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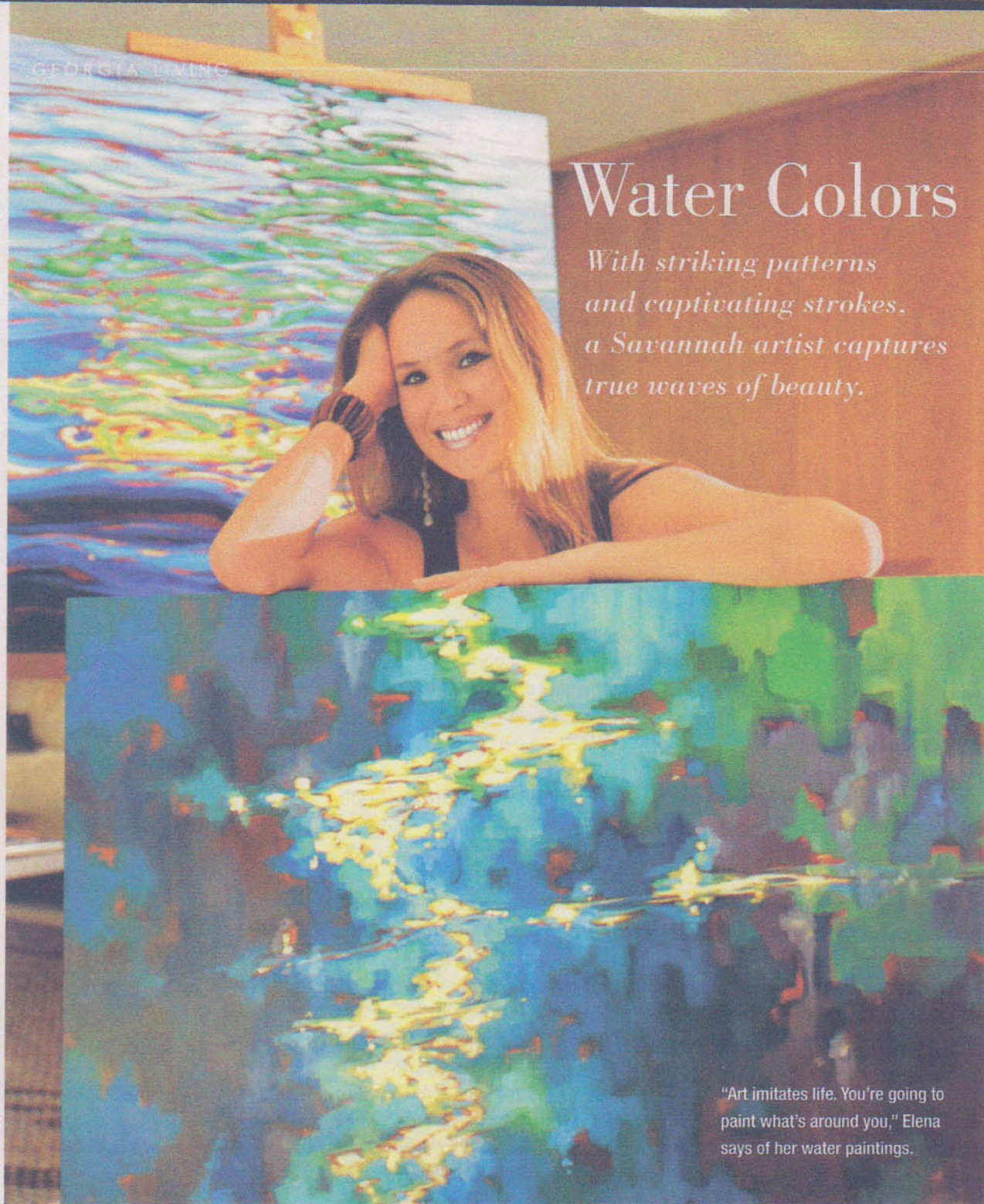
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Water Colors

With striking patterns and captivating strokes, a Savannah artist captures true waves of beauty.



"Art imitates life. You're going to paint what's around you," Elena says of her water paintings.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK SANDLIN

Artist Elena Madden skips a pebble across the Savannah River at dusk, creating wavy rows of pink and orange ripples. She takes a mental picture—no camera needed—of the scene with its concentric rings growing ever larger.

Riding the Waves

"I paint what I remember," she says. Admittedly, the photographic memory took time and practice, but Elena cherishes reliving these moments.

"Painting is like an emotional release of a memory," she explains. Elena, a water lover ever since her childhood in South Carolina, finds plenty of inspiration around Savannah. Today, she and husband T.J., daughter Hannah, and Great Dane Bull spend lots of time splashing around together. Trips on their ocean boat stand out as family favorites.

"When the weather is nice, we love to go to the barrier islands outside Savannah—we just make a family trip out of it," Elena says. If she's not with her family, she also enjoys studying the water while canoeing. No matter where she



Elena's 1950s ranch home also serves as a studio for painting.

“Painting is like an emotional release of a memory.”

Elena Madden

is, the artist remains fascinated by how light affects the water. “I see 12,000 different colors every time I look at it,” she says.

From Water to Canvas

With her colorful array of memories, Elena zones in on painting when she returns home to her 1950s retro-style ranch. A giant window along the back of the den, which doubles as her studio, allows plenty of light to pour inside. The atmosphere helps her create mesmerizing pieces, offering a genuine sense of fluidity.

