

Artist to Collect
Gerda Marschall



written by Debra Usher

"Your still life's are anything but still!" was the comment made by one of her collectors, and this pretty well sums up who Gerda is and what and how she creates. While this is the basis for her painting style, it is also how she approaches her other passions – gardening, cooking, road biking, horse riding, traveling.

When asked where she gets her inspiration for painting, she says "Colour, nature and energy – mix them up and you've got an idea of the origin of my creativity."

"I have been told I have boundless energy and a truly joyful view on life and what is around me. This translates into an approach to painting which has vigorous bursts of pigment and bold strokes - not too structured or pre-planned, but more free-flowing and taking on a life of its own."

Did she mention that she loves colour? Her painting day starts with laying out her colours and then mixing them on her pallet. Unless it is a commission, there is no preset colour layout. The fun begins here. The colours dictate whether the painting will create tension, harmonize or purposefully clash. And music helps set the mood too – she is always listening to a wide range of artists and styles.

"I'd love to say every day is a good day in painting but there are some days that will test you. I just keep with it, flip the canvas to work on colour and balance, then flip again to refocus and visualize a new approach," says Gerda.

Whenever Gerda Marschall fears that she is going to overwork a painting she will leave it for tomorrow and consider it on the easel first thing in the morning before any other influences intrude. Sometimes she might ask for an outside opinion, which is usually her husband, Ed. She drags him to the studio before he leaves for the city, and while she sometimes initially rejects his views or comments, they do give valuable insight to what was subconsciously bothering her and she can then revisit the canvas with her mind unfettered.

So how else does she unfetter? "Well," Gerda says, "While painting is obviously my great passion, it is not my only one – our home and my studio are on a four acre property on the banks of the Ottawa River half-way between Ottawa and Montreal. These cities provide a



Lock Your Dreams at Night, 36" x 48"

wide range of things to enjoy and experience – museums, art galleries, theatre, concerts, and of course some wonderful dining – preferable outdoors. Yes, even when in the city, I am drawn to the outdoors."

Back at home, sunrises often reveal mallards trailed by their brood, loons, bufflehead ducks, or maybe Harry the heron – all 5' of him strolling and trolling along the river bank. In early spring or autumn, they don't need daylight to tell them to wake up if there are thousands of Canada geese close to shore – their raucous squawking wakes them up before the sun does. Both Gerda and Ed imagine that they are having endless discussions about which nearby farmers' field will offer them their next breakfast.

Gardening is another passion. For the last 18 years, they have replaced much of the grass with gardens – some wild and crazy, others themed. All have chairs or benches to encourage not only Gerda and Ed, but also their many friends to stop, contemplate and re-energize. Having planted over 500 trees and shrubs – all with bird-attracting attributes – food throughout the year and nesting cover in the evergreens has resulted in hundreds of new neighbors.

What else gets Gerda outside enjoying herself –

well there is Shamade, her 21-year old horse, who is at a stable only 5 minutes away, so arena and trail rides really put her in the here-and-now – no option to day-dream or fret about a canvas that is giving Gerda trouble. For Gerda, being with or on her horse is more Zen than anything she can try to do with morning yoga. She started riding only 3 years ago but already it is an important part of her world.

And if she is not riding her horse, you can find her riding her road bike through the back roads, mooing at cows or cackling at chickens. Gerda Marschall finds that it is wonderful to be swooshed by the fresh air and smell all the different aromas changing with the weeks and seasons.

Gerda also loves to travel within North America and Europe – it gives her great pleasure – seeing and experiencing new things, culinary delights, and of course the art. Her studio holds a collection of art books, but seeing the real thing and so many different styles and approaches to putting paint to canvas is both liberating and intimidating. Gerda says, "I lean to the Abstract Expressionists for mentoring, especially Joan Mitchell, and living Canadian artists like Michael Smith, Harold Klunder, David Alexander, to name a few, are truly inspirational".



Madame Butterfly, 36" x 26"
Collection of the Queen's Landing Hotel, Niagara-on-the-Lake



Sweeter Than Wine, 48" x 36"



Four Strong Winds, 36" x 48"



You Were Always There, 36" x 48"
Collection of the Parsons Family, Niagara-on-the-Lake



painting detail, *Heart on Fire*, 36" x 48",
Collection of the Oxley Family, Mississauga

Gerda's studio building is 300' from the house and has twenty-foot windows on three sides letting in the light and giving an awesome view. It is surrounded by trees and gardens, and of course the river. Next to the studio's field stone patio is a magnificent 60' weeping willow that takes 3 people to hug. Its huge limbs support a swinging bench that makes a wonderful place to reflect.

"Occasionally we use the studio and its patio for social gatherings, wine and cheese, and even the occasional full course meal for twenty, surrounded by easels and works in progress," says Gerda.

Gerda was born in Bavaria. Her family came to Canada when she was five, growing up in or near Montreal. She earned her B.Com in Marketing from McGill while working full time. She then started her own business buying and selling shipping containers, and then added a second business related to transport repairs.

Well, that's the left-brain part of her background. The right-brain came bubbling to the surface in the 80's. She explored various art courses, most notably at the Saiyde Bronfman Centre of the Arts, as well as participating in numerous workshops. Her first solo exhibition was in 1994. Continued exhibitions and positive reviews encouraged her to quit her day-time job and become a full-time artist. "I have never looked back" she exclaimed, "It is wonderful to have a career pursuing and developing my painterly talents."

Her advice to others, "Never give up – believe

in yourself, work diligently and the rest will come." She has explored other art mediums – clay and soapstone sculpture, acrylic paint, charcoal, but her favorite is oil and oil stick, using brush, pallet knife and gloved fingers to energetically transfer and maneuver the paint. "Sometimes the hardest thing is to know when to stop", she explains, "Because I get so involved, I don't see the finish!"

But when it does come time to stop at the end of the day, she enjoys a 'wine-walk' with Ed, shepherded by their lab-mix dogs Sumac and Jasmine, and Missie, to look at the gardens or sit on one of the decks or patios overlooking the river and the Laurentians beyond.

Cooking is another creative passion says Gerda, "We buy as much as we can from the local farmers, and we are thrilled that more and more are converting to organic methods – it just tastes so much better! A favorite to share with friends and family is a leg of lamb with a heady merlot. And, of course we love to discover superb Canadian wines as a complement to any meal. A favorite autumn pastime is to explore the Niagara wineries, and this naturally includes some great restaurants – a must-not-pass is the On the Twenty in Jordan Valley".

Gerda's creations can be seen at galleries in Montreal, Quebec City, Baie St Paul, Ottawa, and Vancouver. She is represented exclusively in Toronto/Mississauga by Harbour Gallery in Clarkson Village (905) 822-5495, www.harbourgallery.com.



Painting Detail, *Sentiments*, 48" x 60"



October Stroll, 48" x 60"