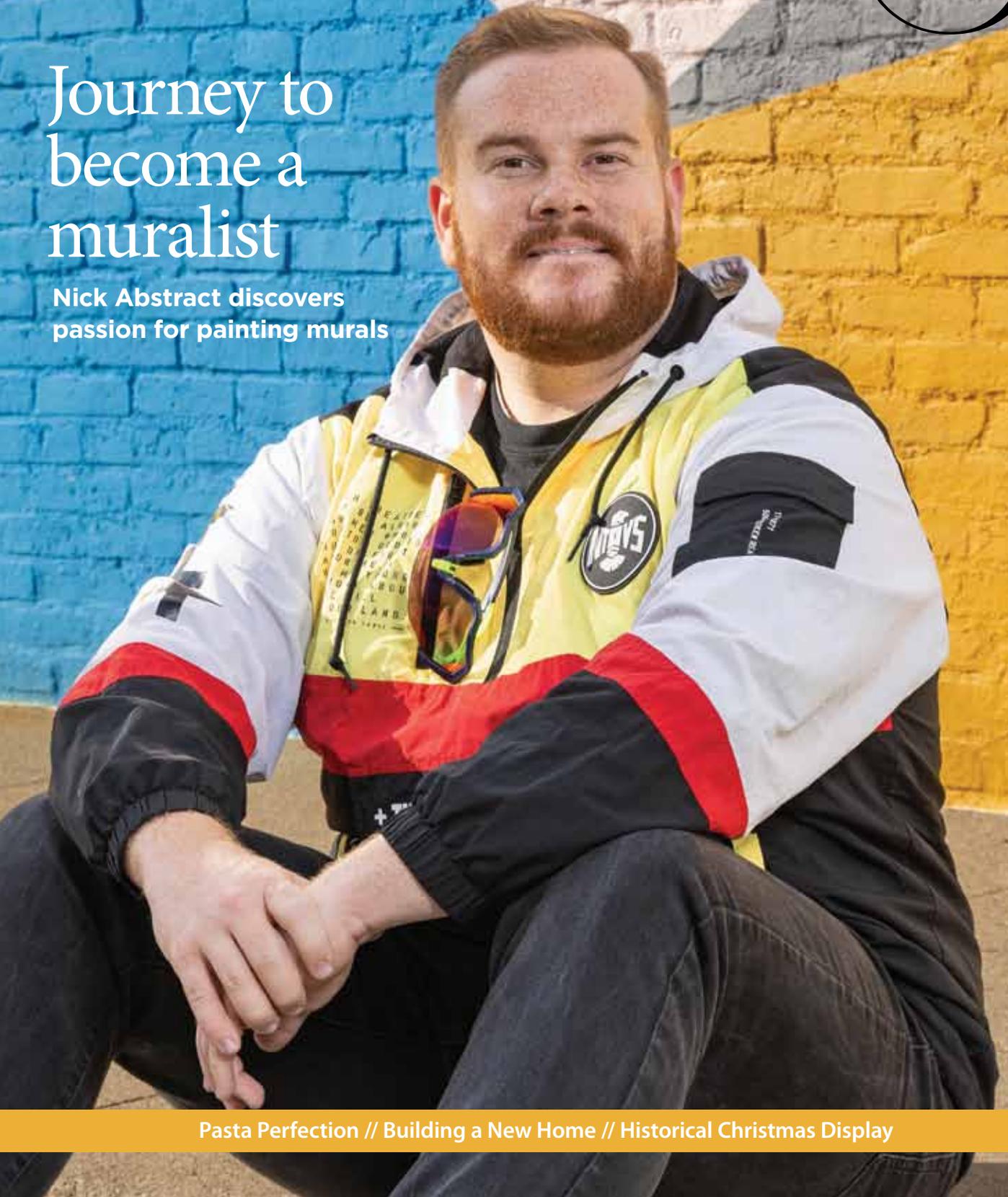


November | December 2022

# COLUMBUS

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Nick Abstract discovers  
passion for painting murals



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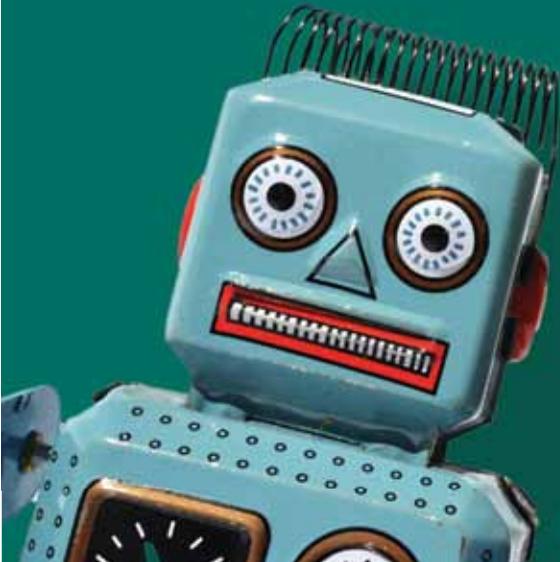
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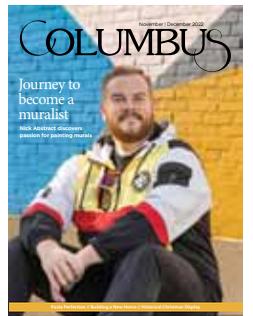
# contents



HOME & FAMILY

## Reflection of couple

Abhishek Mehrotra and Richa Tandon build a home with personality in Columbus



ON THE COVER

Nick Abstract  
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Tony Vasquez

