

Art & the country life

Renowned artist Terry Redlin spent much of his life getting back to his first love—the country

“Come on in,” Terry Redlin says with a huge smile as he swings the front door open to his Watertown, S.D., home. He leads the way across a sparkling black-and-white granite floor through the entryway, past the detailed cabinetry in his spacious kitchen, and into the radiant white lights of his art studio.

“Pull up a seat—but not that one,” Redlin says, motioning to a blanket-covered chair next to his. “That’s Be Ge’s.”

Be Ge, Redlin’s bichon frisé dog, scampers into the studio among dozens of half-finished paintings resting against the wall and leaps into his cushioned seat, claiming his throne.

Redlin leans back in his chair with crossed legs, and rests his hands behind his head. Gazing out his studio windows to the sparkling water of Lake Kampeska, he grins. In this moment, Redlin shines with contentment and happiness. He is home.

Voted “America’s Most Popular Artist” for eight years in a row by *U.S. ART* magazine, Redlin depicts life in a simpler time on canvas, arousing emotions of nostalgia and sentiment in viewers. He credits his inspiration to the spot where his life began.

Redlin grew up in Watertown, playing on the shores of the lake where he now lives. Although he traded his country life to chase the corporate dream early in his career, somehow, he always knew that he’d find his way home.

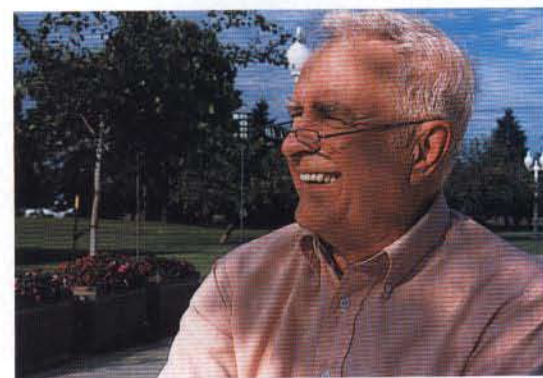
Boyhood memories. “This very spot is where I fished off the beach when I was 10 years old,” Redlin recalls.

As a boy, Redlin had dreams of becoming a forest ranger or game warden. But, when he was in high school, a motorcycle accident took his leg and forced those dreams to change.

“To make a living, I had to leave the area and get into something I could do sitting down,” he recalls. “Art was the thing.”

At 19, he married his high-school sweetheart, Helene. They moved to Saint Paul, Minn., where Redlin began art school. For many years, they lived in cities while Redlin pursued careers with publishing and architectural companies in Minnesota and South Dakota. All the while, he never forgot his roots.

“I just remember being so homesick, so we came back to Watertown every chance that



Far left: Containers filled with Redlin’s vast paintbrush collection cover a studio desk. **Above:** Redlin has found joy in returning to his boyhood home of Watertown, S.D. “It’s like being home forever,” he says.

we could,” Redlin recalls.

He knew that in order to make it back to Watertown, he’d need a change of careers.

“I said to one guy, ‘I’m going to be a





wildlife artist,” Redlin says. “He laughed. They all laughed. But I was dead serious.”

He drew up a five-year plan to make art his full-time work, and devoted every spare moment to photographing and researching wildlife, honing his skills.

Soon, people and country scenes made their way into his artwork—something new to the “wildlife art” world. Redlin’s combination worked. Within three years, his art was generating four times his corporate salary.

Heading back. On a routine trip back to Watertown, Redlin discovered that a house on the shore of Lake Kampeska was for sale. “It was love at first sight,” he recalls. “I have 500 feet of shoreline, right where I fished as a boy.”

Redlin’s son, Charles, decided he’d also leave the city behind for the lake’s shores. Today, they’re neighbors.

“Everybody is happy now,” Redlin says.



Above: “Spring Fever” was inspired by Redlin’s childhood memory of flying kites from a hill in Watertown, S.D. **Left:** Redlin’s son, Charles, built this boat, which provides hours of enjoyment for father and son.

Before moving, he was worried that Watertown wouldn’t be the same as the childhood memories he cherished.

“I was right—it’s not the same,” he says. “It’s a thousand times better. I love it. It’s like being home forever.”

Redlin says that living in the country is “everything” to him. “When you live in the country, you wave at this guy and that guy



Top left: Wildlife art of Canada geese is transformed into a camper's paradise in "Evening Solitude."

Above: Redlin and his bichon frisé dog, Be Ge, enjoy relaxing on the shores of Lake Kampeska.



Above middle: "Trimming the Tree," one of Redlin's annual holiday paintings, depicts a festive country celebration. **Above:** Redlin's patio overlooking Lake Kampeska is a source of relaxation for the Redlin family.

when you pass," he says. "It's a way of life. I'm about as content as you can get."

Redlin's childhood memories of growing up in Watertown are filled with visions of fishing, hunting, and taking in the outdoors.

"I've done so many paintings that are take-offs of when I was a kid," Redlin says.

He recalls scenes of kids flying kites and fishing on the river, and visions of farmers laboring in the fields.

"All of those memories came back when I came back," he says with a smile.

Giving back. Each year, Redlin creates two or three paintings for his "conservation series." And, in the past 25 years, he's donated more than \$40 million to conservation groups like Ducks Unlimited through monetary and print donations.

To additionally help conservation groups, Redlin has set aside almost \$280,000 to begin a freshwater biological reserve to study the effects of pollution.

Redlin's gift to his community is the Terry Redlin Art Center in Watertown, which houses more than 130 of his original oil paintings. The

center has drawn more than 1.5 million guests since it opened five years ago. Admission is free, and all proceeds from gift-shop sales are returned to the center's foundation.

Julie Ranum, executive director of the center, says that many center visitors have developed an emotional tie to Redlin's work.

"We see people come through the center who are so emotionally connected," Ranum says. "They are emotional enough that you can see tears in their eyes."

Grinning, Redlin looks away and shrugs, obviously humble about his work's success.

"I'm a run-of-the-mill person with a boyhood memory," he says. "I just hope the art gives these people the good memories that it gives me when I paint it."

Where he belongs. Redlin says that since he's returned to the place of his boyhood memories, he doesn't need a vacation.

"Since I'm back home, this is vacation," he explains. "My whole life revolves around this place right here."

Redlin's life today is a relaxed one. Seven days a week, it's often the same. He alternates painting sessions with walks on his treadmill, quick trips to town, boating, or walks on the beach. "That's the routine, and I love it," he says. "I never get bored."

Dream chaser. Years ago, Redlin took a chance, leaving the corporate world behind to follow his passion—art. That passion has led him to the place of his boyhood dreams. Yes, he's finally made it home. **■** *By Christy Couch*