

GH Blazing Artists

Full Spectrum of Original Artwork on Display at the Blazing Mako

By Sue Cocking, Guy Harvey Outpost staff writer scocking@guyharveyoutpost.com

Decorative wall hangings made from reclaimed shotgun shells; eye-catching handmade gemstone necklaces and bracelets; handsome wooden sculptures and furniture carved by hand; and one-of-a-kind neon sign paintings that pop.

These are just a smattering of the original, handmade works of art that will be on display (and for sale!) at the Blazing Mako Tournament and Festival Father's Day weekend June 16-19 at the Islander, a Guy Harvey Outpost resort in Islamorada.



Here's an advance peek at several of the artists and their creations that you can browse in the tents of the "Conch-servation Village":

CHRIS NICOLAUS, Fort Lauderdale

Several years ago, Nicolaus began organizing trash clean-ups in the Everglades where he and his volunteers picked up more than 500 pounds of spent shell casings. His friends told Nicolaus to just scrap them, but he decided instead to turn them into marine life art.

"I've always been a fan of Guy Harvey and a fan of fishing," he said.

Despite no formal artistic training, Nicolaus forged ahead, sorting the shells by caliber, washing and drying them, gluing them to hand-cut wooden backings in the shapes of sailfish, orcas and other sea creatures, then painting them. Photos of his creations showed up on social media, and he has sold more than 20 for several hundred dollars each over the past few months. He puts the money back into his conservation program.

"I'm taking something that's destroying the Everglades and making something beautiful," he said.

He expects to display as many as 70 pieces at the Blazing Mako.



JOYCE NELSON, Miami

This Coconut Grove former advertising executive who taught fashion merchandising and design at the college level didn't originally set out to become an artist. But after taking jewelry-making and gemology classes beginning in 2000, she fell in love with precious stones and pearls and decided to make hand-crafted jewelry a full-time career.

Since 2005, Nelson's one-woman firm Cosmopolitan Jewels has been creating one-of-a-kind, head-turning necklaces, bracelets, and earrings suitable for dressing up or down. Prices range from about \$75 to \$4,500.

"It's versatile that way," Nelson said of her artistry. "You can wear it anytime and if you do, people will notice you. I can create anything-- just ask."

As lifelong anglers and boaters, Nelson and her husband Ron are excited about coming to Islamorada for the Blazing Mako.



DAVID WIRTH, Islamorada

A well-known and longtime contributor to the Keys art scene, Wirth produces a wide range of wildlife art-- some of it made from the wildlife itself. A lifelong fisherman and hunter, he is fond of saying that he hunts and fishes to make art and makes art to hunt and fish.

At Wirth's Islamorada gallery, visitors might find rich wooden or bronze sculptures of fish with backgrounds of mangroves and sea fans; hardwood furniture with handles made from the antlers of a deer; Hawaiian-style circle hook jewelry; and a variety of creatures fashioned from stone.

Nearly all of the wood the artist uses comes from blown-down trees or remnants from cleared lots. He fashions wreaths from barbed wire discarded in farm fields. A deer skin becomes a throw rug (while the meat goes into his freezer). Works sell for an average of \$2,500 to \$3,500 apiece.

He won't have to travel far to attend the Blazing Mako.

"The Islander is a great location-- a nice, Keys-y place to do an art show," Wirth said.

"We're all about supporting anything Guy does."

ALISON CLAIRE LaMONS, Lakeland.

This seafaring, world-traveling, beach-loving, architectural drafting, married mother of three has longed to become an artist since her childhood in Fort Lauderdale. But LaMons didn't make art her full-time career until about three years ago and she occupies an unusual niche: watercolor portraits of vintage neon signs.

"I want to be the Guy Harvey of vintage neon signs!" she declared.

The hand-painted, original signs may depict anything from sport fishing boats to tropical flowers to blue marlin accented with shimmering neon that immediately catches the eye. Frames are fashioned from salvaged scrap metal.

"It's sexy and at the same time kitsch-y," LaMons said of her work. "I invent a sign to suit what I want to say."

LaMons' larger watercolors sell for upwards of \$5,000, but she'll also bring a selection of prints and note cards to the Blazing Mako.

"I have great fun doing these art shows," she said.

Sue Cocking chronicles the Guy Harvey Outpost travel and adventure experience in regular blog posts on GuyHarveyOutpostNews.com/. For 21 years, Cocking covered the full spectrum of outdoors adventure opportunities in South Florida and beyond for the Miami Herald, including fishing, diving, hunting, paddling camping, sailing and powerboat racing. She is a certified scuba diver and holder of an IGFA women's world fly fishing record for a 29-pound permit.

Share your photos, videos and experiences with Guy Harvey Outpost by hash tagging #OutpostAttitude to all of your social media posts.