



The Rock Garden

Crafts "non-shop" in Bandon

Text and Photos by

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Etched glass above the door-moon, pine havh-symbolizcs the longevity of the building. The Breuer building, now owned by the Hannas, was built in 1904, and housed Michael Breuer's men's clothing store and shoe shop through the 1940's, surviving both of Bandon's disastrous fires unscathed. Its recent metamorphosis began in the early seventies, when Bernie Dalmazzo, a bronze sculptor, opened Gentle Visions, a representation of

over forty local artists, expanding into the lean-to with a candle shop, a leather works, and a silver shop.

"When I first came, in 1974," recalls Gary Ekker, a potter who now shares the building with Bernie, "I would notice things for months that I hadn't noticed before; the place was floor-to-ceiling shelves. But it wasn't chaotic; if somebody had moved something, put it back in a different spot, you could see it right away."

"It seems to me that I came alive in the sixties," Bernie recalls. "People were becoming more involved with the things they were using. They were looking around, and it seemed we were surrounded with plastics. People started working with natural materials, and a craft shop came out of this. We always managed to keep a free and easy spirit, and there was a lot of energy."

But nothing remains unchanged, and Gentle Visions, in its time, became past. "People are still asking me, 'Why did you change the name?'. Because the place isn't 'Gentle Visions' anymore, not at all. We're doing a completely different thing now. Anyway, I'm not a merchant. I didn't have time for my own work, I was so busy talking about everybody else's. And by that time, the crafts world had become the McDonald's of the hippie generation.

One day, when there was still Gentle Visions, but the demise was becoming evident, Gary and Bernie made a rock garden down the center of the shop. Things were changing; that was 1975. More time was to pass before only they remained, and began to conceive of the present studio.

"People thought the place was dead. We hung cloth over the windows, and spent all of 1977 planning, talking, getting materials, working. Neither of us did any art work that year. No one knew What.' was going on, and there were rumors we were ruining the place." On January 2, 1978, the cloth came down, the old latch on the front door was unlocked, and their studio on West First Street was open.

"Rock Garden open 12 to 5"

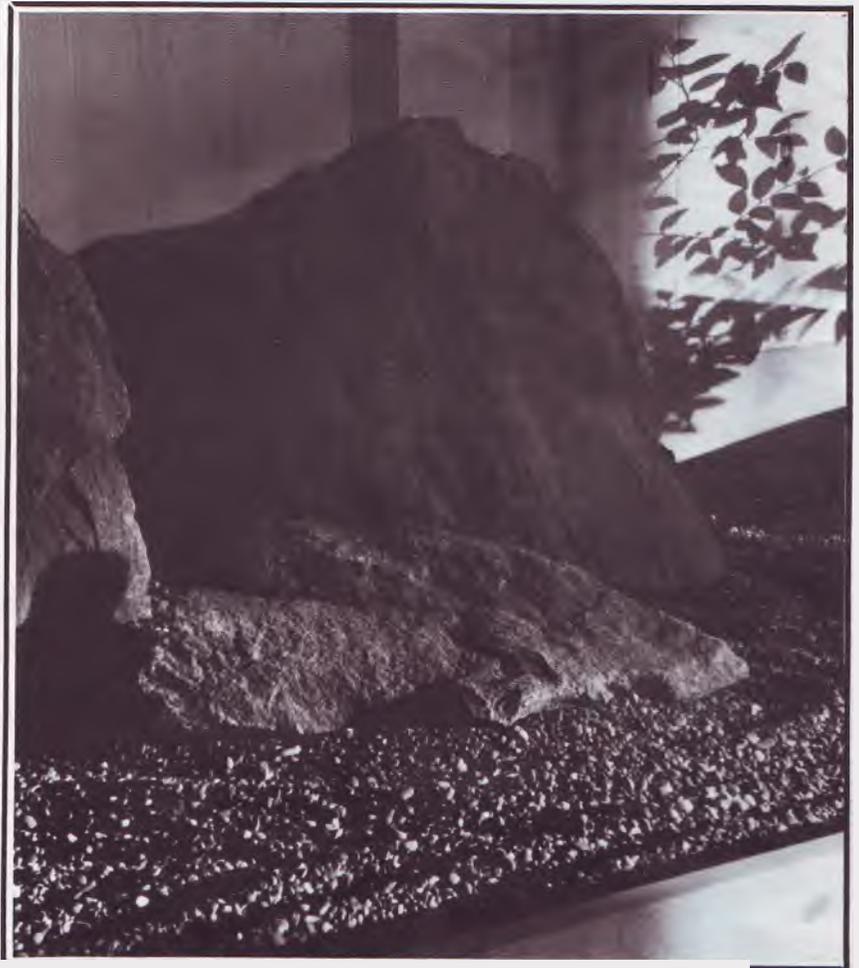


River-worn rocks near the front door

reads the sign. The rocks are reminiscent of islands and sea, or, as a recent visitor remarked as she walked her fingers along the edge of a rock, "I feel as if I'm walking on a cliff." There are always flowers, reflecting the seasons, the ceaseless cycle of change. Bernie and Gary have a casual daily routine of sweeping the wooden floor, raking and misting the rocks, and making flower arrangements. The shop is constantly changing; a new arrangement, a new piece of driftwood, always new sculptures and pots, or simply a new configuration of what is already present. Even the flower arrangements always change in their containers. Music is in the air, sometimes Paul Horn, sometimes Bach, or Dylan, most often the jazz and big band music of the twenties, thirties, and forties. The light changes with the hour and the season, sometimes resting on the rocks in the back of the shop, sometimes on the tokomoma near the door, sometimes not even coming directly inside.

