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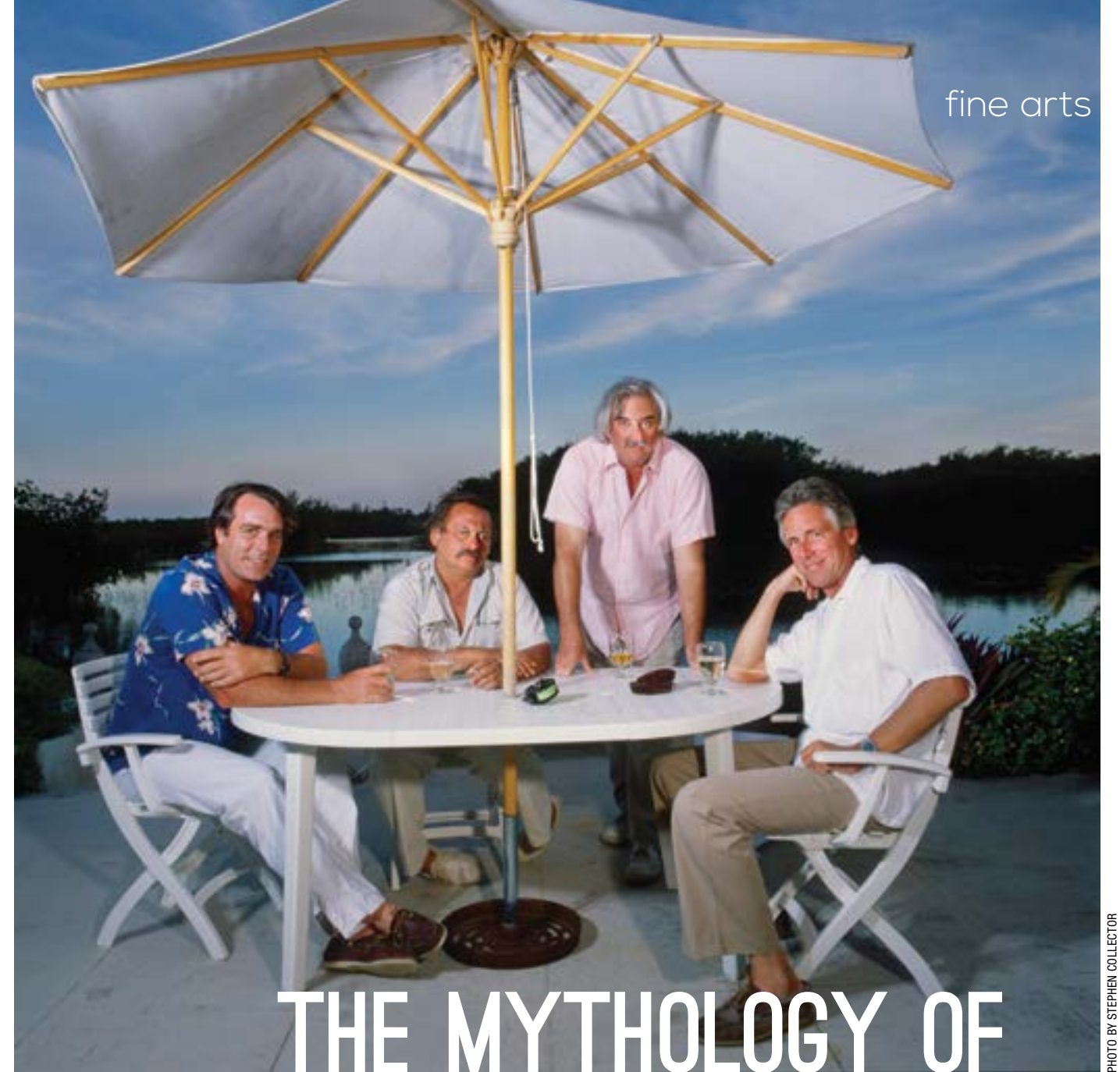


