



I-Park Foundation, Inc.

Photos and profile by Caryn B. Davis

Picture an intimate setting where artists are given the time and space to work uninterrupted. A place of such exquisite beauty it naturally inspires creativity. An environment so immersive the artistic spirit flourishes, and you will have imagined I-Park Foundation, Inc., an artist's retreat in East Haddam, Connecticut.

I-Park is a non-profit organization dedicated to the fostering of the arts. It was co-founded by Ralph Crispino and Joanna Paradis who in 2001 had become concerned about the state of the arts in this country.

"I didn't think the arts were in good shape. My theory was people were rushing it to market too soon; but maybe if they spent more time with their work, they could get it to an exceptional state of impact and completion," says Crispin, I-Park's executive director.

"We discussed the concept of creating an artist colony where people could block out a certain amount of time they wouldn't have otherwise," adds Paradis, board member and treasurer for I-Park.

They purchased a parcel of land comprised of woodlands, wetlands, wild fields, forests, and cliffs, along with a 1850s house renovated to accommodate artists attending the Artist-in-Residence program, which runs from April through December. The program is only open to six or seven artists at any given time.

They share the living quarters and have a talented, supportive staff at their disposal so they can focus their full attention on their art.

Each is given a private studio, but there is a barn available for large-scale work. The studios offer a solitary experience; but if the artists wish to interact, there is a common area, kitchen, a lending library filled with art books, and many walking trails. The group arrives and leaves at the same time spending one month together so there are no disruptions, but rather

opportunities for bonding and collaboration. Meals are taken together to cultivate dialog, and four times a week a professional chef prepares dinner to give the artists more time with their work.

The residency is open to a variety of genres including music composition, sound sculpture, architecture, creative writing, landscape and garden design, the visual arts, and the moving image, though many artists work in more than one discipline.





It costs \$5000. for one artist to participate. Funds are raised through private donors, grants, and I-Park's Trail Sponsorship Program where the general public can sponsor one of their many pristine paths. While room and board is covered, along with travel for international artists, art supplies are not. There is however, an abundance of natural materials like wood and stone and an area containing leftovers from twelve years of art installations. In typical I-Park fashion, one artist took all those recycled remains and refashioned it into a creation now known as the Junk Trail.

The artists are chosen by a panel of jurors and are required to fill out an application, submit a bio, artist statement, work samples, and a project they would like to start, continue, or complete during their stay, though it is perfectly acceptable if the project changes upon their arrival as it often has.

"The work samples are the most important, but we often look at the project and ask ourselves, is this person likely to get anything in particular out of an I-Park residency? Could they do this in their basement, or do we have something special to offer them; or maybe they have



something special to offer us in helping to achieve our mission," says Crispino.

At the end of each session, I-Park hosts an Open Studio so the general public can meet the artists, see their work, and tour the grounds to experience the land and see the many sculptures set amongst branches, brush and streams.

I-Park's mission is to nurture the creative process. But their subsidiary goal as an organization is to take some of the ideas they have learned and experiment with them. Their Environmental Art Program was born from this ideal. Artists from all over the world come for 3 weeks to produce art on the land.

"The only thing we insist on is site responsiveness. The piece must be created for a specific site and make the viewer believe that piece could only exist in that particular space," says Crispino.

Unlike the residency program where the artists are not required to finish their pieces, during this program they are. On September 21, 2013, I-Park will host their 4th international, multi-disciplinary Environmental Art Biennale. The public is invited to witness all the wondrous installations on exhibit throughout the grounds.

"It started off as just environmental sculpture; people building things with sticks. But there were people who wanted to challenge the convention





and use steel, for example," says Crispino. "We have now opened it up to all disciplines including language and performance art, visual art, music composition, architecture, landscape and garden design, and sound sculpture. We wanted everyone to play."

Since their inception, I-Park has hosted over 600 artists from 40 countries.

