

WILLIAMSON A.M. *Real Estate*



PHOTOS BY ANDREW WITT

When artist Suzanne Fitch moved into Rocky Top four years ago, the walls were already lime green, a perfect backdrop from Fitch's unique studio furniture.

DON'T MESS WITH DESTINY: QUIRKY HOME BECKONS ARTIST



Suzanne Fitch inherited the treasure hunt sidewalk, where a previous owner embedded unique items and lined with bottle terrariums.

Letters explain the origins and symbolism of Rocky Top's décor and embellishments

By MARILEE SPANJIAN
For *Williamson A.M.*

If you believe in fate, then you'll understand how local artist Suzanne Fitch swooned when she found Rocky Top.

It's as though this quirky, obscure gem was built and nurtured just for her. When she drove up the twisted gravel drive through the thick woods and stepped inside four years ago, she fell immediately in love with every inch of stone, every bold color, and every blooming perennial.

Fitch, whose painted studio furniture will be on exhibit with the Cumberland Furniture Guild this weekend at the TACA Fair at Centennial Park in Nashville, never expected to find such a perfect fit that day, she recalled.

Much to her good fortune, the house and its 12 acres had fallen out of escrow and was back on the market. However, about the same time Fitch's Realtor was submitting her offer, another buyer was getting ready to do the same thing.

Without a second thought, Fitch offered \$1,000 over asking price. As if to say, "Don't mess with destiny," the house was hers.



Suzanne Fitch has lived at Rocky Top for four years.

Not an easy build

After purchasing this Williamson County home, Fitch was given two detailed letters — one from the original owner and another from the sellers — describing the home's history.

According to original owner Robert Pilling,

"To those who live here after me," this home's history began with a creative bash. "To help clear the land, I had a 'Chainsaw and Chile' party."

And then, the real fun began. The house was a "three bay wide gambrel" barn home kit shipped from Woodstock, N.Y. In 1979, it arrived disassembled on the back of two 18-wheeler flatbeds, Pilling noted.

Minor, but heavy details

Luckily, for Fitch, Pilling took his time to weave natural treasures into this three-story, three-bedroom home. For example, the massive fireplace was crafted using local stone. What's even better is the 400-pound fish-shaped stone that sits above the fireplace opening. It took four men to set. On the back of the fireplace in the dining room, massive white natural stones look like birds in flight.

The second owners left their stamp

Eleven years later, Pilling sold the home to Carl and Susan Holmgren. They moved to the area for

► Please see **DESTINY**, 20

their jobs at Saturn. Like Pilling, the Holmgrens also appreciated its wooded, almost spiritual secluded setting.

After making heat and air mechanical improvements, the couple cut down the thick woods that cradled the original deck and had a charming screened gazebo built at one end of the deck. Call it crazy or just creative, at the peak, they added a weathervane fashioned from an old bomb and turned each of the rafter tails into bird heads.

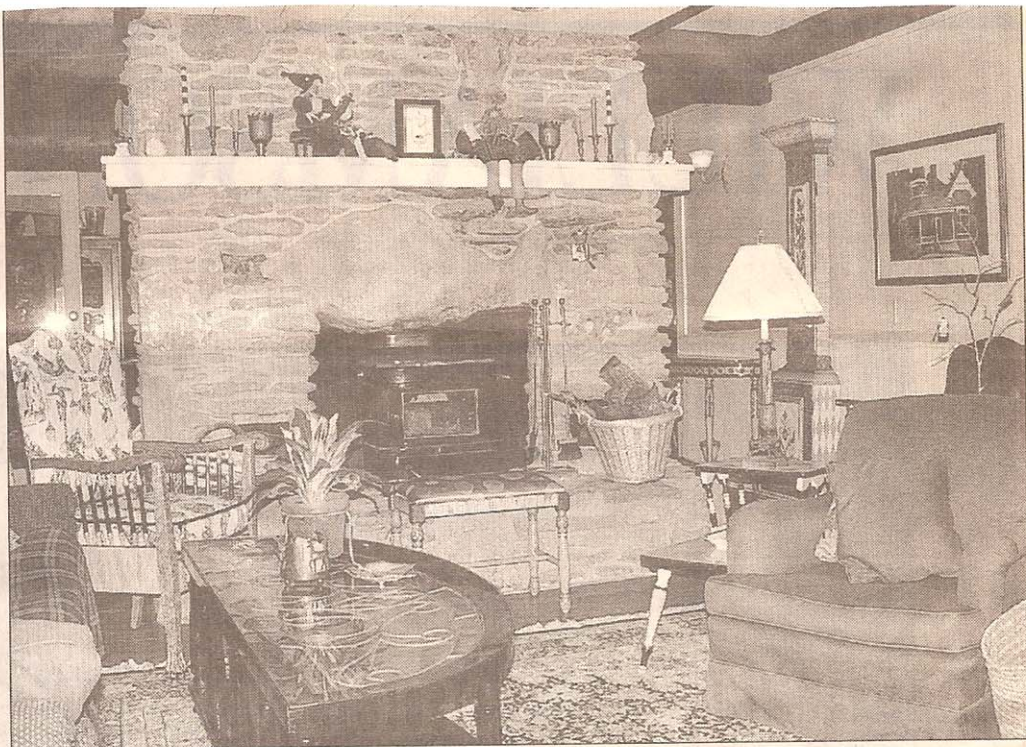
They also added a pool. Four woodsmen they met out in "a holler in Fairview," the Holmgrens wrote, extended the deck. "Whittler, Monroe, Dan, Bud and another man who never spoke but always whistled to the birds," used timbers from the property to create a pool deck and a tiki bar that looks more like something out of the popular 1960s cartoon, *The Flintstones*.

