



A HOME WHERE

# art lives

by Lee Ann Sandweiss      photography by James Kellar

You've probably driven by the sprawling yellow villa on Bloomington's east side—the one with the life-size painting of Renaissance ladies peering out from a second story window—and had such thoughts as *What's the story with that house? I wonder who lives there? What in the world is it like inside?*

## Here are the answers:

It is a love story about art.

Susie Seligman, a fiber artist, lives there.

The inside is mind-boggling! Like nothing you have ever seen! The house, filled to the brim with art, is a work of art itself.



## A CREATIVE VISION

In 2002, when Seligman and her now-deceased husband, B.J., a radiologist, bought the house at 1114 S. Brooks Dr., it was a garden-variety 1950s ranch with a leaky basement. Their collective vision was to transform the structure into a uniquely artistic home, working studio, and gallery space for their growing collection of regional art.

Once the Seligmans got the leaky basement under control they turned their attention to the house's aesthetic overhaul, which involved gutting the structure, raising the ceilings, and painting the exterior "Gauguin yellow"—the color of countless villas in Italy that Seligman loves.

For help in the transformation, they turned to Susan Schutz from the Design Nook in Vincennes, Indiana, and Bloomington artist/builder Chris Martin.

Remembers Seligman, "We used the mantra, 'For better or worse.' We opened the house to make it breathe. I wanted light with a capital L, and I wanted to feel like I could walk out onto the land in any direction.

"Chris was instrumental in helping redefine the spaces and creating visual interest with the rounded walls and skylights. This gave us the wall space we needed to display our art collection. We bought art we liked from individual artists and created rooms or areas in the house dedicated to the particular work. This was always going to be an artists' house. Renovation was second."

They named their home Sigodlin (Si-GOD-lin), an Appalachian word meaning "slightly askew."

Nondescript rooms were transformed into veritable temples to showcase the works of individual regional artists. For example, the new entry tower, with its faux-coffered ceiling painted by local muralists John Thom and Jeffrey Thom, was created for three large abstract paintings by Carol Lowengrub, a Bloomington artist now living in New York. The master bedroom's Pompeii murals were designed by Isiah Killion and John Thom to showcase Betsy Stirratt's gold-leaf medical paintings. The lower-level media lounge was created to highlight Wayne Manns' jazz paintings, and the aqua bedroom evolved around Dawn Adams' *Stillwater Marsh* oil on canvas and Cappi Phillips' shell-mosaic dressing table.

The ornate main entrance features a faux-coffered ceiling by John Thom and Jeffrey Thom; the room was designed to showcase three large abstract paintings by Carol Lowengrub.



### OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:

John Thom's lifelike mural appears to be two Renaissance women peering from a turret window.

### TOP:

An acrylic mural of the night sky by David Wade and Veda Stanfield adds drama to the sitting-room ceiling. Dawn Adams' oil on canvas, *Dusk Cloud*, hangs on the red wall of bookcases.

### RIGHT:

Reza Pishgahi created the kitchen's hand-hammered copper backsplash. The kitchen window overlooks Suzanne Parker's acrylic mural, *The Nap*.



## THE PISHGAHI RAILINGS

The Seligmans admired the work of Bloomington sculptor Reza Pishgahi and commissioned him to do the entry lights—architectural fixtures of glass and copper with an aquatic feel—as well as stair railings and the kitchen backsplash.

“Initially, I told Susie that I didn’t make railings,” recalls Pishgahi, “but she called me again a few weeks later and asked if I would reconsider and said that I would have total freedom in the design. This was certainly appealing to me. Thanks to Susie’s persistence, since creating the railings for her I’ve gone on to design and create major sculptural railings in Bloomington, Indianapolis, and Carmel.”

The house, with its many layers of texture, pattern, and color, reflect Seligman’s fiber artist’s aesthetic. The epicenter of the house’s creative energy is her large studio in the lower level, where she creates one-of-a-kind and limited-edition art chairs for her business, Fiber Art Furniture. Almost every surface in the studio is covered with tall, tidy stacks and bolts of colorful fabric, and a seemingly endless array of clear boxes filled with curious trims and doodads lines its many shelves.

Art is everywhere and not just inside. Sculpture and pottery adorn the lawn, steps, and garden. On the fence, visible from the kitchen window, is Suzanne Parker’s mural, *The Nap*, which was inspired by a



Paul Gauguin painting. “Suzanne painted the mural in 1995 for the deck of a condo I owned out at Eagle Pointe,” explains Seligman. “It was taken down and stored for many years. When my neighbors built the fence a few years ago, I had the mural taken out of storage and installed so I would have something colorful in view.”

## A COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS

As the years have gone by, Seligman’s circle of artist friends has grown exponentially. “I think artists just find each other. I can’t remember how or when I met most of my artist friends,” she says. “I think that often one artist introduces another and then, before you know it, your community just expands. I met people in art school at IU, at the Fourth Street Festival, at Gallery North. It’s pretty easy to get involved with the art community if you are a collector or working artist.”

During the past decade, more than three dozen Bloomington artists have made contributions to Sigodlin. For several years they have convened there on a June weekend to hold their Awesome Artist Yard Sale, where they sell their artwork as well as gently used personal and household items. Seligman says that her husband, B.J., who passed away in 2011, especially enjoyed the event and the sight of the artists and the community at large hobnobbing on their front lawn.



### TOP LEFT:

*The Nap*, Suzanne Parker’s acrylic mural on the fence, was inspired by a Paul Gauguin painting. The mural is visible from the kitchen window.

