



andrew nash  
trees  
october 2007

“three pines-simulands” 2007, 26x21”



### THE REAL DeCOY

Can you tell the difference?

BY ALISON BEVILACQUA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS FOSTER

WINGS OF WOOD  
DECORATIVE DECOYS AND SONG BIRDS  
JAN AND DAVE BAHNS  
(631) 324-5504 / EAST HAMPTON



When the newly married Janet and Dave Bahns moved into their first home 30 years ago, the mantel above their fireplace seemed empty. Agreeing that a wooden duck decoy would fit the space perfectly, the couple spent hours antiquing and scouring yard sales, only to find damaged or wildly expensive carvings. “I thought, ‘We could do this’” said Janet, “and I bought Dave a book about woodcarving for Christmas.” What began as a thoughtful present has turned into a lifelong passion for both of them.

The Bahns make decorative decoys, which they often enter in competitions, as well as functional decoys used for hunting. The couple works as a team; Dave carves and Jan paints. Their partnership has been fruitful. Among the many awards and accolades their decoys have won, one particular Black Duck has taken blue ribbons at the regional, national and world competitions. Using

SOME AWARD WINNING DUCKS, SUCH AS THIS BLACK DUCK HELD BY BAHN, MAY TAKE AS MANY AS 300 HOURS TO COMPLETE.

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## DUCKS IN A ROW

LEFT: BAHN STUDIES THE NATURAL MOVEMENTS AND BEHAVIOR OF DUCKS TO CREATE BELIEVABLE POSES SUCH AS THIS, FEATURING A PAIR OF WIDGEONS. ABOVE: SMALL IMPERFECTIONS IN THE CARVED FEATHERS OF A BLACK DUCK CREATE A MORE REALISTIC LOOK. BELOW: A GOLDEN EYE RESTS ATOP A BLOCK OF BASSWOOD; BAHN'S CHOICE RAW MATERIAL FOR CARVING. THE BAHN'S AWARD WINNING BLACK DUCK, WITH NECK OUTSTRETCHED IN A SWIMMING POSE. THE STUDY OF COLOR PATTERNS AND METICULOUS PAINTING ARE IMPORTANT TO THE EXECUTION OF THE GREEN WINGED TEAL.



## THE ART OF DECOY DUCK CARVING IS A TRUE MIX OF SCIENCE AND CRAFT, OF KNOWLEDGE AND INTUITION. THE BAHNS SPEND HOURS RESEARCHING DUCK MUSCULATURE, BEHAVIOR AND COLOR PATTERNS BEFORE THEY EVEN BEGIN CARVING OR PAINTING.

tools as thin as a razor blade, Dave carves each slightly imperfect feather. An award-winning decoy like the Black Duck might take as many as 300 hours to complete.

The art of decoy duck carving is a true mix of science and craft, of knowledge and intuition. The Bahns spend hours researching duck musculature, behavior and color patterns before they even begin carving or painting. All of these aspects are taken into account during judging. And while these are beautiful works of art, they must also be functional; the decoys are weighted and balanced in order to float properly. Janet recalled one particular judging, when the decoys were being floated: "One judge picked up our duck, pulled out a pocket knife, and cut a notch in the bill. He thought it was a fake! He thought

we had cheated by using a plastic mold!" Although the Bahns can laugh about it now, Jan remembers being horrified as the judge chipped away at her hours of work.

A modest man, Dave simply enjoys his hobby. "You really do it out of love; sometimes you just lose yourself in it." He carefully follows the work of some of the great decoy-carving masters, such as Patrick Godin and Jim Sprankle. "Those guys would make a bird like that look like it could fly right off the table," he said, gesturing towards the beautiful carving in front of him.

While the Bahns have already enjoyed much success in the world of decoy carving, they show no signs of slowing down. "Someday I'd like to try a goose, or a duck with wings spread," said Dave.