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LIVING WELL

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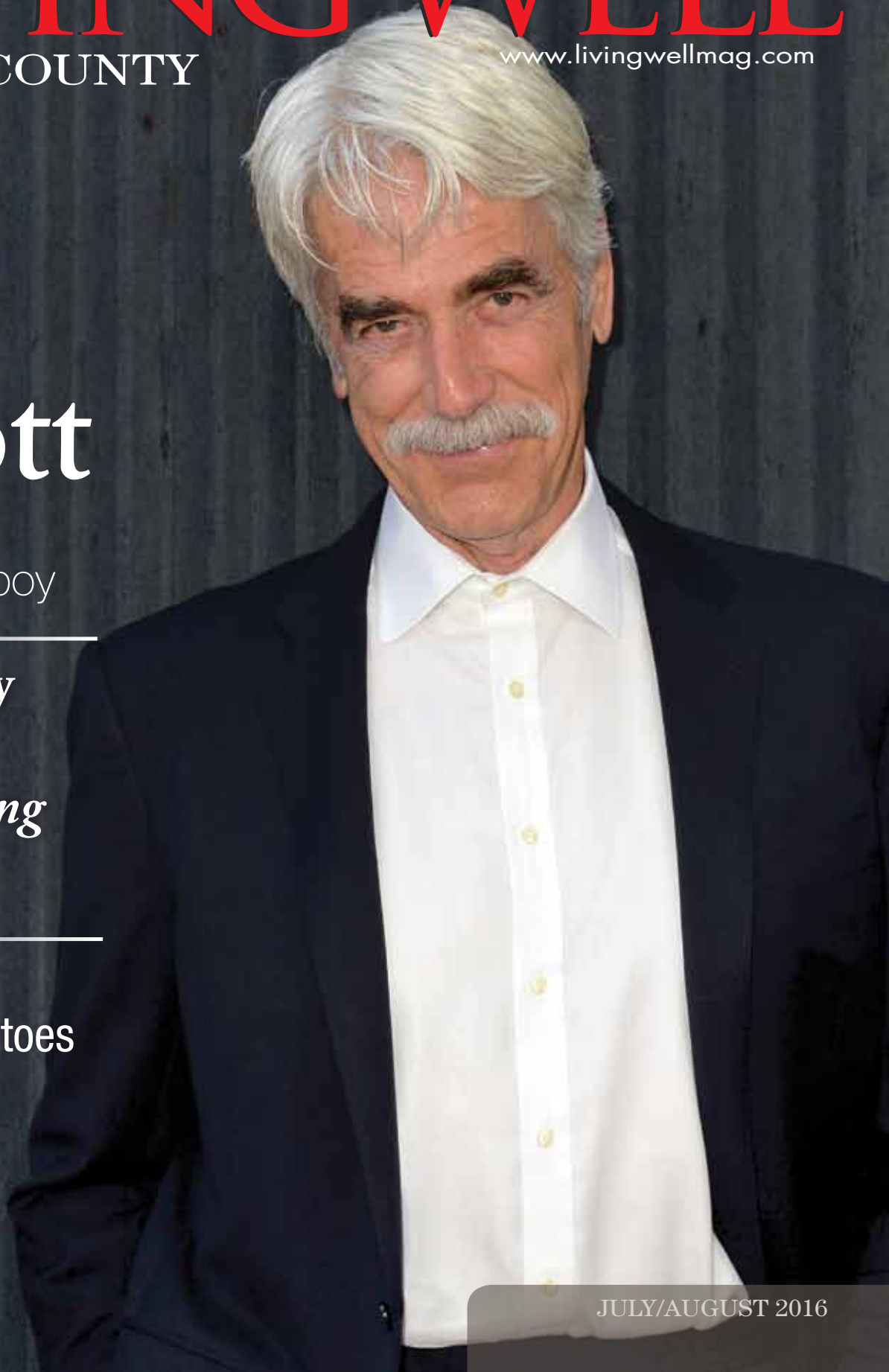
Sam Elliott

