

Revitalization dreams shared on frosty holiday cards

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A renovation or revitalization project becomes more real when people can see it and get excited about it. Architects sketches are nice, but an imaginative holiday card with a frosty scene of swirling snow, flying birds, and low lying mist bring more smiles.

Maggie LaNoue, a Michigan artist, has been using her skills to capture the visions of organizations on paper, developing scenes to show for feedback over the web. Maggie, the president of Albion Design & Marketing, has been creating art for businesses for thirty years. She has seen many changes in how the art business works over those years.

The Detroit RiverFront Conservancy commissioned Maggie to create a series of drawings for holiday cards. Pat Vintevoghel, Exec. Assistant at the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, found Maggie's art of Detroit at Michigan-Prints.com in 2005. Pat wanted art to capture some of the new projects along the Detroit Riverfront. Some of the projects needed some artistic magic to capture the essence. Maggie combines photos with art, working in many hand painted touches, adding snow on the ground and weather touches such as fog and snow flakes in the sky.

Detroit Riverfront scenes captured by Maggie over the years include the following views. At right, the view from Belle Isle of the Detroit skyline, this view was created to mimic the logo of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, with some liberties taken by substituting evergreens for deciduous trees to add a holiday touch. Maggie went to a Christmas tree farm to take photos of real trees for the effect shown.



Left, the Milliken State Park and Harbor Lighthouse. William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor boasts a 63-foot lighthouse, which is a scaled down replica of the recently renovated lighthouse at Tawas Point State Park, originally built in 1876. Tawas Point Lighthouse is the sole representative of a true Victorian-era style station built on the Great Lakes. Maggie combined many photos with art, including the bench, Riverfront signs, lights, and birds huddling, and recreated them with hand painted touches in Photoshop, adding mist and wispy snow.



This art by Maggie LaNoue features a Detroit Riverfront landmark in Rivard Plaza, the Cullen Family Carousel. The Carousel was handcrafted and specially designed for Detroit.

It features creatures native to the Detroit River, including sturgeon, egrets and walleye, along with the mythical River Mermaid and River Monster.

The carousel opened in June 2007, and quickly became a favorite a Detroit destination for families visiting the Riverfront.

This winter scene by Maggie was used for the Conservancy's 2008 holiday cards. It features the Gabriel Richard Park, which is located just east of the Belle Isle Bridge. This park is the furthest eastern edge of the Riverfront redevelopment project directly across the Detroit River from Belle Isle. The Detroit RiverFront Conservancy has enhanced the park with a plaza and pavilion, located along the river's edge. During summer months, Gabriel Richard park is an especially pleasant place to visit, with fountains, fishing outlooks butterfly gardens and a labyrinth. There is a RiverWalk Cafe, open in season.



The Dequindre Cut Greenway, an urban recreation was officially open to the public in 2009. This art was featured on the 2009 Detroit Riverfront Conservancy holiday cards. The 1.35 mile greenway offers a pedestrian link between the Riverfront and the Eastern Market. Formerly a Grand Trunk Railroad line, the area is well known for its urban artwork and graffiti.

There are separate lanes for pedestrian and bike traffic. Each card of the series brought many comments from the recipients and became collector's items. Framed prints of the original art are in the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy home offices in the Renaissance Center.

Maggie offers custom greeting cards with her art to businesses. Her clients get a chance to co-create the custom art, watching the progress over the web, and offer their ideas, photos, feedback and critiques. Maggie has transformed trees that are newly planted to make mature trees, added lamp posts that are not yet installed, moved signs to be more readable, added holiday lights and garlands to buildings. These special touches have helped create interest in several architectural redevelopment projects in Michigan and in other states.

Using her imagination and a Macintosh computer, Maggie combines many photos, and hand drawn touches to build scenes that are not viewable in real life. Her clients sometimes want something fast and basic, like adding snow and a Christmas tree, but other times they want to change details, compare versions, and get more of their own creativity into the picture.

Maggie enjoys projects that feature renovation of older buildings and one recent project was for the Milwaukee Road Depot (now called “The Depot” in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A Renaissance Revival style building, The Depot still stands as a monument to romantic, adventurous rail days gone by. Today, the finished complex includes The Depot Renaissance Minneapolis Hotel, the Residence Inn Minneapolis Downtown by Marriott, an indoor water park, an interpretive history center about the Depot, The Stone Arch Bar, Charley’s Restaurant, banquet space, underground parking for 650 automobiles and an enclosed seasonal ice rink.

Maggie was commissioned to capture the charm of the building. The renovation project was still underway so art was created for a card mailing to be sent to interested parties for future development and travel projects. Maggie added custom street lights, swags of evergreens, ribbons and of course snow.



Many of the custom holiday cards created by Albion Design include history of the project on the back or inside top of the cards, so that the cards become souvenirs. Maggie shows proofs over the Internet now, with slide shows of versions of art, and clients can review each version of the art and participate in the creation process. She uses several different software programs including Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, Corel Paint and more in combinations and layers to create the scenes with her distinctive style featuring attention to detail, much like her hand drawn work of earlier years.



