

EVERGREEN

An Exclusive Magazine For Evergreen Residents

Spotlight

DONALD NEFF, An Artist's Perspective

PAGE 5

IN THIS ISSUE...

Solskrit ROARRRs [page 7]

Green and Clean - The Simple
Truth to Healthy Cleaning
[page 14]



Best Version Media

DONALD NEFF, AN ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE



Donald Neff is an internationally-recognized artist and a 30-year resident of Evergreen. In late 2013, he started a year-long quest called "The Creeks and Rivers of Silicon Valley," which is being chronicled by an international art magazine. To fulfill the quest, every week he paints a different stream, river, or waterway in the Santa Clara Valley.

Donald enjoys capturing places in the valley "as they always have been, under the freeways, in back alleys, and other out of sight places." A devotee of the 'en plein air' style, he begins and completes his paintings entirely on location, in one sitting.

Donald Neff likes to create things. "I've been drawing my whole life," he says, "ever since I was a little kid. I'd come home with drawings of birds and other things. My mom was amazed."

But when he began his working life, it was as a computer programmer. He entered the computer industry in the 1970s, right out of college where he majored in Religion/Philosophy and minored in Computer Science. (There's another story: his father and brothers were all preachers, but Donald decided to follow a different line.)

"I love computer programming," he explains. "Most people don't realize it, but programming can be a very creative endeavor, very elegant and creative."

Donald arrived in the Bay Area in 1979 after earning a consulting contract with Visa in San Mateo. He moved to Evergreen in 1984 after switching to a different company with offices further down the peninsula. He bought a house that was still under construction at the time of purchase and turned it into a family home, getting married and raising a son.

He liked that Evergreen was a little out of the way, a quarter-mile from the edge of the city, on the way up to the hills. In the time he's lived here, he's watched Evergreen grow up. "There are lots more houses now than in '84. Evergreen High School used to be a vacant lot. There are lots more restaurants now. You don't have to drive so far to get a good meal."

In 1994, Donald founded Tellan Software. Based in Evergreen, the company did work related to credit card networks. He sold the company in

1999, just before the bubble burst, and decided to stop and look around. In 2001, he took up painting full time.

A self-taught artist, Donald studies the finished work of other artists to learn from their techniques. "If you go into a museum and see a person

Continued on Page 6

looking really closely at a painting, it's probably an artist looking for the way the brush strokes were put down or what colors were used. It's real easy, once you learn certain techniques, the technical aspects, to copy a painting. If you do copy someone's work, just to learn how they did something, you can learn a lot. Just to learn how that master painted that painting."

He also takes workshops from artists whose paintings he admires. His first workshop was in Sedona, AZ. His most recent was in Scottsdale. He's also taken workshops in the Tetons and Big Sur.

Describing the workshops, he says: "We'll go out and the artist will do a painting demonstration in the morning. Then the students will set up and start painting the same or a similar scene. The biggest thing you learn at a workshop almost can't be put in words. It really helps a lot to see how the artist mixes colors or how he uses his brush. Watching a good artist develop a work from scratch is a lesson in itself."

Though Donald does do some painting in-studio, en plein air painting offers a different type of outlet, and develops different skills, than studio painting. "If you take a photo of something, photos tend to make the shadows more dark and the lights lighter. A photo does not portray the true value or the true colors of the scene. There's something about the immediacy of observing nature directly.

"En plein air paintings are alla prima [wet-on-wet]. If you're doing something all at once, you're always painting into wet paint. You have to paint the darks first then the lights. You paint thin to thick, meaning the viscosity of the paint itself. You might start out with oil paint thinned with

turpentine and end with thicker paint.

"You learn how to solve problems more quickly in whatever you're painting. You learn how to paint things with a few brush strokes. Because the light is changing, you have to paint faster. You have to simplify and paint faster, embracing the idea that in art less is more."

By the end of Donald's current project, he'll have 52 paintings of

local bodies of water.. (He's currently seven paintings ahead of his 'one per week' goal.) When the paintings are done, the final leg of the quest will involve finding a local gallery to display all the paintings. That gallery showing will help Donald fulfill the project's ultimate goal, "to help people appreciate the small little areas in the valley that people rush over in modern life."

To follow the progress of "The Creeks and Rivers of Silicon Valley" or learn more about Donald's other works, visit www.donaldneff.com

