



By K. Wheeler
Photography by Bob Doran

The coastlines along the North Pacific Ocean have more than a few cities nestled between their dunes and coastal mountains. There is one, Arcata, that you can find on the ocean's eastern border, a little more than halfway to the equator from the North Pole. It is a wet, green locale. Some people are drawn to this place, as people will be, whether they know it or not. Traveling enchantment. Within this city there is a home that is a living, glittering, work of art: The realm of Our Lady of Mosaic.

The eyes always recognize her powers, following the pieced-together colors and textured material. She is finishing murals on the Seascapes Restaurant for the Trinidad Rancheria. There are scenes on the trash cans at the Arcata Plaza, and mosaic murals fenced along Wildwood Music and Los Bagels. There is a turnaround thick with tile art just up a few blocks from there on 12th Street. But once a person walks onto 11th Street the residence is obvious, and the turnaround will wait. Light dances here; it winks, reflected in all sorts of subtle angles. It is caught up in infinite variation by pigment and material. There, at the very beginning of the lot, arrangements of tile, found treasures, and broken bits of everything come together as a piece. They fill neat rectangles mounted on the fence, '948' above the open passage in.

Soft water sounds come from ponds facing the street, the sidewalk, and the south. An intricately-tiled great blue heron stands, as they will, like a statue in the water. Koi dart under lily pads as visitors step across the bridge, monkey on the railing, to the partially enclosed front porch. A beautifully tiled bench and walls are recessed next to the front door. Our lady loves her steampunk screen in front. Most people miss it. Well, most people miss so much here, they are so busy finding and seeing. To the west of the ponds is a driveway for a car or bikes. It unrolls pavement into celebration, mosaic walls and statues and mountings and flowers. What was once a garage opens into the local classroom, lined with working surfaces, glitter, glam and color.

Laurel Skye has tended here for just shy of 20 years, Our Lady of Broken Pieces Put Together Anew. Our Lady of Encouraging Inspiration. You will find her still, giving intentional, special touches to every square inch of everything she lives in and finds, like weaving prayers, connecting, coming together. Her daughter, Marley, goddess of intricacies, lives and

Our Lady

LAUREL

SKYE

She is a writer, musician, sculptor, and portraitist, all contained behind dark lashes. Our Lady, Laurel, is all sorts of an artist. She is a natural host and teacher. "I like entertaining because I like people," Our Lady says. She is a believer. "Follow your own bliss and know what



you love to do. If you run out of rice the universe will give you noodles." A bit before the last mid-century she was born in the sign of Gemini in Chicago. Her family moved to Hollywood soon after. She tells of a mother who sang and a father who played sax. They met at a dance. Russia and England were their backgrounds.

A brother who was 10 years older than her meant so much to our Lady. He was a musician and a music producer. During her youth she loved hanging out at his house in Laurel Canyon, where people like Jim Morrison and Sly from Sly and the Family Stone would stop by. He brought her backstage at all his shows at the Troubadour and the Ash Grove, where she met countless artists. It was a time when people wanted to be a hippie, and hippie was a brand new thing to be. She loved to play guitar and sing in coffeehouses. Her life took a path of wonder and adventure as naturally as bees make honey. "What other way is there to live?" Our Lady muses. She holds her pointer finger and thumb a pinch of an inch away from each other in the air and says, "We have this much time." And, walking into her home, taking her classes, coming in contact with her spirit – a common person may chance to realize there is no common person. Yes, what other way is there to live? People from all over the states and all over the world have stayed in her home. A year ago, they became an Airbnb; guests come and stay in the upstairs suite, with rooms full of all sorts of art and instruments and mosaic creations. The phone is a rotary dial masterpiece of mosaics. There is a shrine from Brian Sprowl. Our Lady of the Tile's book, *Mosaic Renaissance*, is dedicated to him. Then there is the Diva Bowl made by Julie the Las Vegas showgirl, who passed on about two years ago. She was past 70. She had found Our Lady Laurel Skye and come to stay with her numerous times for workshops. She called and asked Laurel for a cremation box "for a friend". The next day the Diva Bowl was in a FedEx box on Laurel's front step, full of pres-

ents. Julie passed within the week. There are display shelves full of mosaic bottles, clocks, skulls, hats, shoes, boxes, and tape measures. The plates, pillows, walls, blankets, portraits, instruments, windows, floors, appliances, cremation boxes, sinks, toilets, silverware, mirrors, shrines, purses, furniture, light switch plates, if you can mosaic it... Dharma the friendly dog wanders around with a little ponytail so he can see from underneath his long hair. "There is an abundance out there. I truly believe everyone has the ability to make art," she says. "That we just get disconnected from that river of energy and juices flowing constantly in this universe, that's why I like being a teacher, because I can be a guide to reconnect you. It really isn't about mosaics. I just throw that in the cracks. You can start anywhere in mosaics and go anywhere."

Through the front room and kitchen, past the classroom entryway full of tiles, and along the hall under the mannequin, there is a deep alcove full of mosaic supplies. This is the store. When they are home it is open. "If I'm alive, I'm open," she says.

Our Lady of Mosaic is sought all over the world. Half the year is usually spent traveling. Every year they go to the Village in New York (their favorite place) to teach workshops, as well as Puerto Vallarta, Montreal, and a little hill town outside of Florence. They have their favorite venues for entertainment and shopping and food. Between their annual workshops are all the rest of the destination workshops they are asked to do. Everywhere they go they find regalia to add to the creations.

If a visitor were to pass through the hub of the house to the other side, a little-used greensheened brick walkway leads to the back third of the lot. Here is another, larger pond and a few big trees. There is a sense of a piece of another world set down in the middle of Arcata. That is how the house feels too, but from different worlds, glued together, real estate mosaic. This part of the property evades your attention, almost on purpose. Soothing, still, quiet, let be. Just as the home is full, moving, creation and production. www.laurelskye.com

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