America's
favorite cowboy

Carlyn Ray
Dallas
Glassblowing
Artist

Plants that
Repel Mosquitoes

JULY/AUGUST 2016



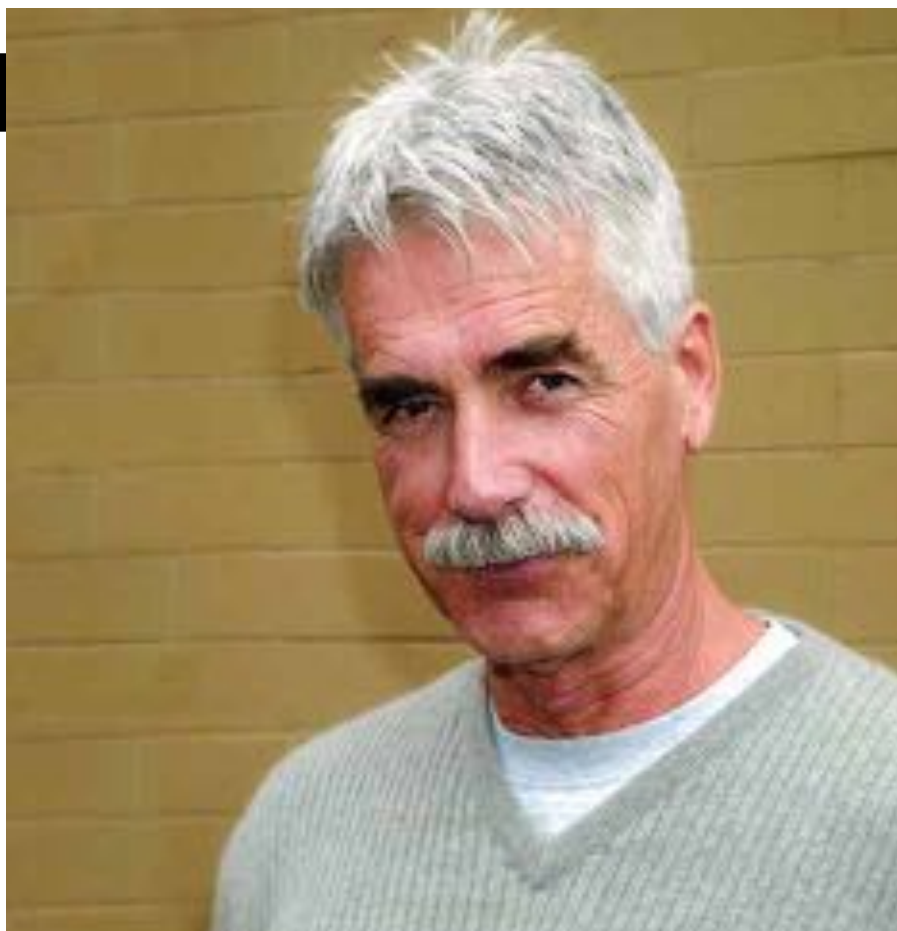
CONTENTS

JULY/AUGUST 2016

on the cover

6

SAM ELLIOTT
AMERICA'S
FAVORITE COWBOY



in this issue

- 11 Staycation – DART Destinations
- 15 Walking to End Alzheimer's
- 18 What Would You Do?
- 20 Dropless Cataract Surgery
- 22 Your Best Friend in Retirement
- 28 Summer is Trauma Season
- 30 Health Checkups in Your 50s
- 31 Choosing the Best Sunscreen
- 32 Hector Picard - Inspiring Triathlete
- 35 Stem Cell Therapy for COPD
- 36 Five Great Summer Reads
- 38 Solitude vs. Loneliness
- 40 Yummy Recipes
- 42 The Intelligent Investor
- 43 Battle Buddies: A Cancer Story
- 44 Summer Boredom
- 49 Blue Chip Equity Income Fund

features

24 **CARLYN RAY**
DALLAS
GLASSBLOWING
ARTIST



46 **PLANTS
THAT REPEL
MOSQUITOES**



Scan this QR code with your smartphone app to read more features from *Living Well Magazine*.

A woman wearing a purple bandana, safety glasses, and a pink t-shirt is working in a workshop. She is using a torch to heat a piece of glass on a metal rod. The workshop is filled with various tools and equipment, including a workbench, a table, and a large metal container. The text "2,300 degrees Fahrenheit" is overlaid on the image.

