

SusanDaileyAvogadrosNumberTextTVS

Susan Dailey/Avogadro's Number

By Tim Van Schmidt

It's the dream of every artist- to have your work shown in a place where people see it every day. For Fort Collins artist Susan Dailey, that dream has come true through the murals that she paints in public places throughout the region. That includes a mural in Rockwell Hall at C.S.U., a historical mural in Berthoud, work in Estes Park and for the Fort Collins Museum.

Dailey's most prominent work, however, could be the fanciful universe she has created on the walls at Avogadro's Number, a popular restaurant in Fort Collins. Thanks to Dailey's artistic contributions over a stretch of twenty years, the walls at Avogadro's have become covered with exotic landscapes peopled with unusual characters, all painted with a sense of both mystery and whimsy.

"What really makes it exciting is that it is still building and still evolving even after twenty years," Dailey said recently.

Nobody seems to know when the first mural work appeared on the walls at Avogadro's, although 1976 is the best guess. It started on the north inside wall of the restaurant where the abstract imagery of several area artists mixed together. Dailey was initially hired in 1981 to work on the north outside wall, which had already been painted with a sky blue background and a small, detailed castle in the clouds in a corner. Dailey, who was also painting oversized reproductions of album covers for Rocky Mountain Records at the time, took over the fantasy theme of the existing painting and created her own world based on J.R.R. Tolkein's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy of books.

As she began work on the inside walls, Dailey worked around the already existing artwork, including the mural paintings and a series of macramé hangings, trying to "build on the history" of the previous work. Expansion of Avogadro's into the next building to create a showroom and a bar provided Dailey with even more areas to decorate.

While the mood of Dailey's work at Avogadro's is strange and dreamlike, the characters painted on the walls are often based on real life. They might be friends of the artist, relatives of owner Rob Osborne, longtime employees of Avogadro's or loyal patrons. While many consider it an honor to be chosen to appear on Avogadro's walls, Dailey insists that there is no real selection process.

"The way people get into the paintings is random. When I need an idea, they just come of their own accord," Dailey said.

For the current project, painting newly remodeled areas in the front dining room of the restaurant, Dailey did not work alone. Feeling the pressure of the construction deadline, she appealed for help that came from every direction.

"The idea came to paint the duct work to look like logs, but there just wasn't enough time for me to finish by myself," Dailey said. "So a bunch of cashiers joined in and some guys from the bar. Over the course of the project, probably 20 different people worked on the logs."

These are high times indeed for Avogadro's Number, which just celebrated the grand reopening of the restaurant with a reception that attracted over 400 well-wishers.

"For me, it was the greatest day in my life, professionally speaking," Osborne said. "It gives me the motivation and the enthusiasm to continue and build on."

Avogadro's Number will be celebrating the completion of Dailey's most recent artwork in the dining room area with a public reception on Sunday, February 11. The event is scheduled for 4-7 p.m. and will feature refreshments and a performance by the Bluegrass Patriots.