

Arts Council~Haliburton Highlands presents...

'Featured Artist'

Young entrepreneurial artist is proud to call Dorset home

By Mark Arike, Marketing Associate



Tara Gilchrist stands outside her Dorset studio on Harvey Avenue.

For Tara Gilchrist, art has always played a special role in her life. From the time that she was a little girl to adulthood, that creative relationship has been maintained and grown to the point where it's present from the moment she wakes up to the time that the lights go off.

At just 29-years-old, Gilchrist is demonstrating a level of enthusiasm and business sense that is quite remarkable for someone her age. Over the past two years, this Toronto native purchased a historic building in the heart of Dorset, transformed it into a fresh studio space and as a result, added to the already growing vibrant arts scene in the area.

"My business plan in high school was to be a cottage potter," explains Gilchrist from Chetolah Fresh Air Studio, located on Harvey Avenue. "This has been a dream that I didn't fully see happening, but subconsciously in my mind, it was what I always wanted."

When Gilchrist was a little girl, her parents placed her and brother into art classes outside of regular school hours. It was then that she worked with a variety of mediums and found the one she would truly fall in love with.

"Since then I have always been into clay," she says. "It was where I learned how to throw on the wheel."



After playing around with clay in her primary and high school years, she was encouraged (by her art class peers) to pursue postsecondary studies in the arts. She took that advice and enrolled at The Nova Scotia College of Art & Design University.

“I didn’t think I would get in [to the college] ... when I found out, I burst into tears because I was so happy.”

After finishing with a bachelor in fine arts in 2005, she returned to Toronto and worked various odd jobs – like many recent graduates do. Soon, the whole cottage potter concept came back to mind when she thought about the cottage her parents owned in a little place up north called Dorset.

With the endorsement of her parents, Gilchrist took her kiln to the cottage and set-up shop.

“I put my studio inside a small screened-in porch,” she says, while gesturing to indicate the size of the small confines she worked within.

One year ago, she learned that the historic barn building on Harvey Avenue was up for sale. At the time, Gilchrist approached the owner to see if he would consider renting her the space.

Surprisingly, he warmed up to the idea and gave her the go-ahead.

“I got the keys on my Birthday – April 13,” she recalls.

Along with the help of friends and family, she has made many upgrades to the building and continues to do so.

“In the past year it has seen a ton of changes; I’m constantly adding to it and doing more work.”

Through what she considers to be “some sort of miracle”, Gilchrist took ownership of the building in October of last year. And now, there seems to be no looking back.

“This really is my full-time career, and I’m really in it now,” she laughs.

At her studio, Gilchrist connects with the natural surroundings to create what she calls “relaxed and truly unique” pottery. That means you won’t find any two items that are exactly identical; this artist believes in variety and creating something different each and every time.

“If you order a set of dinner plates from me, they’ll be similar in size and shape, but they won’t be exactly the same in their design and look,” she proudly states.

And when it comes right down to it, she finds the most joy in knowing that her creations are being used and enjoyed by people of all ages.

“I’ll ask people to send me a picture when they’re having a family dinner and using my ceramic products,” she says. “Knowing that my functional pieces are being used in everyday circumstance brings me the most joy.”

At the studio, one can find practical items like bowls, platters, tumblers and jugs to decorative tiles – most of which are electric fired.

This summer Gilchrist is offering kids clay classes at her studio, which will be held on weekdays in July and August.

On June 9 at the Loft Gallery in Dorset, she’ll be the next featured artist in the Arts Council’s artist chat series. The free, informal event is open to the public and starts at 6:45 p.m.

To keep up with Tara, visit her web site at www.chetolah.ca or drop by her studio located at 1022 West Harvey Avenue in Dorset.

For more information about the artist chat, contact Jan McDonald at 705-766-2170.