PHOTO BY STEPHEN COLLECTOR

THE MYTHOLOGY OF RUSSELL CHATHAM

By Hayden Seder

There are thousands of words written about Russell Chatham, from articles in *Esquire*, *Architectural Digest*, and *Outside* to the several books written about his works to his own published books and articles. And if the saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words” is applied, these thousands of words all paint a vivid picture of the artist, man...nay—the personality—known as Russell Chatham. With his passion for subjects—from painting to hunting to writing to women to food—Russell’s actual life creates a nostalgia for times before screens and cell phones when storytelling itself was an art, landscapes remained wild, and passion for a good meal and a strong drink were respected. A true “*mensch*” who has been around the world 20 times; hunted deer in the New Zealand Alps; eaten puffin in Iceland and reindeer in the Russian arctic; camped among the last of indigenous tribes in Tierra del Fuego; and in his words, “had more lovers than most people have had hot dinners,”

Chatham, standing, with novelists and fellow sportsmen (from left) Guy de la Valdene, Jim Harrison, and Tom McGuane at Jimmy Buffett’s house in the Florida Keys. Shot on location for a piece for *Rolling Stone*.



the art of Russell Chatham is one small facet of his bold personality and one that will be viewable at Ketchum's Broschofsky Galleries this July.

"He's really just interested in the best of things," says Minette Broschofsky, one of the owners at Broschofsky Galleries. As a man who appreciates enjoying a fine meal or sitting for hours on a riverbank waiting for the fish to bite, it's no surprise that a Russell Chatham painting can take up to a year to complete. "His paintings are so valuable because he doesn't produce a lot," explains Minette. "He's such a perfectionist that he doesn't let a work go until he is ready."

Much like the nostalgia Chatham's life itself represents, so do his paintings, invoking a time when wilderness dominated more than civilization did and unspoiled horizons were easy to come by. Look closely and you are transported into the magic of Russell's landscapes. Although now described as a "western artist," Russell wasn't always welcomed into the genre as his scenes don't depict your typical western horses or cowboys. The beauty of Russell's work is its ability to relate across generations, geographic areas, and demographics. Having done around 400 one-man shows at museums, art centers, and galleries throughout the U.S. since exhibiting formally in 1958, Russell has perfected his landscapes, using subdued colors to convey the sensual nature of the rounded slopes of Montana to the canvas. "Although some people prefer a cheery blue sky landscape, most viewers find a solace and calmness in Russell's works," says Minette. "I think he's an intense person and it grounds him to do these."

He wouldn't be Russell Chatham if he didn't have a few more talents up his sleeve. Although most notably known for his landscapes, Russell is also a master lithographer, using several machines and up to 50 separate plates and ink shades for 180 hours to create a lithograph. After several decades of doing lithographs, Russell no longer has the machinery and time needed to create them, making them an even greater find for a collection.

Despite growing up under the tutelage of his grandfather, the great landscape painter Gottardo Piazzoni, and doing hundreds of his own self-taught paintings in California starting from an early age, it was in Livingston, Montana, where Russell's painting skills truly blossomed. Russell himself claims that he didn't know how to paint until he moved there. "When I moved to Montana, I vowed never to do any other work in my life other than painting and writing no matter how poor I became. I stuck to that promise, and that's how I learned to do what I do," the artist explains.



Top: "January" by Russell Chatham. 1998. 16"x20".
Bottom: "Hayfields in Summer" by Russell Chatham. 1987. 6"x9".



"November Evening" by Russell Chatham. 2010. 8"x11".

The town of Livingston, Montana, is similar to Sun Valley—not only is it a gateway to the beauty of nature via its hills, mountains, and rivers, but it also invites celebrities to get away from fans and paparazzi and simply live as regular people. Russell visited and subsequently fell in love with Livingston after his friend and author, Tom McGuane, moved there and wrote to his fellow fishermen (Russell being one of them) about the plentiful fishing

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on the Yellowstone River. A "fishing guru to the literati," world-class fisherman Russell taught novelists Tom McGuane, William Hjortsberg, and Richard Brautiga about fishing striped bass, sealing their friendship for when all four moved to Livingston.

