

Muralist Marvels

John DeVlieger transforms the plain walls of area homes and businesses into extraordinary masterpieces.

BY SCOTT PRUDEN *May 20, 2010*

As John DeVlieger approaches the hostess stand at Primavera Pizza Kitchen—a bank-turned-Italian-eatery in Bryn Mawr—owner and staff greet him as if he were a beloved cousin. Upstairs, he's seated beneath what looks like a solid marble lion's-head fountain that, through some oversight of bankerly restraint, had been installed in the original building. In fact, it's a two-dimensional image applied to the wall through a process known as trompe l'œil, which uses shading, perspective and color to give viewers the impression that what they're seeing has depth.



DeVlieger's work covers nearly every inch of Primavera's main dining room. Painted nearly 15 years ago, it would be the first of many mural commissions for a guy whose odds of becoming a professional artist were once pretty small.

"I was actually a business major at St. Joe's," says DeVlieger. "My father wouldn't pay for art school—he wouldn't even consider it."

As such, DeVlieger allowed himself only one art class as an undergraduate. "The guys said, 'You've really got talent,' so I wound up putting together a portfolio," he recalls.

DeVlieger took night classes at what is now University of the Arts, landing a scholarship to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Even then, he favored larger formats—and as his popularity increased, so did his prices. "It's this scale at which your whole periphery is encompassed," says DeVlieger. "I remember saying, 'This is for me. I'm having my cake and eating it, too.'"

Eventually, a designer approached him with the opportunity to tailor his uncanny grasp of depth-of-field and perspective to a client's vision and the shape of specific rooms. "It became very fashionable," says DeVlieger. "I've been really fortunate that the tide of fashion has been in my favor."

And among the fashionable, word travels. That has resulted in a growing number of Main Line commissions—both commercial and residential. Primavera in Bryn Mawr begat work for a second location in Downingtown, this time featuring his own rendering of Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam" from the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel.

Homeowners, meanwhile, came to look upon DeVlieger's work as a way to bring into their homes original pieces of art that could be personalized in a variety of ways. Many murals are actually painted on canvas in a studio, then applied to their designated spots upon completion, allowing clients to take them along if they move later.



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One wine-loving homeowner is represented as Bacchus in a wine-cellar rendering. Children are painted into trompe l'œil ceilings as cherubim and

seraphim. “As far as trompe l’œil goes, the large scale makes it easier,” he says. “When it’s not a one-to-one scale, it’s actually harder.”

Jack and Judy Coats of Bryn Mawr engaged DeVlieger to create a tropical mural inside the enclosed pool house of their six-year-old home, and they’re obviously proud of what they’ve been able to achieve with his help. The artist took as inspiration Judy’s experiences growing up in Florida and the couple’s travels to a variety of sandy, sunny destinations, offering them a panoramic scene that will complement the pleasures of swimming in warm waters even when snow covers the ground outside. “I always wanted to have something fun,” Judy says. “I just didn’t know that until John showed up.”

The Coats also drew inspiration from a saltwater aquarium that serves as a divider between a media room and bar area near the pool house. “This is what motivated us—and sitting there looking at a blank wall thinking we need something tropical and fun,” Judy says.

In putting together the Coats’ mural, DeVlieger solicited specifics from the couple, presenting them with photographs and other images of tropical scenes to gauge what they preferred. With an idea firmly established, he created a small rendering that reflected the dimensions of the surface to be painted.

In



Villanova, DeVlieger is in the midst of transforming a child's bedroom into a massive aquarium. “When this mural is finished, it’s going to feel like he’s underwater swimming along with the fishes,” quips DeVlieger.

That’s the depth of his talent: Whatever a client imagines, he can deliver. But it’s the collaborative process DeVlieger relishes most—something far different from what the typical fine artist might be called upon to do.

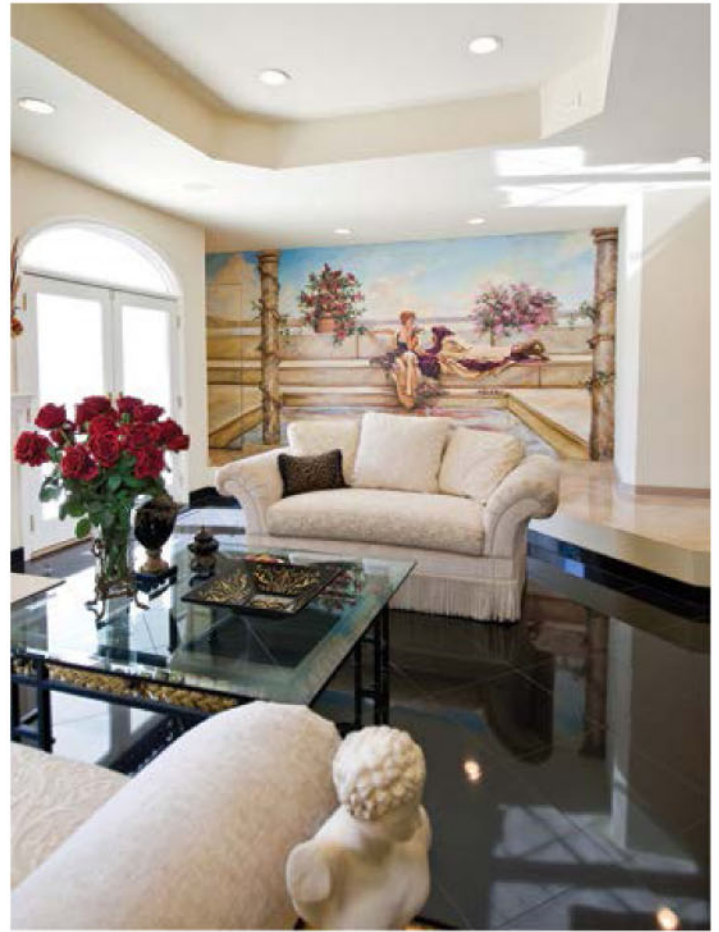
“People ask what it’s like collaborating with a client,” he says. “A lot of times, they make me look better.”

To learn more about DeVlieger’s work, call (610) 246-1372 or visit muralmaster.com.

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Considering a Mural for Your Home?

Muralist John DeVlieger offers these tips:



1. **Carefully choose the room you want to adorn.** “I’ve done everything from wine cellars and kitchens to small powder rooms and master bedrooms,” says DeVlieger. “Once you decide on the room, the choices become a lot clearer.”
2. **Be open-minded.** Murals can also go in nontraditional places. DeVlieger has had requests for murals on pool bottoms.
3. **Research your options.** DeVlieger has been painting murals for 25 years, so he has a diverse portfolio of work.
4. **Go with what you love.** “Many times, designing a mural becomes a three-way discussion between myself, the homeowners and the interior designer,” DeVlieger says. “But it’s the owners who will be the people living with it every day, so they have to love it.”
5. **Know that a mural can be modified.** “I did a mural once for a client and incorporated their children into it,” says DeVlieger. “Years later, their family grew, so they had me come back to add in two other kids.”