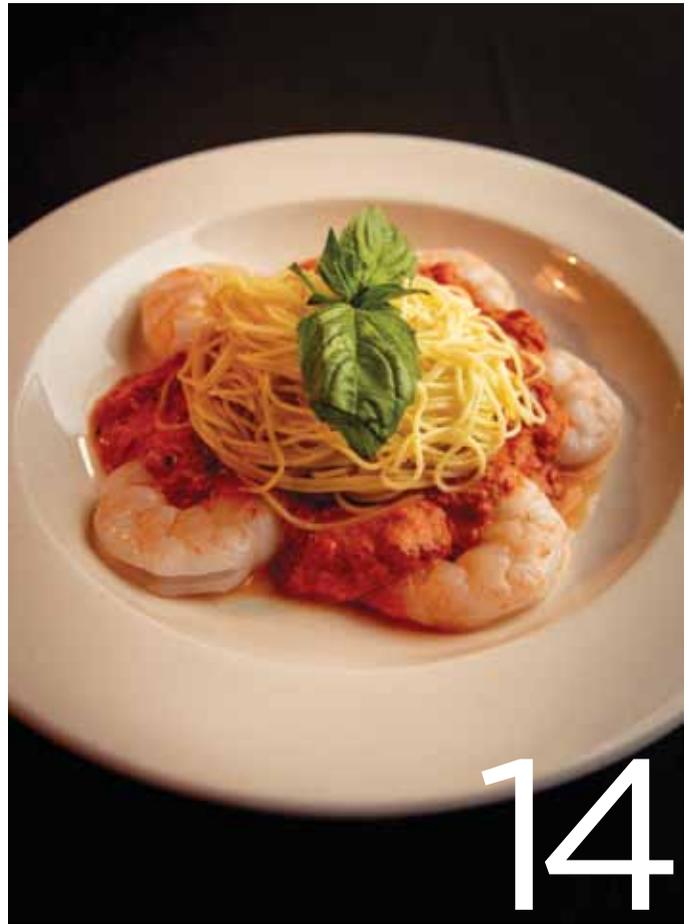
MEDLEY

- 8 EDITOR'S NOTE
- 10 WHAT DO YOU THINK?
- 12 BOOK NOOK

14

TASTE

Pasta



14

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## contents

28 **PROFILE**  
Nick Abstract

36 **COMMUNITY**  
“Christmas Memories”  
holiday exhibit

### IN EVERY ISSUE

- 42 WEDDING
- 44 OUR SIDE OF TOWN
- 46 THE BIG PICTURE



# COLUMBUS

November, 16, 2022

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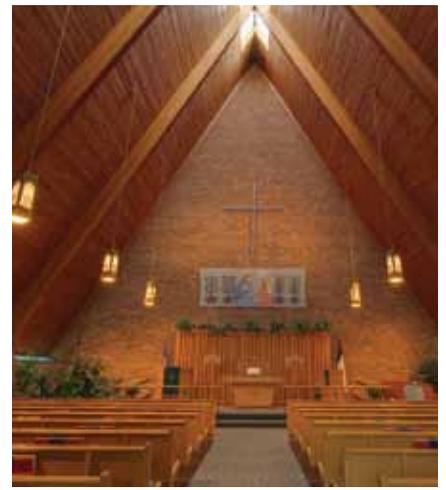
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## Hello and goodbye — sort of,

My father always told me when I have a child of my own my whole world will change. He couldn't be more right. While I was pregnant, he asked me if I wanted to quit my job and stay home with the baby. I laughed and said I would never be a stay at home mom. I worked hard for my degree and to get where I am at, so I never imagined myself wanting to take a step back from my career to take care of my children.



My father was right though. When Eli was born, my whole world changed. I love Eli so much and could not stand leaving him at daycare all day while I was at work. I hated the fact that I might miss his first time rolling or saying his first word because he was at daycare nine hours a day.

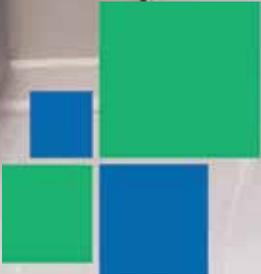
About two months after returning from maternity leave, I decided I wanted to be home with Eli more, so I started working part-time. Therefore, my role with Columbus magazine is changing a little bit. I will no longer be the editor, but I am so glad I am able to continue working on the magazine as a graphic designer.

I have really enjoyed working with all of our writers, photographers and sources this past year to publish amazing stories about our community. It has been a pleasure.

Read my last stories as editor in this issue. Explore the pasta options offered in town and the beautiful artwork created by Nick Abstract. Get a look at the new home of Abhishek Mehrotra and Richa Tandon and the Christmas Memories exhibit for the Bartholomew County Historical Society.

*Keely*  
Keely Spitler

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In each issue of Columbus, we ask people for their opinions on a variety of topics. This month's question:

## What would you like to see in Columbus' local art scene?



I would love to see a wider variety of fine arts extracurriculars for our children and young people. Columbus is home to a large population of families that value the arts and creative thought. There is endless imagination in our youngest community members and I believe the availability of art classes and collaborative projects would be incredibly impactful on this population.

— Meredith Blackerby



I would like to see more theater and I would like to see the commercial spaces downtown used for pop-up theater experiences. If I could have a permanent theater, ideally it would be downtown, but for the parking. So, I would like if the new Nexus Park could make room for a theater. It would be a go-to space, a destination space, for people in Columbus and people from elsewhere.

— Jill Tasker



As a retired art teacher, art should be for everyone and inclusive. My hope is to build a community art center and/or art gallery, dedicated to displaying our local artists, and featuring our high school students' artwork. It would be valuable to have a multipurpose area to support adult painting, drawing and ceramic art classes.

— Denise Kocur



As a recent transplant to Columbus, I admire the work that many local organizations do to nurture and maintain a vibrant art scene. Both publicly displayed and tucked behind gallery doors, art truly seems to be a cornerstone of Columbus and what makes it special. With inspiration on every corner, I have managed to meet and speak with many local artists who may have been raised here or are transplants like myself. There does seem to be a growing discussion of whether or not enough of our local, homegrown artists get featured and are appreciated throughout the community. It is my belief that the Columbus art scene should look inward. With beautiful public art displays by well-known artists from the east and west coasts, or abroad, the resident artists that pass us in the aisles of the grocery store or that sit beside us at our children's little league games seem to get lost in translation. With attractive pieces by Robert Pulley greeting those on Third Street, or Zinn Street Art peaking out around downtown, I believe it would be beneficial for us all to lean into the likes of these local artists. To be a local artist to me means producing art that can bring change to the area it influences. The more local is emphasized, the more art begins to mean more to those who may have never been influenced or moved by art in the Columbus community before. — Jared Anderson



I would like to see more children involved and more performance art. Children having input to what we see and what is shared and more art around where the children are, school campuses, that kind of thing. And I would like to see a lot of the art installations come to life with some kind of performance art, dancing and music.

— Karina Willats



I would like to see more live music venues, especially some that are all ages or don't necessarily serve alcohol.

— Dan Mustard



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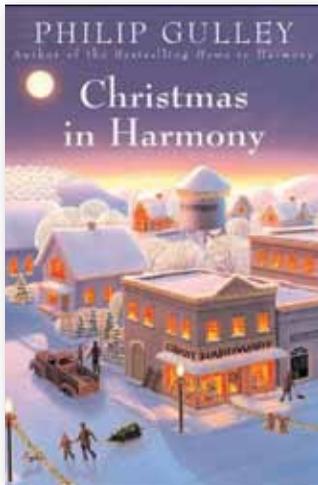
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## “Christmas in Harmony”

By Philip Gulley

Yes, Virginia, there is a Harmony, Indiana. It exists as surely as the warmth and generosity of Hoosier Christmas spirit that is on full display, as the residents of Harmony and the members of the Harmony Friends, find their way to Christmas and the “mangers of the mind” (my favorite phrase this time of year). As in all of Gulley’s books set in Harmony, this one sets the foibles of our humanity against its glorious potential. Gulley is a true Hoosier treasure in his ability to tell a story that is both challenging and endearing. Several years ago, I started observing the Icelandic tradition of jolabokaflokkur or “Christmas Book Flood,” the practice of giving books to be read on Christmas Eve. More than once, I have given “Christmas in Harmony” as a gift, and relished again myself, the beauty of this profoundly touching story.

— Suzanne Fountaine

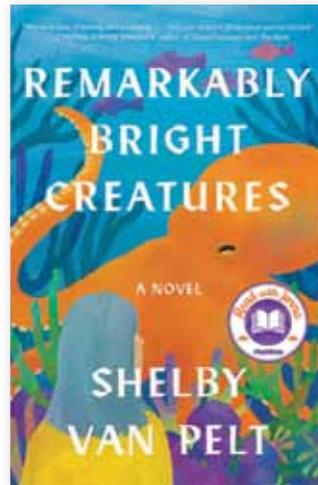


## “Gilded”

By Marissa Meyer

Serilda is known for telling stories and tall tales. When she tells a specific lie about being able to spin hay into gold, it gets the attention of the Erlking. She is forced to spin gold for him or be killed, but the problem is, she cannot spin hay into gold. In her despair, she meets Gild, a boy who CAN spin hay into gold. He agrees to assist her, but is unable to help unless he is given payment — just normal things, you know, like her necklace, her ring and her firstborn child. This retelling of Rumpelstiltskin is creative, haunting and the perfect book to read huddled up in a blanket on the miserably cold days of January. If you are looking for a Christmas gift for a teenager or any young adult fan, this book is perfect.