Chatham moved to Livingston in 1972 when the town was like an artist's colony of artists, writers, celebrities, and ideas. Using the hunter's eye he had garnered hunting in the once-wild coun-

try of Carmel Valley in California as a child, Russell learned to assess the landscape with a keen eye and dictate the landscape to the canvas. With little money, living off fish and game birds, Russell had no problem trading his paintings, now worth over tens of thousands of dollars, for food, drinks, and services. When friend Tom McGuane's screenplays for *Rancho Deluxe* and *Missouri Breaks* were both sold and later filmed on location in Montana, celebrities began to mingle in Livingston and soon fell in love with Russell's notorious landscapes. Celebrities like Jack Nicholson, Jimmy Buffett, Jeff Bridges, and Tom Brokaw soon became life-long collectors and many even relocated to Livingston, contributing even more to the "artist colony" feel of the town.

While you might think that Russell was spending his hours and days constantly painting, he truly is a fisherman at heart, to the point that some great fisherman might even say, "Russell Chatham is a painter?" For many years, he held the world record for catching a striped bass on a fly and has been featured in and written for magazines from *Field and Stream* to *Outdoor Life* to *Sports Afield*. Did I mention Russell is also a prolific writer? "I have no formal education so I had to learn to write by reading in much the same way I learned to paint by looking at great paintings," says Russell. He has also written several books. Says Russell about his writing versus his paintings, "Painting is static, whereas writing, like music, unfolds in time. You can write a story but it's a big mistake to try and paint one. I only write non-fiction, so I

“His works are very poetic; they make you calm.”
 –Broschofsky Galleries Owner, Minette Broschofsky



"The Heart of Winter" by Russell Chatham. 2014. oil on linen. 30"x36".

COURTESY OF BROSCHOFSKY GALLERIES

describe what I've seen and done. People should laugh appropriately at certain stories, but if they laugh at your paintings you're through."

If I were to end this story here, simply discussing the paintings, lithographs, and writings of Russell Chatham, it would be an immense amount of accomplishments for one lifetime. But a man with so much passion for life cannot be limited and almost as if to prove that, in the 30-plus years he spent in Livingston, Russell also founded the printing shop Clark City Press as well as the gourmet restaurant Chatham's Livingston Bar & Grille. As someone who truly enjoys good food, wine, and cooking, it was only natural that Russell open a restaurant. "I became interested in food, fine wine, and cooking in my early thirties, and during the ensuing twenty-five years became friends with any number of chefs and restaurant owners. I was fifty-four when I decided to design, build, and operate my own place. There were two reasons: one, I had to know if I could do it, and two, I was determined to create something really classy in an otherwise dreary environment." It seems only natural for Russell to have made such an impact on the town of Livingston after the impact the town had on him and his career.

Which is why it was with sadness that Russell was forced to leave his beloved Livingston in 2008. "I left Montana because the gangsters on Wall Street brought the house down around

everyone's ears in 2008. In less time than it takes to make a painting or a lithograph, the banks seized everything I had and I was suddenly broke and homeless. I grew up in Marin County, California, and it's where I learned to paint, write, and fish, so I hightailed it for home." Like salmon returning home to spawn, Russell migrated back to his home state of California where he now has the mature eye and hand to put Californian landscapes to the canvas.

With Montana landscapes literally and figuratively behind him, the opportunity to see some of Russell's original works is here, with local Broschofsky Gallery displaying the artist's work through July, including a commissioned work for the gallery. And as for Russell? "I live in a bubble out at Point Reyes where the land is still all ranches and farms just as it was a hundred years ago, and I will interpret this country until I get my harp."

Russell Chatham
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RUSSELL CHATHAM
 Opening July 8th



Fields Near Deep Creek, 1990, Oil on Linen 16" x 20"

Also, works by gallery artists, historic through contemporary including Bill Barrett, Edward de Groot, Michael Coleman, Edward Curtis, David Dixon, Jan Grotenhreg, Tom Howard, William Matthews, Gordon McConnell, Doug Owen, Ken Peloke, Billy Schenck, Theodore Villa, Andy Warhol, Russell Young and more.

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