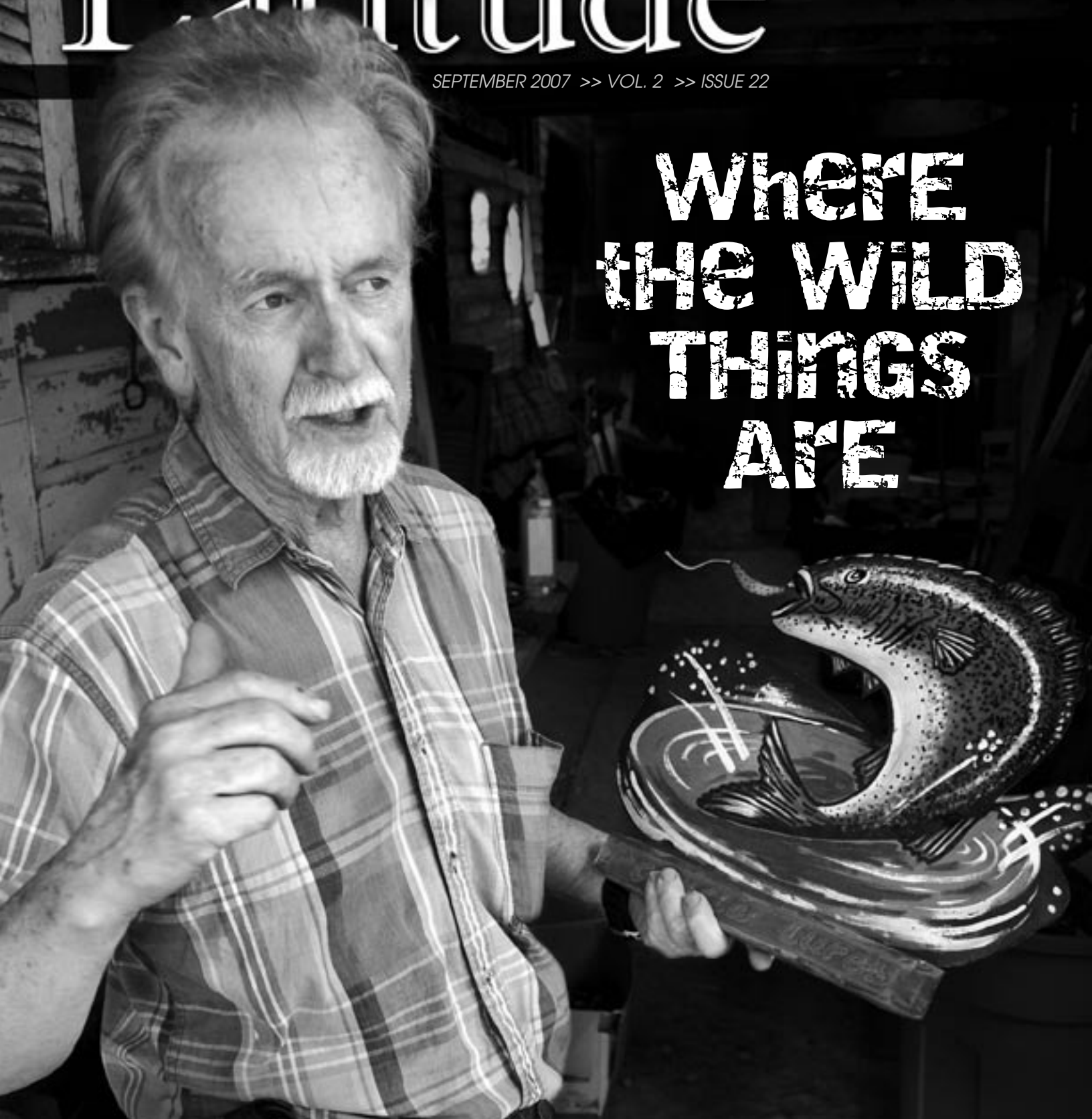


Latitude

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**WHERE
THE WILD
THINGS
ARE**



INSIDE 36 FALL FESTIVALS & TIME FOR MUSCADINE

ART GONE WILD

Rusty saw blades adorn a “Sawfish” here. Rain gutter spouts become roosters with rakes for tails over there. Battered license plates become sides to unusual birdhouses and old decorative windows, splashed with colorful fishing lures, offer a view to one man’s free-spirited interpretation of life.