— Gabby Revell



## “Remarkably Bright Creatures”

By Shelby Van Pelt

With all the craziness in this world, what do you get your family and friends for the holidays? I know: a book that puts a smile on their face, has wonderful characters (one of them being an octopus) and will be remembered a long time after they finish it! Tova is a 70-year-old widow who works at the local aquarium and befriends the giant Pacific octopus, Marcellus. Cameron is a 30-year-old man trying to find his father and his way in the world. Cameron takes a job at the aquarium and forms a friendship with Tova. As another, Pointer and I both put it after we read the book, “Delightful!”

— Kelli Strickland

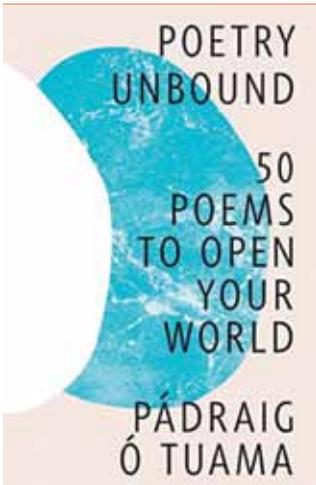


## “The Ultimate Reading Challenge”

By Owen Weldon

Give the book that keeps on giving this holiday season! The Ultimate Reading Challenge” is a beautifully presented portfolio “book” packed with prompts and incentives for stretching one’s reading horizon. Little messages in envelopes request challenges like, “read a beloved book from your childhood,” “read a book that has a character with a disability,” or “cook a meal mentioned in a book,” just to name a few. Did I tell you that one gets PRIZES (bookmarks, greeting cards, etc.) for completing each effort? The manipulatives included here make “The Ultimate Reading Challenge” irresistible to readers of all ages, including younger readers just sprouting. January is a long, cold month. Warm it up with... prizes.

— Polly Verbanic

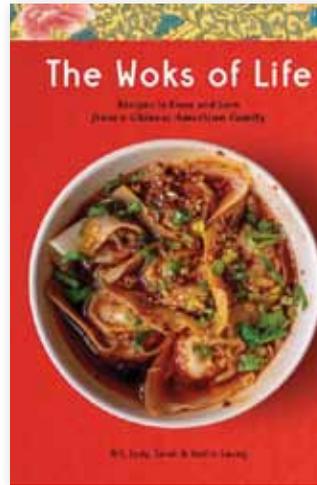


## “Poetry Unbound: 50 Poems to Open Your World”

By Pádraig Ó Tuama

A great collection of poems from various authors! Each poem is accompanied by a brief explanation of the poem and an exploration of Pádraig Ó Tuama’s life. I was just as excited to read his insights as I was to read the poems themselves. This is a very fun read and a lovely introduction to poetry, acting as a guide to searching for deeper meaning. “Poetry Unbound” is like a love letter to poetry itself. (Publishes December, 6)

— Kylie Brooks



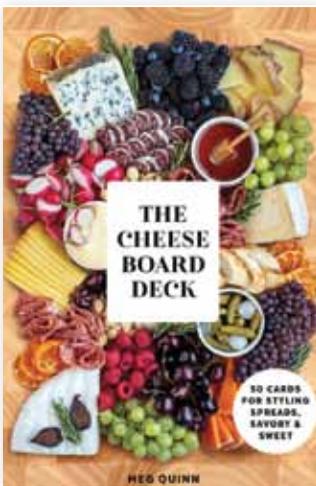
## “The Woks of Life: Recipes to Know and Love from a Chinese American Family”

By Kaitlin Leung, Sarah Leung, Bill Leung and Judy Leung

I love, love, love this blog, and when we lived in China, it was the only site I trusted to help me decipher REAL Chinese cooking. I know, it seems crazy that I turned to an American blog to help with Chinese food while in China, but I did not speak enough conversational Mandarin to learn to cook there, and the area we lived in was small, so very few people spoke English well. But the fresh fruits and vegetables, spices and groceries that were readily available to me did not mesh with the Midwestern recipes that I kept in my head. Canned foods? Nope. Frozen veggies? Nope. Cheese? Rarely. Ground beef? Uh-uh. Tortillas? No, again. So, it was essential I figure out what to do with the copious amounts of fresh fruits and veggies, freshly slaughtered meat, live seafood and 17 trillion kinds of tofu, or we were going to starve. This blog is a collective effort of four family members — the parents and two daughters — who all offer

diverse perspectives, favor varied types of cooking, and approach food a little differently, so their recipe file is vast and wide-ranging. On their blog, they also walk (wok :) you through Chinese pantry staples, any brand preferences they have and Chinese vegetables (and sometimes their American equivalent). I have probably tried 25 recipes from their site, and not one was a failure. They taught me how to make basics like chicken and broccoli, or more complicated dishes like steamed BBQ pork buns (char siu bao). I am thrilled to have a beautifully-bound compilation of their best recipes accessible to me in my own kitchen, even though I am back in the land of canned foods and ready-made meals — because once you know how to make delicious Chinese food at home, you will never crave takeout again.

— Angie Revell



## “The Cheese Board Deck”

By Meg Quinn

“The Cheese Board Deck” is a box of 50 beautifully photographed ideas (with recipes) for creating delicious grazing boards. The back of each card lists the pictured ingredients, as well as suggestions on presentation and substitutions. With the growing popularity of grazing boards from brunch, to beverages and everything in between, this is a perfect hostess gift for those festive holiday gatherings!

