



"The Newspaper That Cares About Rural Life"

Country Market

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The Country Today SECTION



A concrete bench makes a solid canvas for a mosaic created by Karin Overbeck.

Still learning

Artist teaches classes on creating stained glass, mosaics at former schoolhouse

SURGEON BAY — Karin Overbeck lives in a former schoolhouse, so it makes perfect sense that she would teach classes at her Door County home.

Twice weekly, women from throughout Door County visit her home for sessions on how to create mosaics.

Her house has no school books or blackboards, but instead an array of materials line the walls of the basement where she holds classes for adults — rather than the first-through fourth-graders who attended Evergreen School before it closed in 1957.

Ideas flow freely in the basement.

"Karin has the ability to throw things together," said Gail Elsholtz, an Algoma artist working on mosaics. "Her creativeness is off the charts. We all feed off each other."

Student Joan Maclean, a former classical music singer in Minneapolis, finds comparisons in creating a mosaic with singing.

"The juxtaposition of each individual piece in a mosaic to make the whole is the same way you express music," Maclean said. "The more time I spend with mosaic the more musical it becomes to me."

Visitors to Overbeck's 2-acre garden need only walk in the yard or take a look in her house to get an idea of how she incorporates mosaics into home fixtures or as focal points in the garden.

She opens the garden in summer and fall, charging admission.

After a feature on the garden ran in *Midwest Living* magazine, more visitors have found their way to her home. She welcomes the additional customers.

"All the donations are

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used to fix up the old school," she said, noting that tours include a visit to the one-room schoolhouse.

Teaching how to design and construct a work of art that combines pieces of glass or tile with grout has evolved for Overbeck.

When her husband died in 2001, she found therapy by taking stained-glass classes at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College in Sturgeon Bay.

Working on stained glass at home also enabled her to take care of a son who didn't like day care.

This artist in residence also practiced recycling before it became common.

"I don't like to throw things away," Overbeck said. "When you make stained-glass windows you have a lot of scraps. Instead of throwing it away, you can mosaic with it."

Many of her mosaics are built around collections of rocks in the yard arranged in patterns by her late husband, Mike.

Many of her mosaics were crafted to weather Wisconsin winters — whether the artwork graces a rock garden, a courtyard, or many footpaths with stepping stones winding through the garden.

Her philosophy in designing a mosaic pattern carried out in concrete and tile or glass is as pretty as stained glass.

"I don't draw nouns," she said. "I just like doing design — nothing to true life."

Except maybe for the bugs and butterflies that have a permanent home in a concrete bench.



Karin Overbeck's mosaics are embedded on many outbuildings such as this woodshed at her home east of Sturgeon Bay. In the summer she opens her 2-acre garden for tours to supplement her income.



Door County women attending a workshop in the school's basement were, from left, Joan Maclean, Carol Olson, Kathie Vevra, Gail Elsholtz, Vicki Dirst and Karin Overbeck, the instructor.

"My idea is if you do a picture of something in stained glass, it will always be that picture. But if you do a design you will see many different areas such as the background sticking out or one color sticking out. You see something different every time," she said.

Several years ago she was commissioned to create a mosaic for a two-year traveling exhibit called "Common Ground" that was designed to create awareness of the water quality of Door County.

She wove the words endorsed by the environmental community into an 8-foot-high piece that occupies a choice spot at the edge of her garden.

With the onset of winter, she'll have more time to work on a half-dozen pieces for customers in Door County and as far south as West Bend. A new home near Fish Creek will sport six stained-glass windows crafted by Overbeck.

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Classes ended in 1957 at Evergreen School. In 1986, Overbeck moved into the school where she and her late husband, Mike, began a succession of improvements and additions to the one-room schoolhouse.



Overbeck created a tower promoting water quality awareness for a traveling exhibit to Wisconsin and Michigan.

Story and photos by Judy Brown