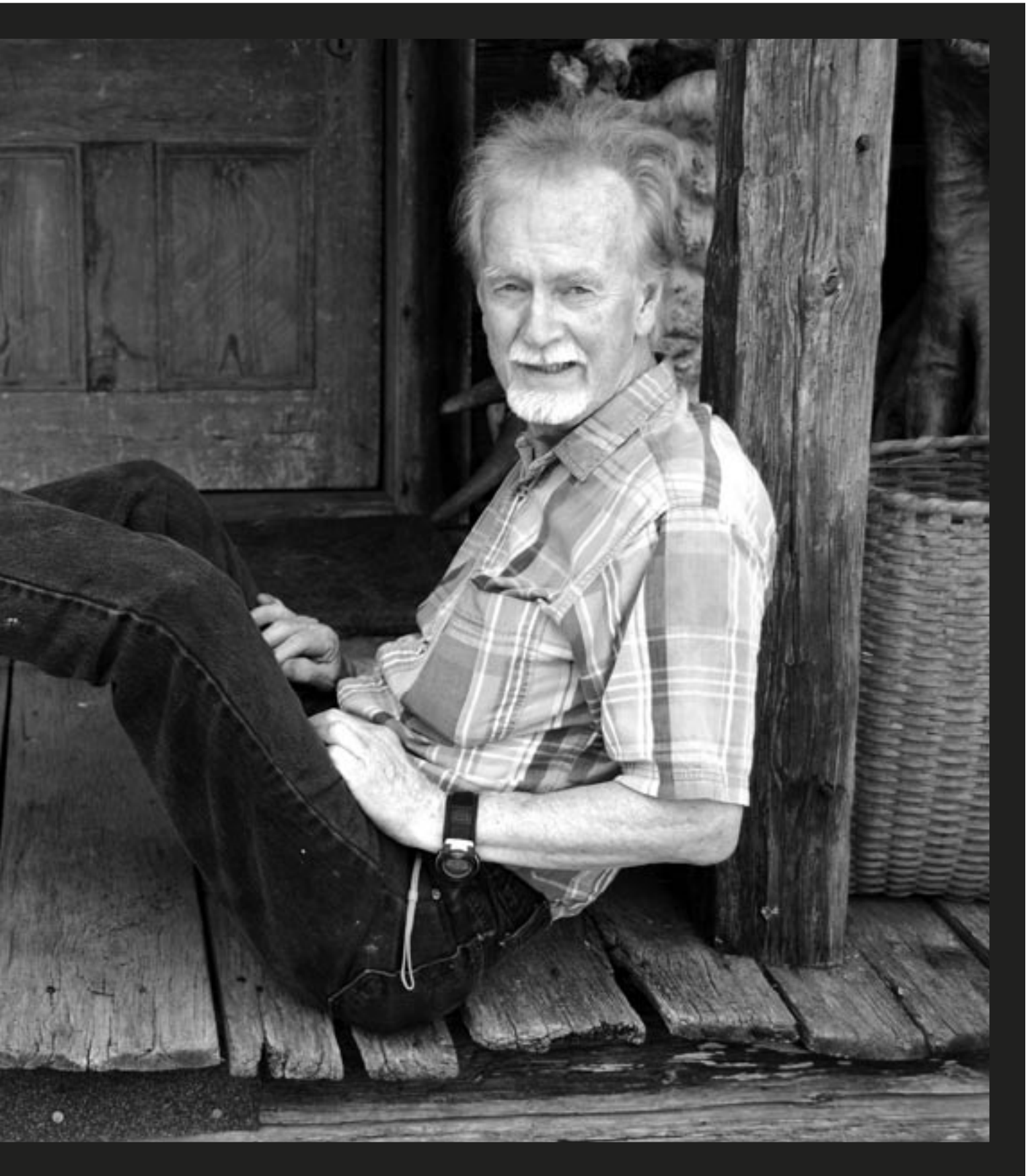
In this particular life, most any old scrap of metal, wood or paintbrush that has relinquished its former usefulness becomes a candidate for metamorphosis into a piece of art created by outsider artist C.B. Tatum of Winston-Salem.

