

Water Arts & Craftsmen

North Carolina's Fine Artists and Artisans

BY BRIAN CLAREY

Scott Taylor sits in the office of his newly-refurbished studio and gallery in downtown Beaufort, his desk piled high with cameras and drives and digital cards the size of matchbooks that hold thousands of photographs and millions of colors. He's working the mouse like a seasoned techno-geek, rifling through images from a two-day shoot on the wafer-thin screen of his desktop machine. Photography and technology go hand-in-hand these days, and though Taylor's been in the game since the late 1970's he stays abreast of the innovations and changes in the tools of his trade.

"Here's one of the guy fishing in the place he wants to be buried," Scott says, and turns the screen to show me the image of an exceptionally adroit septuagenarian flicking casts at the legs of his favorite duck blind. I was there when he took the shot, ducking down in the wobbly jonboat while alligators swam about as Scott directed the fisherman to position the craft in a spot that would perfectly complement action, theme and frame. He snapped the shot from a low crouch, adjusting to the sway of the unstable craft like a seasoned merchant marine. Before editing, the rough shot on his computer screen is a telling portrait of a man who's spent a lifetime outdoors and is clearly in his element.

The pristine white walls of Scott's studio are filled with stuff like this: stolen scenes that resonate like a ripple in the flats out on the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW).

He's got black-and-white shots of wild horses eating dune grass and frolicking in the surf; full-color magazine covers behind glossy frames; seascapes both tranquil and enraged with storm. His work appears in magazines, newspapers and journals all across the state and region, and we here at NCboatinglifestyle are fortunate to have him at the top of our cadre



of freelancers. And his work is collected in a book, "Coastal Waters: Images of North Carolina," which had its first printing in 2000.

In a manner of speaking, Scott Taylor is not from around here. He readily admits to a Cleveland upbringing and can talk Ohio col-

lege sports with even the most seasoned Buckeye. Yet he also grew up here. Childhood summers were spent with family in Beaufort and the waters around it. He moved to Chapel Hill as a youth to attend UNC and after graduating in 1978 with a degree in political psychology, he gave up a chance at grad school to take pictures for the Chapel Hill News and hone his photography skills as a journalist.

"I loved doing news," he says. "I took pictures of Michael Jordan on the basketball court. How exciting is that?"

From there he took a job with the Duke Marine Laboratory, which enabled him to move to Beaufort full-time in 1981. He stayed there nearly 20 years, eventually becoming the associate director of communications for Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment where he managed to shoot tens of thousands of photographs in between wranglings with the university system.

His life and his art are inextricably linked to the state of North Carolina, and her vast coastline in particular. The book showcases twenty years of cruising, and in it he presents his vision of this part of the state.

His familiarity with the constantly-changing cloud cover allows him to mirror it off the water's surface or cast it as spectacular backdrop to timeless water scenes: trawlers slinging nets, surf casters at Hatteras Point and the cottages on Portsmouth Island. The photographer's journey takes him out to Ocracoke, up the Chowan and White Oak Rivers, down to Shackleford Banks and of course in to the waterfront at Beaufort,

the place he calls home. "I always forget to bring my camera out here," he says. "It's such a pretty town. When the tide is high it's especially nice to look at."

The Beaufort waterfront is where he lives and works. The house is just a short stretch



from downtown with easy access to dock and tide (Scott is a reformed sailor with a slight case of powerboater's remorse – "I could never get anybody to sail with me," he says defensively). The studio and gallery sit a little closer to the heart of town, where you can hear the clamor on the docks and perhaps catch just a faint whiff of the catch of the day.

The building is a restored storefront building with a squared-off facade which he gutted and divided into equal parts gallery and shooting space, with a glassed-in hardwood office which is where we now sit, looking at the photo of the old man on the lake. Shot



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through a polarized lens, in the photo we can see each line in the man's face and the youthful gleam in his eye when he casts. We notice thick cobwebs gathered in the corners of the dented jonboat and the organic pattern the water lilies make in the background.

I think he's captured something here and I say so. But Scott merely shrugs his shoulders and keeps the mouse clicking like an electronic cricket, bringing up shot after shot, moment after moment that he's captured, this time, on little tiny memory cards as big as matchbooks at a seaside motel. He's got pages of this stuff.