The Holmgrens didn't stop there. Their profiles were used to create the unique latticework design under the original deck. Then, they poured the front and side walkways where they embedded odd little items like keys, a pool table ball, sunglasses, tile, even an inch-long plastic nude baby doll making each step more of a treasure hunt. To add even more of a twist, they planted ferns in old, colored glass bottles, turned them upside down and buried the necks in the ground to outline the sidewalk edge with year-round miniature terrariums.

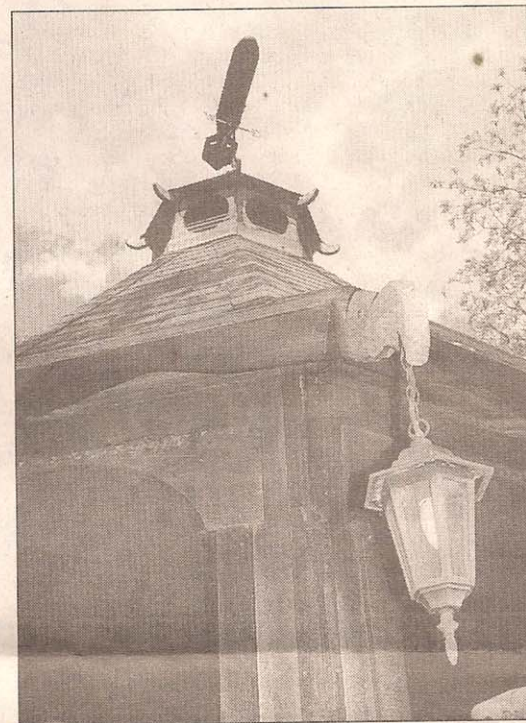
Even the stone pillars on the deck "have special meanings," the Holmgrens wrote. They came all the way from North Avenue Bridge in Milwaukee where as a young and a "little wild" girl, Susan Holmgren accidentally sideswiped a police car. When the bridge was rebuilt, she brought some columns back to Tennessee. And — as if you need to ask — they're now part of Fitch's deck.

As for the unusual lime green and periwinkle blue washed glaze walls and the 1950s Art Deco tiles and fern wallpaper in the kitchen, these creative touches also came with the house. Except for the Southwest pink walls in the master, Fitch admits, "All I did was move my furniture in."

Down in the basement, her studio came together as if it was just



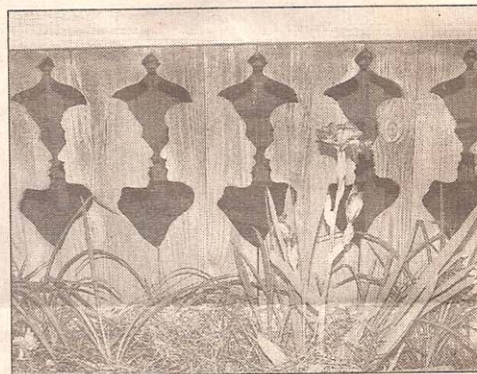
ABOVE: A 400-pound fish-shaped rock above the fireplace opening was the original owner's idea.



LEFT: Outside, artist Suzanne Fitch found a gazebo the previous owner designed and built, complete with a bomb as a weathervane and birds' heads as the rafter tails.

BELOW: At first glance, the deck lattice looks like a decorative design. Look closer, though, and you'll find the previous owners' silhouettes are featured as the pattern.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW WITT



waiting for her paints and raw furniture, which was featured in Williamson A.M. in 2000.

Throughout the first and second floors, the old weathered wood-sided house quickly wrapped this

colorful artist and her whimsical designs with an almost embrace, "We're glad you're home." ■