

# PARADISE BLOOMS *& in* ARTIST'S MANOR

**F**lowers in a vast array of hues and perfumes flood the 6,000 square foot brick manor of Carol A. Christie and Bill Duty. They thrive in vases, sprout from pots, and peek in from outdoors through expanses of windows \_ but the most vibrant ones live in Carol's paintings.

Carol, age 60, is a floral artist who has been staging exhibitions interweaving nature's richest bounty since 1990. She grew up in a beautiful house in Royal Oak, Michigan, with a garden that out staged the house, at least in her eyes. "I can still envision every flowerbed and every type of flower in the yard," she recalls. Her father's breathtaking roses have been reincarnated in many of her abstract expressionist works. The pansies that he brought her to plant as a child have revived

themselves a hundred times over with the flick of a brush. Walking through the yard with her mother (who died when she was a teenager), and reciting the names of flowers are cherished memories that have been reseeded, to blossom over and over again in every blooming inch of the Christie-Duty abode.

Bill, 59, owner of a home improvement company, doesn't know much about art. "But he loves my artist friends and going to art shows," says Carol. And, who wouldn't? Life with a bubbly creative creature sort of grows on you. Their family, a combined lot from former marriages, includes Carol's unavoidably creative offspring: Marcellina, an actress living in Los Angeles; Chris, a chef; and Melissa, a wife and homemaker who still finds time to design jewelry while caring for two of the couple's four



BY REGINA LYNCH-HUDSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARTHUR USHERSON



CAROL CHRISTIE AND HUSBAND BILL DUTY HAVE COMBINED THEIR ARCHITECTURAL AND ARTISTIC ABILITY TO YIELD A GALLERY SHOW HOUSE.

grandchildren. Bill's son and daughter are the business barons. Chad helps him run the business, and Anne is an administrative professional for a healthcare firm. Then there are two aloof cats and three high-energy dogs.

In the couple's personality-packed home it's always springtime, no matter what the season. Christie treats flowers as a medium of color and texture to create a panoramic mood-setting accessory. On the greyest winter day you step into a spray of warming sunshine and lively foliage.

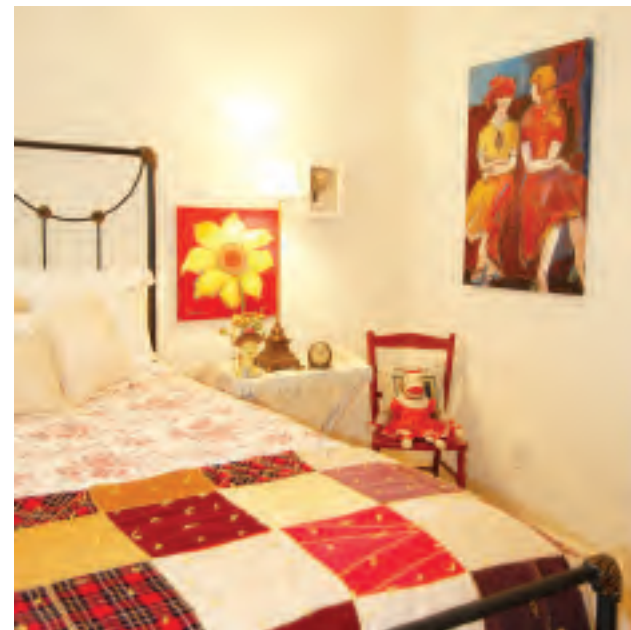
After moving in two years ago, Bill's energetic elbow grease and Carol's perky palette yielded an architectural bouquet. The front entry foyer sets the tone with its cheery golden glow. Straightaway, upbeat paintings cause guests to linger. *Tender Moments* depicts toddlers playing in a field of yellow tulips. There are earlier works of landscapes and trees and spectacular species of flora. A playful wooden red bench is invitingly positioned under the stairwell.

In the living room, the most formal vignette in a layout of upscale vacation-villa appeal, a baby grand piano claims center-stage, a gift from Carol's late father. The fireplace mantle bears an abstract nude from Carol's figure show, *Entrapment*. More recent artwork includes

*Sunflowers #3* (from her epic solo debut titled aptly *Wallflowers*). Situated nearby, is an antique gate leg table, a flea market find from 40 years ago, another arty undertaking that took a year to strip, sand, and refinish. A whimsical red wicker chest is flanked by two Victorian style chairs upholstered in floral fabric. Angels, placed throughout the room, symbolize Carol's mother—providing a feeling of protection that also comes from surrounding herself with flowers.

The kitchen, painted the color of tropical orange-red hibiscus, draws you in like a magnet with its collection of whimsical folk art (painted under the pseudonym *Annie Mae* in memory of her mother). Other folk art and artifacts by various artists make you feel as if you've just stumbled into a French flea market. Her mother's blue enameled teapot, a 70-year-old treasure, sits regally atop the stove, in the midst of vintage finds amassed during Carol's weekend "antiquing" jaunts.

(TOP) A COUNTRY COTTAGE GUESTROOM DISPLAYS *BIG SIS LITTLE SIS* AND *SUNFLOWER*. (BELOW) THE ENTRY FOYER IS A BLAST OF SUNSHINE YELLOW PUNCTUATED WITH DAZZLING FLORALS ON CANVAS.



(TOP) COUNTRY COTTAGE LIVING IS CAPTURED IN A LEMON-YELLOW KEEPING ROOM, FEATURING *COTTAGE BOUQUET #4*, A PAINTING THAT BRILLIANTLY DEFINES THE SPACE. (RIGHT) FRESH FLOWERS YEAR-ROUND AND COLORFUL BLOOMS ON CANVAS UPLIFT EVEN THE GLOOMIEST MOOD OR SEASON.

An adjacent lemon-yellow keeping room is festooned in a chic country cottage-style. Colors both fiery and feminine magically soothe the soul. Furnishings, pillows, window treatments and always fresh-flowers sweep you momentarily away-from-it-all to a powdery white beach in Malibu. If you close your eyes you can almost smell a blend of fragrant French lavender, roses, snapdragons, and peonies that appear in fabrics. A multilayered tapestry of more buds—poppies, tulips, hydrangeas—shows up in *Cottage Bouquet #4*, a painting that brilliantly defines the space.

Around the corner, the dining room breathes the aura of early Americana with its cobalt blue hydrangea toned walls. Implanted within are five of Carol's most exquisite botanical arrangements on canvas. A commanding English china cabinet, (circa 1900's) anchors a back wall. An antique sideboard flanks another. A rustic farm table with black Windsor chairs adds charm to a picturesque space that's become the centerpiece for special occasions.

Upstairs, a wonderfully laid-back cottage-look imprints a guestroom (one of three bedrooms), with its iron bed, homemade heirloom-quilt, and pretty and primitive furnishings. A painting titled *Big Sis Little Sis* (in ode to her daughters) lends girlishness to the room. The basement level containing Bill's office, a bar, library, game room, gallery, and art studio are further offshoots of the sprawling house.



Yet, when Carol needs quietude and privacy to meditate and sketch, she relishes the sanctuary of her garden. As an artist, she finds within it an endless field of possibilities. Her paint brush interprets each miraculous detail: the different species of hydrangeas that bloom in every shade of blue imaginable, antique rose bushes, wild azalea, bee balm, lamb's ear—and their eternal promise of renewal.

**Empty Nest columnist Regina Lynch-Hudson is a luxury home and décor writer for many national publications. The noted publicist also pens travel and celebrity profiles. [www.thewritepublicist.com](http://www.thewritepublicist.com)**