Luiza Kurzyna is a New York City based artist who came to I-Park for the Artist-in-Residence program. She intended to work on an idea she had for interactive playthings, but found herself so drawn to the land, she

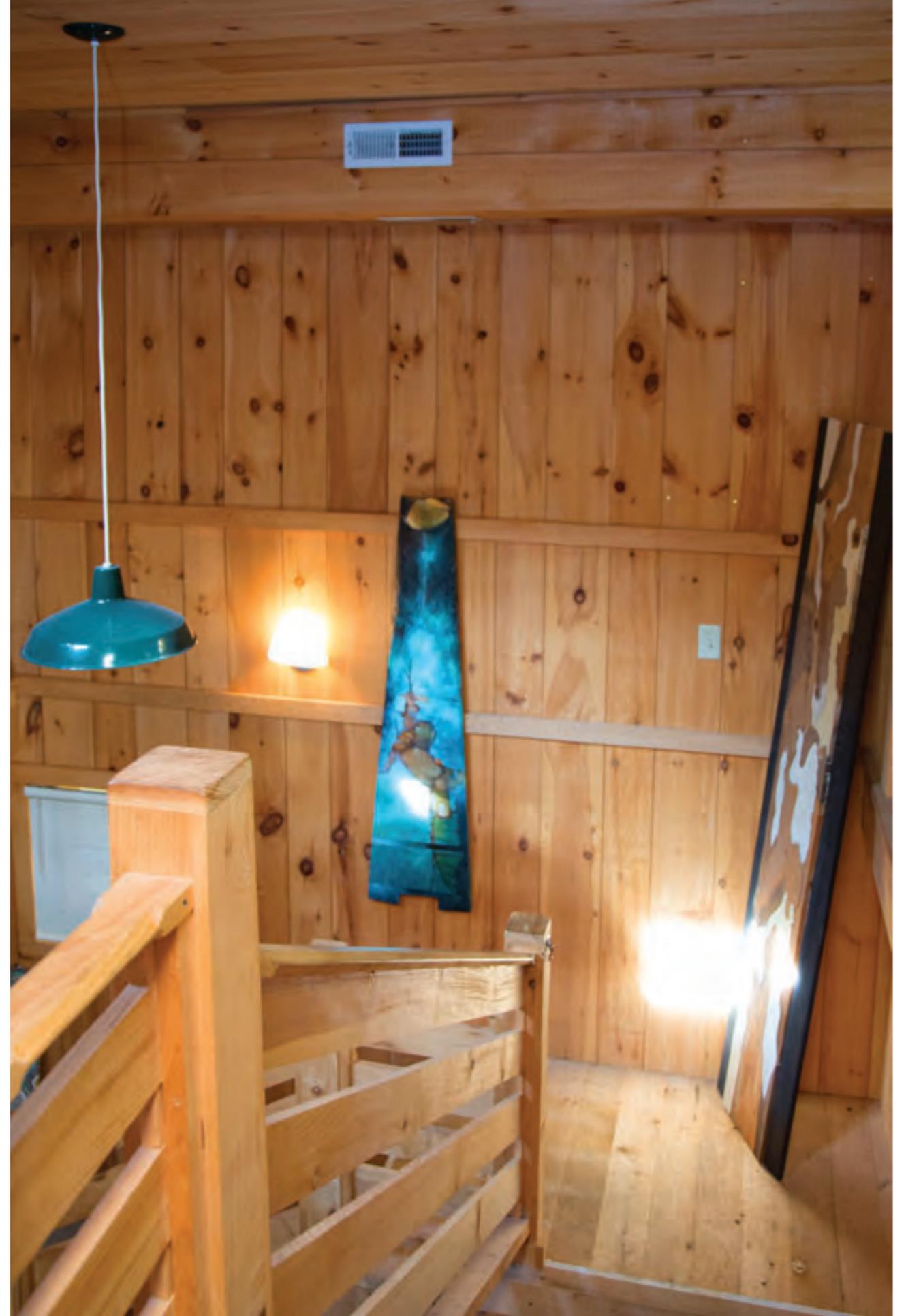
designed and built a site-specific installation instead.