**2,300 degrees
Fahrenheit**



By Melanie Hess
Photos by Turk Studio

It's with this temperature; the temperature of a volcano, that artist Carlyn Ray feels most alive.

That's because it's also the level of heat that is required to melt glass. And while the well-known lyric, "a world beyond your imagination," from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* is, in the story, referencing a chocolate paradise, for Ray, a professional artist and Dallas native, her mind envisions something different—a colorful haven made solely from glass.

"Glass is an amazing material," she stresses. "It epitomizes the act of creation. It is dust, melted to the temperature of the hottest material on earth, lava, and it becomes molten. It is one of the few materials that you can actually blow into. It is literally shaped by your breath."

A professional glassblower based in Dallas, Ray claims she still cannot know glass in its entirety.

"The potentials with glass are endless; the surface is only scratched," she says. "It is the one material that I can almost guarantee that you will come into contact with every day. From drinking glasses and windows, to spectacles and cell phones. Glass is everywhere."

An Early Adventure

Ray discovered her passion before she was even a teenager, witnessing her first glass blowing with her parents at age 9. At 14, she recalls standing in line at the Dallas Museum of Art to meet Dale Chihuly, one of the more renowned glassblowers in the world. "He told me to come to his school, Pilchuck," she says. "I looked at that as a personal invitation!"

After attending school at the College of William and Mary, where she studied art and psychology, she was given the opportunity to attend Penland Craft School, one of the oldest craft schools in the country, located in the Appalachian Mountains. And it was work through an apprenticeship at Penland that did eventually bring her to Chihuly's school on a 200-acre tree farm about an hour north of Seattle.

"I assisted artists there during the winter and then worked at the school there for the next summer season" she says.

Ray was then hired on with Chihuly, Inc. In addition to learning the art, she also took this time to master the business side of things and through teaching lessons got to know Chihuly and his son personally. "He is not only a mentor and a brilliant businessman, but an amazing and insightful person," Ray says.

As her time at Chihuly wrapped up, Ray was afforded the opportunity to work for the Corning Museum of Glass on a cruise ship traveling to locations such as the Baltics, Mediterranean, and Caribbean. She traveled the world with this

Continued, Next Page



From previous page

team for about two years before finally returning to Texas to work on her own studio and give back to the community that raised her.

Difference Brings Revelation

While Ray will share that it has been an incredible journey, she stresses it hasn't always been an easy one. As a young student, Ray discovered she was dyslexic. "Being learning different, you can feel stupid or inadequate," Ray expresses. However, while attending the Episcopal School of Dallas, in seventh grade, she had a revelation.

"Our headmaster, Father Swann, talked about our 'path'," she says. It was then that I wrote in my journal and reflected upon that with which I struggled, being learning different, and where I sought balance.

She realized her great fortune in having a family and extended community that cared for and supported her. "I was safe, believed in, and loved," she says. "This became my mission

to present love, art, imagination, and belief in and to others." Glass, she soon decided, would become the platform through which she would accomplish this mission.

A Creative Science

So how does it work? It may be an art form, but Ray says the science behind glass blowing is remarkably intricate. Glass melts at 2,300 Fahrenheit, which Ray points out is the hottest thing on earth. "The working temperature is 2,100 degrees," she says. And at this point, light is key.

"Glass is like a crystal," Ray says. "You know it already has these beautiful qualities and you put light through it. And all of a sudden you're completely transforming a room." She explains that she believes the more one understands the science behind it, the more they can push the material. "Glass naturally teaches one to be a creative thinker—to think outside the box" she says. "There are so many colors. The more you're aware of physics and math and science in art, the more colors are brought to the chemistry lab. It's this whole really symbiotic relationship."

It's a Team Sport

Another important relationship in glassblowing, Ray emphasizes, is the team.

"Finding people who are also passionate about what they do, if it's in lighting or if it's my resin specialist, is one of the greatest gifts," she says. "You feel a part of something larger than yourself."

She also notes that glassblowing is a niche where artists will be very limited if they try to work alone but that team doesn't have to all be made of veterans. It's a team of diverse skills and a perfect platform for education.

