

MASTER CRAFTSMAN



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MASTER CRAFTSMAN HANS VAN DE BOVENKAMP, SCULPTOR

As evidenced in public spaces and fine homes the world over, the dialogue between sculpture and architecture can move from harmonious to unforgettably symphonic. No matter how brilliant the sculptor or architect, their combined discourse builds upon individual genius and produces something far greater than the sum of its parts.

“It’s like a flower in the lapel,” Sagaponack sculptor Hans Van de Bovenkamp says, describing the role of his monumental abstract works when placed next to



HANS VAN DE BOVENKAMP (RIGHT)
WITH ASSISTANT KEVIN MILLER

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the homes or buildings he’s so often called upon to enhance and adorn. “I like my sculptures to be a part of the architecture,” he explains. “It brings the scale of the building down, to humanize it.”

For more than five decades, Van de Bovenkamp has collaborated with architects and designers to beautify and contextualize private homes, corporate campuses and public squares with his substantial metal sculptures, gates and fountains. But beyond his ample aesthetic facility, the artist seeks to create “sacred space” and conceptual works rife with symbolism about everything from the demise of Native American culture, to spiritual portals, music and nature’s majesty. “Nature and God and the sun and the moon—that is the greatest,” Van de Bovenkamp says in the thick Dutch accent he’s kept since he and his family left their native Holland for Ontario, Canada in 1957. He went on to study sculpture and architecture at the University of Michigan the following year before beginning his career in earnest.

Like most successful artists, Van de Bovenkamp paid his dues before reaching the point of accepting commissions for monumental outdoor sculpture, such as his famous 1986 piece, “Mariner’s Gateway,” a 35-foot, white stainless steel composition from his “Circles & Waves” series, which still stands at Haverstraw Marina in Haverstraw, NY. It’s just one among dozens of his mammoth landmarks now presiding over public spaces around the globe.

“I started with small things,” Van de Bovenkamp says, recalling his early days, finding prosperity in New York City with more functional objects, such as unique candelabras, magazine racks and copper and brass fountains. “The sculpture



A SMALL PORTION OF VAN DE BOVENKAMP'S PROLIFIC BODY OF WORK

got bigger and bigger," he points out, noting that he had 20 assistants and things were going well, but one must never stop growing and evolving.

Van de Bovenkamp slowly began getting gallery shows. Soon, people were requesting large versions of his sculptures, and he used his architecture background to enlarge them into breathtaking, structurally sound arrangements. "That put me on the map," Van de Bovenkamp says. "You can't just step over a 40-foot sculpture."

By the mid-1960s, the artist was diversifying and gaining acknowledgement. His first brush with the Hamptons came while delivering a sculpture to playwright Edward Albee in Montauk, and Van de Bovenkamp immediately fell in love with the area. "I went to deliver it, and in East Hampton at the pond, instead of turning left, I turned right," he says, remembering an impactful drive through the town's estate section. "I saw these houses that were five times the size I'm used to," Van de Bovenkamp adds. "[Later,] I saw the fields of Sagaponack and that reminded me of Holland...I like to see food grow." In short order, the sculptor rented his first beach house in Amagansett.

Years later, in 2002, Van de Bovenkamp and his first wife, late Swedish writer and artist Siv Cedering (1939–2007), bought a rundown horse farm in Sagaponack, which has since grown into the impressive, 7-acre "Sagaponack Sculpture Farm" compound where he works and lives ensconced in art and beauty with his partner of about a decade, Denise Moore.

At 81 years old, the sculptor spends much of his time painting, drawing and sketching new concepts, which he will eventually cast as small bronzes with the help of longtime assistant Kevin Miller. "We're like brothers," Van de Bovenkamp says, noting that Miller has been an essential part of his operation for the last 20 years. "He really understands me and my brand."

After making the smaller maquettes, which are gorgeous tabletop sculptures in their own right, Van de Bovenkamp uses Photoshop to place the works in their planned locations and play with scale. From there, he and Miller construct larger cardboard models to understand the construction nuances before cutting and welding sheets of stainless steel for a full-scale build. "I have to understand them structurally," Van de Bovenkamp says. "These large sculptures have to stand up to 100-mile-per-hour wind, with a sheet of ice on it, and not fall over."

During a recent visit to his studio, Van de Bovenkamp was working on five large pieces for an installation on Park Avenue, among several other projects, including a proposed memorial for victims of the 2017 Las Vegas concert shooting. "All of this is a work in progress," he says. "I'm always working."

With his power to produce enduring and relevant landmarks, and boundless motivation to propagate them at sites around the planet, it appears Van de Bovenkamp's creations will remain standing long after he, and the rest of us, are gone.