### TOP MIDDLE:

Reza Pishgahi’s sculptural railing guards the stairwell to the lower level.

### TOP RIGHT:

Seligman at work in her studio in the house’s lower level.

### LEFT:

The lower-level media lounge has a jazzy nightclub vibe and features David Wade’s reproduction of Paul Colin’s *La Revue Nègre* lithographs of Josephine Baker (left) and Wayne Manns’ oil on canvas, *Ella* (right).

### ABOVE:

Cappi Phillips’ shell-mosaic dressing table is a focal point in the aqua bedroom.

### RIGHT:

Artists of Sigodlin include (back row, l-r) Dawn Adams, Carolyn Rogers Richard, Reza Pishgahi, Seligman, Linda Meyer-Wright, Cappi Phillips, Jeffrey Thom, and (front row) John Thom and Isiah Killion.



## A PRECEDENT IN ENGLAND

Other homes centered around art, similar to Sigodlin, exist but are rare. Perhaps the most famous is Charleston Farmhouse in East Sussex, England. In the early 20th century, it was the home of writers Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant and the country retreat for the artists, writers, and intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group, who decorated its rooms with murals, painted furniture, ceramics, paintings, and textiles.

## MUSIC, TOO, IN THE FUTURE

While Sigodlin is an amalgam of the visual arts, there are plans to incorporate the musical arts as well. Katie Dukes Walker, Susie's daughter who has a master's degree in vocal performance, was giving informal recitals at the house when she was a student at Bloomington High School South. Today, Katie and her husband, Michael, who is pursuing a doctoral degree in French horn at the IU Jacobs School of Music, hope to revive the recital tradition.

"To me, Sigodlin is one giant piece of art," Michael says. "Every aspect of the house has layer upon layer of art. I think it would be a great place to collaborate with local musicians and colleagues and hold intimate house performances there."

Adds Katie, "My parents started out to build a house, but what they ended up doing was creating a celebration of artists in the community."

As this younger generation prepares to carry the torch of creative collaboration at Sigodlin, Seligman is reflective about the changes in her home and in her life.

"Someone else will eventually live at Sigodlin," she says. "The gardens may disappear, the rooms will be painted other colors, but the happiness we have known here has been profound. To have become dear friends with all the artists who have contributed and brought beauty and elegance to my family and our home and to be loved and supported by such a lovely gentleman as B.J.—one could not ask for more." ✨



The master bedroom's Pompeii murals were designed by Isiah Killion and John Thom to showcase Betsy Stirratt's gold-leaf medical paintings.

## ARTISTS AT SIGODLIN

- James Acord and Susie Shie *art chair*
- Dawn Adams *oil painting*
- Jan Arborgast *pottery*
- Julie Bloom *jewelry*
- Kristin Busch *pottery*
- Laura Chaiken *enamel*
- Patricia Cole *oil painting*
- David and Marilyn Ebbinghouse *sculpture*
- Jacob Gardener *acrylic painting*
- Lynn Gilliatt *oil pastel*
- Marilyn Greenwood *jewelry*
- Chris Gustin *weaving*
- Terry Howe *metal sculpture*
- Tamar Kander *oil painting*
- Isiah Killion *acrylic mural*
- Carol Lowengrub *oil painting*
- Bonnie Gordon Lucas *illustration*
- Barb Lund *pottery*
- Wayne Manns *oil painting*
- Chris Martin *architectural design*
- Linda Meyer-Wright *mixed media, acrylic painting*
- Mary Ann Orr *surface design, basketry, and photography*
- Suzanne Parker *acrylic mural*
- Cappi Phillips *mosaic*
- Reza Pishgahi *metal sculpture and fused glass*
- Carolyn Rogers Richard *mixed media, painting*
- Larry Spears *pottery*
- Veda Stanfield *acrylic mural*
- Betsy Stirratt *oil painting*
- Peggy Taylor *weaving*
- Sandy Taylor *jewelry*
- Jeffrey Thom *acrylic mural*
- John Thom *acrylic mural*
- Rosemary Trubitt *quilting*
- David Wade *acrylic mural*
- Megan Winn *art books*
- Phyllis Zajicek *fused glass*



Jeffrey Thom suggested the name Sigodlin for the house, an Appalachian term meaning "slightly askew." John Thom carved the name into a cedar plank per Chris Martin's design plan for the porch. The house is painted "Gauguin yellow"—a shade reminiscent of Italian villas.

1: Child's Monkey Recliner, by Susie Seligman, sits in front of a turquoise folk-art cupboard from New Mexico.

2: The arch in the entry is a recycled art piece purchased from Foursquare Antiques, Furniture & Fine Art. Originally in a church, it was painted by John Thom. Above the arch hangs a hand-carved wooden elk head.

3: Two of Seligman's art chairs covered with Indian textiles flank a wall hanging that incorporates hand-quilting, embroidery, beading, appliqué, and trapunto techniques, with hand-printed fabric and photo emulsion transfer images.

4: Sculptured "river" lights by Reza Pishgahi are vivid on the front porch when lit at night.

5: Suzanne Parker's acrylic mural, *Girl in Garden with Striped Dress and Royal Cat of Bali*, enlivens a plain fence.

6: One of a series, Betsy Stirratt's anatomical gold-leaf painting of head growths.

7: Dawn Adams' large oil on canvas, *Stillwater Marsh*, established the aqua bedroom's water theme.

