

Longtime West County business closing doors this year: Quicksilver Mine Co.

Posted: Wednesday, November 7, 2012 2:03 pm | Updated: 11:43 am, Fri Nov 9, 2012.

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Forestville's Quicksilver Mine Co. closing after 30 years on Dec. 31

Expect an emotional and semi-wild gathering of West County artists and writers next week when Khysie Horn holds the Last Hurrah for her beloved Quicksilver Mine Co. gallery in Forestville.

"I expect we will have a very full house," said Horn this week in an e-mail. Next Saturday's (Nov. 17) reception starts at 4 p.m. and kicks off the gallery's Last Hurrah, an exhibit of work by 87 of the more than 600 artists, crafters and poets whose work has been showcased at Quicksilver over the past three decades.



Photo: Frank Robertson

END OF AN ERA

Khysie Horn's Quicksilver Mine Co. gallery has been a centerpiece of the West County art scene since the 1980s. She's closing the gallery at the end of December, after a Last Hurrah exhibit that starts next week.

Reaction to the gallery's closing has been a mix of disappointment, resignation and understanding.

"So bittersweet, so sad," said Cheryl Costantini, a Sebastopol ceramics artist who showed her early work at Quicksilver after Horn first opened in Guerneville in 1983.

As young ceramic artists just starting out, "We approached her with pots in hand, hearts on our sleeve," said Costantini who with her partner Mikio Matsumoto went on to create their successful Nichibei Potters studio in Sebastopol.

She remembers Horn's initial greeting as "gracious, accommodating and understanding," said Costantini.

“I was really sad to hear it,” when Horn announced Quicksilver was closing at the end of the year, said Costantini. “It felt like an era was coming to an end.”

After Quicksilver survived two Russian River flood disasters in Guerneville (1986 and ‘95) Horn moved the gallery to downtown Sebastopol where she continued to showcase work by Sonoma County artists. The Sebastopol shop on Main Street was a gallery as well as a gift store offering crafts, jewelry, clothing and food and wine by Sonoma County artisans. Horn helped establish Sebastopol’s downtown Artwalk and was instrumental in starting the Sonoma County Gallery Group that began publishing a Sonoma County gallery guide in 2004.

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From the beginning Horn always promoted and supported the work of Sonoma County artists, including musicians and writers. Gallery receptions often included live jazz by local musicians such as Monte Rio jazz percussionist Benny Barth and the late Monte Rio jazz vibraphonist Ben Hill.

Four wine country writers including Sebastopol’s Jonah Raskin read from their work in September at a Quicksilver event entitled “Poems, Stories, Humor & Blood.”

“Khysie’s always been really visionary,” said Costantini. Especially in the early days, Horn’s gallery survived because “she saw enough cool stuff going on around here.”

Horn will close Quicksilver's doors for good Dec. 31 after the Christmas holidays. She plans to take it easy for awhile, but the Last Hurrah artists' reception next week looks like a typical Quicksilver humdinger with artists and patrons supplying the food and the gallery pouring the wine.

Asked what kind of feedback she's getting about closing up shop, "A lot," said Horn. "Most people get it and understand. I've been doing this almost 30 years. I love what I do but I really need to get loose from it a little bit," said Horn.

"I've worked virtually every single Sunday for 30 years," said Horn. "That probably is kind of it in a nutshell."

She had no interest in trying to sell the gallery or keeping it open under someone else's watch?

"Not Quicksilver," said Horn. "It's so much of me. If somebody wants to do this there's no stopping anybody from picking up the ball."

She owns the Forestville building that houses Quicksilver and has it on the market for \$650,000.

"If somebody were to make an offer before the end of the year it comes fully loaded with the pedestals and everything," said Horn.

Anyone thinking of running a bricks-and-mortar gallery these days needs to have their eyes wide open, said Horn.

"They have to be prepared to have shows that don't sell, to not make any money and not be able to go anywhere. They're basically committed to this," said Horn.

"I think most people who have a gallery do it because they really care about the art and artists. You get to be around people doing amazing things," said Horn. "It's wonderful. It's great."

It can also make it hard when you decide you need to step away for a free Sunday afternoon.

"When I hear somebody say, 'Do you feel like you're letting the artists down,' my God, that's a terrible question," said Horn. "Of course that's one of the things I think about all the time."

She plans to continue the Quicksilver website (quicksilvermineco.com) and show Sonoma County and Northern California artists' work online. She's not selling the name, Quicksilver Mine Co.

"I'm going to keep the website going," said Horn. "I'll probably umbrella the gallery in some fashion as an archive so people can read about it if they want and everything will be available," said Horn.

"I want to be able to act as a referral resource to artists that I've worked with," said Horn. "To not just drop that feels important to me."

So there may still be a virtual Quicksilver Mine Co.?

"I'll pretty much focus on having it be online. And I may at some point, but I'm really trying not to pigeon-hole myself, because I really would like some time, but there are some people I've worked with for years and we have really good communications. And I have some people who have no presence, no

galleries, no website, no e-mail. Some of them are artists who are in their 70s and 80s, and some of them are younger people who have chosen just not to do that.” said Horn.

“I could have a page for each person with pictures of available work and do something a little more active but without getting myself in a situation that I’m trying to run a gallery online.”

(Full disclosure: my wife, Mary Robertson, is a painter whose work has shown at Quicksilver. I asked her about Khysie Horn and the Quicksilver experience.)

“I like her and I trust her,” said Mary. “She always liked my work. She was always honest. And I like her taste, of course.”