

I & A COVER STORY

Stone does the talking in Malibu resident's art work

ASHLEIGH FRYER, Senior Editor

Malibu resident Eugenie Spirito believes the best way to transform a substance found in nature is to act natural.

"A teacher of mine told me to imagine that you're water going around the stone — you carve 360 degrees, moving over the stone as water would," Spirito said. "What would water do over 1,000 years to this piece of stone?"

A sculptor for 30 years, Spirito has learned to synchronize her movements with each piece of stone she carves — in her eyes, the stone does the talking.

"Sculpting is it for me — it chose me," Spirito said. "The stones talk. They're individuals. They have distinct personalities."

Those personalities manifest into a plethora of shapes, faces, forms and designs that Spirito etches into many substances ranging from orange alabaster — her personal favorite — to marble. Created out of her workshop in her Malibu home, Spirito's pieces now sit in galleries in Los Angeles and Malibu. And, unlike some artists, Spirito has no qualms about selling her work. To her, emptying the pedestals that sit in her living room signify her art "being put out into the world," a step which is part of her artistic process.

"I don't believe in struggling artists," Spirito said. "I'm a sculptor that loves to sell my work. I want to make more, and making more is dependent on releasing that clutter in my head. I'll be working on four or five pieces at a time, and I'll know what I want



Eugenie Spirito holds a piece of her art work.

to do with each of them."

Twenty-four years ago, Spirito and her husband, Louis, relocated to Malibu after living together in New York City for 10 years, where the pair met and Eugenie began her sculpting career after attending the School of Visual Arts, studying under the famed sculptor Philip Pavia. From the moment she stepped into her first class, Eugenie recalls being taken aback by the physicality of the art form, chiseling and carving a piece of marble for three hours until she had worked herself into a full sweat. But it didn't take long for her to step up to the challenge and embrace the process.

"It makes me brave," Eugenie said. "You have to be brave to take away stone because it's something you can't put back. Every time I carve, I don't know if the stone is going to break at the last minute. You never know if you're going to take off too much or if it's going to come out beautifully."

For Louis, his wife's passion is one to be admired, and one that gives unique life to their decades-long relationship. A writer, himself, Louis, shares the creative spark that inspires his

wife to sculpt.

"Normally, as a husband you'd say, 'Honey, what would you like for your birthday?' And my wife will say, 'Take me to Home Depot for some tools,'" said Louis, laughing. "I'm a tough critic, but she's really talented and her work has always been good."

Although the pair enjoyed success while living in Manhattan, they said that Malibu has indisputably become their home. Frequenters of the Trancas dog park with their adopted dog, Tanner, the Spiritos have come to embrace the community feel of Malibu.

"Every day we wake up and we say how grateful we are to live here," Eugenie said. "It's things like being able to go to the market and be recognized by name, or knowing which teller I want to go to at the bank. It's a community — we care about Malibu and we care about each other."

As part of that community, Eugenie works closely with Malibu art and clothing boutique CANVAS in the Country Mart, where she is currently displaying five of her sculptures amid designer clothing, accessories and other one-of-a-



Eugenie Spirito carves into a piece of stone in her sculpting workshop in Malibu.

PHOTOS BY ASHLEIGH FRYER/22ND CENTURY MEDIA



Pictured are stones Eugenie Spirito uses for her art pieces.

kind artwork.

"They keep Malibu hip," said Eugenie, laughing.

In addition to enjoying the perks of a close-knit community, Eugenie said Malibu has also had an influence on her artistic pursuits. While her sculptures are often based on human or animal forms, Eugenie said she garners inspiration

from things like the ocean and the elements that surrounds her in Malibu.

"We were married in Italy, and for the past 25 years I've been wanting to move to Italy because that's where I thought my heart was," Eugenie said. "But for our 25th anniversary, we celebrated by going back there. And I came

back from this wonderful trip there, realizing that Malibu has everything that I'm looking for. That was a priceless realization. Even though we've been here for 24 years, I've got a new passion for Malibu now."

For more information on Eugenie Spirito's work, visit www.eugeniespirito.com.