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Beverly carver's art to decorate White House Christmas tree this year

Vincent Gianetto III, though modest if you ask him about it, is used to acclaim for his woodcarving techniques, but this year, he received one of the greatest honors of his carving career to date.

The White House has asked Vincent Gianetto III, a native of Beverly, and one of the south Jersey folk art carvers whose work is highly collectible throughout the United States, to carve an ornament for this year's White House Christmas tree.

First Lady Laura Bush will present Giannetto's unique creation to the nation during December as part of the traditional holiday celebrations.

Gianetto was asked to represent New Jersey and help bring the First Lady's theme to life based upon his reputation and craftsmanship as a wood carver over the past 35 years.

Born and raised in Southern New Jersey, Giannetto leaved to carve decoys from local hunters on the Delaware River during his teen years.

Inspired, he began carving. He attended his first decoy show in Babylon, L.I., New York in 1967 at an invitation from a local hunter. The following year, he entered two decoys in the competition and took home Best in Show and runner-up ribbons. As he found his way into the winner's circle, his work became increasingly known and collected. He has been the recipient of every major carving competition in the country.

Gianetto carves in the Delaware River Style. All decoys are carved to give the general impression of a live duck floating contently on the water. This use is important because it defines a decoy as an artists' interpretation of the live duck. Decoys are not an attempt to create a perfect duplicate of a real duck, but rather the artists' interpretation of that duck.

In the early days of decoy carving most were made and used extensively by their owner and often took a lot of abuse. Over time certain standards worked there way into what made a good, functional decoy. They had to be easily made with common tools, sturdy enough to take constant use, light enough to be transported as a rig, anchored to float properly but not get swept away by the current, and simple enough in detail so that pieces did not brake off. Other than these loose "rules." the carver was free to use his imagination and skill as he saw fit.

The Delaware River style developed because of the nature of the river itself. The river had a swift current and therefore each decoy was made more narrow to offer less resistance to the swift current.

Delaware River hunters, like those along Barnegat Bay, use the shallow-draft gunning boat called the "sneakbox," which was invented right here in southern Ocean County.

Since the river itself was narrow the average rig required fewer decoys, allowing more time to invest in the creation of each one. The hunter did not shoot from a blind, but

rather sculled in amongst the ducks. This required resting decoys that were more intricately carved and painted , and has contributed a great deal to making them stand out in comparison to other styles.

There has always been a tradition among Delaware carvers to depict the wing primaries with a raised "V" on the back, and this has become the signature trademark of the style. Over the years, it has been the mix of history and tradition, combined with the artists' freedom to interpret that has made them into such collectable pieces of art.

Traditional interpretations still follow these rules very closely, and are therefore usually smaller and carry less detail in their carving. More contemporary interpretations still follow the Delaware River style, but are carved and painted with more detail, reflecting the decoy as a work of art.

Gianetto's decoys and other carvings have been sought after by the Audubon Society and Ducks Unlimited, as well as hunters, collectors and authors. His carvings have been displayed in museums throughout the country and he's been featured on television and in magazines such as "Country Living," "New Jersey Outdoors," and "Country Business."

His artwork has traveled from the shores of the Delaware River to the Christmas display windows of Rockefeller Center in New York City and on to foreign lands, including Japan and England.

His greatest honor to date will be to find himself and his artwork in the White House.

Giannetto's talent and artwork has been described as being "born from the love of the outdoors, from the respect and affection for game and from recognition that nature's beauty is something worthy of preservation."

His talent among carvers is founded upon his abilities both as a carver and an oil painter. He has been carving exclusively since 1967, prior to which he earned a living as a mason and game bird breeder.

Gianetto is an outdoor enthus9ast who spends considerable time at his wetland property on the shores of the Delaware Bay.

In addition to his reputation as a decoy carver, he also has become known as one of the top folk art carvers on the East Coast. His line of folk art is sold through finer home decoration stores and furniture stores. Some of the items have been cast in resin for widespread release in such stores as Hallmark.

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