



NORTH COAST CITIZEN

COVERING THE HEART OF OREGON'S COAST

Wednesday, December 17, 2008

No project is too big for this local sculptor

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Neahkahnne resident Edward M. Brownlee's two sculptures, pictured above, will soon be on their way to the Sun Peak Ski Resort in British Columbia.

Brownlee's sculptures are on display in Alaska, Fiji, Oregon, and Hawaii.

The Honolulu Academy of Arts and the Hawaii State Art Museum are among the public collections which feature work by Edward M. "Mick" Brownlee.

His current project is an extensive commission by Australian architect, Jim Farrell. The Brownlees have worked with Farrell on several projects after meeting him in Fiji.

When he needed an artist for the extensive designs for the Sun Peak project, he contacted Mick and Phyllis. Brownlee has designed all the art for the projects, though some of it is being created in British Columbia by local artists.

Some of these elements are carvings, one a giant weaving, and one a dimensional tile mural.

The parts of the commission Brownlee is working on in his son's Highway 53 workshop are two cedar rounds, three feet in diameter, with abstract, interlocking, curvilinear patterns carved into them, and a smaller piece in old growth cedar salvaged from a farmer's field.

Size is no obstacle for Neahkahnne sculptor Mick Brownlee.

For the last year, he has been working on a commission for the Sun Peak Ski Resort in British Columbia, the size of which might intimidate a less experienced artist.

Brownlee and his wife, Phyllis, an interior designer, built their house here in 2000.

His art career began in Portland where he was born. He lived in a run-down neighborhood on the west side where he found old building materials and used them to create sculptures.

Brownlee was a topographer for the Army and was stationed in occupied Japan. Upon returning to the mainland, he attended Oregon State University and the California College of Arts and Crafts. In 1954, he became the first recipient of a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Hawaii.

He started carving in the 1950's, and is the recipient of a special award from the American Institute of Architects for "outstanding contributions of art to architecture."

The works represent

patterns of the mountains at Sun Peak. One pole, called Sun Shadows, is 10 feet tall, and the other, Moon Shadows, is eight feet. He started with small models of the finished works called macquettes. The poles were cut from one second growth tree, downed by last year's big storm.

After Brownlee hand-planes the face of the log to round it and peel the bark, the design is drawn on and the areas to be carved out are painted, so that he knows what to cut away.

Brownlee has a beautiful collection of carving tools which he has made and collected over the years. In fact, he says, "The most important thing is a sharp chisel."

When the carving and sanding are complete, the pieces are stained with 10 to 15 coats of oil-based stain, which will protect the work from the weather of British Columbia. Copper caps on the tops add additional protection and interest.

Kevin Brownlee, Mick's son, is a retired biologist who lived in Alaska for many years. He has also been recruited as assistant carver for this commission.

The finished pieces will be shipped to BC on a truck, after any requirements with customs as to getting the project across the border are met.

Brownlee has this advice for young artists: " Start small and work up; beginners start too grand."

When questioned about young artists who try to find a balance between earning a living and 'doing their own thing," he said, "I used to tell my art students that art for public spaces has a different responsibility than personal art. You owe it to the designers and users of the building or site who will be using it to focus on their vision."