— Theresa Wilson



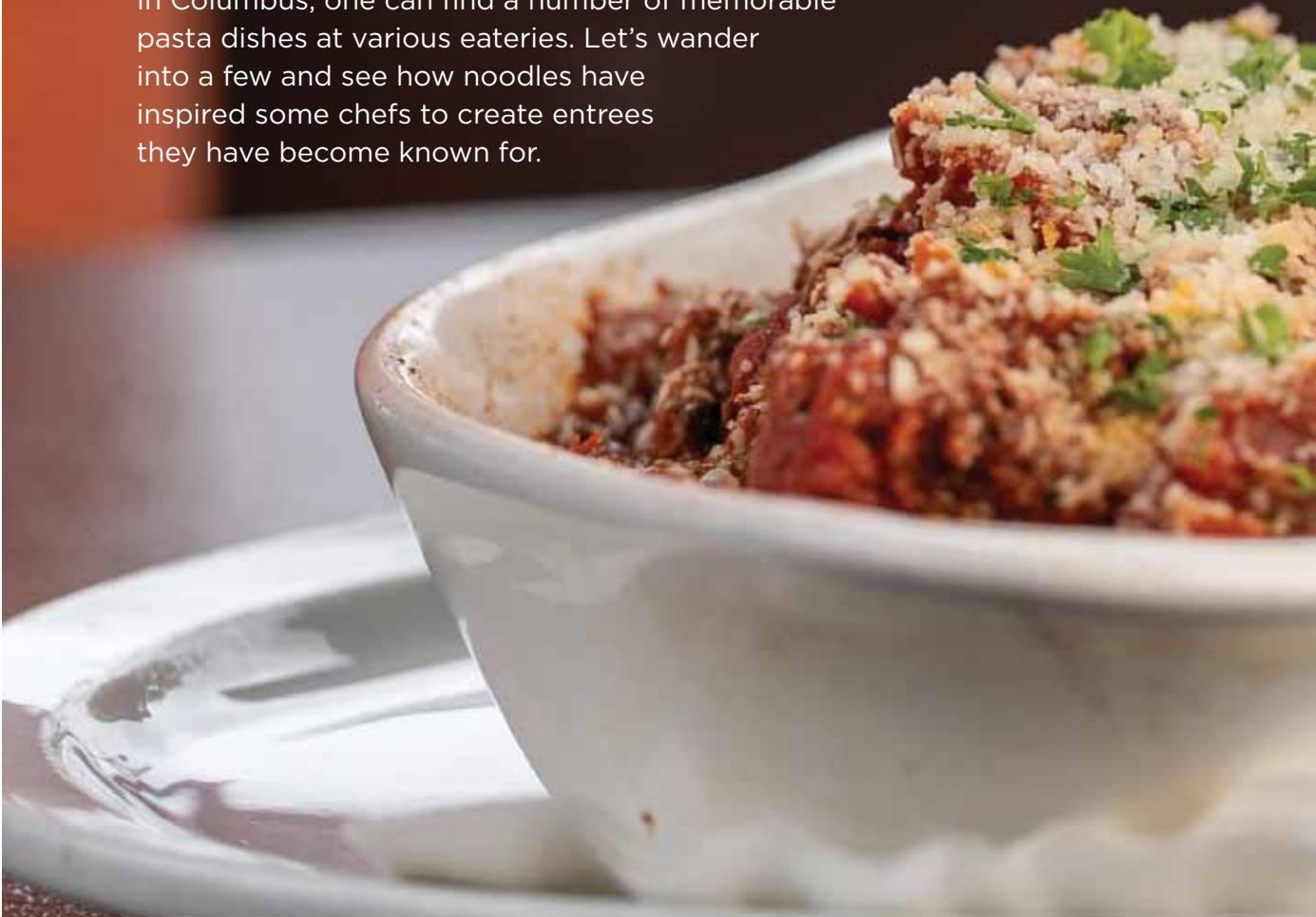
# Pasta

## possibilities

BY BARNEY QUICK // PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANA JONES

Pasta. The mention of it conjures all kinds of images, due to the seemingly infinite variety of shapes it comes in. One can twirl it, slice through layers of sauce, cheese and meat demarcated by sheets of it, or discover wonders stuffed into its shell forms.

In Columbus, one can find a number of memorable pasta dishes at various eateries. Let's wander into a few and see how noodles have inspired some chefs to create entrees they have become known for.





## Lasagna

Bucceto's | 318 Washington Street  
812-348-7600

Bucceto's occupies the southwest corner of 4th and Washington Streets, the epicenter of downtown's arts, entertainment and dining activity. This makes its dining room ideal for people-watching on either thoroughfare, particularly when a festival or performance is happening.

The Bucceto's take on lasagna reflects the establishment's commitment to using fresh, locally sourced ingredients wherever possible. An Indianapolis supplier makes the noodles and a local vendor supplies the Italian sausage, but Bucceto's grinds its own beef. San Marzano plum tomatoes provide the basis of the rich, pungent sauce. They are cooked down with carrots, onions, garlic and fennel. The ingredients are stacked into five layers and baked. Then, when fresh out of the oven, it is topped with even more meat.

General manager Adam Cornett noted that Bucceto's has been using the same lasagna recipe for 31 years, and added, "Why fix what's not broken?"

## Tomato & Basil Pasta

Fresh Take Kitchen | 424 Washington Street | 812-799-1097

The Tomato & Basil Pasta dish at this downtown lunch favorite features cavatappi, which is the Italian word for “corkscrew.” Corkscrew noodles are s-shaped, and they cook up kind of bouncy, which adds an element of fun to the dish, as one tries to establish primacy over them with a fork.

According to Fresh Take’s Tucker Schwartz, the sauce for this dish, which is prepared fresh every day, starts with onions, celery and carrots cooked down in butter, and then a gallon of vegetable stock is added. Next, comes whole plum tomatoes, which cook for 10 to 15 minutes. All ingredients are then pureed, and heavy cream is added. Finally, just before serving, it is topped with parmesan cheese.

This dish has been on the menu for about three months and is proving to be a winner.





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## Broadway Joe

Angotti's | 217 Washington Street | 812-375-0686

A few months ago, Chef Ingrid Karlsen, moved her restaurant from its previous location near the airport on the city's north side to the downtown area.

The dining room is smaller now, but the location — across from the courthouse — has ensured that it stays full. The decor is the same endearingly quirky mix of gangster and celebrity portraits and period-piece furnishings.

Angotti's now offers a lunch buffet during the day and sit-down dinners in the evening. Some item favorites at the

previous location are proving to be popular at the new location as well. Such is the case with Broadway Joe. For a Broadway Joe, Karlsen sautés jumbo shrimp in a vodka reduction, and adds tomato gravy, heavy cream and fresh basil, before serving over angel hair pasta.

"I don't quite let all the alcohol cook off, so the sauce has a bit of a kick to it," Karlsen said.

However, the name actually is not inspired by 1960s New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath, but baseball legend Joe DiMaggio.

Chef Karlsen is considering adding a menu item she would call The Marilyn, after Marilyn Monroe, to whom DiMaggio was briefly married, and for whom he continued to carry a torch after her passing. She said it would probably involve shrimp, red onions, artichokes, fresh basil, mushrooms and a lemon-wine sauce.

The Yankee Clipper would probably be gratified to know he and the love of his life were united on the menu of an Italian eatery in America's heartland.

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# personal touch

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## Couple from India build Columbus home that reflects their personalities

BY GLENDA WINDERS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY VASQUEZ

**F**rom the outside, the comfortable custom home of Abhishek Mehrotra and Richa Tandon in the Tipton Lakes area does not appear all that different from their neighbors. But step inside, and it is immediately clear that this is no ordinary house. Every room reflects the personalities and interests of this cosmopolitan couple.

Mehrotra and Tandon are both from northern India, where they met through their parents in an arranged marriage — sort of.

“It was an arranged marriage where parents meet first and then the kids get to meet

each other,” Tandon said. “It’s a typical system that’s very prevalent in India, and in some families, once the parents decide, that’s it. But our families are very liberal. We had the liberty to share our opinions. We had the option to say no.”

In fact, she had already said no to two other would-be suitors, but this time her answer was yes, and even though she was the first woman Mehrotra met this way, he knew she was the one.

They married in November 2009, and the following month, Tandon joined her new husband in Columbus.



They both earned bachelor's degrees in India — he in engineering and she in communications and marketing. Actually, he was in the process of earning a master's in mechanical engineering at the University of Southern California when he went home for a visit and met his future wife. So when her husband went back to school for his MBA at Indiana University, she went back, too, and earned a master's degree in public relations management from IUPUI.

Afterwards, Mehrotra was recruited by Cummins Inc., and they moved to Columbus. Eager to become involved in her new community, Tandon put her skills to use first

with Columbus Regional Health and then with Engage Columbus, helping to brand and promote the “Love Where You Live” campaign. She also did Indian folk dancing with a group called Bhenghie Beats, which took first and third place in two of the three years they participated in “Columbus Got Talent.”

