

# Create what you love

by donna scaglione

The subjects of Tom Higham's paintings almost always show their wear—peeling paint on porch floorboards, an oaken bucket with a warped handle, a shack overrun by a wild rosebush. You've seen these familiar things while driving along Cape Cod's Route 6A, or along an old coastal road in Maine, 20 years ago and yesterday.

This timelessness brings a certain serenity. We take comfort in the weathered shingles of an old cottage, the muted granite rocks in a stone wall, the stark whiteness of billowing sheets on a clothesline. These are images easily lost in today's world, but they are very present in Higham's everyday life. He knew such sights as a Cape Cod boy growing up in Osterville, hanging out at Crosby Yacht Yard; they are what he knows today as an occasional visitor to the Maine coast.

Maine has turned Higham's head recently. He says he loves the atmosphere of the mid-coast—Rockland, Port Clyde, and Monhegan Island—and a trip there last fall noticeably influenced his latest watercolors and acrylics.

Old houses—beach shacks, boat-houses, and tilting windswept cottages with window boxes—are a favorite subject. Higham knows his subjects intimately, and we see that with the warts-and-all details in his paintings like old nails that leach rust on graying clapboards and porch floor planks misshapen by time.

Andrew Wyeth, a strong influence on Higham, once said to paint what you



*Sparkling Day in Maine*, acrylic on panel, 8"x10"



*Calm Morning, East Bay*, acrylic on panel, 12"x16"



*Apple House Porch*, acrylic on panel, 16"x24"

love. Higham took that advice to heart. "I paint old houses because I love them," he says in his Hyannis studio. "They sit on the land nicely. They've settled somehow, so that all those straight lines aren't so straight anymore. I guess you could sum it up in one word: character."

Higham was born in Hyannis in 1952 and grew up mostly in Osterville, where his father Doug built graceful Wianno Senior sailboats at Crosby. "It was basically a paradise—the Cape back then," Higham recalls. "All you needed was a bike, a pair of shorts, and a T-shirt. And if you had 25 cents to buy an ice cream cone, you were lucky."

He has been painting since he was around 12, but started out drawing mostly boats—imaginative ones, he says, as well as skiffs and kayaks. His family has their own creative legacy. His mother and aunts drew, his grandmother was a successful milliner, and his father was always working on a home boat project.

Higham's creativity extends beyond painting. He is also a classical pianist, occasional boatbuilder, inventor, and now Nantucket-style basket weaver. He learned the art from a book after getting curious about the process when he re-caned two old chairs. He has made about 50 handsome baskets with rattan, grooved wooden bottoms, wooden staves, and carved handles. Some

feature delicate wooden, hand-carved scallop shells. "It's satisfying to make them," he says. "You end up having something material, something you can hold." Just another way that Tom Higham makes life richer by shaping something he loves.

## UPCOMING SHOW

New Paintings & Nantucket Baskets ~  
**Thomas Higham**  
**TREE'S PLACE,**  
 60 Cranberry Highway, Orleans  
 July 18 to 23  
 Opening reception: July 18, 5 to 7 p.m.

**Tom Higham's art can be seen at Tree's Place, 60 Cranberry Highway, Orleans, MA, 508-255-1330, [www.treesplace.com](http://www.treesplace.com).**

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