

Framing the Fun Times

A Florida couple turns old postcards into collectible artwork.

Everybody comes from somewhere," reasons Liz Coursen as she plants herself at the computer and zips to www.americanpostcardart.com, her Web site featuring a vast personal collection of vintage postcards. "You have a sentimental attachment to places you've lived--and we create fine art by enlarging the postcard of your place so you can frame and decorate with it."

Here's how it works: Let's say you went to a certain university, vacationed at a popular tourist spot, or grew up in a beloved city or state. It's easy to locate postcards depicting those places from your past



on the Web site--you're bound to connect with something in the collection of more than 72,000.

When you hit on the one that tugs at the heart, simply order it as a frameable print. Liz then transfers the image onto your choice of glossy paper, a canvas-type surface, or watercolor paper; a 10- x 16-inch print runs about \$54 with three larger sizes also available.

The Big Cleanup

"I scan the card into the computer, blow it up to 200%, and then spend about an hour or more cleaning up



above: Phil Neigh and Liz Coursen transform postcards into frame-worthy fine art. **far left:** Beach beauties from a century ago **left:** A positively Victorian Uncle Sam Santa, toting toys and bright American flags



the images in formats where people can frame them, and I don't have to relinquish my cards."

Liz isn't about to let go of those cards. I knew I was a collector when I bought that very first one," she says, recounting the hours she has spent prowling flea markets, scouring yard sales, and attending postcard shows.

the original, taking out any imperfections," Liz says, explaining the process. "This way I can share my collection, print

"It wasn't enough to have just one when there are so many wonderful views and topics. I like the art, I like the history. It's interesting to see how people dressed and to look at the cars. I started with my hometown--everyone starts with a hometown--and I was fortunate enough to have two towns.

"I initially collected Sarasota, Florida [where she now operates the business with husband Phil Neigh], and Brunswick, Maine. Because both places have remained the same to a certain extent over the years, the old postcards are especially fun to look at because you can recognize familiar landmarks."

FROM YOUR MOUSE
TO YOUR HOUSE

At www.americanpostcardart.com, click on your preferred category from the "People," "Places," or "Things" boxes. The "Places" box, for example, provides you a map of the United States--just click on a particular state. Once there, pull down the menu under "Choose a City" to see all the cards available for a particular town. You can use the same procedure to search state after state, city after city. Click on any postcard to enlarge it (pricing information lies at the bottom of the screen). To order, go first to "Add to Basket," then to "Checkout." Turnaround time is generally a week (less during the holidays if you pay overnight charges).



Postcard Extras

As she flips from one postcard image to another on the computer screen, Liz points out the snippets of information she adds to the online experience. "The heyday of postcards was between 1906 and 1911, and I'll tell you all I know about the particular card's history," she says. "Our collection basically ends just after World War II."

She also educates you about the various styles--installment cards (example: the Uncle Sam series of four cards, which, put together, form the patriotic fellow from head to toe); an alligator-border series, featuring Southern scenes with toothy gators curling around top and bottom; the 1940s-era "Greetings From..." cards and a "state girl" series, created in the early 1900s.

above: Alligator-border views of early 20th century Florida **right:** One of the "state girls" from the early 1900s **far right:** Scenes from 1940s Texas sneak into the "Greetings From..." series of postcards.

Beyond the Internet business, the couple sells their postcard art to college bookstores (campus and stadium scenes, plus the occasional "university girl" card). Robb & Stucky, a Florida furniture business, buys framed shots of swaying palms and vintage local scenes to enhance in-store room settings, and interior designers personalize their work with postcard memories of their clients' roots.

Liz used to give the actual cards to friends--but now she lets the prints do the talking. "They make such lovely, personal gifts," she says. "You can get into someone's psyche. If you can produce

a scene of their hometown, someplace they know and love, or a moment in time, it's such a profound personal gift."

For the former English major, who put herself through Emory University in Atlanta by mowing lawns, the ability to make a living from her hobby seems the supreme indulgence. "I can find almost anything when people ask me for a specific building or a specific place," Liz says with confidence. "I want our business to be really big so I can keep getting postcards. I'm having such a great time."

CAROLANNE GRIFFITH ROBERTS

