



# The Creative Hands of Benitta Wilcox

By Gloria Hildebrandt Photos by Mike Davis

Before you enter Benitta Wilcox's studio in the village of Erin and see her fibre art, don't be surprised if you are distracted by her garden.

Benitta Wilcox, fibre artist, shows some of her work in her whimsical garden.



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Even the garden shed becomes a backdrop for Ben's creative expression.



The waterfall that Ben made screens traffic noise from Erin's Main St.



In the studio, an armoire custom made to old, beautifully displays some of Ben's

While her front yard is elegantly groomed and beautifully colour-coordinated, every inch of her back yard is intensively gardened and filled with quirky treasures. Curving garden beds, some edged with rock, are lushly planted

with shrubs and flowers. Plants also bloom in pots, old buckets, wash-tubs. Sculpture, old tools, bird-houses, birdbaths, whirligigs, cedar posts, even a horse's jawbone found when the street was excavated for a water main, have been positioned throughout the garden.

"A lot of them have stories or are gifts," Ben says of her outdoor treasures.

Steps lead down into the garden from Erin's street level along a rocky little waterfall that Ben created about two and a half years ago. "I eyed the slope for many years," she says. "I wanted a water feature there. The traffic on Main Street is noisy. This helps."

Winding paths throughout the whole garden lead to several seating areas and focal points. "I like to follow the shade," she points out. "And I like to look at different aspects of the garden. The neatest place is at the back where the hammock is. It's lower than the garden so you can look up at the plants."

Many of her garden pieces are stored in her garden shed over the winter. This shed is yet another blank canvas for her artistic eye, with a piece of sculpture hanging from it and retired garden tools leaning against it.

Ben began creating the garden 20 years ago. The 55-square-foot yard was absolutely bare except for a willow tree, so she began by putting up the green board fence. It is now decorated with old rakes and shovels.

"They give a break from the green and from the fence," she says. Because the septic system's weeping

bed uses a large part of the yard, she is restricted from planting trees in the middle. There isn't much lawn in her yard, either.

"Every time I see a plant I must have, the beds get a little larger," she confesses. "I keep pulling things out and changing them. I don't move plants around a lot. If I feel something will do well in another place, I'll split it."

A picnic table, chiminea and central fire pit are evidence that she entertains outdoors, but she says she tends to use the garden more on her own. She enjoys actually listening to her garden.

"There are birds, the waterfall, and I have a primrose with flowers that open at night and make a noise. They open with a click," she explains.

While she spends a lot of her weekends in the garden, she denies that it requires work. "It's who I am and what I want to spend my time on. To see things grow is a joy. I couldn't be without having my hands into something outdoors."

### Colours to Smile At

Only after touring the garden are most visitors ready to enter Ben's basement studio. Colour and texture are everywhere in the charming room filled with antiques and



Winding paths and sitting areas in the garden outside Ben's studio invite exploration.





look work.

People of all ages are drawn to the delights in Ben's studio.

lovely scents from candles. Ben makes "regular" knitted hats and fingerless mitts that help warm up leather gloves and spectacular "free-range" knitted scarves, wraps and shawls.

Saying her aunt taught her to knit, Ben credits a friend with get-

ting her to take up knitting again recently. She started in order to have something to do with her hands in front of the TV. Now she likes to experiment with yarn and form.

"The fun part is putting the colours together," she says. "I have an enormous stash of yarns and the garden gives me colour combinations. Obviously I'm a purple person. Combinations of colours make me smile."

Texture is just as important to Ben, who says that kids immediately want to touch her creations. Many of her pieces are finished with yarn embellishments that add rich lushness. She gets varieties of wool from a local shop and spins them herself in her studio. She does all the preparation herself, washing, carding, spinning, washing again, plying and dyeing the wool before creating her wearable art.

Prices for her works start around \$10 for her fingerless gloves, go to \$30 for her narrow decorative scarves, up to \$100s for full shawls. There is something for everyone to purchase in her studio and to admire in her garden.

Ben's Studio will be part of the 20th anniversary Hills of Erin Studio Tour on Sept. 27 and 28. For more information, see [www.hillsoferinstudiotour.com](http://www.hillsoferinstudiotour.com). ■



Ben found the jawbone of a horse when the street in front of her house was dug up for a watermain.



A windmill & salvage become art in Ben's garden of treasures.