

PASO ROBLES



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Mother-daughter duo share Paso Robles gallery



Photo by Julia Bluff

Mother-daughter duo Laurel, left, and Emily Miller pose for a picture inside their Firefly Gallery in Paso Robles. The pair opened the gallery in December of 2006.

Julia Bluff
STAFF WRITER

It is evident that mother-daughter duo Laurel and Emily Miller have a solid relationship — they finish each other's sentences, they work well together, and, in December, the two women celebrated the first anniversary of their downtown Paso Robles art gallery, Firefly.

"It is something that we have both always been interested in doing," Laurel said of their decision to get into the art business.

The two women have a passion for both collecting and making art. Laurel is a long-time crafter who has worked in ceramics, wood, fabric and glass, and her daughter, Emily, graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute with a degree in photography — both of which factors seemed to thrust the two into the gallery business. But it was Emily's 2004 wedding that provided the catalyst the two women needed to move their business plans forward.

"It really kind of crystallized it because [the wedding] was the first time that we really had to plan an atmosphere together, and it was really fun," Emily said. "When it was over, I think I kind of missed the working together. That is when we started thinking about [the business] more seriously."

Though Laurel and Emily live in Templeton and Atascadero respectively, the co-owners decided that Paso Robles would be the perfect place for their art gallery.

"There is so much tourism here," she said. "It just felt like a good place for a good store."

In December of 2006, just in time for Christmas, the mother and daughter team opened their doors for business in their current location at 1301 Park St. With another holiday season ending, the two women reflected on their first year and their first anniversary.

"This is an adventure," Emily said. "It has been a huge learning experience."

While many other local businesses have been struggling to keep their heads above water with 2007's poor economic conditions, Laurel said that the gallery has done remarkably well.

"We had a good year for being brand new in the area," she said.

The fledging gallery's success is likely due to the unique assortment of unusual fine art and handcrafted contemporary craft pieces. Its two stories house pottery, cards, glass pieces, wall art, one-of-a-kind jewelry pieces, house wares, delicate paper products, soaps and candles, as well as unusual furniture pieces. The two women personally pick every one of the gallery's selections from artisans both locally and throughout the United States.

Though many of the gallery's pieces wouldn't fit the traditional definition of fine art, Emily said that every piece in the contemporary craft gallery is, in fact, just that.

"People look down at crafts sometimes as less than fine art and it is really not," she said. "I believe that you should have beautiful, functional art and use it everyday in your life. It makes people feel good and that is the type of art that I want to promote."

The upper level of the two-story gallery functions as a show room for a rotating schedule of local artists. Firefly gallery is currently displaying the work of Los Osos native artist Tom Shultz.

"He is an accomplished artist," Emily said. "He has shown a lot throughout his career and I am glad to have him show [at Firefly]."

The exhibition, entitled "Arteries of the West," which Emily describes as "portraits of the road" with "a hint of abstraction," features a collection of tranquil local landscapes.

"You really get the sensation that you are moving and that you are going through the landscape," Emily said of the Shultz exhibition.

The gallery will be displaying the pieces until Saturday, Jan. 19. A show by local Paso Robles artist Heidi Francioni is slated to follow. Francioni works from a photography base and adds a paint overlay, Emily said.

While many mother and daughter relationships can be difficult without the added strain of running a business, the women said that they are doing very well in their partnership.

"Luckily, we had a really good [mother-daughter relationship] before, so that carried into this a lot," Emily said. "It has been fun. We are getting to know each other as people beyond mother/daughter."

In matters related to the gallery, the two women try to treat each other as business partners and as equals.

"I don't want to separate [the relationship], but I think that we have to," Laurel said.

As the new business year dawns, the women are looking forward to the continued success and perhaps even expansion of their gallery. Laurel and Emily have plans to integrate their own artistic creations into a brand new Firefly line of products. Emily is also expanding the store's current Web site, www.thefireflygallery.com, to include an online store so that patrons can shop for Firefly products from the comfort of their own home.

"Hopefully, [Firefly] will keep changing and growing and being interesting," Emily said.

For more information on Firefly, visit the gallery or its Web site.