Sixteen year old Booker T. Washington High school student Simon Waranch has seen this truth first hand. After a freshman class trip to Italy, where he was first exposed to glassblowing, Waranch knew he had to try it for himself. "I was excited about seeing something turn from liquid to solid so quick and how there was obviously a process towards the magic," he says.

After taking a class with Ray, he completed an apprenticeship and was later asked to continue as a teacher. "What keeps my passion growing is there are so many different techniques of how to blow glass, and I want to learn all of them," he says. Being part of Ray's team allows him to do that.

"It's not only about your skills with the material but it's also your skills with your team," Ray says. You have someone start with the color they put the color on. And then someone adds more glass to it and they shape it."

Giving Back

Waranch and Ray also have a shared passion for teaching, where teamwork is just one aspect of glassblowing that they focus on. Co-founder of Art Reaching Out (ARO) through Bishop Arts Foundation, a 501(c)3, Ray runs cooperative STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) programs/proj-

ects with different youth-focused groups, another step toward her mission of impacting her community through glass.

"We introduce them to glassblowing, and they create something like a chandelier," Ray says "Really, through learning this craft, it's putting passionate individuals in front of these kids." It starts with inspiring students through an exemplary artist, local or foreign, then moves into a brainstorm and finally creation.

"Through the process of making individual pieces, we bring in STEAM exercises and experiments to integrate into the creative realm," Ray says. "Together the group will create a large-scale installation. This piece will then be placed in public areas and go through an art-leasing program, then possibly an auction, to continue to facilitate the educational outreach." Waranch takes part in this work.

"Lately, I have been teaching a good amount with Girls, Inc. For this project, we are bringing girls in ages 7-12 and each one of them is making a flower," Waranch explains. "Then we are turning all of their flowers into a chandelier. When I'm teaching the girls, I see how happy and excited they are, and that makes me so happy." The Girls, Inc. chandelier was hosted at North Park Center in June 2016 and will later go into an art leasing program or be auctioned to raise money for next year's project. The organization also recently completed a similar project with Hockaday. The Hockaday sculpture will soon be installed in the school's new Centennial Center. Working with youth also gives Ray the chance to share that she did have to overcome obstacles to get where she is. "We've gotten here through grit," she says. "Glass blowing is really difficult but we loved it, and we stayed with it. We wake up every morning excited." As she tells the girls, glassblowing is very male dominant.

"While I can't say I started in a low income neighborhood and got here, I did start out as a minority," Ray says. "I really had to work to prove myself, and now I have and I'm able to share it with you."

Her specialties

As she and her team create weavings with the girls, Ray expresses she is sharing a very personal part of herself.



To see Carlyn Ray's work, visit her website at www.carlynraydesigns.com or better yet, sign up for a class or workshop with her at www.dallasglassart.com.



White on White weave at Oak restaurant in Dallas.

"The weaving itself is close to my heart," she expresses. "To make room for me coming into the world, my mom gave her loom to her best friend, Hinka. So while growing up, we raised silk worms and then I would go over and watch these cocoons become threads and be woven on this huge loom. The process was mesmerizing to me. While traveling, I saw that many cultures have their stories and voice in different types of weavings. So I create my own story, woven out of glass." Ray says she feels honored to have found her signature line of work at such a young age, noting it takes many artists decades.

"My weavings embody all that I love about glass," she admits. "Each piece of glass is colored carefully for the perfect saturation and then stretched and pulled into strands of glass. Each glass strand captures the light and transfers the color through the shadows. Aesthetically, I like the mixed materials with the metal frame, metal wire, and the woven glass."

Goals and future plans

As for what's next, Ray says she looks forward to one of her next projects, the Bishop Arts art garden (anticipated to open in November 2017).

"Like minded people came together and are creating a creative mecca," she says. "Chefs, artists, gardeners, and other creators will be actively making their products around this garden," she says. "I imagine this garden to be full of imagination, color, and energy. It is my hope that as people cross into the walls of the garden they are present among the smells, colors, sites, and people around them."

Despite her enthusiasm for upcoming projects, the prospect of the future doesn't pull Ray far from each moment of today. "Everyone asks me what I'm most excited about," she says. "And I'm always excited about the piece I'm working on. I'm always trying something new and always pushing myself, and I love it."