Then, Cummins offered her husband the chance to work for three years in China.

“Columbus was our comfort zone,” she said. “We lived here, we knew people, we knew the community so well. Moving from your comfort zone is not an easy decision, especially moving to a place you don't know much about.”

But they both love to travel

and could not resist the opportunity. They spent the first 18 months in Wuhan and the rest of the time in Chongqing. They traveled to 15 countries and many small towns while they were there, despite being confined by the COVID-19 pandemic for six months.

### Returning to Columbus

At the time, Tandon also worked in the communications department for Cummins. So when that stint was over, and the company said Mehrotra could choose anywhere in the world to work, he and Tandon chose Columbus.

Today, Mehrotra is a chief engineer in power systems and working in Seymour.

“We’ve made a very beautiful group of friends here,” Tandon said. “It is a very close-knit community and we love being surrounded by people. Our friends have become our family here in the U.S. We see in them a reflection of the family we left behind in India.”

Once back in Columbus, they moved into Spruce Ridge Apartments, so they could be involved daily with the shaping of the new home they were building.

They chose Benchmark Construction to do the work, and credited Kit Ehrman, Phil Ehrman and Enrique Alvarez with helping them to incorporate many of the touches they wanted to include. One of which was placing arches in several spots throughout the home. Other additions were several niches that look like small windows.

“Arches are personal preferences,” Mehrotra said, “but the bigger homes and palaces in India have so many arches. It gives you a different dimension, different angles. Maybe subconsciously they impacted our choices.”

The couple have only lived in their new home for a few months and say it is still a work in progress, but eventually these spots will display treasures, such as the portrait of a horse made from silk thread they brought back from China and the cast impressions of the hands of Mehrotra’s grandfather, with whom he had a close relationship.

All of these elements make an impact, but the adventure begins when you first walk through the door. Guests are immediately greeted by a marble carving of the “elephant god,” Ganesha.

Homes in India have this

for good luck and prosperity, usually at the entry of the house,” Mehrotra said.

Tandon ordered the piece from India, making sure that the trunk was positioned facing right, which is the blessing mode, instead of left to indicate that the god is angry. The expression of the eyes was also important to the couple, who are both practicing Hindus.

Also, in the foyer, is a

fiber-art piece that depicts the two of them walking into their home for the first time. It was gifted to them by Mehrotra’s brother and sister-in-law at their housewarming or “griha pravesha.”

They have named the first room visitors see the “travel room.” Here, a wooden map of the world covers one wall. Pushpins with the appropriate flags on them, mark the





countries they have visited, and they plan to attach strings leading to photos they took in those places. Also, there are two sculptures — one they purchased in a small town near the Russian border, and the other, a gift from a Chinese friend. The centerpiece is a carved, solid wood gramophone they also bought near the Russian border.

“When we saw this I said, ‘This is going to the United States with us!’” Tandon said. “Abhishek and I are both fond of classical Indian music, so we like to spend time here in the evenings listening to music and having our cup of tea or coffee.”

On the other side of the foyer, is the dining room, which they wanted to be

welcoming since it is one of the first rooms guests see. The focal point here is the coffered ceiling painted a deep blue. In fact, the whole house is done in shades of light gray and blue with dark blue accents.

“We tried to play with neutrals,” Tandon said, “except for the areas we wanted to highlight.”

Another one of their priorities was to have lots of open space, so the large groups of people they plan to entertain could easily move around. The dining room can be accessed from both the foyer and the kitchen, and there are also two entrances from the garage. This way, they can bring in groceries through one door and guests can be delivered directly into the living room through the other.

The island in the kitchen has plenty of room on all sides. The island is a deep-blue complement to the lighter-blue cabinets, white quartz countertops, and stainless-steel apron sink and appliances. Deep drawers accommodate dishes they collected in China. The deep-blue glass tiles that make up the backsplash behind the counters make the room sparkle.

Also, high on the couple's wish list, was to have an open concept throughout the house so that everyone can feel connected, whether they are upstairs in a bedroom or outside on the deck. To this end, the kitchen is completely open to the high-ceilinged living room, where huge windows provide a view of



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the forest behind the house. The white stone in one of the niches is duplicated around the fireplace, and deep-blue alcoves on either side of the fireplace will one day be filled with benches or shelves. They brought the solid-wood furniture from China, and a central wall is currently reserved for family photos.

They also insisted on putting a bedroom on the main floor.

“We wanted to have one bedroom just for our parents,” Tandon said. “That way they will be comfortable when they are here with us and not have to climb up the stairs to go to their bedroom.”

They added large windows in this bedroom to provide natural light and to take advantage of the view. The builder insulated the wall between this room and the TV set in the living room to keep it quiet, and the floor is

carpeted (as it is in all of the bedrooms) for further comfort and warmth. Floors in the public areas are a deep-gray hardwood, the color of which Alvarez was able to match when he painted the staircase to the second floor.

Mehrotra and Tandon had some specific ideas about this area, too. She wanted a wide “lobby” instead of a narrow, “claustrophobic” hallway. He wanted the space, which overlooks the living area below, to have a curve to it instead of being perfectly straight. In addition, he wanted a deck outside their bedroom, and now that is where they have their morning tea. The deep-blue pleated shades at the windows in this room are operated by remote control.

In the master bathroom, the walk-in shower and soaking tub are across the room from double sinks and 160 inches of counter space. A pocket door affords privacy for the commode. It was Mehrotra’s idea to have a window in the shower in addition to the one over the tub. Blue wood-look tiles complete the décor.

One bedroom serves as Mehrotra’s home office. Currently it contains his desk — solid wood from China, like the living room furniture — but future plans include shelving and seats for meetings.

Something else that was important to Mehrotra was to have music everywhere he went.

“We like music, so we wired the whole house,” he said, pointing to a speaker in the ceiling. “We can listen in just one room or the whole house. There’s even a speaker in the bathroom because I wanted one next to the shower.”





The focus in this room, however, is the deep recess that houses their in-home temple.

“We especially made this place here because the altar needs to face the sunrise,” Tandon said.

The white stone behind it is the same used for the fireplace and the niche downstairs. The countertop and cabinet doors below are also white, which she says signifies peace. The idols they follow, including Ganesh again, are represented in pictures and small statuary. They light the tiny oil lamp each morning when they say their prayers as they start the day. A red curtain covers the arrangement when the temple is not in use.

The second-floor laundry contains the washer and dryer — also deep gray — with a sink and retractable drying line, and it is completely insulated, too, so that anyone sleeping nearby is not disturbed. Also, on this floor, is another bedroom and a bonus-room, whose function is yet to be determined.

They reclaimed 200 square feet of their attic to be useful space, and beneath the 3,500-square-foot-house, is a

1,900-square-foot basement that they plan to finish in stages.

#### ‘A special moment’

The couple recall the day of their griha pravesh as “a special moment, a very big deal.” Both sets of parents came from India, and a priest came from the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana in Indianapolis to say the pujah — prayers for good luck and a happy home. They decorated the door and the inside of the house with flowers to signify happiness, wore traditional Indian clothing and incorporated religious objects, food and sweets into the celebration. One part of the ceremony involved boiling milk.

“You boil the milk in a new vessel until it boils over,” Tandon explained. “It is a sign that you are embarking on a new journey and opening your kitchen. Your house is functional; it’s all yours now.”

