



To complete her creation of house as work of art, Fredi Cohen fashioned hundreds of detailed ceramic tiles for every room and surface.

DANA SHAW PHOTOS

# Sculptor's Masterpiece Is Also Where She Lives

By Hilary J. Larson

**A**fter 25 years of creating elegant but essentially non-utilitarian sculptures, Fredi Cohen had the urge to be not only artistic, but practical. Her next project, she decided, would be her house.

So, four years ago, Ms. Cohen designed and participated in the construction of her 1,500-square-foot East Hampton home, which is located at the entrance to the Northwest Woods. She carved intricate sculptures—some abstract, others representing fish and animals—into her fireplaces, doorways, staircases, cabinets, coffee tables, floors, bathtubs, and countertops.

Her reasoning was simple: after touring dozens of what she considered boringly similar houses, she wanted something distinctive, and something that reflected her own aesthetic.

"I designed the house to fit the artwork," Ms. Cohen explained, noting that the living room has a 26-foot-high ceiling. "I wanted to bathe in works of art. I wanted my counters, my floors, to be works of art." The art itself, she said, "is inspired by the environment of the Hamptons and how it makes me feel—to have all my senses alive and to expect beauty at every turn."

Ms. Cohen's unusual home, which she has named Archsculpt Studio, will be featured this weekend during the East Hampton Chamber of Commerce 15th

Annual Holiday Tour of Inns, B&Bs and Special Places. The tour is scheduled on Saturday, December 13, from 12 to 4 p.m. In addition, LTV will broadcast a 15-minute filmed tour of Archsculpt Studio on Channel 20 this Friday, December 12 at 11:30 p.m.

Interested visitors can also tour the studio, which has already been featured on several television programs, by appointment. In the future, Ms. Cohen also plans to host "salon evenings" for local artists to share their work and exchange ideas.

From the terracotta-colored snake and scorpion carvings on the steps at the building's entrance to the swirling fish shower tiles, Ms. Cohen's crowning achievement is a house unlike any other. "Some of the art is abstract but organic, with an international feeling," the sculptor said. Her work is inspired by the ancient designs of Native American, Celtic, Indian, and Spanish cultures, which is



Sculptor Fredi Cohen

evident from the geometric shapes and repetitive motifs, as well as the technique of covering surfaces with discrete tiles rather than one large sculpture.

As for themes, Ms. Cohen has always been inspired by two: femininity and the earth. "All my work is very sensual, with round shapes," Ms. Cohen said. "I've always liked very rounded forms and materials that are conducive to that."

Stoneware clay is her favorite medium, but she also works with concrete, wood, steel, and plaster, depending on whether the art is destined for

the outdoors or interior. Her color scheme, reflecting her organic inspirations, is appropriately earthy: sepia, bronze, black, dark green, faded blue, chalk white.

"My work reflects the interrelationship between Mother Nature, the feminine, healing energy, and the earth," Ms. Cohen added. "I'm a woman, so I feel total-

ly connected to the earth. To me the earth is where mankind has constructed architecture which is straight-edged, and it's efficient, but female forms are what's found in nature. That resonates with me."

Always a lover of nature, Ms. Cohen actually grew up in New York City, living in Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan at various times and studying liberal arts at Brooklyn College. She was always an artist, she said, but her art frequently took a backseat to more mundane concerns. While taking sculpture classes at local art schools, she worked in the advertising business and later ran an insurance agency—"basically doing left-brain kinds of things to support my art." Every few years, when she had saved up enough money, Ms. Cohen would take a few years leave to pursue art full-time.

In 1985, her sculpture took first prize at the International Juried Arts Competition, she said. The honor led to solo gallery shows in Manhattan and East Hampton and participation in several group shows in the city. "I was getting all this wonderful feedback, but I didn't have enough money to sustain myself," sighed Ms. Cohen.

After a few more years in the insurance business, she was invited to work on a large-scale sculpture project at a spiritual retreat in Rhinebeck, New York. The experience changed her life. "One per-

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Fred Cohen's sculpture/house in East Hampton.

## SCULPTURE: *Where She Lives Is Also a Masterpiece*

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son told me my work reminded him of Antonio Gaudi," said Ms. Cohen, referring to the renowned Barcelona architect whose buildings and public spaces incorporate elaborate and whimsical sculptural elements. Ms. Cohen had never heard of Gaudi, but she was inspired to turn her artistic focus to buildings, rather than objects.

"I had never done pottery or anything functional before," she said. But she decided to sell her Pennsylvania farmhouse and design a home in the Hamptons, which she had visited for years. "I just said, 'I'm going to do it my way.'"

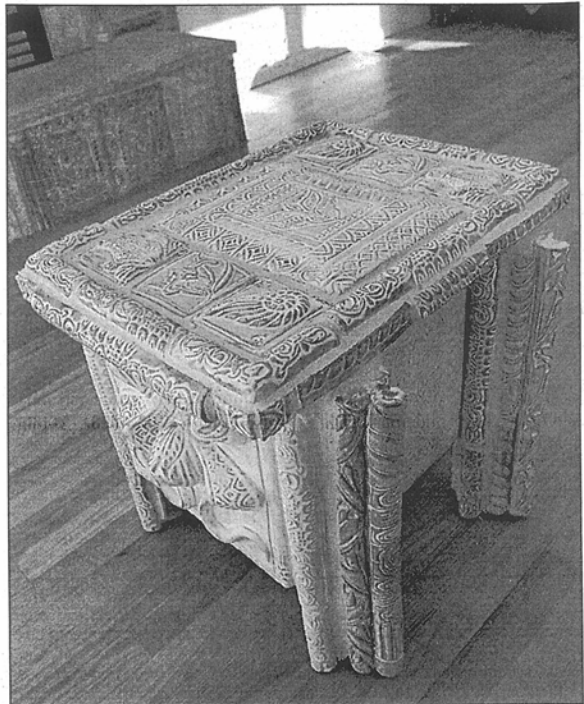
Now she lives in the East Hampton home and studio full-time and has begun receiving commissions from other East End homeowners to do built-in sculptures. "So many artistic people live out here; why do they all have to live in the same house?" Ms.

Cohen asked rhetorically, noting that her designs vary depending on the client's tastes and location.

"All fireplaces tend to be the same," she added. "They're made out of brick, with a slate of sheetrock and a picture above them. But they should be the centerpiece of the home." Ms. Cohen's own fireplace, it is worth noting, is flanked by a two-story-high white-on-white sculptural relief of a tree with hanging branches and dove-like birds. "My work looks sort of like antiques," she noted, "because the carvings are very detailed, the way artisans worked hundreds of years ago."

Now that she has settled into the East End, Ms. Cohen said she feels newly inspired by the rural atmosphere. "With all this beauty," she said, "I have the feeling that anything is possible here."

To make an appointment to visit Archsculpt Studio, call 324-3049 or e-mail [archsculpt@aol.com](mailto:archsculpt@aol.com).



One of the ceramic pieces that adorn the interior.



Handmade tiles are part of the artist's signature on her work.

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