

Built-in Art At “Archsculpt Studio”

By Debbie Tuma

Photos by Debbie Tuma

When sculptor Fredi Cohen decided to build her dream house in East Hampton about five years ago, she knew nothing about general contracting, but she knew she wanted her home to be an extension of her artwork. In fact, she dreamed of creating fine art and building her designs right into the architecture itself.

“I took a leap of faith as an artist and decided to create my own ‘gallery’ within my home where I could live with my art every day, rather than putting it in a museum or outside gallery,” she said. “I decided to call my house, where I live and work, ‘Archsculpt Studio.’”

Today, her spacious, airy home is a true reflection of Cohen’s artistic style, and her two main themes throughout are a tribute to nature and its interrelationship to feminine, sensual, healing energy. It is reminiscent of the architecture of Antoni Gaudi, only a feminine, Hamptons version. “People who know art keep telling me of what Gaudi did in Barcelona. I cherish being surrounded by the beauty of nature and art, and the Hamptons is my retreat, so I wanted to express this love of nature and the environment in my house,” she explained.

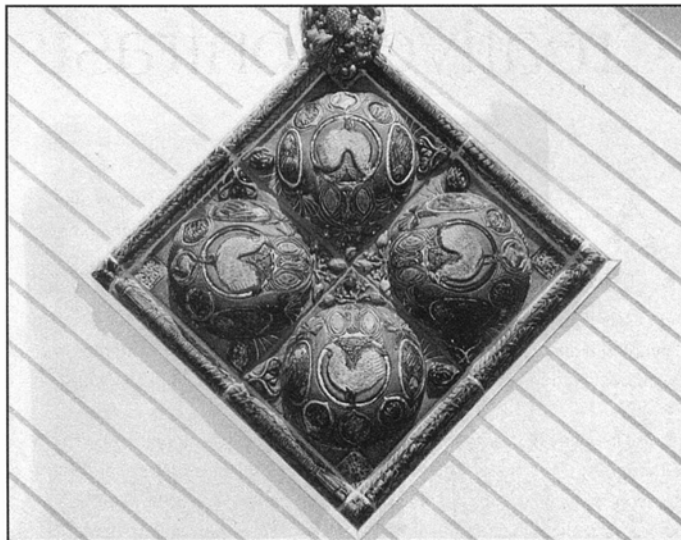
Walking up the driveway to her home, situated in the Northwest Woods, the light reflects off several large, round sculptures built into the exterior. In keeping with Cohen’s environmental theme, the steps to her front door are handmade tiles with pictures of animals and sea creatures on them. Numerous handcrafted tiles also edge the doorway, creating a dramatic, inviting entrance to this unique house.

Hand Tiled Fireplace

Upon entering the two-story, white living room, the eye is drawn to the exciting, hand-tiled fireplace, which is the centerpiece of the room. “To me, a fireplace is too important a focal point to place common brick or stone,” she said. Her custom-made fireplace is a combination of totems — organic, sensual forms like dolphins and female

anatomy. It also has a Celtic and Native American look. Each tile depicts either female forms or forms from nature.

Surrounding the living room are free-standing sculptures from an earlier period of work, including a tiled mermaid on one wall and beautiful



A close-up of the large nature relief sculpture on the façade of her house.

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white female and male forms on the other. There is even an elaborate hand-created fountain, with terra cotta colored tiles and birds and roses intertwined, creating a Native American feel.

Both the kitchen and bathrooms contain hundreds of hand-created tiles in soft blues, turquoises, and also some deeper blues. "Throughout my house are over 5,000 handmade tiles," said Cohen, who creates and fires them in her downstairs studio. These tiles and other sculptures are built from the earth itself—using stoneware clay.

