

shutters but said that most customers install their own."

The Crafted Country Shutter Company builds interior and exterior shutters and even decorative gates. There are several different styles of shutters. Lockyer works with the customer to design exactly the right shutter to suit their home or cottage and their own personal style.

"Have you ever noticed the way some people's houses look more like

homes? I think shutters make a huge difference," says Lockyer, who likes to "enhance the character of your home."

Susan Eck is multi-talented Muskoka artist. She is a published poet and lyricist, now focussing on her contemporary abstract paintings that are featured in galleries across Muskoka.

About 10 years ago, Eck went through a passage of emotional upheaval and personal loss. "I used

my art as a way of touching my own soul," she explains. "Searching for my own truth, I found a part of my soul that I liked even more." Since then she has been concentrating on her art, both professionally and more passionately.

She originally started with watercolors but now has developed a abstract style using oils, acrylics and mixed media. Eck is very proud of the Award for Excellence in Mixed Media that she received at the Muskoka Arts and Crafts Spring Show in April 2001.

Eck's studio is at her home on Three Mile Lake near Windermere. In the summer, she creates in her Muskoka room studio facing the lake, but in the winter she moves into the lower level of the house.

"I have a mini showroom and an area where I do my art and write poetry." She has had three books of poetry published under her pen name of Michaela More.

She credits friends with helping her growth as an artist. "One helped me understand interpretation of color and how those colors can help us heal," she explains. "I realized how color affects us individually and in developing an environment. I saw that and used it in my work."

She describes her abstract as "a composition of an alphabet of colors.

"I try to develop a passionate message," she says. "I use color to tell a silent story." Eck says people have described her work as playful and her new "sky blue" series as sensitive. In her landscapes, she strives to capture the simplicity of life and a feeling of freedom.

Being an abstract artist really distinguishes her from other Muskoka artists, says Eck. "Some people just don't get it. A person may be overcome by abstract.

"Looking at art is like drinking wine. Some people like sweet and others like dry. Your palate has to be educated."

Each work is one of a kind. "I want the piece to speak to a person. I want them to feel it. Art is supposed to give you joy, and I want my buyers to have a lot of pleasure."

Eck is concentrating on getting her work "out there.

"People can see it and they can decide." Her work can be seen at Jasmine's in Bala, The Shomi Gallery in Huntsville and Muskoka Pottery and Glass in Bracebridge.

"Abstract is fantasy," explains Eck. "It is light-hearted, joyful and lets the mind rest. I love it when my kid comes out in my work."

Eck still works, teaching at Sheridan College while pursuing her artistic interests. "I cannot afford the luxury of painting without a job. It is a very exhausting life I have."

She says her family were very practical people and the arts were not considered a profession. She studied business until she realized it was time for a change. Ten years ago, she decided to focus on her art instead. "My life is not a dress rehearsal," she says. "So I've got to try these things."

Lots of energy and the ability to see something special in our surroundings are the common thread for these three women. Through their talents, they are sharing it with others.



Photograph: Sandy Lockhart

Abstract artist Susan Eck draws on the influence of the local environment and friends in her artwork.