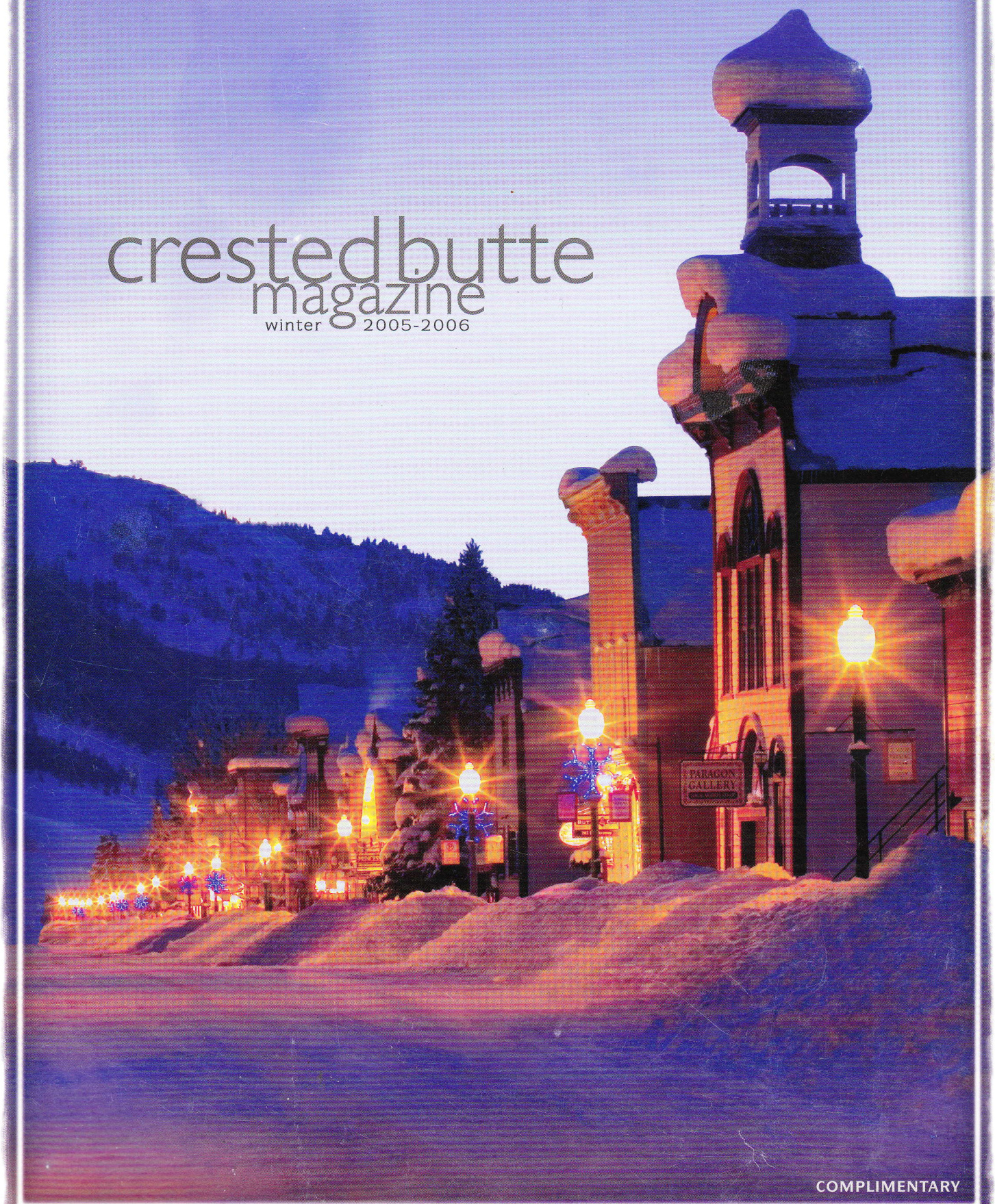


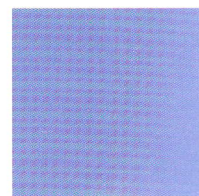
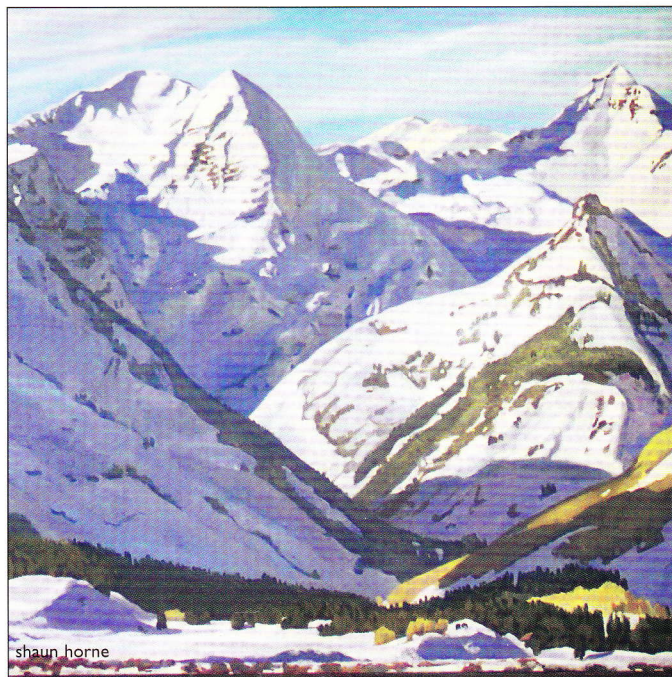
crested butte magazine

winter 2005-2006



COMPLIMENTARY

Braving it for beauty



In summer or winter, wilderness or downtown, plein air painter Shaun Horne seldom takes the easy road.

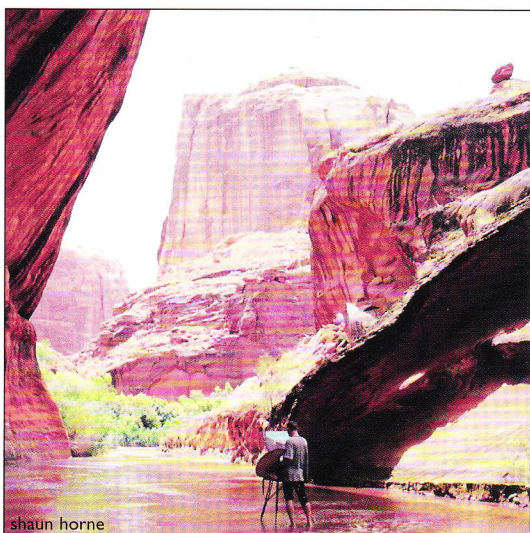
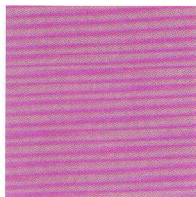
By Molly Murfee

Crested Butte locals will brave most any element Mother Nature can throw at us to achieve something adventurous, competitive or pleasurable: enduring the stinging pellets of a blizzard on the North Face Lift for that prized powder run, or 40 miles of mid-night skiing, with 6,000 feet of elevation gain and loss, for glory in the Elk Mountains Grand Traverse. In this land of the uber-athlete, we know how to push the envelope.

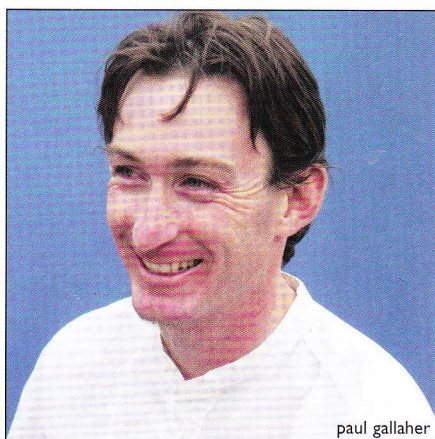
But one man braves the elements for a different reason. He will also take ice pellets in the face, or hike miles to his goal. But he does it for art. For laying vivid colors and light on a white canvas.

If you've been to Crested Butte, you've probably seen Shaun Horne, plein air painter at work. As most of us scurry from heated building to heated building through the snow berms that line Elk Avenue, Shaun perches himself on top of the snow-bank, his French easel anchored in the frozen mound, artist's palette splotted with the greens, blues, reds and browns of the landscape in front of him. Bundled as though ready to climb Mt. Everest, Shaun moves his brush over the canvas, glancing like a curious bird back and forth from the picture before him to the picture he is creating, seemingly oblivious to the murmur of traffic and people around him. Carefully he adds a curve to the summit of Mt. Emmons, darkens the shadows cast on the Eldo deck, works the highlights brightened by the afternoon sun.