“One thing has stayed constant over the years,” Maggie remarked. “People tend to keep printed items that are unique, and make them feel good. They can tell when someone has taken the time to do what is necessary to create something special.” In the early days of her business, Maggie would take photos with a camera and film, and do sketches in pencil based on the photos. At left is Clara’s On The River, a renovated depot that is now a family restaurant in Battle Creek. Maggie created this art the old fashioned way with pen and ink and watercolor in 1993. Maggie recently created Clara’s web site at www.claras.com.

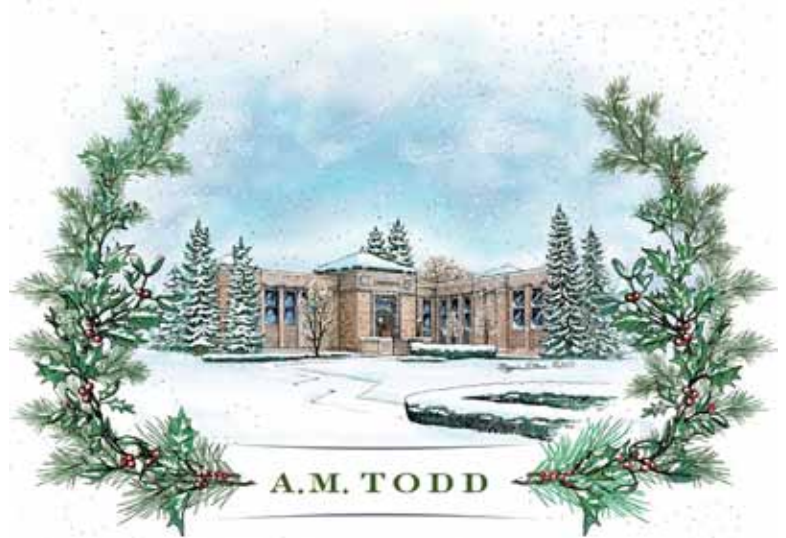
Before the internet, and the advent of powerful computers, Maggie would show pencil sketches to her clients in person for their approval, and this was the basis for final art. Some of her clients wanted more creative projects, especially during the holidays and she would sometimes bring her sketchpad to a business lunch for brainstorming on those projects.

One such client was Bev Lambkin, Exec. Assistant at Dawn Food Products, based in Jackson Michigan. Maggie’s company, Albion Design, created holiday cards for Dawn Foods, with Bev’s ideas, for over five years. Maggie’s custom holiday cards for Dawn were sent out from four continents, and the holiday characters such as the children sledding and playing snow ball fights, continued from one card to the next over the years. Dawn Foods is one of the largest family owned businesses in the world with sales over one billion dollars annually.



For Michigan's 150 year celebration, Maggie created a one woman art show featuring Michigan's centennial businesses and the show toured the state including showings under the dome of the state capital and at Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island.

The art from this show has been adapted over the years for some companies' holiday cards. One of these centennial clients is A.M. Todd of Kalamazoo, which manufactures mint extracts for many products sold throughout the world. The art features the old headquarters and is circled with mint or evergreen bows with a classic title below. These cards are sent from their manufacturing plants in Michigan, as well as in Japan and other countries. The art shown of A.M. Todd is a combination of old art done with ink and updated with computer art.



Family owned businesses seem to be among the most loyal of Maggie's art clients. The art, which is the basis for holiday cards, begins during the dog days of summer, the cards go into printing in the fall, and are ready for mailing before the holidays. The art becomes a family heirloom, and captures the time and place of the business, or the family history and traditions.

A woman owned contractor business in Brooklyn, New York (Falco Construction) commissioned Maggie to create holiday cards over a ten-year period of time that included 2001. That year, the cards for Falco Construction had a statement of why the New York skyline, which is part of the Falco logo, will not change, just because the actual skyline of New York did change. The cards

that year had a patriotic theme, and other years have more of a folk art style that incorporates the heavy equipment of the construction company with the New York skyline and children playing in the snow, and always the Christmas tree. Maggie's card series for Falco is displayed on the Falco web site that she also designed for them, ten years after she started doing their holiday cards. www.FalcoConstruction.com

"Some companies don't like to have a Christmas tree in their holiday cards that I create. But many companies, even banks, love the holiday touches and don't worry so much about being politically correct. The holiday spirit is something to share, and a special greeting card is a way of saying to your clients and employees that they are important to you. It's a lot like sending a little gift in an envelope and they do get noticed."

See this article (with additional notes and more scenes of Maggie's art of these companies) at :

www.AlbionDesign.com/revitalization/

The link also shows a Google map with the Detroit art on location points.

See more of Maggie's cards online at:

www.AlbionDesign.com • www.CustomCorporateCards.com • www.CentennialBusinessPortraits.com