

Fripp Island Art Guild Studio Tour

By Barbara Grunden

There's something uniquely Fripp about finding art by golf cart—salty air, Spanish moss, deer crossings, and friendly conversation. Recently, the Fripp Island Art Guild invited members and guests to experience just that with a lively golf cart crawl across the island to visit three distinctive artist studios. The event offered a glimpse into the spaces where creativity and just plain hard work go into every piece of art. Each stop showcased an artist's working studio and the personal stories and processes behind the art.

Kathleen Stables

The first stop brought guests to the Ocean Creek home of Kathleen Stables, whose artistic journey started as a simple hobby that gradually grew into something much more involved. What was once a large, utilitarian garage has been thoroughly transformed into a bright and welcoming studio, complete with beautiful rugs, soft painted walls, proper lighting and climate control. The space reflected Kathleen's wide-ranging talents. A sewing station showcased a beautiful and meaningful quilted bed runner crafted from her mother's clothing while nearby, an expansive painting space gave proof of her talents in that area. But it was the stained-glass studio that captured everyone's attention and served as the centerpiece of the tour.

About eight years ago, Kathleen set out to learn how to create her own stained-glass pieces, initially motivated by the high cost of purchasing finished art. She now laughs, admitting that the investment in tools and materials likely surpassed those original price tags. However, gained knowledge and the ability to sell her own work has rewarded the effort. The group was fascinated as Kathleen walked them through the meticulous steps behind each piece. Using a lightboard on top of her workbench, she carefully selects colors to match a template design. Each section of glass is then cut and scored to fit within the pattern. The glass is then ground smooth for safe handling before being cleaned, foiled, and prepared for soldering. The process requires patience, precision, and an eye for detail. Seeing the process first-hand made it clear: the beauty of stained-glass takes many hours of careful work and planning, and that effort shines in Kathleen's hands.



Pattie Orchell

From there, the group continued to the Davis Love area and the custom engraving studio of Patti Orchell, a space as inviting as it is functional. The large, meticulously organized studio featured gleaming epoxy floors, softly painted walls, and thoughtful touches that made it feel warm and welcoming—including comfortable seating and a big-screen TV—where members and guests were treated to goodies, wine, and cake. At the heart of Patti's workspace is the Xtool P2 engraver and cutter, a laser machine that uses a powerful beam of light to cut through or burn designs into materials. It is the true workhorse behind her creations. While the machine performs the engraving itself, the artistry begins long before that. Patti uses specialized software to program each project, carefully determining elements such as depth and power levels needed for the various materials she uses which include wood, acrylic, leather, metal, glass, and slate. The machine also has two cameras that give a live preview of the work area so it is evident exactly where the design will land on the project. Her work spans a wide range of components from wooden platters, tumblers, glassware, slate coasters, metal items, and leatherwork. Each piece is transformed into something personal and meaningful, tailored to the individual story behind it.

Patti shared that her interest in engraving began with a simple desire: to create thoughtful handmade gifts for family and friends. What started as a hobby quickly grew as others recognized the beauty and uniqueness of her work. Encouraged by that response, she turned her passion into a small business, launching Lowcountry Gifts and Engraving. Patti enjoys collaborating with customers to design custom pieces for weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, and those “just because” moments that call for something special. Her work is a reminder that even in a technology-driven process, it is the personal connection that truly makes it meaningful, and her exuberance and joyful spirit resonate through every piece.



Kari Cornwell

Meandering across the island beneath a clear, starlit sky, the art guild ended the evening tour at Kari Cornwell's home in the Fiddler area. As the final stop on the tour, her studio offered a peaceful and fitting close to the day. Kari's studio is brand new and still evolving, much like her artistic journey. Having recently moved into their newly built home, the space is a work in progress—yet already filled with light, openness, and touches of elegance. Expansive views of the marsh flood the studio with natural light, providing both inspiration and a tranquil backdrop for her work.

Kari shared that she has been painting for just two years, beginning simply to create something that brought contentment to her life. What has grown from that intention is a deeply personal body of work. She described her process as storytelling through paint, often guided by God as to what to share. Her studio currently features a collection of angel paintings alongside Lowcountry landscapes and oyster shell creations. In a uniquely local touch, Kari sometimes incorporates sand from the Fripp beach into her paintings, adding depth and movement. One of her pieces now hangs in the Fripp Island Welcome Center—a meaningful milestone in her growing interest to share her art. Kari named her studio Chatty Dragonfly, being a fan of the whimsical creatures, and the space matches the name perfectly. It was a lovely place to end the evening where the art seemed less about process and more about connection. The event was a reminder that on Fripp Island, creativity isn't confined to galleries. It lives in garages turned studios, in new places taking shape, and in the artists who open their doors and share their story.