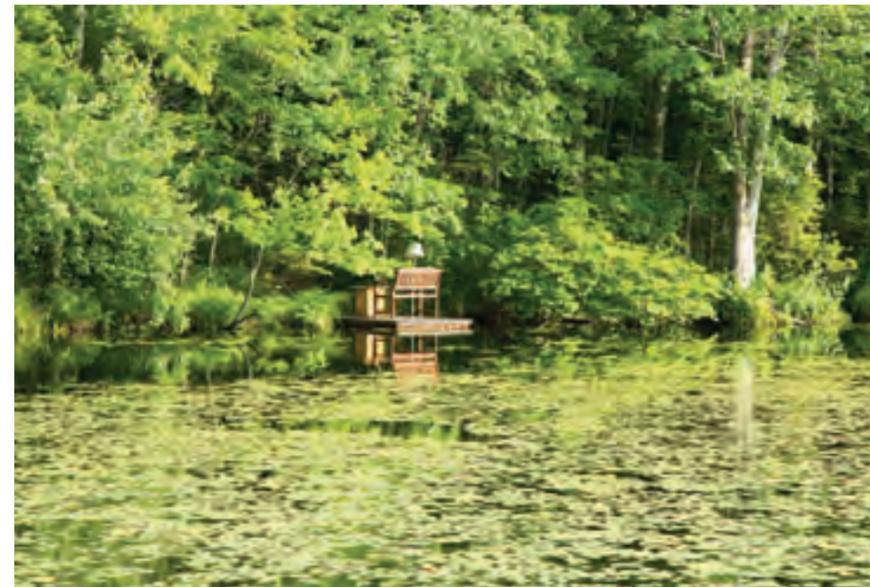
"The nest was inspired by all the other sculptures here, but also by the beauty of the land, and by wanting to relax and sit and take it in by having a really comfortable space in the woods. It was something I was craving, and I usually make what I crave figuring other people might need that too."



I made it with pool noodles that are used for swimming. I was able to make a coiled nest-like structure with a love seat shape to create the most luxurious outdoor experience I could give. It's the plush softness of the inside bridged with the natural beauty of the outside. It's not just about what it looks like but what it feels like. I was aiming for it to be hidden away. When you come around the curve of the trail, you can't see it. So when you come upon it, it's an overwhelming feeling of color and warmth.

This was a great opportunity to use the land and the space to talk to other works that were already here. It was a nice challenge. I really felt engaged the whole way through."





Mason, the gardener, helped me collect some bottles he had dug up. I washed them and dried them out. The staff is so enthusiastic with any idea we have had, and they try to help make it happen.

It's also been great to be exposed to other artists, genres, and mediums. I am the only writer. It's been great to collaborate. I had my first chance to participate in a performance with another artist's project. Visiting their studios to see what they have been working on has been fantastic. It's the best residency."

Although I-Park has maintained a low-key profile to ensure that their artists have the solitude they require, it has perhaps, in turn, made "I-Park something of an unknown quantity, even an enigma, in the local art scene". But since acquiring non-profit status, they are engaging the community more in their programs to share the experience of art with all.



Sara Hughes came to I-Park from Georgia to finish a collection of poems for her dissertation. Initially she was going to write about the experience of being an identical twin, a southerner, and growing up in the

Bible Belt. While she crafted 40 poems in the month she was there, which is more than what she wrote during the 4 years leading up to her stay, her work took an unexpected turn.

"When I got here and saw the landscape, I wanted to add something to it. But I don't know what or how as I am not a visual artist. I have always been fascinated with this idea of messages in a bottle. I saw a bottle while walking one of the pond trails and thought, what if there had been a message in that from somebody a few years ago? Then I thought, what if I did that? What if I put all the poems I wrote here in bottles and just hid them all over the property for people to find...almost like an Easter egg hunt. The person can choose to open it, read it, keep it, or put it back.

I have an idea where I want certain poems to be placed so they fit into the landscape since some of the ideas for the poems came from me just walking around. This one called "Pond Fishing" I want to put in the floating living room on the pond. This one called "The Tire Swing" I want to put by the swing. Some bottles are dictating which poems go in it. This beer bottle has the poem entitled "Last Call." The contemporary wine bottle has a poem about a very contemporary experience of hanging outside a slinky bar. This Yoo-Hoo bottle is quirky for a quirky poem. This blue bottle is my favorite. Inside is a love poem for my husband. It's going home with me.

For more information on how the public can participate in I-Park's various activities, become a volunteer or intern, attend an open studio, workshop or symposium, or make a donation, log onto www.i-park.org.

