

OLD FRIENDS

Elizabeth Sandia returns to her favorite spots and shares them with us through pastel images.

By Gussie Fauntleroy



"Near Telluride," pastel, 12" x 15"

Here's a new twist to an old saying about things in life that can never be possessed in overabundance, like being too rich or too thin or having too much chocolate. For artist Elizabeth Sandia, it's indisputable: "You can never have too many pastels."

That would be like saying there's too much color and light in the world.

In Sandia's Santa Fe studio, several open, flat boxes supply her with as many as 800 chunks and sticks of chalk pastel. She uses them daily to meet her own insatiable need

for expressing the southwest's special qualities of color and light. The award-winning images she creates as a result, whether of Colorado peaks or the sun-warmed walls of an aging adobe church, lead to another irrefutable conclusion: There can never be too many splendid depictions of downright beautiful places.

Even before moving to Santa Fe in the mid-1990s, Sandia was enchanted with the beauty of New Mexico on several visits to the state. But as with many events in life, her

relocation from Key West, Florida, involved a pull, a push, and a voice that declared the time was right.

The pull was a dream of pursuing art full time after successful turns as an illustrator, graphic artist, art director, and architect in New York, Ottawa, and Key West. The push was an allergy to mold in a humid, subtropical island climate. In a search for a healthier place to live, Sandia had been scoping out various cities around the country, but hadn't yet decided on one. Then, one day, she heard



"Two Palms Behind San Xavier," pastel, 12" x 9"



"Old Wall at the Fenn," pastel, 10" × 12"

the voice—on TV.

"I walked into a room and caught the tail end of a Joseph Campbell tape on the television," she remembers. "I stopped and he looked right at me and said something like, 'Go for your dream. Don't worry about the money.' I heard exactly what I needed to hear. The next day I realized it was time to paint and that Santa Fe would be the place. Within a month I packed up and left Key West."

Once in Santa Fe, another serendipitous

occurrence brought Sandia together with the first of many boxes of pastels. Previously she'd done extensive amounts of drawing, of course, and had worked a little in watercolor, so she decided to try her hand at oils. After her first class, a fellow student introduced her to pastels—and she knew it was meant to be. The seventh pastel painting Sandia ever did earned several awards. Proud of her new achievement, she was hesitant to part with it. But she did, to a seasoned collector from Illinois.

And the acclaim and sales have continued. Recognition of her work has found its way into numerous national magazines, and her place has been well earned as a signature member of both the Degas Pastel Society and the Pastel Society of America.

The roots of Sandia's artistic bent—as well as a deep interest in the structure and design of houses and even of visual space within the landscape—can be traced to her childhood, the greatest part of which was spent in New York City where her father



"Peaceful Afternoon," pastel, 32" × 40"



"Nambe Vista," pastel, 18" x 22"

was a minister in Chinatown. She was ten when her father's church needed a new building. Accompanying him to the architect's office, she was instantly bitten by the architectural bug.

"I used to interview my classmates and ask them what they wanted in a dream house. Then I'd draw up the floor plans," she recalls with a smile. "But even before then I was interested in houses. I remember telling my mother how I wanted to renovate our house."

That love of arranging and rearranging space continues today, in her imagination and her art. During her first few years in Santa Fe, Sandia's work focused largely on the earth tones, textures, and soft, inviting contours of adobe houses and walls. Today she ranges much farther out, setting up her easel to capture pastoral scenes and pure landscape around the southwest. Among her eventual goals is the painting of all 85 or so small, rural churches scattered around the northern half of her adopted state.



She's almost made it up to 20. But several of these have been painted again and again, emerging anew with each shift in angle, season, time of day, and quality of light. In fact, with the artist's inclination to return many times to special spots, she would add one more item to the list of things that are never found in extreme: time to paint.

"There are so many paintable places and not enough time," she laments. "I love to go back to my favorite places. It's definitely an exchange of love—between me and a building, or a tree or a cactus. It just makes me feel happy. I don't feel like I'm repeating myself—I feel like I'm in the presence of old friends."

Elizabeth Sandia's work is represented by Canyon Road Fine Art, 621 Canyon Road. Hours: 10:00-5:00 daily. (505) 988-9511. A show of new paintings, much anticipated by her collectors, takes place August 20-26, with an artist's reception August 22 from 5 to 7 pm. www.canyonroadfineart.net.