

What brought you to live in Yankalilla?

My father built one of the first shacks at Myponga Beach in the late 50s, and for a number of years my family enjoyed weekend stays there. I spent hours fossicking on the beach, sketching and making models from the clay I dug up from cliff faces at Pebbly Beach. My father loved fishing and built his own wooden boat. We missed the shack when my parents sold it during our teenage years.

On retiring in the 1970s they built a house on a 5-acre block on Bower Road in Normanville, and my visits to the area resumed.

Has your life always had a focus on art?

Yes, always. As my art was self-directed in my early years, I had no formal training, however, until I reached year 11 when I convinced teachers at Blackwood High to allow me to do art. My path was set. I studied at the then Western Teachers College (now University SA) in conjunction with the SA School of Art in Stanley Street North Adelaide where I was lucky enough to be encouraged by lecturers Geoff Wilson, Dave Dallwitz and Ann Newmarch.

After graduating in 1970 I began my 40-year career as a secondary art, design and drama teacher. Appointments ranged from Pt Broughton Area School to Norwood High, then Blackwood High where I taught for 16 years. In 1990 I left for an intended year-long position at Coober Pedy but remained for three and a half years. It proved one of my most enjoyable experiences as I immersed myself in the spirit of the outback, multicultural community.

In 1994 I was appointed to Glossop High in the Riverland. Later Country Arts SA seconded me as an Arts Officer for the Riverland/Mallee Region. Returning to the city in 1997 I taught at Marryatville High for 12 years, and later Pulteney Grammar.

As an educator, I mostly taught Year 11 and 12 classes, and coordinated a number of Rock Eisteddfods. Receiving The Education and Arts Minister's Award for Excellence in secondary art teaching provided a grant to study animation and computer art. I also had three daughters during my career.

How did you maintain creativity while still giving so much to students?

I found stimulation in creating with the kids.



Changing seasons

While the demands of Year 12 students could have leached my creativity, I didn't mind if they were highly motivated. I loved both the teaching and my students as energy was a two-way flow. At Coober Pedy I designed, developed and managed students in their first entry and win in the annual South Australian Rock Eisteddfod in Adelaide. At Glossop High I directed students to another Eisteddfod win. Such gratifying experiences were an expansion of my own interests. I had my first solo exhibition in the Coober Pedy Underground Gallery and have made time for regular exhibitions in various venues since.

In 1993 and 94, I won three large commissions. For Tourism SA I designed and painted sets reflecting *The Year of Indigenous People* for the opening ceremony of the Adelaide Grand Prix. The Adelaide City Council commissioned 21 panels for a sound maze in North Adelaide, and for The Investigator Science Centre I created a 45 metre underwater scene for the Whale Expo *Giants of the Deep*. Such personal recognition and financial reward for my own work kept me on the creative path.

What artists have influenced you?

The Impressionists have inspired me with their pursuit of light effects and vibrant colour, and as the first group to eliminate black from their palette. I was particularly moved by a Pissarro painting in the Victorian Art Gallery which demonstrated his amazing ability to capture a white snow scene by using every colour of the spectrum. I began to realise that there was intense colour to discover in the environment and nature. Jeffrey Smart's hard edges in architecture have been an influence too, as have Salvador Dali's wit and nonsensical humour.

Contemporary art impresses me, particularly works that involve clever ideas with skilful technique. I admire both traditional and contemporary artists who combine these qualities.

Colour abounds in your home and garden, as well as in the vibrant paintings in your studio. What landscapes and places have stimulated your art?

Every part of our environment whether natural or made. I am acutely aware of the power colour has in connecting to emotions, memories, places and nature.

Visiting my daughter who taught in Mexico City for two years, I fell in love with the Mexicans' bold use of colour in their clothes, houses, and craft markets. Bright public buildings and street murals, and ebullient pageants and fiestas bowled me over. A side trip from there to New York with its different but never sleeping city streets and amazing galleries made me feel anything was possible.

Various artistic arenas seem important in your life.

I find theatre a wonderful art form. Its scope for decorative backdrops, lighting effects and lively story telling inspired me to produce Rock Eisteddfods. I'd grown up learning skills from my father so that I could build things, fix them or improvise, an approach I've used for a lifetime in creating sets, art and gardens.



Colourful painter Barb Pettigrew

I have designed for operas and drama productions, conducted master classes in set design and given set construction workshops for unemployed youth. For three consecutive years I took a high school group to Singapore to work on a joint production to large audiences.

Music has also been important. In an earlier phase of my life, I spent time among musicians and singing harmony in Blues and Bluegrass bands.

In turn drama and music influence my painting which is often theatrical, three dimensional and sometimes has a musical motif, as in my exhibition of decorated musical instruments several festivals ago at The Links.

Locals know you for your brilliant contributions to Festival Fleurieu including the doors exhibition and then the chairs.

I like to think outside the square while involving as many people as possible. Novelty and visually captivating exhibitions which both startle and bring the community to participate with their own inventions really add to the local vibe. While on the Festival Board and its planning committee, I had the chance to put such values into practice.

Obviously, art continues to be a driving force.

Yes most days I lose myself for hours in the studio which we specially designed and built into the rear of our house when retiring in Yankalilla. I teach a weekly class and continue to exhibit. During the 2015 Festival Fleurieu my daughter painted a mural on a Normanville café, and I painted 21 doors for the street theme and decorated the piano in the shopping mall. Most recently I painted the pots outside the Yankalilla Post Office. Now I am readying for an exhibition in SALA month for South Australian Living Artists.

We look forward to your work in a SALA exhibition in Coral Street Gallery Victor Harbor from July 15 to August 15. No doubt you'll make a big splash of colour along with fellow artists Karen Hammat, Bill Page and Peter Fitzgerald.

The exhibition's open 10 to 4 daily but closed Wednesdays and a great chance for YRN readers to see for themselves works by our local painters.