

The Studio

OF PEGGY IMMEL

By Vicki Stavig

For the past three years, Peggy Immel has been happily painting in a studio south of downtown Taos, New Mexico. Although she says it's nothing fancy, it certainly meets the needs of the landscape painter, providing her with the space and privacy she needs to create the majestic scenes that have captivated her since she moved to the area 17 years ago.

Although Immel spends much of her time painting en plein aire, her studio has everything she needs when she is putting the finishing touches to her work, framing her paintings, or taking care of other business needs that come along with being an artist. Her studio is big and bright, not unlike the paintings that have earned her many awards.

"I had been doing portraits, when we lived back East, but didn't pursue them seriously until we came to Taos," Immel says. "It was an emotional response to this country. Taos is really special. The light is very different than in other places, partly because it's at a high altitude, so the skies are much bluer."

Before moving into her new studio, Immel had been painting in a bedroom at the home she shares with her husband Stephen on the outskirts of the city. Although her studio is located a mere two miles away from her home, in a sense, it seems worlds away. "We have five acres of bucolic, beautiful property [at our home], but my studio is in an industrial area," she says.

When she and Stephen moved to Taos, they purchased a small house, and Immel painted in the mudroom. Later, when they moved to a larger house, she painted in one of its three bedrooms. "It was maybe 12' by 12'," she says. "I was so cramped. That alone will make you become a plein air painter, because there's no room for anything. If I wanted to look at my painting from a distance, I had to go outside the room."

The move to Taos in 2002 was the latest in a series of places Immel has called home. She was born in Arizona but, because her father was in the military, the family moved often—to California, Alaska, Kansas, Washington, New





York, Georgia, and the Philippines, where she attended high school. During those years, she was interested in art and took her first art classes when she was just 10 and living in Kansas.

When Immel enrolled at Arizona State University, however, she did so with the intent of becoming an architect. But, after two years of study, she married Stephen, and the couple moved to California, where he began a career in the corporate restaurant world. Meanwhile, Immel was working in the architectural field, doing designs and renderings. "Architectural studies are wonderful for people going into art," she says. "There is a lot of training in drawing, design, and two- and three-dimensional work."

Three years after that move, the couple had a son—Garrett, who is now grown, living in Los Angeles, and has won three Emmy Awards for his work as a special effects makeup artist—and Immel decided to stay home and raise him. She also began to paint. Her medium was acrylics, her subjects were portraits.

Several more moves were in the offing for Immel, as Stephen continued his work developing and running chain restaurants in various parts of the country: Minnesota, Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Connecticut, where Immel began taking plein air painting classes. "I switched to watercolor and started painting outside," she says. "I learned how to mix colors and how to see and think about painting."

Although Immel began to enter her paintings in some shows, she says, "I wasn't actually selling my work, because I didn't really have the courage to. I thought my work wasn't good enough."

That changed, when Stephen retired and the couple moved to Taos. Immel had painted some landscapes before then, but the land and light around her new home provided an intense, new inspiration. "My landscapes are regional, but the majority are local," she says. "I want to paint a place I have seen and that resonates for me. The better I get to know an area, the more I enjoy painting it. I also paint in Wyoming and Colorado and have painted in Europe, but that was just for me."

Immel also paints some florals, saying, "I like the still life idea, because you can paint from life, no matter the weather. I do maybe one floral out of 50 paintings."

No matter what she is painting, however, Immel thoroughly enjoys working in her studio, located on the second floor of a two-story building in an area that

is home to several other metal warehouse type structures. The space, which encompasses more than 900 square feet includes skylights, two 3' by 6' windows, color-correcting fluorescent lighting, and enough room for Stephen, a photographer who specializes in black and white work, to set up when he is shooting portraits.

"I looked at all kinds of studio spaces here," Immel says. "Some were so nice you could live in them. We also looked at some cute, historic ones, but this one suited us."

Immel's studio encompasses a space that is 51' by 24' with an 8' by 14' cutout in one corner. Two windows—one on the north side, the other on the east—combine with skylights above to provide wonderful natural light, as she works. The space is organized by function, with half of the studio occupied by couches, chairs, and bookshelves that range from four to eight feet in height, while the rest is dedicated to Immel's working space. Occupying center stage are two tables she uses when framing her paintings.

"My studio is large enough that I can teach a workshop here for 10 to 12 people," she says. "I teach a five-day workshop every summer. We meet in the studio and then go out to paint."

The studio's northwest corner houses Immel's desk, computer, and easel, while the north wall features a large rack for storing frames, paintings, canvases, and photographs. Those racks run along the wall for almost 18 feet and rise up eight feet toward the ceiling. The floors are simple plywood painted a warm gray, while the ceiling is angled, rising to about 16 feet in one area and a little more than eight feet in the other.

"I try to be in here every day, but it varies with the seasons," Immel says. "When it's nice, I'm outside painting a lot. The ideal would be to be out in the morning and in the studio in the afternoon. I love being out of doors and experiencing the whole effect of it: the sounds, the smells, the light, the incredible variety of plants and animals. It is an adventure every time I set up my easel and paint. Even when I'm not painting, I am looking at the light and its effect."

"When I am painting, I am think-



ing about the scene and how I am impacted by it. I try to bring a sense of my feelings and thoughts to the canvas but, sometimes a viewer will have a response to a painting that is very different than what I was feeling as I painted it; both are valid."

Whether she's outside, soaking up every sensory detail around her, or inside the studio, adding minor touches to complete a painting, Immel is immersed in her work.

Outside, she absorbs the beauty around her; inside, she is thankful for her studio and the opportunity it affords her to close off the world as she works.

"I love this space," Immel says. "I love coming in, closing the door and shutting out the world, having that total privacy to paint." *AV*

Vicki Stavig is editor of Art of the West.



Welcome Autumn Rain, oil, 16" x 20"