At the Rock Garden, the natural world is very close outside. The shop is located near the mouth of the Coquille River, the sand dunes at Bullard's Beach clearly visible from the back windows. There are harbor

pg. 36)



The afternoon sun highlights the carefully groomed rocks.



The light has changed again in the shop. The etched glass window was designed by Bernie and Gary.

(Crafts cont. from pg. 13)

seals in the water, the crabbing and fishing are fair, the cormorants flock nearby, and hawks can be seen across the water. The gulls, particularly, offer an insight into the world on the river. The patient and regular watcher sees how lively and directed their interactions are, how much they change from day to day, season to season, and most, how comfortable and free they are in their harsh environment.

While certainly not practicing the discipline of Zen, or thinking of themselves as neo-Orientalists, both Gary and Bernie have been deeply influenced by the naturalness, spontaneity, and emotional depth of Oriental art. Bernie's work space is at a window overlooking the water. "I spend most of my time looking out of the window, until the mind becomes still." The studio is primarily an aesthetic space, a daily communion with the beautiful. A ten-year-old once inquired, after a thorough look around, "You don't sell anything in this store, do you?" The answer to that is both yes and no. The works are for sale, definitely. But they are not made with that in mind, and

(Poitt. on pg. 38)



Bernie's work area, at the window overlooking the Coquille River

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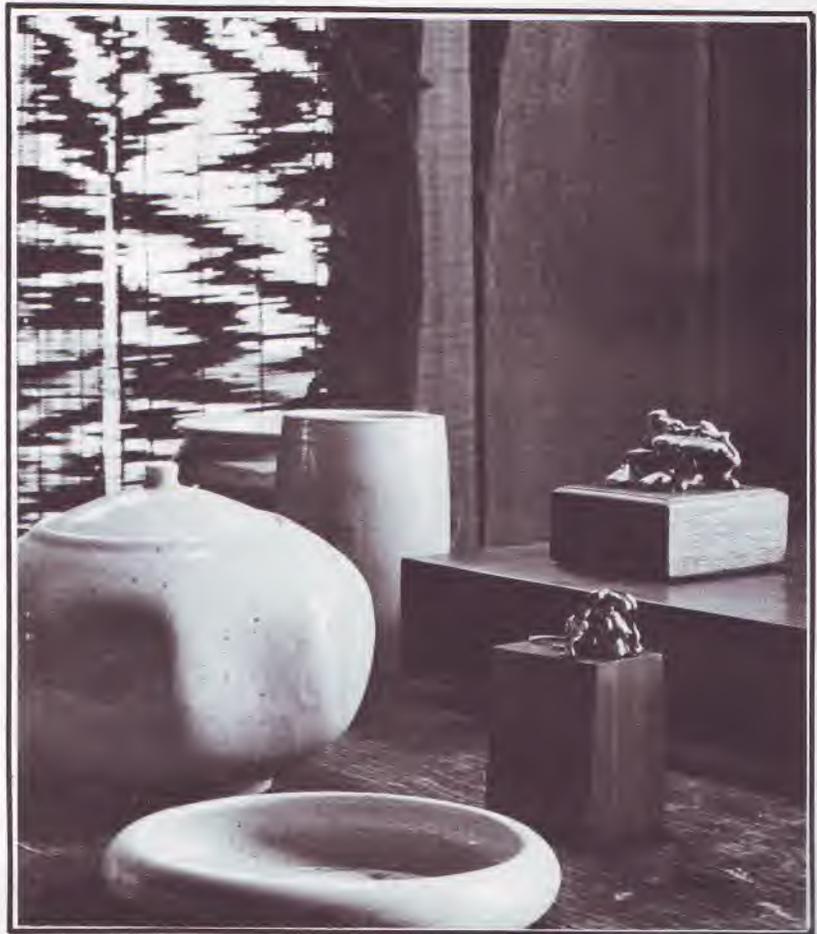
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(Crafts rout. from pa. 36)

purchases are few and far between. Gary and Bernie, above all, are patient.

"I've been working in bronze for fourteen years, and have developed a style that is easily recognizable. I don't cast the bronze at all. The technique is simple; I combine bronze rod and a torch, drawing, building up the form. I'm more interested in my control over my pace than I am in producing. My work is not directed toward the mass public. If it were, I'd copy something selling well now, and price it a dollar cheaper."

Gary has been potting for five years, and his work is likewise highly individual. "The pots that I've felt closest to in making them, the ones that I feel are unique, are the ones that most people pass right over. The way the pot's made, the involvement and spontaneity are what I value in them. Some of them are irregular, bent, twisted, and perhaps people don't look at them because they want a mirror, they prefer my round, symmetrical pots with the smooth



(right and below) Some examples of the bronze sculpture and pottery creations.



glazes as a reflection on themselves
"I've recently been experimenting with single-firing my pots. The technique is a more spontaneous, yet a total, method of working. The challenge is in the bringing together of clay, glaze, and fire in a single process, without destroying the pot with thermal shock, or losing the glaze in pieces. My last firing was the first single-firing, and although I lost some pots, and many of them aren't beautiful, it opened up a whole new world of questions and possibilities. I've spent the last few years developing some reliable glazes and gaining some consistency in firing my kiln. I'm also going to use local materials as additions to my basic clay and glazes. They can't be achieved any other way.

Bernie, likewise, does his work with his whole being. Some work comes from dreams. Creation is everywhere. I feel like old times in the shop, all over again, being in the old Breuer Eames shop. I assume other times, I become with the river, the Eskimo times

I feel I am the
and sometimes I feel like a fool.