

in the gallery

Envisioning Old Charleston

Artist Robert Harris captures the spirit of historic Charleston with his detailed pencil drawings

BY AMY S. MERCER

Local artist Robert Harris was inspired by Charleston's historic architecture on his first visit to the city. He was a college student studying art and graphic communications when he realized he wanted to convey the feel of this historic city in his art.

"I was infatuated with the character and charm of the historic houses and buildings," he says.

After working in Atlanta for several years, Harris moved to Charleston in 1998. The first Lowcountry illustration he created was Charleston's famous Battery. Renting a small boat, Harris motored out on the water to get a better vantage point from which to view the landmark. His rendering sold so well that he continued to search for hidden historical treasures throughout the city. Today, Harris

captures images of this historic city on film, then translates them into detailed pencil drawings.

Working from his home in Mt. Pleasant, Harris works to evoke depth by his use of shadow and light. He says, "I was inspired to use pencil by 18th- and 19th-century etchings and lithographs." His renderings include recognizable attractions such as: The Battery, The French Quarter, Rainbow Row, St. Michael's Church and—one of his most popular subjects—#2 Meeting Street Inn. His prints, which reproduce his original work, are small. Most fit into a standard size 8"x10" frame. Mounted in simple black frames on cream-colored paper, the art stands out from typical pastel-colored reproductions of Rainbow Row. For those who prefer a bit of color, Harris also offers hand-tinted prints, rendered with color pencils.

"I was inspired by the way the old etchings were hand-tinted before color photography and color printing were invented, and wanted to recreate that in my art." Harris's prints are popular with tourists who want to bring home a slice of Charleston. His originals are larger—10x12 inches and up. They are available for purchase through both Classic Charleston Gallery & Gifts and Charleston Accents. Larger prints come with a history of the architecture printed on parchment paper. Gallery owner Tom Newton calls Harris a "rising artist," whose works have grown in popularity over the last year.

Harris is prolific, working long hours on his illustrations. One day, he says, he'd like to experiment with oils. Until then he keeps coming back to the simplicity of pencil and paper.



Photographs courtesy of Robert Harris