Whether she’s painting reds, blues, purples, greens, or yellows, all appear as though the sun is shining directly on her canvas. “I love the unique feeling each painting can evoke,” she says. Most of her finished pieces fall into one of five separate series: City Lights, Horizon, Pure, Rings, or River. ▶

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Saluting Savannah

Artistic skills aren't the only things this Columbia, South Carolina, native gained by moving here to attend Savannah College of Art and Design. Surrounded by water, Elena finds endless sources of inspiration. Whether she's boating on the ocean or paddling a canoe or kayak on local rivers and estuaries, Elena believes the Savannah area offers the ideal place to connect with water—the main subject of her art.



LEFT: Elena finds inspiration while hanging out around Savannah's waters with husband T.J. and daughter Hannah.

ABOVE: "Savannah is a wonderful place to connect with water," Elena says.

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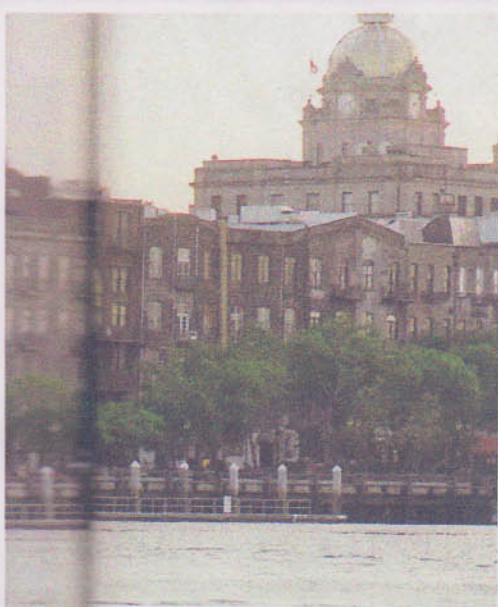
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Elena finishes about 8 to 12 pieces each month to keep up with demand. Her paintings attract lots of attention around the Savannah area, and she currently sells to other galleries around the U.S. She's also featured in exhibitions and collections throughout the country.

A former gallery owner herself, Elena loves being able to work from home now. "I ran a gallery downtown and lived in the loft above it," she says. "It was fun, but it became more practical for me to move. I felt like I always needed to be open to sell my work. Now I have time for vacations."

Family of Art

If the right surroundings inspire creativity, it's no wonder Elena paints with such grace. She learned from a commercial-artist father and a mother who painted in her free time. "My dad inspired me," she says. "If he could do it, then I could do it too." Determined never to be a struggling artist, she has always focused her energy on making a living strictly from painting. "I never wanted to work as a waitress or anything else to pay the bills," she stresses.

Her husband, a contractor, sculpts as a sideline. Even the couple's 8-year-old daughter shows artistic promise. "Hannah started

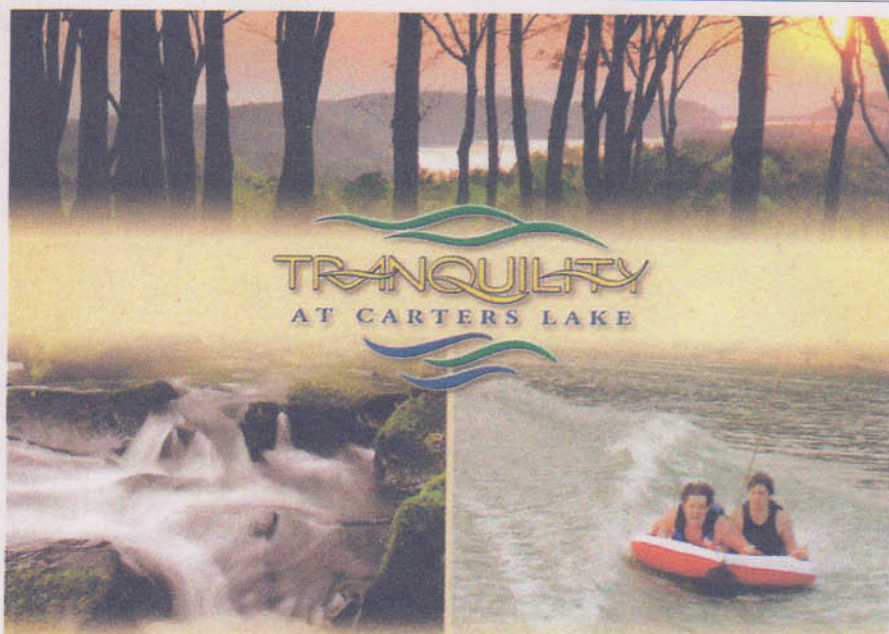
her own business, Art Bark, to raise money to buy a guitar," Elena proudly notes. "Basically she went around drawing pictures of people's dogs."

Elena believes she could continue painting water indefinitely. "It's always changing," she explains. "Things look different at dawn than they do at dusk." Even more importantly, she feels she's constantly evolving with her work. "I'm still in the midst of exploring where I am right now," she says.

SUZANNE POWELL MILLS

Searching for Elena

Visit www.elenamadden.com. In Savannah find her work at **Chroma Gallery**, 31 Barnard Street, www.chromaartgallery.com or (912) 232-2787. Other galleries she supplies include **Tyndall Galleries** in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, www.tyndallgalleries.com or (919) 942-2290; **Center of the Earth Gallery** in Charlotte, North Carolina, www.centeroftheearth.com or (704) 375-5756; and **I. Pinckney Simons Gallery** in Columbia ((803) 771-8815) and Beaufort ((843) 379-4774), South Carolina, www.ipinckneysimonsgallery.com.



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