In addition to their family, many of their local friends came for the festivities that day, too.

“This is why we call Columbus home,” Mehrotra said. ©

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# abstract discovery

Nick Abstract finds his artistic style as muralist

BY GLENDA WINDERS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY VASQUEZ



# W

While you might not recognize Nick Abstract's name, chances are you are familiar with his work. He created the bright blue-and-yellow mural that covers the south wall of the Odd Fellows Building and splashes down to meet with the same colors on Sixth Street, creating what is now called Arts Alley. Or maybe, you caught the recent show of his paintings at The Workshop. His geometric works of art both on the sides of buildings and on canvases are bold, modern and colorful, and they all trace back to when he was a teenage tagger with a can of spray paint. But his story starts long before that.

Abstract was raised in New Pal-

estine, just a half-hour from downtown Indianapolis.

"It was a small agricultural community – classic Indiana," he said. "Our town had just a gas station and an ice cream shop. It was a nice place to grow up."

As a child, he played sports and had aspirations of becoming a professional athlete. But his family life changed dramatically when he was still in grade school and his little brother was born with developmental disabilities and in need of multiple surgeries.

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“I had a need to express myself and exist on my own and have my own voice. So I started painting graffiti under a little railroad bridge that no one ever went to. I did letter-based graffiti, which is called style writing.”

— Nick Abstract

“At the time my dad was working with an engineering firm and making pretty decent money and the family was very stable and everything was good for a while,” he said. “When Sean was born, the dynamic changed very quickly.”

The doctors told his parents they did not know whether the child would have regular cognition or what the levels of his abilities were going to be.

“That was tough for my parents to hear,” Abstract said. “But it ended up OK. He has exceeded their expectations and grown into a really cool, very inspirational little kiddo.”

For a while, however, the family’s attention and resources were focused on Sean. In fact, when Abstract was a teenager, his parents told him not to get into any trouble because they just did not have time to deal with it.

“In seventh and eighth grade I grew up really fast,” he said. “I did not have time to explore and do my own thing. I learned very quickly to be self-driven, self-motivated. I found out early on to be happy with myself and the things I’m doing, which a lot of people don’t achieve until much later in life.”

### Self-expression

In high school, he discovered graffiti.

“I had a need to express myself and exist on my own and have my own voice,” he said.

“So I started painting graffiti under a little railroad bridge that no one ever went to. I did letter-based graffiti, which is called style writing. You use letter forms, but you paint it with as much style as you can.”

He connected with other graffiti artists and has traveled to Miami, New York and Canada for “graffiti jams,” where he met up with other members of the close-knit community to paint on buildings the owners volunteered.

### Finding a style

After graduating from IUPUI with a degree in graphic design, he landed a job with an advertising agency.

“I was working downtown,” he said. “I had my own apartment and was making decent money, but my heart wasn’t in it.”

He was further discouraged when he observed his co-workers trying to scramble up the corporate ladder, and older colleagues told him they had sold out their artistic dreams in order to support their families. While he respected their position, he did not want to end up the same way.

When that job ended, he struggled to figure out what was next. He did not want to earn money from graffiti, since the graffiti community — himself included — frowned upon it with fear of corrupting the art form developed by a subculture of impoverished young people in big cities. Neither did he want to just do graphic design, as he had at the ad agency.

“Coincidentally, I was becoming inspired by architecture,” he said, “and I started to think more about the place. Before it was like, ‘OK, here’s a wall. I can paint my artwork on it. Cool.’ I started thinking about what the history of this wall is. What is the history of this place? How do I envelop that into some sort of concept? Art, architecture, graffiti and graphic design all sort of merged. That’s how I got to my

style today. It just kind of morphed into its own thing.”

He also had become interested in murals and thought he would like to paint them for a living, but his abstract designs were mainly lost on people who expected representational art or ads.

As it happened, his first commission came about because of his graffiti. He and a friend had gotten permission to paint on some semis parked behind

a business and used for storage. One day, Roger Berlin, the owner, commented that he liked their work, telling them that the trucks had been a great canvas for them to paint on. Abstract quipped that the 160-foot wall on the side of the building would be an even better canvas.

When Berlin surprised him by asking him to submit a design, he put together one of his geometric mural ideas, expecting it to be rejected.





“I don’t like sitting around and waiting for the opportunity to come to me. I like to take action and do things.”

---

— Nick Abstract

Instead, Berlin asked him how much it would cost. Since Abstract had never done a mural before, he had no idea and answered \$1,000, to which Berlin responded, “How about \$7,000?”

After that, he began photographing buildings and superimposing his design ideas onto them to show their owners.

“I don’t like sitting around and waiting for the opportunity to come to me,” he said. “I like to take action and do things.”

When he saw on Instagram that a new coffee shop called Bovacanti was opening, he liked the clean, contemporary look of the place and wanted to be involved in the design. He showed the owners what he had in mind for them, and they were enthusiastic. Once that mural was up, some people who

drove by and saw it called him to do a mural for them, as well and so it has gone.

Along the way, Abstract, whose actual last name is Smith, changed it professionally to distinguish himself from another artist named, Nick Smith, and all of the other Nick Smiths on the internet.

### Sixth Street mural

The Sixth Street project came about when Daniel Martinez and Lulu Loquidis, co-founders of LAA Office, were looking for a muralist to work with them on a project they were doing in Salem, Indiana.

“We did some reconnaissance to find some muralists doing interesting work in Indiana,” said Martinez, who is also an assistant professor at Indiana

University’s J. Irwin Miller School of Architecture. “We saw Nick’s name on an Indiana Arts Commission website, and we thought his work looked very exciting.”

Abstract’s concept proved not to be a fit with that project, but his work stuck in the minds of Martinez and Loquidis, and when the Columbus Area Arts Council charged their design firm with creating the changes on Sixth Street, they immediately thought of him.

“We appreciated his abstract patterns and color as a way of working through a design,” Martinez said. “And we wanted to work with someone who could do something really colorful and abstract that would be the right vibe for that project. We worked together as a team

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to figure out the colors and the scope of the mural, so that it established a relationship with the piece that was going in on the ground. We really enjoyed working with Nick, and in the end we were really happy with the way the mural turned out. He delivered a piece that the community has embraced.”

**From walls to canvas**

Since Abstract’s work is seasonal, he determined that doing smaller works on canvas — using his same method of taping off sections and spray-painting — would be a way to stay busy during the winter months. That is how he came to have a show at The Workshop, the office space and adjoining creative suites that are the headquarters of the Tovey-Perry Co. When the office area was complete, the owners decided to leave the



walls bare and invite artists to have shows.

“I didn’t want to buy art to just fill the place up when we have a great community of art organizations and artists,” said co-owner, Travis Perry. “We could give those people a space to display, talk about and sell their art. Ours is a working/ living space so people can see the art in a real environment. And it keeps the building really fresh.”

Perry knew about Abstract’s downtown work, and he also attended the arts council Small Talk the artist had given. They had an opening on their calendar and asked Abstract to take part. He hung about 40 pieces, and Perry said at the end of the show more than half had red dots to indicate they were sold.

“We love finding artists who need a spotlight shined on them,” Perry said. “Nick is very genuine, he’s the real deal. I can’t say enough about that guy. He’s been a highlight of our program.”

**‘Color deficient’**

Despite all of his colorful creations, however, Abstract is what he calls “color deficient”—in other words, color-blind.

