



Jane Morris

Renaissance Man: Artist and wine expert Peter Hiers stands next to his steel sculpture "Sliver," at the Winfield Gallery in Carmel. Hiers' piece "Lineage," made from Monterey Pine, is below.

Force of Nature

Peter Hiers brings steel to life. **By Brett Wilbur**

Peter Hiers likes to talk about sculpture in abstract terms. He talks about things like "theology of form." But he is careful to make a distinction between the tangible pieces of steel and wood he shapes and the more ephemeral world he is reaching for.

"I never like to use the word 'spiritual,'" he says. "There are too many groovy connotations."

Hiers is standing in front of his piece, "Sliver," at the Winfield Gallery in Carmel. It's a six-foot vertical chunk of steel with a long triangular notch hollowed out that exposes folds of sanded metal formed into elegant twists.

"I like to get at what is inside, what's left after the outside layers are taken away," he says. "What's hidden."

"I almost called it 'Splinter,' he says. "There's a sense of precariousness, a sense of balance; you wonder, why is it still standing?"

The size, like many of his other pieces, is of a scale that manages to make a statement yet not be imposing.

"The vertical design of the piece is about a simplification of the human form," Hiers says. "It's designed so we can have a relationship with it and walk around it and experience it."

Hiers moves over to a piece called "Lineage," made of blocks of Monterey Pine heartwood stacked 76 inches tall. He collected the wood from downed trees from winter storms.

"They are part of the same tree," he says. "I tried to construct it so the blocks are linked together." Hiers points to some chewed out chunks of wood.

"My favorite part is the Monterey pine beetles had lunch here. I see such a spiritual beauty in it," he says, slipping and using the taboo word.

"We humans think we are separate from evolution," he says. "But I want to

expose that evidence of life; that we will continue, no matter what travesties we wreak on the planet."

Hiers, the son of a theology professor at the University of Florida, got his start in sculpture working in ceramics at the University of Michigan. Then, 12 years ago, he moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

"I showed a lot and sold a lot of work, but felt a great financial pressure to sell that interfered with my creativity," he says.

Hiers soon took on a gig that became his "meal ticket:" working in the wine industry. It was a lifestyle that proved perfectly suited to his art. By day, Hiers ran the wine-buying program for an award-winning Santa Fe restaurant and, by night, he continued his sculpting, without the pressure of having to create art for sale.

"The wine industry ended up being a creative outlet for me," he says. "It became another place for me to shape a vision."

In 1997, Hiers was offered the job as cellar master at the Highlands Inn by local restaurateur David Fink, and moved to Carmel. After a few years, Hiers became wine director for the Highlands, working such renowned events as the Masters of Food and Wine.

At about the same time Hiers took the job at the Highlands, he also began experimenting with metal sculpture. After a few classes at Monterey Peninsula College and Hartnell College, Hiers began creating his own patinas to put over some of his steel sculptures, giving them the appearance of stone or wood.

"Pericarp Fragment," shown at the Carmel Art Association, has almost the look of fossilized stone, but is made of steel.

"Pericarp' is a botany term, meaning seed vessel," Hiers explains. "It's an entity designed to protect life as it's carried forward. That's how I view humanity. Each of us,

individually and as a species are guardians of life. Evolution is not a theory, but a process I see."

Hiers says that a day spent alone in the New Mexico badlands created an epiphany that gave him hope for humanity's future.

"I was in this seemingly barren, sculpted land, but then I looked around and there was so much evidence of life," he recalls. "There were mouse droppings, and seedlings, and little grasses, and Pinion trees, so short and tenacious. I found it inspiring. It gave me a sense of faith that life is going to be fine. No, I don't like that we are polluting and displacing species, but there's something remarkable about life moving ahead."

Between frequent trips up to Napa County to visit with wine makers, the Bay Area to visit with artists' groups, and his wine brokerage business, Hiers has also created a series he calls *US 101*, made with exploded tire rubber. Hiers collects blown-out tires from the side of the highway and arranges the pieces in designs, such as a piece called, "Vortex."

"Vortex' is the giant sucking sound from all the detritus our culture has created," he says. "I picked up hundreds of pounds of rubber by the side of the highway. The tire has the imprint of our industrial design, but is exploded by the forces of nature. Natural forces have the final say."

It's an art form that's won him awards, and has also sliced up his arms.

"It looks sensual and soft, but if you touch it, it will cut your skin," he says. "It's vicious."



PETER HIERS' WORK IS ON EXHIBIT IN CARMEL AT THE CARMEL ART ASSOCIATION, DOLORES BETWEEN 5TH AND 6TH, AND AT THE WINFIELD GALLERY, DOLORES BETWEEN OCEAN AND 7TH. 372-6697 OR E-MAIL PETERHIERS@NETEZE.COM.