You might find him tucked into a corner of a crooked alleyway, capturing the juxtapositions of the modern and the historic, the rough-hewn log cabin with a television antenna, a car passing, a stop sign. Depictions of the Union Congregational Church, the Old Town Hall and the two-story out-house convey the largeness of the mountains that wreathe the tiny town; Mt. Emmons, White Rock



shaun horne



paul gallaher

Neither rain nor snow nor miles of backpacking can keep Shaun Horne from applying paint to canvas.

j.c. leacock



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Ya Gotta Have Art

Mountain and Mt. Crested Butte loom above and bear down on his chosen scenes. Shaun's paintings capture the presence of the mountains as they intersect with a community. As the seasons change around him, his colors move through magnetizing autumn golds, the succulence of new spring greens, the subtle shades of the snow billows draping over buildings, fences and cars.

But Shaun's work goes far beyond the intriguing angles of buildings and mountains in Crested Butte. In creating what he calls "affirmations of beauty," he has traveled to far and remote places to wrap his eyes around the natural grandeur of the American wilderness.

"Beauty is real," he asserts. "Nature, which is everything you can see, is beautiful and that is a great consolation to people. It's a real joy to capture and share beauty in my paintings. It is not *my* beauty or *my* vision, but the shared beauty in our world."

Taking his art for a month into the backcountry of the desert West, Shaun painted canvases that expose the sultry streaked walls and arches of Escalante Canyon. For weeks in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, he detailed the striations and snowy nuances of those famous peaks. He journeyed to the heart of the Weminuche Wilderness to honor the spired summits of Jagged and Sunlight peaks.

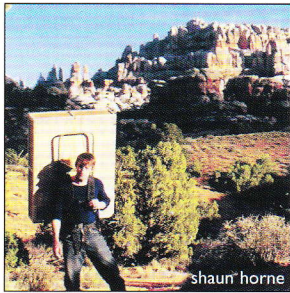
Shaun takes his painting to extremes that most plein air painters don't, so the trials and tribulations are also more extreme. Painting in the heat can be draining; snow and sand have the uncanny ability to entrench themselves in the oil paint. On long backcountry trips, excessive rain doesn't allow the canvases to dry. Wind moves the canvas, and the larger the canvas, the more apt it is to act like a sail rather than a recipient of paint. Changing seasons provide another set of challenges: the snow may melt, the autumn leaves may drop, the summer wildflowers may wither before a painting can be completed.

For these reasons, most plein air painters choose to use smaller canvases, working on a painting for only a single session of a few hours. But Shaun's paintings are large, an attempt to communicate the largeness of the landscapes he is painting. He expands the typical 9 x 12-inch into a 32 x 40-inch. His paintings involve five to ten sessions on each individual landscape, totaling 20 to 30 hours.

He also completes his paintings on site. Most painters of his genre choose to create smaller paintings or to expand their paintings



dusty demerson



shaun horne

Shaun Horne

The artist on ice and in the wilds.



shaun horne

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Photo by Alex Fenlon

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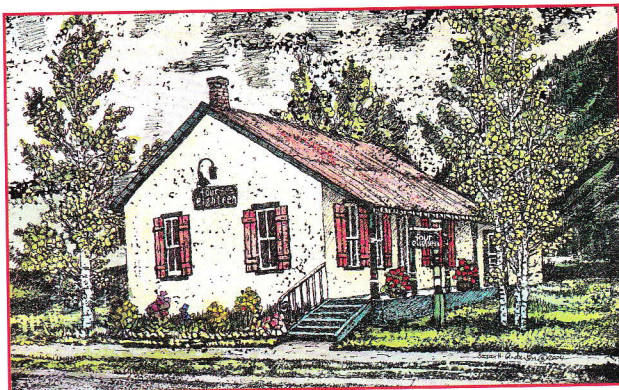
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in their studios from rough sketches done on site. Shaun feels, however, that his larger, on-site paintings allow a vibrancy and life to show through his work that might not otherwise be there.

"The size of my paintings allows me to have a longer, more intimate conversation with nature," he explains. "I am able to feel the full range of what nature is doing in a day. You get to a point where you can feel things with your eyes.

"Plein air painting is very challenging and exciting because the subject matter is constantly changing," he continues. "There are so many relationships – a glacier carving, man-made structures, seasonal changes. The relationships are cosmic where human and nature intersect. Any landscape is a whole history of forces. You may be seeing something that is 10,000 years old and something else that is only there for 30 seconds."

