



Bright new beginning

CHANGES | In a time of crisis, June Hunter found new purpose creating artworks inspired by nature

In 1997, June Hunter's mother died suddenly in her sleep. The following year, Hunter's father was diagnosed with cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. He died in 1999.

Faced with the reality of losing both parents, she says she felt catapulted into a "mid-life crisis" that forced her to look more carefully at the world around her and made her search for a deeper sense of permanence.

The experience not only brought her closer to her father in the final months of his life but awakened a whole new appreciation for a garden's ability to heal and inspire.

After her mom died, Hunter, who lives with her husband, radio producer Phillip Ditchburn, and their two children in East Vancouver, went back to her hometown of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in northeast England to nurse her father.

"We had never been very close," she says. "When I used to phone, he would always say, 'I'll get your mother.' So when I went back to look after him, we had to carve out a relationship."

They began by working together in the garden her mother had made. "We used her garden tools and we tried to figure out why she had done things the way she had. In the process we started to talk to each other and we got to know each other again."

At the time, a friend told Hunter that although things looked bleak, something good could still come out of the situation and she urged her not to lose hope.

"She was right about that. Even though my dad was sick, we managed to go dancing together. It was more fun than either of us expected. It took us both by surprise."

But feeling shaken by the loss of her mom and watching her father's health deteriorate, she says she felt an increasing need for a sense of permanence.

Finding an old Kodak camera, she began snapping photographs of flowers in her mom's garden. Hunter says she knew that when her dad died, the house would be sold and before that happened



Lovely images such as this white lily photographed by June Hunter are used for her designs on marble tiles, giving permanence to gardening memories.

she wanted to preserve memories through her photographs.

"I was feeling under a lot of stress and I had this urge to try to hold on to things and make them permanent. At the same time I started to notice things I had overlooked before — the beauty of a flower, a whisper of wind, a cloud passing over the sun, a bug landing on a leaf."

Back in Vancouver, she experimented at transferring the closeups of plants to marble tiles. She also got more proficient at taking botanical photographs which she enhanced into a more artistic image on her computer.

Today, six years after her father died, what started as a response to grief has produced a series of impressive flower and leaf images preserved in marble.

Her subjects range from a black parrot tulip, 'Star Glazer' lily, Japanese anemone, and *Clematis alpina* to gerbera, amaryllis, spider dahlia, echinacea and roses.

Available in two sizes — eight inch and four inch — the tiles sell for \$59.99 and \$40 respectively at GardenWorks at Man-

deville on Marine Way in Burnaby and at Thomas Hobbs Florist by Maureen Sullivan at 41st Avenue in Vancouver.

Interior designers have used the tiles as accents in backsplashes or walls or hung them like paintings or used them simply as tabletop decor.

A full-time marketing assistant at Capilano College in North Vancouver, Hunter says her crisis over the loss of her parents has opened up a new life for her as a visual artist.

Part of the reason for preserving the images in marble, she says is because "growing things and looking at them" in her garden wasn't enough.

"I'm driven to preserve and share with others," she says. "But I also want these images for myself when I'm too old and arthritic to garden any more. They preserve a quiet moment of perfection."

For more information contact June Hunter at 604-251-9897 or by email at flying_design@shaw.ca. Her website is www.junehunter.bc.ca.

whysall@png.comwest.com



Jane Hunter takes close-up photos of plants (above) then transfers them to tiles (two examples below).



IAN LINDSAY/VANCOUVER SUN



IAN LINDSAY/VANCOUVER SUN



IAN LINDSAY/VANCOUVER SUN

June Hunter saw in the garden's beauty a way to come to terms with losing both of her parents.