

Joe Srholez

Colorado Artist + Wood Sculptor

BY LAURA LIEFF



is one of his major influences. Although his grandfather's creations were a bit different, Srholez says their simplistic yet intricate design sense is similar.

"His attention to detail was unbelievable, and that's important to me as well," he explains.

In 2015, when chainsaw carving was still a hobby, Srholez signed up for the Minturn Farmers Market where he sold Colorado flags, flowers and abstracts — all made of wood. Although setting up and breaking down his booth each week was laborious, Srholez describes it as a good learning experience for future shows.

BIG CHANGE, NEW GIG

An avid snowboarder and snowmobiler, Srholez was in a sledding accident in 2016, which caused severe head trauma. After he recovered, he decided to get out of the log home construction business and give full-time carving a shot.

"I didn't have a plan, which was rough financially at first," Srholez explains. "But in the spring of 2017, I heard about a chainsaw competition in Rifle and went to check it out. I thought it was going to be all bear carvings — which I didn't want to do, because everyone else was doing it — but I was wrong. It was so much more."

The chainsaw competition was Carve Wars — an event that invites chainsaw artists to compete against each other and create authentic pieces over three days. Once completed, the pieces are sold in a live auction, giving spectators a chance to purchase original art after



If it's made of wood (or ice), Joe Srholez can carve it. A Colorado resident since 1989, Srholez is an artist, wood sculptor and performance wood and ice carver who is inspired by travel, landscapes and culture. Before founding Sweetwater Trading Post in 2009, he honed his chainsaw skills during the two decades he spent building log homes.

"I was sitting on a log reading blueprints and decided to carve a saddle into the log to make it more comfortable," Srholez remembers. "Then, I carved abstract shapes into it, and my interest in wood design continued from there."

A true artist of nature who occupies his own niche in an industry that requires the utmost precision and expertise, Srholez's dedication to his craft runs deep. His grandfather — a master gold, silver and coppersmith who created pieces for Tiffany and Co. and Cartier —

watching it being made.

"Participating in that first Carve Wars event changed everything," remembers Srholez. "I saw how fast people were carving and how much they were selling because of their pace."

LEARNING FROM THE PROS

After Carve Wars, Srholez became ingrained in the carving world. He met Rustic Arts owner Ken Braun, who became his travel partner to events like Chainsaws & Chuckwagons in Frederick and Bear Hollow's exhibition carving shows that take place across the United States. Srholez also met Joe Wenal, who owns Carve Wars and introduced him to more shows like Whittle the Wood in Craig.

"I met some of the top carvers in the world and was invited to learn from them," he says. "It was like going to carve school, and, after absorbing their knowledge, I won my first competition."

In 2018, Srholez won Carve Wars in

Eagle. In 2019, he won Carve Wars in both Eagle and Durango and placed second at Chainsaws & Chuckwagons. He continues to be part of the carving competition circuit, participating in 12 shows this year.

"I'm creating pieces and competing at these events, but I'm also putting on a show," Srholez explains. "After doing it a few times, I realized that I enjoy performing in front of an audience."

WOOD + ICE

Since carving shows are seasonal (mostly happening in the summer, early fall and late spring), Srholez spends winters building inventory, taking custom orders and ice carving — a skill he learned after meeting world-renowned ice sculptor Scott Rella. Trained at the New York Academy of Art, Rella represented the United States in ice carving at the 1994 and 2002 Olympic Games.

"I started performance ice sculpting in 2017 and have learned so much from Scott," Srholez says. "Now, I do sculp-

tures around the country — from Beaver Creek to Las Vegas to Banff, Canada."

When Srholez isn't on the road, he is working in his Sweetwater studio in Gypsum. While he welcomes visitors by appointment, Sweetwater Trading Post is not a retail shop; it's a place for people to see Srholez's pieces and discuss custom orders. Eventually, Srholez would like Sweetwater Trading Post to become a place where artists show their work to fellow artists and the public.

"The most significant difference between the construction world and the art world is in construction people ask, 'When will you be finished?' which gets old," he says. "Conversely, in the art world, people say, 'Wow, what a cool piece,' and that's very much appreciated."

Srholez adds, "I'm happy that people like what I do. I'm also glad that people are buying art and supporting the arts in general. It's all extremely important." +

Learn more at joesrholez.com.



BIRD & COW
Breckenridge
COLORADO

*Cooking up your
BRECK CRAVINGS*

Open Daily
113 S. Ridge St.
Breckenridge, CO 80424
birdandcow.com



ARTSPACE
WORKSHOP • GALLERY

UNIQUE GIFTS
BY LOCAL ARTISTS



READER'S CHOICE
BEST
VAIL VALLEY
- Vail Daily -

VOTED VAIL VALLEY'S
... BEST GALLERY
FOUR YEARS IN A ROW

Join us for...
ARTwalk FRIDAY
DEC 9 - FEB 10 - APR 14 - MAY 12
5:00 PM - 8:00 PM
ON
BROADWAY STREET
Eagle

EAGLEARTS



120 Broadway, Eagle | eaglearts.org

MASSAGE • WELLNESS
INTEGRATIVE BODYWORK



**local
revival**



READER'S CHOICE
BEST
VAIL VALLEY
- Vail Daily -

Where the locals go

www.localrevival.com • 970-401-2449
40780 HWY 6 suite 205 EagleVail, CO