

ZADORA

THE PERFECT MELDING OF BEAUTY AND DESIGN

Destined for the traditional career path of the German aristocracy to which he was born, Andreas von Zadora-Gerlof was saved from the military by a crippling hunting accident and a Haida Indian.

For the next thirty six years, the world benefited from a display of some of the most beautiful, exotic, and technically advanced art ever produced.

by Walter Knapp

Photography by David Behl

Andreas, how did a hunting accident as a teenage boy completely change your life?

"It's a story I love to tell. It is almost unbelievable. I grew up on The Queen Charlotte Islands about seventy miles off the coast of British Columbia, Canada. Any one familiar with the area knows that it is a lush forested semi wilderness which lends itself to fishing and hunting. At age fourteen, I suffered a serious accident while hunting that left my right hand crippled and claw like. Doctors recommended all sorts of physiotherapy like wringing out towels or practicing crab like movements against the wall. The therapy was boring and tedious and left me feeling extremely depressed.

"One day, a good friend of my father, a Haida Indian artist named Gordon Cross, asked him if he could assist in the therapy by teaching me some native crafts that might help strengthen my hand. My father agreed. From Gordon and others in his family, I was introduced to Haida art. Suddenly, I was no longer bored or depressed. I learned sculpting, silver engraving, totemic wood carving, and carving on argillite, a black stone native to the region.

"The result was that I got so involved and loved the process so much that it was no longer physiotherapy, it was fun! It was nothing for me to work ten hours or more which dramatically improved my hand. It is still crippled, but you can hardly tell. I reckon that I would never have progressed as rapidly had it not been for the Haida processes I had learned.

"Without both those events happening, I would be doing something totally different today. This practice opened up the idea to me that I really could sculpt and it has lead me far from anything anyone in my family had ever done."

You mentioned something you called "Form Feel," what does that mean?

"It's the ability to see the shape of an object in the material

I'm using, and then remove all superfluous matter. I just find it very easy to see what material I need to remove from a given shape to create the new shape I desire. I can visualize it and do it and I think that is the first step necessary to have a fair shot at becoming a good sculptor."

I believe it was Michelangelo who said that sculpting marble was easy, all you had to do was cut away the marble you don't want and keep the part you do want. What do you find to be the most challenging part of working

with gems?

"First, obviously is that you are working with precious material, so if you make a mistake it is very costly. Secondly, is the fact that the materials can be many times harder than steel, so you're sculpting with tools tipped with crushed diamonds. Even though I know what material I want to remove, it's very hard and very nerve wracking."

Are there any forms that you find particularly difficult to sculpt?

"I consider the two most

challenging subjects to sculpt are women and horses. It doesn't matter what material I use, recreating the female and equine forms are the most difficult."

Why women and horses?

"Maybe if I was just doing some generic female and equine forms it wouldn't be so difficult, but usually I am commissioned to sculpt a specific horse or a specific woman and those subjects have unique characteristics that I have to be able to capture. For instance, a mid-eastern client commissioned me to sculpt a couple of his prize Arabian horses. They were incredibly beautiful with splendid muscle structure, and I found that I had to concentrate on every detail. I wasn't trying to re-create a horse; I was trying to re-create "That Horse."



Andreas von Zadora-Gerlof at work in his shop, 1999.