“My life is generally more grayed out than the average correctly sighted person,” he said, “which can be depressing if you think about it too much, but it’s all I’ve known, so it doesn’t really bother me. If anything, I think it has allowed me to see things from a different point of view. I’m playing with color as color itself. Instead of trying to mimic what I see, I try to create something new out of colors I enjoy. I like testing myself



and using colors that I really can't see that well, jumping into the unknown and doing work that I have to delve deep and understand the limits of my color-blindness to make. I think I can produce cool artwork for color-blind folks and sighted folks at the same time, and I really enjoy that challenge."

He credits his girlfriend of nine years, Courtney Cocco, with keeping him from making mistakes in his color choices, and she sometimes works with him to install the murals he designs. The two met in college, and she works as a graphic designer.

"Without her, I would have picked some colors that were really bad for some folks," Abstract said. "She's my litmus test for regularly sighted people, and she's a super hard worker."

### Flow of life

In their spare time, the couple likes to travel, often picking a road and seeing where it takes them or just visiting small towns around the state.

"We are always exploring," he said, "and that's one of the things I really like about Courtney. She's not down to just sit around and not do things."

He also enjoys heavy-metal music and often listens to it when he is creating.

"If I'm just sitting in a studio by myself and there's no sound, it's OK," he said. "I'm creating from literal nothingness. But sometimes it just takes the right song and the ideas and colors flow out of you. It puts you in a different mindset."

When he was in tighth grade, Abstract made a commitment to live the "straight-edge" lifestyle. He does not drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or use

drugs. He does not even drink soda, preferring water instead. He says this way of living frees up his mind and allows him to concentrate on his creativity.

Never content to do the same thing twice, being in his head — expanding the repertoire of what he can do and working on his next project — is where Abstract most likes to be.

"You get into a flow state and the painting paints itself," he said. "I love that. The artwork style I use is very meditative, so there is a lot of process in just laying the color down and laying the tape down. You can get lost in the process of it. I really enjoy that kind of Zen state when I'm just existing in that moment and not thinking. I think that's when the purest work comes out. It's magic." ©

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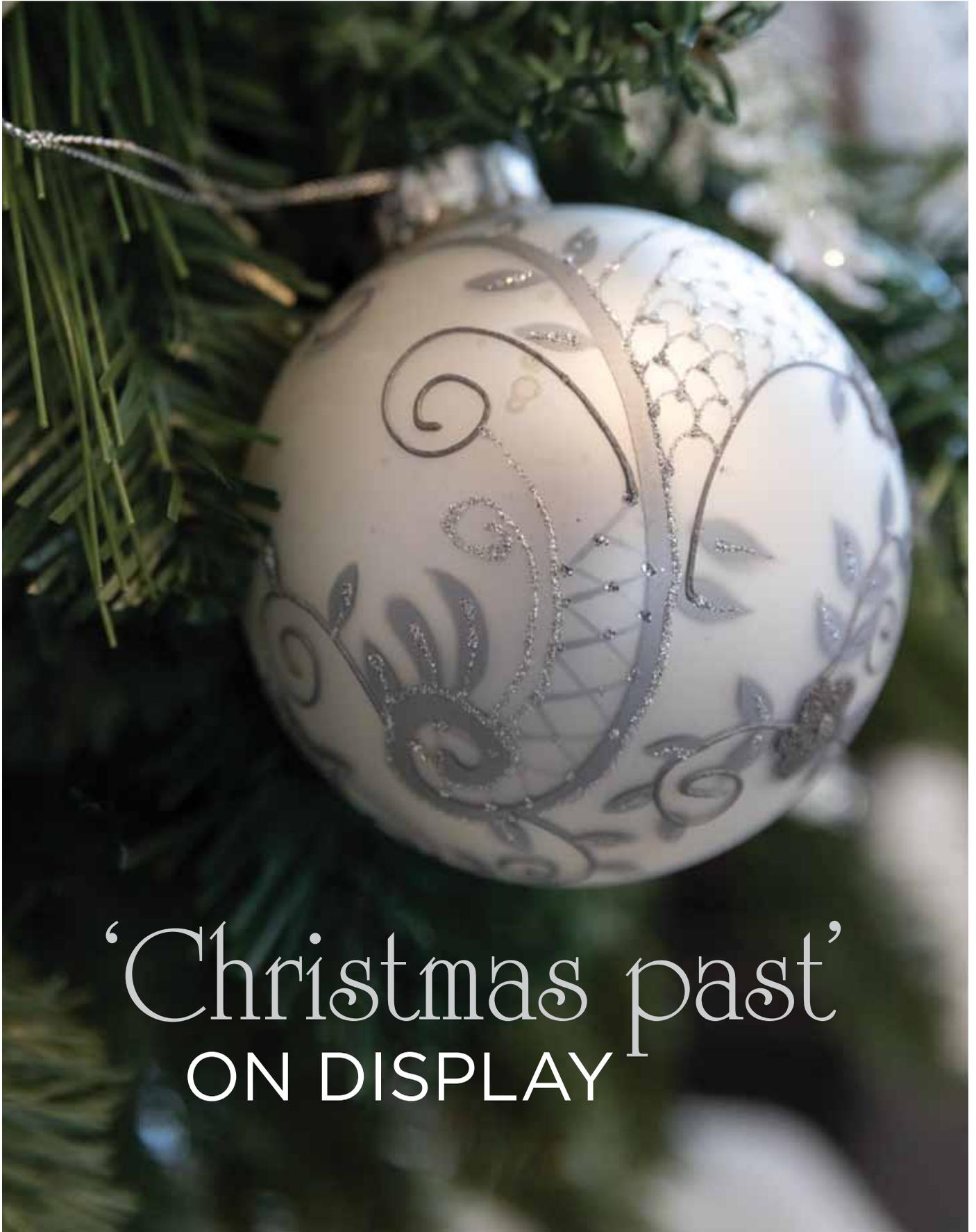
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‘Christmas past’  
ON DISPLAY

## Historical society honors holiday with 'Christmas Memories' exhibit

BY SUZANNE KANEHL  
// PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
TONY VASQUEZ

Founded in 1921, the Bartholomew County Historical Society (BCHS) has always maintained a very specific mission. This unique mission is to collect, preserve and safeguard artifacts, documents and photographs associated with Bartholomew County.

Their goal is to expand on this region's interesting and remarkable history.

"Through various thoughtful and interpretive programs and displays, BCHS has taught

the heritage of the region, which has been able to enrich the lives of past and future generations," event coordinator, Geri Handley said.

Technically retired, Handley has been currently focusing her event planning expertise on this year's Christmas Memories.

"These displays are the culmination of a year's planning for the forthcoming holiday exhibition at the Bartholomew County Historical Society



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Museum,” she said. “Christmas Memories was created to honor the spirit of Christmas past, while creating new memories for local families.”

This year’s Christmas Memories exhibition may be the best yet and promises to offer something for everyone. With decorated trees, intricate displays and a variety of diverse items from the Bartholomew County Historical Society’s permanent collection, the museum will be transformed into a Christmas wonderland for people of all ages.

“Have you met the ‘Lady in White,’ or imagined a Christmas tree decorated like a scene from the movie ‘Frozen?’ Add the Winter Visitor and a Dickens Christmas Village, and you have the beginnings of this year’s Christmas Memories,” Handley said. “The first floor of the Museum will feature the ‘Lady in White,’ awaiting entrance at the original door of the Donner house, which is part of the permanent collection of the Historical Society,” she added.