One Way Architectural Antiques co-owner Carolyn Landreth guides visitors through the barn gallery where Tatum’s works are featured. Tatum’s outsider art is unmistakable. Despite its roughness, there’s poetry in the sculpting of a face added to an old paint brush with stiff bristles whipped up like frosting on a cake that are a “brush man’s” hair. And his old house shutters, with their cut-out panels of trees, boats, branches and other creations are making the rounds with North Carolina collectors.

“His crab shutters are extremely popular with the coastal crowd,” explains Landreth, an ardent supporter of Tatum. One Way is the only place to find Tatum’s work in the area, but he also has some items in a gallery at the coast.

“Tatum is so creative,” Landreth says. “He continually surprises me at what he brings in.”







Tatum's work has been a staple in the gallery shop since 1999.

One Way's park-like setting includes a huge open-air barn with dirt floors, where Tatum's work appears. Landreth points out a shelf of bird houses on the left, and molded brick masks on the right, also Tatum's work. His signs are stacked here and there, each one a riot of color and texture. Professional-grade paintings and lettering mingled with cut tin and sparkling scales of a fish, made of layer upon layer of shiny metals.

"His sign painting is so professional, so unlike some of the other lettering you might see in this type of art," adds Landreth. "His birdhouses have won awards, too. Tatum is a three-time winner of the birdhouse competition BirdFest."

"I go to the Lexington Flea Market religiously every Tuesday," says Tatum. "I end up hauling boxes of doorknobs, junk and parts back to my workshop—it's just so incredibly cheap, I can't not buy it. After two or three weeks of designing a piece, I can use this stuff."

And the way he uses stuff is amazing. What even the best recycler would consider useless, Tatum considers perfect for a mouth to a larger-than-life metal fish, complete with cheese grater fish tail and bulging electrical connector eyes.

In addition, his creatively decorated shutters and hand-painted-ed signs have inspired homeowners to contract him to decorate entire lake houses.

"I just started fooling around with birch bark one evening, and now I'm working with that to form canoes and other pieces. Before long, my furnishings were filling up the clients' homes."

But where does this well of creativity come from? For Tatum, it's life itself. Tatum is a serial entrepreneur. Early on, Tatum worked as a fashion artist for Robin's, a well-regarded women's clothing store based in Winston-Salem. "That job required me to

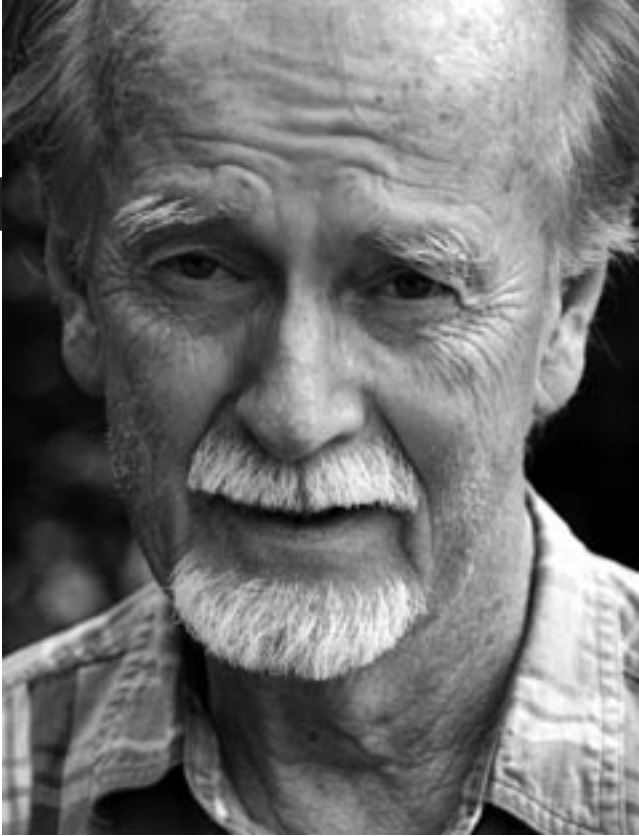
paint exactly what we were selling in fine detail," explains Tatum. "Over the years, I've had to force myself to get worse and worse in my art to keep within the outsider-art tradition. In outsider art, there aren't symmetrical sides or contrived lines."

