

Artist adds website to widespread canvas

By Sylvia O'Hagan

Throughout the Rivertowns, the whimsical, stylish work of artist, illustrator, and designer Patricia van Essche stands out. From a painting of the Riviera Bakehouse's first storefront to Ardsley Hardware's business postcard to The Perfect Pair shoe store's logo on Main Street in Irvington — and countless children's rooms, painted teacher's gifts, and portraits in and of people's homes in between — van Essche's work has been in demand, largely through the "mom referral network," since she moved to Ardsley almost 11 years ago.

Now, the mother of three hopes to expand her freelance business with the help of her new website — www.pvedesign.com. Developed by Hastings-based web designer Kristi Stangeland (Mustang Web Designs), the website was created to showcase van Essche's work and build her business. Van Essche's goals include continuing her current specialties and also expanding to books and book covers, magazine assignments that combine home art and fashion, like Domino or Real Simple, and seeing her graphics in the quintessential creative forum that is The New Yorker magazine. "I frequently hear how my work is 'so New Yorker,'" explains van Essche. "Having a website gives a great presence and a starting point [from which] to build a business and forge ahead," she adds.

The new website showcases van Essche's dexterity. She has been an illustrator for the high-end clothier J. McLaughlin for over 20 years, creating lifestyle vignettes for their advertisements, mailing postcard pieces... even patterns for their ties. Pattern/print design has helped her maintain her fashion-designer footing, and she is currently working on some sweater designs for J. McLaughlin, including a silhouette design series in cashmere. Van Essche reports the website has already worked well for her, bringing in some exciting business leads from all over the country.

Van Essche's art background and training reflect a creative bent cultivated from an early age. "I love to make and create and, from the time I was little, I have honored that side of me," she says.

Born and raised in Louisville, Ky., van Essche attended the University of Cincinnati's acclaimed College of Design, Architecture and Art, where she received a degree in fashion design and was awarded the school's



CHRIS RIBEIRO/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Patricia van Essche stands under a ceiling mural she painted at a neighbor's house.

coveted "Golden Brush" award.

Fashion yields to family

A job opportunity in fashion design brought van Essche to New York, where she spent more than 15 years designing, mostly wovens, for Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, and Liz Claiborne. "I had some amazing

experiences," says van Essche. "I traveled often to Hong Kong, China, Japan, and throughout Europe — it was an exciting time." In the midst of all this excitement, van Essche had married her husband of now almost 20 years, John-Charles van Essche, a banker, and had twin sons, John-Paul

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

Van Essche

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

and Joseph — additions which made her glamorous, far-flung jobs a little more complicated to manage.

"I continued to work full throttle and then a new desire to be present, be there more for my children, became apparent when we moved into our house," explains van Essche of her outlook five years into motherhood. "I wanted to be more a part of their world, and when I did it, making the switch from a full-time career to a full-time mom was much more challenging than I thought."

Van Essche decided early on that she wanted to stay committed to her creative side, and her work. "I started by creating things to sell locally and also continuing to

freelance as jobs were granted."

Working from her home allowed van Essche more time to not only be with her children, which came to include her daughter Amelia, but become involved in the local arts scene. Soon van Essche was participating in Rivertowns Art Council activities, taking lessons at the 145 Palisade Street building in Dobbs Ferry, including oils lessons from artist Geoffrey Barbey of Hastings, and even assisting the administration of the Ardsley School District in interviewing new and interim art teachers. For work, van Essche segued into decorative arts commissions, painting murals and scenes on the walls and ceilings of homes, transforming rooms into works of art. She describes how for one particularly intense job, she transformed a 1-year-old's room into a garden aviary, right down to painted knobs on a dresser. These projects are the most time consuming and intensive projects of all her artistic endeavors,

says van Essche. "It's so demanding and physical," she says of decorative painting. "And, I've had to turn down some projects as I don't have the equipment, like scaffolding, needed to scale the huge rooms in some of these big, newer homes!"

A creative role model

As her children became school aged, van Essche lent her talent to classes with arts-related projects, like creating masks for a poetry focus and a repetitive art project based on Andy Warhol's famous Campbell Soup can series. "I'm involved in the schools as a parent and as an artist as needed," says van Essche. "I'm always asked to do artwork for fliers and talk to classes about being an artist." As her twins enter Ardsley High School this September, she hopes to be able to participate there as well, "inspiring artists to pursue their craft and focus on an area, be

it graphics, illustration or fine arts."

Though her work life is evolving, and easier to maintain now that her children are older (her daughter is starting third grade in September), van Essche continues to make parenting her focus. She considers her business her passion, and a way to teach her children some valuable lessons about work.

She notes that she feels her children need her around now more than ever, and not only for the frequently needed chauffeuring all Rivertowns moms can relate to. She finds that now her children are more interested than ever in what's going on in her work life. "My children really respect me for my work and always love to see my projects," explains van Essche. "They always ask, 'Hey mom, do you like doing that? How much are you getting paid for that?'" she continues. "I hope I give them a good lesson for the future when I tell them often: learn to love what you do and it will love you back!"