

Saratoga Style



Photograph by George Sakkestad

After 23 years as landscape architects, Hank Helbush and Rebecca Dye are realizing a new dream by opening their own gallery.

Gallery a dream come true for local couple

By Mandy Major

Uprooting their love of nature from the gardens they create, landscape architects Rebecca Dye and Hank Helbush are giving a new home to their passion with the opening of the Golden Oak Gallery.

Exhibiting a diverse collection of nature-themed art that includes paintings, garden antiques, and manipulated photographs, this couple is looking to give a new dimension to Saratoga's artistic culture, while creating a creative community hub in downtown Saratoga.

Refurbished and painted a fresh off-white, the expansive gallery now fills the front room of the Odd Fellows building on Oak Street. Stocked with eye-catching art ranging from traditional to contemporary, the gallery houses several nationally recognized artists, including Elizabeth Murray, who is the featured artist for the opening show that runs through January.

"I want to bring the world to Saratoga," Dye says. "But I want this to be a community niche as well." Ideas for drawing in the community include offering regular art classes, lectures in painting and photography, and open poetry readings, as well as reading and after-school programs for children.

"It is really important that children get exposed to art, music, and gardens," Dye says. "It becomes part of their lives and their values. Art is so important. And community is very important to us. We want creativity, fun, and to be of service."

In addition to the classes and community events, Dye and Helbush decided on a large wooden table to the side of the room, allowing visitors to sit comfortably and relax. There are also no partitions that would block views from any angle of the room.

Although the venue might be new, Dye and Helbush are not newcomers to the business of mixing aesthetics and people. In business as Design Focus for 23 years, the couple has been very active in Saratoga, working on a variety of landscape projects from personal property to community areas such as Wildwood Park and Hakone Gardens.

The two met while attending Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where Helbush studied horticulture and Dye studied planning. After getting married, and through a series of twists and turns, they both ended up in landscape design together, working their way up over the years until they established their own company in town.

Helbush says it's nice to work together as a couple, as each person has his or her own role in the company and on each project. Helbush generally works on the overall concept of each design project, creating the outline grid sketches, coordinating workers, and "making the miracles happen." Dye, on the other hand, works with the function of the plans and the actual three-dimensional design of the space.

"When you design a space, a garden, or whatever, the most important thing is you want the design to be an experience," Dye says. "If you can create an experience, people want to be there."

These principles were at the core of creating the gallery, which Dye and Helbush took on at a breakneck speed of two months. The result of all of their labor is a spacious, uncluttered area that is inviting but not cozy, and sophisticated without being sterile.

Dye says the gallery was a natural extension of the work she and her husband had already been doing and was a relatively easy addition to create. "It is a natural interface for the flow between outside and inside," she says. "It is an extension of what we already do outside."

For more information about the Golden Oak Gallery, call 408.867.8646 or visit <http://www.goldenoakgallery.com>.