linda O'Malley,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



making came in between a five-year career refueling nuclear submarines; he was hired out of NYU graduate school where he was earning a master's in nuclear engineering.

Raised in a tenement apartment in the Innwood neighborhood of upper Manhattan, Uttridge was part of a large Greek family – his father, a New York City policeman of English heritage, was the only non-Greek for generations.

It was his father who urged him to pursue engineering, after he showed strong aptitude in math and science.

lege, they decided to take an art class together at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, VA. The experience prompted them to turn their two remaining buildings into an art school. "We hired all these very talented people and put together an art program." Summit Art Group existed for 10 years, with Uttridge as its director and one of a faculty of teachers.

"It was wildly successful," he says.

In 2002, they sold the school and the Uttridges moved to Vero Beach. For a decade, Uttridge kept busy making huge paintings on plywood with ex-



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Father-daughter sculptors

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

the gallery is one of the few in the 14th Avenue arts district that features works from out of state. They were immediately intrigued and sent Uttridge home for his other pieces.

A Dec. 6 opening is planned for Uttridge and Davis at Darby, with a few of their works on display there now, and the rest remaining through the month of December. Davis is flying in for the opening.

Meanwhile, the collaboration continues long-distance.

"We start talking about 7 a.m. and don't stop until 7 p.m.," says Davis. "I've taught him how to get on Face-time, which is quite amusing," she says. Often it's Uttridge who keeps calling with more questions. "I will tease him, 'You've met your quota for the day.'"

Though her brothers tease her for all the time she spends talking to her dad, she thinks of their relationship in terms of their sculptures. "I'm so grateful I get to start a whole new spiral, in a completely different context," she says.

Darby Gallery is on 14th Avenue at 19th Street. Call 772-480-0491 for information. ■



Darlene Davis, and her father fellow sculptor, Ed Uttridge.



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