

Neustaedter inspired by Emily Carr

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Post reporter

After Chrissandra Neustaedter got hit by a truck, the west coast girl decided to pursue her longtime passion for painting.

Neustaedter is a west coast girl through and through. Born in Chilliwack, she has now settled in Abbotsford, after several years living in Calgary and Nanoose Bay, near Nanaimo. "I'm a total B.C. girl," she says. "I'd rather have rain than the Calgary chill."

And her west coast roots have transplanted themselves deeply into her paintings, many of which feature the rich trees and forests of B.C.

If these works are reminiscent of famed B.C. painting legend Emily Carr, it's no mistake. Inspired by Carr's work, Neustaedter, in fact, points to her piece, *Emily's Cedar*, as a direct inspiration and dedication to the legendary artist.

Still, Neustaedter's work has a unique quality that is completely her own. The trees and other subjects in her work seem to jump off the canvas, thanks to an innovative technique that she's yet to name.

"I'll give a free painting to the person who comes

up with a name for it," she says with a chuckle, adding, "You can print that."

So what's the yet unnamed technique about? "It looks like it's carved," she explains, "like the peaks of old Roman buildings" — which is fitting since her love of Italy has inspired a series of paintings reflecting the Cinque Terre region of the country.

So how does she create that carved look? She explains that she manipulates plaster with a knife on the canvas before she paints with acrylic and varnish.

Although she's been in the Clearbrook area for three years, she says it's different here than it was when she lived on Vancouver Island. "When I moved to the island, my career really started taking off," she says. "It's very artist-driven there, and the island had so much connection." She became a regularly featured painter at the Nanaimo Art Gallery.

When she moved to Abbotsford, she found it more difficult to make connections with the art world, until she met the other members of Pieces of Eight, such as Bev Ellis, a painter and jewelry maker profiled in last week's issue of *The Post*.

"I feel really lucky,"



Chrissandra Neustaedter in front of her paintings on display at Clayburn Gourmet Gallery in Abbotsford

Photo By Margaret Jetelina

Neustaedter says. "People are finding out about me." Her work is displayed in many high-end galleries across Canada, including the White Rock Jenkins Showler Gallery.

But art is actually the 40-year-old's second vocation; although, she has loved to draw since she was a child, she started out her adult career as a legal secretary. "I was very unhappy doing what I was doing," she says. "But one day I was walking to work and a truck went through a stop sign and I got hit."

That life-altering event

changed her forever, and she decided to trade in her business suits for paintbrushes and signed up at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. She later moved to Calgary with her then husband, where she had her first showing in 2000. "My neighbour was an artist and was really getting out there with her art promoting herself. I said, 'Hmm I can do this, too.'"

Being part of Pieces of Eight has certainly helped her achieve her artistic dreams. The team of currently five artists work to-

gether to help promote their individual work.

In her spare time, Neustaedter teaches art and piano to local students. "I especially love teaching piano," she says. "I have a lot of fun with young kids."

Not your typical blue-haired piano teacher, the platinum blond Neustaedter uses art to teach music. "I like to correlate art with piano teaching. Kids know visuals, they know dark and light, it's easy to express that in music tones. For instance, I saw 'play light, play dark.'

It helps them to express more."

Her main goal right now is to get better known locally as an artist.

She describes her art as "carved, colourful, happy."

"I paint what I love, whether it's trees or Italy." She also has a favourite series of interior scenes with musical instruments.

Some of her work is currently being displayed at the Clayburn Gourmet Gallery in Abbotsford, along with the work of the other Pieces of Eight, for a Christmas show titled, "Gift of Art."