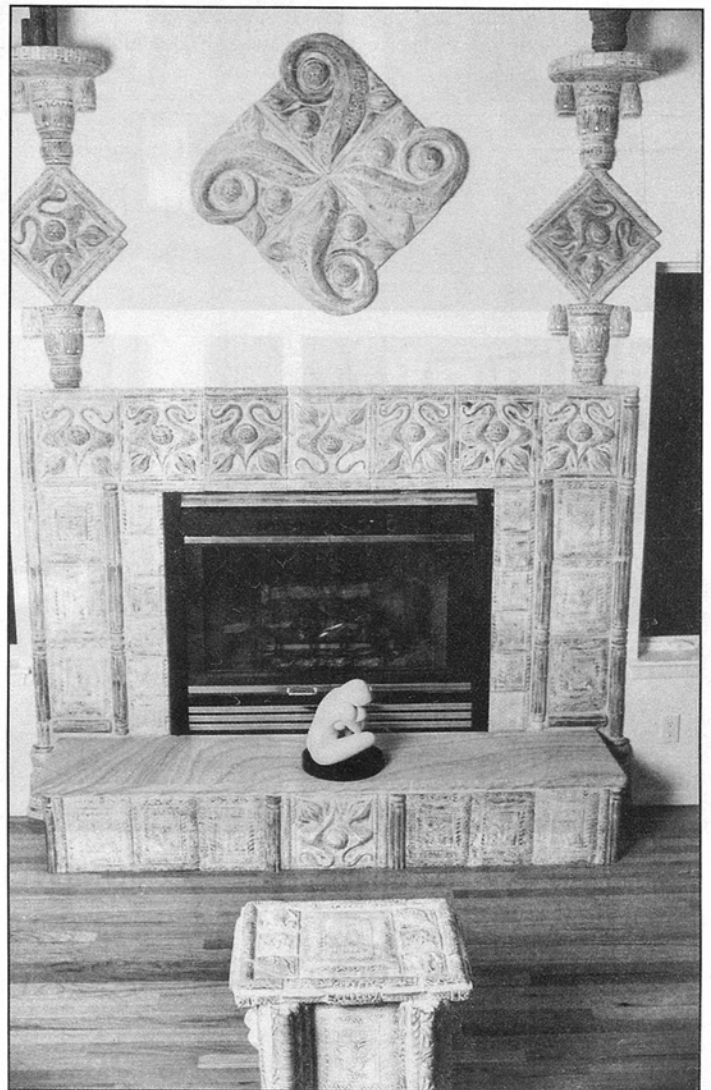
She designed the bathroom sinks in rounded shapes, with sculptures of mermaids built into them, or swirls of unusual colors and shapes. Her bathtubs and showers are works of art within themselves, with each tile carefully designed in themes of the sea—fish and shellfish.

"I feel nurtured and happy when I take my shower in a work of art, or sit



Fredi Cohen's "Archsculpt Studio" of East Hampton.

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The hand-sculpted "totem" fireplace in her living room.

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in my opulent hand-tiled tub," she said. "I can hand-design these tiles to anyone's liking, in their homes as well."

Her large, sunlit kitchen is another example of the beauty of nature, bringing the flowers, fruits and woods right into the house. Cohen delicately impressed leaves right from her garden into the kitchen countertop tiles, and also on the many tiles on her floor. "These counters and floors are easy to wash off and keep clean—they are also very strong and hearty," she said.

Hand Sculpted Rooms

"I would like to create hand-sculpted rooms like this for other people," said Cohen, her work being perfect for the discerning homeowner who doesn't want his or her home to look like everyone else's.

Cohen is constantly reinventing things in her home and creating exciting new works of built-in art in different areas. She is just finishing a new series of almost lyrical swirling feminine sculptural elements for every room in the house — which she describes as "sculptural dresses."

"These architectural forms can be used around door frames or mirrors, or to correct boring straight-edged spaces that need to be dressed up, or to complete bathrooms, kitchens, fireplaces, or windows," she said. "Nature is all about curves and flowing energy, so my 'dresses' restore the beauty of natural form and correct the straight edges of most linear architecture, to restore balance in one's environment."

Now that her house is almost finished, she is starting to work with interior designers and architects on some new



Sculptor Fredi Cohen displays one of her custom-designed sinks and her fine art tiles.

projects. Cohen's Archsculpt Studio will be on tour again this July for the East Hampton Artists Alliance Studio Tour. The Retreat, an East Hampton shelter for victims of domestic violence, will be holding its benefit at Cohen's house in September.

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