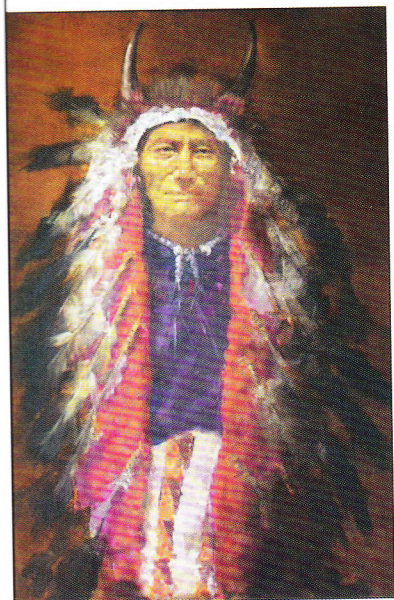
In addition to enjoying and capitalizing on the challenges of plein air painting, Shaun believes strongly in creating an art that anybody can understand and appreciate. He looks for the common thread, that which has no boundaries for interpretation or comprehension. He finds consolation and joy in creating this visual language, of reaching out to others through the common dialect of beauty. He wishes not to isolate through art, but to include.

"Painting makes a human a conduit – translating a conscious experience onto canvas," he says. "Once I was painting in the Utah desert for 30 days. The place was crawling with lizards. There might have been ten different lizards in one moment, mostly small. But there was this one spectacular ring-collared lizard. I felt like the desert was looking back at me, considering me, with these binocular eyeballs. Binocular vision is an earthly language, beyond fad or art, period. It's a conversation with you and me and the lizards and the rock. It is an essential, visceral part of our living experience. I'm not painting about how I see the world differently than you. I am painting about how I see it the same. We are in these bodies and our sight is one of the main ways we know about the world between us. My paintings are bowing to our shared vision. Observational painting can translate across time and cultural boundaries, it is a timeless common language. A lot of people in art believe in creating the language of the elite – art as a class separator. But art is art to the extent that it's connective."

Shaun also believes that his works educate on a fundamental and philosophical

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level, through which the viewer may learn as well as appreciate. The power of observation peeks around every corner in his conversation.

"I'm celebrating beauty and the experience of seeing. I want to emphasize the power of observation and would like to spark that interest in other people. With painting people become more sensitive to what they're seeing. What we see is usually not what we think we see. You've got to actually scrutinize, see past your expectations. There are ramifications for sustained observation. I like to think that if people were sensitive to what they saw, they would use their own observations to question what they're told."

Shaun learned early to question what he was told. Throughout his training and early career as a painter, he was told that his endeavors were risky, that he would never make it because landscape painting was passé. But Shaun took the risk to become a full-time painter, supporting his wife and two daughters by painting in plein air in a unique and challenging way.

"I like to think that if people were sensitive to what they saw, they would use their own observations to question what they're told."

There are times when his backcountry trips don't go quite as planned. A basin he plans on painting is inaccessible due to huge deadfall from the winter's extreme avalanche activity. Excessive rain doesn't allow him the time required to paint, or the sunshine to dry his canvases.

His choice of completing large-scale plein air paintings leaves him more vulnerable to the whims of nature. But Shaun perseveres, choosing not the closest or the most accessible peak, but the highest, the most remote. As he comments, "My pursuit of painting has not been a journey of a hundred steps, but of thousands. It's the risks you take that define you, not the ones you don't."

Crested Butte is full of risk takers, those who are willing to put their physical safety on the line for the chance to see what they are made of. Shaun also chooses challenge, discomfort, and places to paint where the potential to fail is high, but the rewards of success are even higher. He takes these risks for beauty and for the connection of it, conveyed through the silent conversation of paint and canvas.



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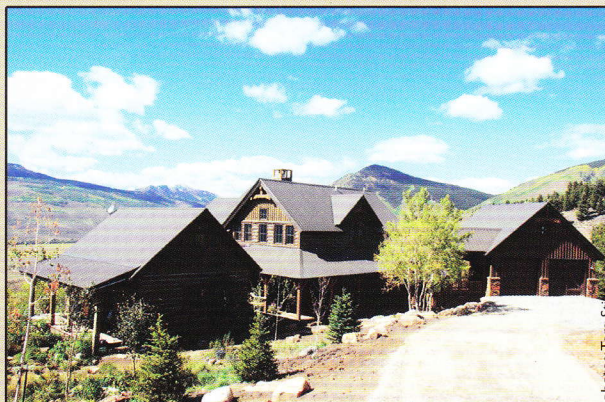
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