

Sally Hope at Versatile

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845-298-6033
www.versatileworld.com

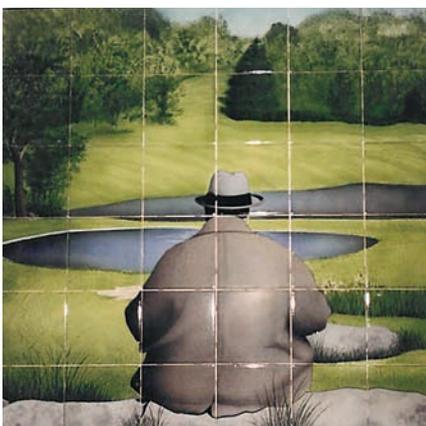
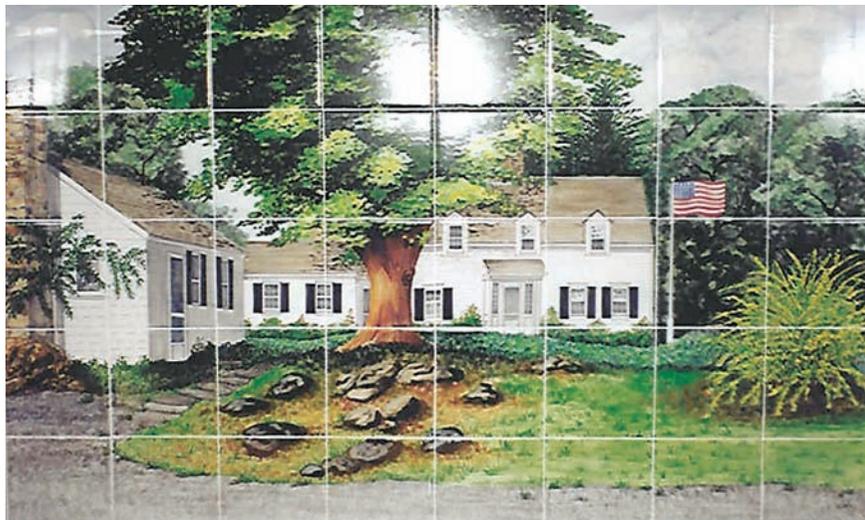
Sally Hope's company is certainly aptly named. Hope routinely takes ordinary, store-bought tiles and transforms them into something extraordinary — sun-baked Tuscan landscapes, glorious underwater tableaux, nostalgic recreations of days gone by. Though her work often takes the form of murals, she also paints individual ceramic or stone tiles.

Hope's artistic journey began in England, where she studied graphic design at Bournemouth and Poole College of Art. After coming to the United States some 25 years ago, she became an apprentice at Versatile, and eventually bought the business. While Hope once made her own tiles, her focus is now just on decorating them, although she still uses her kiln. "The ceramic tiles have to be fired because they're painted with glaze," she explains.

Sometimes Hope's clients know exactly what they want — a portrait of their beloved pet or family home, say — and sometimes they just want to kick around a few ideas before deciding on a design. The artist has been known to suggest trompe l'oeil "windows" to brighten up a windowless space, and to personalize the wine bottles in a still life (a popular choice for kitchen backsplashes) with customers' names and wedding dates.

Though some commissions are more interesting than others, Hope insists that every project is rewarding. "I enjoy all of it," she declares.

Hope will meet customers either at their home or at a tile shop of their choosing. Painted tiles start at \$80 a square foot; individual tiles begin at \$25. She also paints murals, furniture and sinks.



Favorite themes among Hope's customers are house portraits and still lifes (the one in the center is painted on tumbled stone). A much quirkier commission was the image of Winston Churchill gazing over ponds in an English landscape — a tile assemblage that the clients installed in their shower