His life's many iterations include a 1970s stint running Tatum Outfitters, a back-packing store that also carried outdoor clothing, in addition to gear and a rock-climbing wall hand-fashioned by Tatum (before climbing walls were "in") and antiques as part of the decor.

Tatum smiles as he remembers hearing a Woolrich representative's comments back in the day. "My biggest competitor thought I was crazy for carrying clothing and antiques, which I love," Tatum laughs. "Back then, outfitters were supposed to be purists, and specialize only in gear." He got the last laugh when that same dismissive company tried to order Tatum's own stylized work from the furniture market decades later. Tatum refused the order, much to the chagrin of the former rival company.

Now 67 years old, Tatum has also taught various forms of art at a community college, worked the regional antiques show circuit, built and painted motorcycles (he's owned and raced them, too), sung in bands, painted scenery—more gigs than one might expect for a single lifetime; but it's these many endeavors that





have influenced his work. Tatum is quick to point out that his style is loose and spirited creativity rather than art. “I just want to have fun with what I’m doing.”

And doing, he is. In addition to showing his work twice a year in Raleigh and twice more in Charlotte, Tatum participates in One Way’s annual spring show and showcases his work in a few area restaurants. “I’m working now on a restaurant in Thomasville, owned by the same folks who own the Seafood Shack in Walkertown,” explains Tatum. “The owners have been amazed by their customers’ reactions and the increase in sales as a result of the renovations and new décor.”

His work has been featured in 11 magazines in addition to *Latitude Magazine*, yet Tatum is emphatic about not taking huge orders. “I make all this stuff by myself, and that’s how I keep it fun.”

His inspiration comes from many sources—Tatum’s travels in particular inspire him. On any given trip of years gone by, he might be kayaking, sailing or rock climbing; but one trip in particular has imprinted itself indelibly in his soul—a trip to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. During this trip, Tatum spent a great deal of time with the Supai Indians and became a life-long friend of Iron Eyes Cody, the stoic Indian with a single tear rolling down his cheek in old television commercials. “I learned that Cody was helping the Supai, and I was interested in the same things,” remembers Tatum.

The result of this friendship and long visits with Iron Eyes Cody is Tatum’s interpretation of Indian traditions in some of his art, plus a huge collection of Indian artifacts given to him by Iron

Eyes Cody, which is currently on display at the Bob Timberlake Gallery in Lexington. Tatum looks forward to an October trip back to the magical land of the Grand Canyon.

Along his winding path, Tatum has in turn inspired others. One such person is Tom Valone, founder of the wildly successful outfitter store, The Great Outdoor Provision Company. “I was at a show and a young lady came running up to me,” Tatum recalls. “She said she was from Winston-Salem, and asked if I was somehow connected with Tatum Outfitters. When I confirmed her suspicions, she ran to get her boyfriend, a tall, lanky fellow with red hair. This guy said that it was my store that had influenced his life’s decision to create his own store.” But Valone created more than a store; he created an outfitting empire as a result of Tatum’s influence.

Tatum says he is often asked by people about how he learned to create such vastly different styles of art. Tatum contends that desire is more important than talent, though one would be foolish to think Tatum doesn’t have talent. His depth and breadth of work suggests that there’s far more to the man than meets the eye.

“I didn’t know I couldn’t do it,” he chides.

And, for those who enjoy his work, it is fortunate that his creativity seems to know no boundaries. 😊

To view C.B. Tatum’s work, visit *One Way Architectural Antiques in King, N.C.* Hours: Tuesday through Friday by appointment or chance, and Saturdays from 9-4pm. For more information, call 336-983-6790 or visit www.onewayantiques.com.

Laura S. Wharton lives in Mount Airy.