Additionally, vintage Christmas music will greet you, as it plays on an early 1900s Edison record player, which is also from the Museum’s permanent collection and will enhance the “Dickens Christmas Village” display.

“A Natural Christmas” is featured in the Reeves room.

“This area contains items from the original Reeves Pulley Company,” Handley said. “The vast Reeves collection comprises the largest collection owned by the Historical Society, and a festival is held at the Henry Breeding Farm each year to showcase their incredible inventions.”

The large exhibit room also highlights five holiday Victorian-esque displays, a modern version of the ever-popular Victorian-era. There will be “Winter Visitor,” a serene forest scene with an unexpected visitor, and “Frozen,” which is a crystal laden tree. Another display will be “Harmony,” which includes artist-made, ornate Japanese origami cranes, and a mobile, consisting of 150 traditional cranes created by fifth graders from three area elementary schools.

“A coordinating tree and tablescape completes that vignette,” Handley added.

Before ascending the winding staircase, visitors will see “A McEwen Christmas.”

“This display gives a nod to William McEwen, who built the house; originally it was a simple brick house of two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs.” Handley said.

During the special holiday exhibit, the second level holds two unique displays. The figure in the etched glass is the heroine of the



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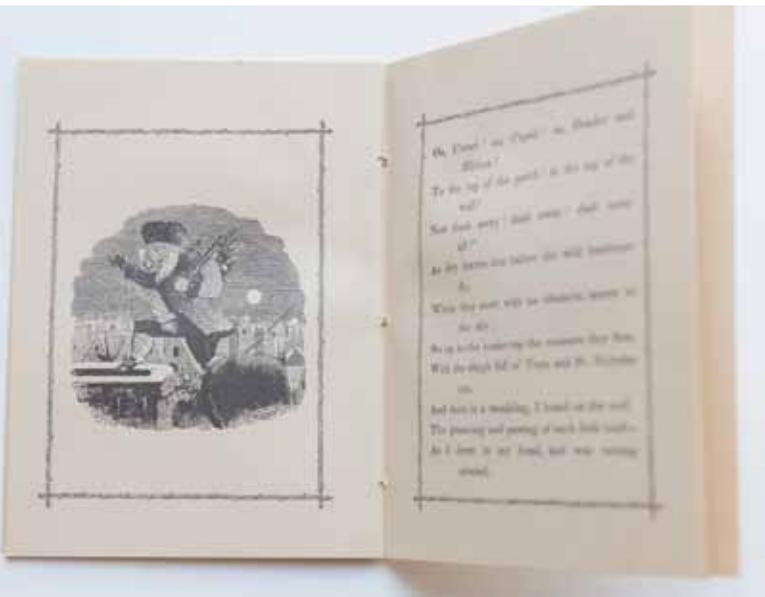
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well-known poem "Highland Mary" by Robert Burns.

"Twas the Night Before Christmas" features large panels of original artwork depicting scenes from the famous poem," Handley said.

Columbus artist and teacher, Susie Signorino, created the illustrations used for the panels.

"Susie taught art at ABC Stewart School for 17 years, and illustrated the book 'May There Always be Sunshine' several years ago," Handley explained.

Signorino remembers the painstaking process.

"It was challenging because of just getting the illustrations to fit the poem just right," she said. "I was honored to be asked to participate," Signorino said. "Geri is very sweet and supportive."

### County History

Interestingly, the original home was built in 1877 on the corner of Seventh and Franklin Streets.

The house was purchased by father and son, David and Samuel Samuels, in 1872.

The home was remodeled to the present Italianate style, which was so popular in the 1870s. Mr. Samuels moved to Missouri in 1889 and sold the house to James Marr, who was a retiring farmer from northeast Columbus.

"It is now known as the McEwen-Samuels-Marr House and is on the National Register of Historic Places," Handley said.

The Bartholomew County Historical Society eventually purchased the home in

### Visit the museum

The Historical Society Museum is located at 524 Third Street. Extended holiday hours are Tuesday-Saturday, 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Admission for Christmas Memories is free, but donations will be appreciated. For more information, visit [bartholomewhistory.org](http://bartholomewhistory.org)

1968, and it now houses the Museum. Since then, the museum has only helped to enhance Bartholomew County's rich history.

There will be many other exciting and unique displays to delight visitors. The history of the Bartholomew County Historical Society Museum alone is special enough and really showcases so much history of the county. ©

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IN-35096495

# Hannah Dietrich & Johnathon Caudill

*Ceremony and reception at White Diamond Lavender Farm*

June 6, 2022

Hannah Dietrich and Johnathon Caudill are longtime Columbus natives, though the two did not meet until mutual friends introduced them in the spring of 2019. Within a few months they realized they had a lot in common and had grown to really care for each other, so they began a relationship.

In July 2021, they took the next step in that relationship when Johnathon took Hannah out on their boat at Lake Monroe, when she noticed they did not go to their usual spot. Instead, they anchored near some friends and he distracted her by checking the anchor. When she turned around, he was behind her proposing and — after she of course said ‘yes’ — he pointed out her entire family on a nearby boat.

Jonathan even arranged to have it all captured by drone footage, so they will have the video forever.

“The wedding was everything that we could have hoped for, which was mainly fun!” Hannah said.

They had an outdoor ceremony and held the reception inside the barn at White Diamond Lavender Farm. The bridesmaids wore sage green and there were pops of pinks, ivory and burgundy brought in with the flowers. The groomsmen wore gray with a grandfather-collar-white shirt to have a more laid-back feel. Hannah’s dress was a fitted, ivory, crochet lace gown from Sophia’s Bridal in Columbus.

They did not have a specific theme because Hannah likes several different styles and combined them. Hannah, her mother and grandmother worked together to perfect the decor themselves.

Hannah said she felt nervous until she did a first look with Johnathon, which put her at ease.

Johnathon is not an emotional person but was unexpectedly very emotional on the big day because he was so happy.

The couple honeymooned at the Excellence Riveria Cancun resort in Cancun, Mexico. They said it was the most amazing vacation either of them had ever taken.





# Ethnic Expo

Downtown Columbus  
Oct. 7 and 8

1. Brittany Perry dances with the Spirit Filled Dancers from Louisville, Kentucky.
2. Meredith Schwab eats with chopsticks.
3. Milo Steenblik bangs a gong to draw customers to the Columbus Chinese Association booth.
4. Ike Nusawardhana talks to customers, as Sayang Willis demonstrates a musical instrument at the Bali, Indonesia booth.
5. People gather on Washington Street.
6. Dalton Hodge watches Addyson Hodge fish for balloons with Takahiro Itagaki.
7. Troubadore performs on the City Hall stage.
8. Akihiko Yano with a sign for the Japan booth.
9. Johnnie Edwards, president of the Columbus/Bartholomew County Chapter of the NAACP, serves his Bankin' Baby BBQ Braai chicken wings from the South Africa booth to Jonathan and Elijah Curry.
10. People gather at the West Africa and South Africa booths.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARLA CLARK







# Fall reading

Trees outside of the Bartholomew County Public Library change to a brilliant red as the fall season sets in.

PHOTO BY TONY VASQUEZ | [WWW.TONYVASQUEZ.NET](http://WWW.TONYVASQUEZ.NET)

# Thinking about retiring?

The thought can be both exciting and frightening at the same time!



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