

# Lifestyles of **Sedona**

Culture • Art • Scenery • Dining

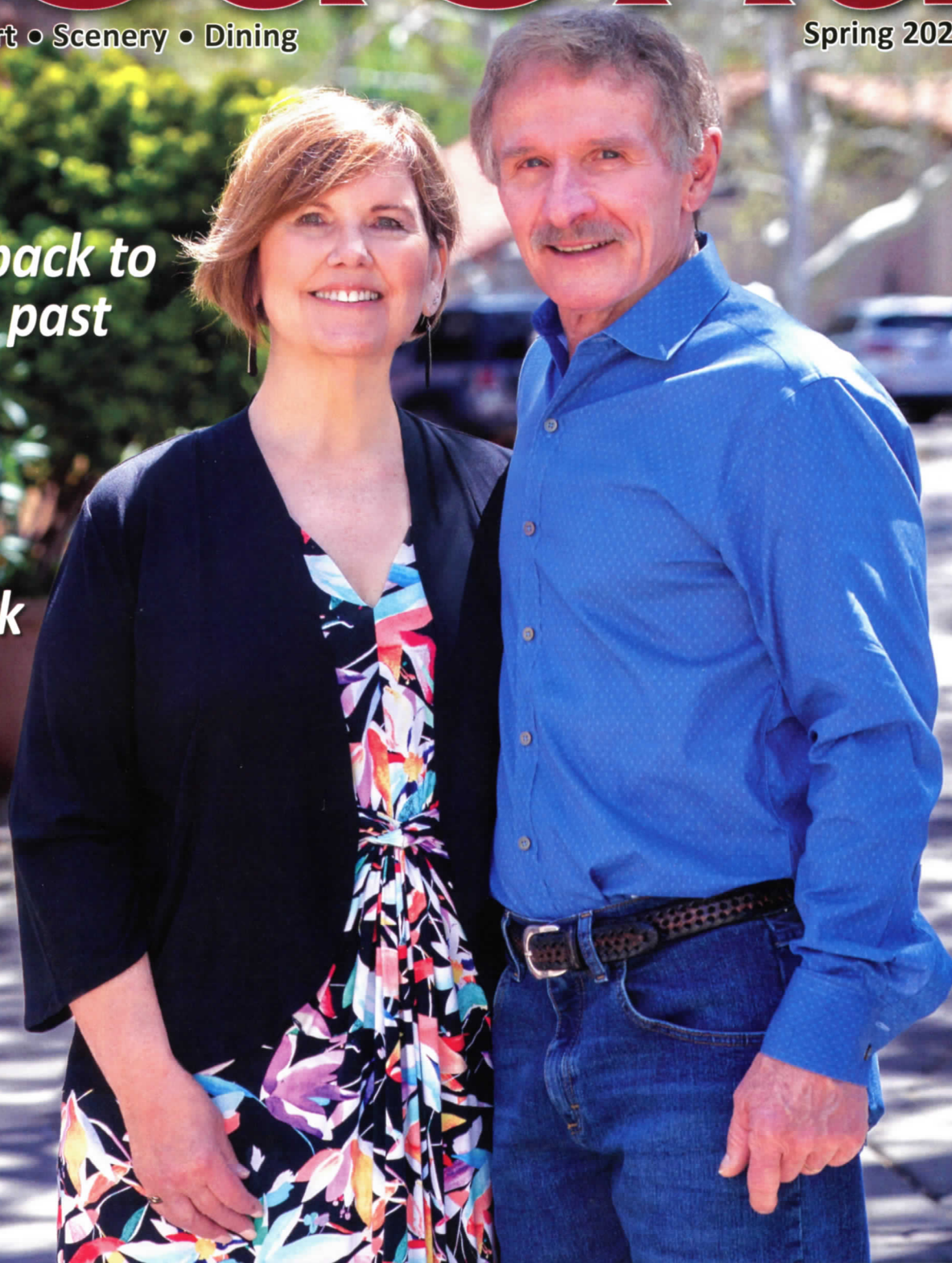
Spring 2022

## **HISTORY**

*Journey back to  
Sedona's past*

## **HIKING**

*Take a  
stroll up  
West Fork*



# Lifestyles of Sedona

Spring 2022

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COVER PHOTO:  
Ken and Monica Rowe  
Owners of Rowe Fine Art Gallery



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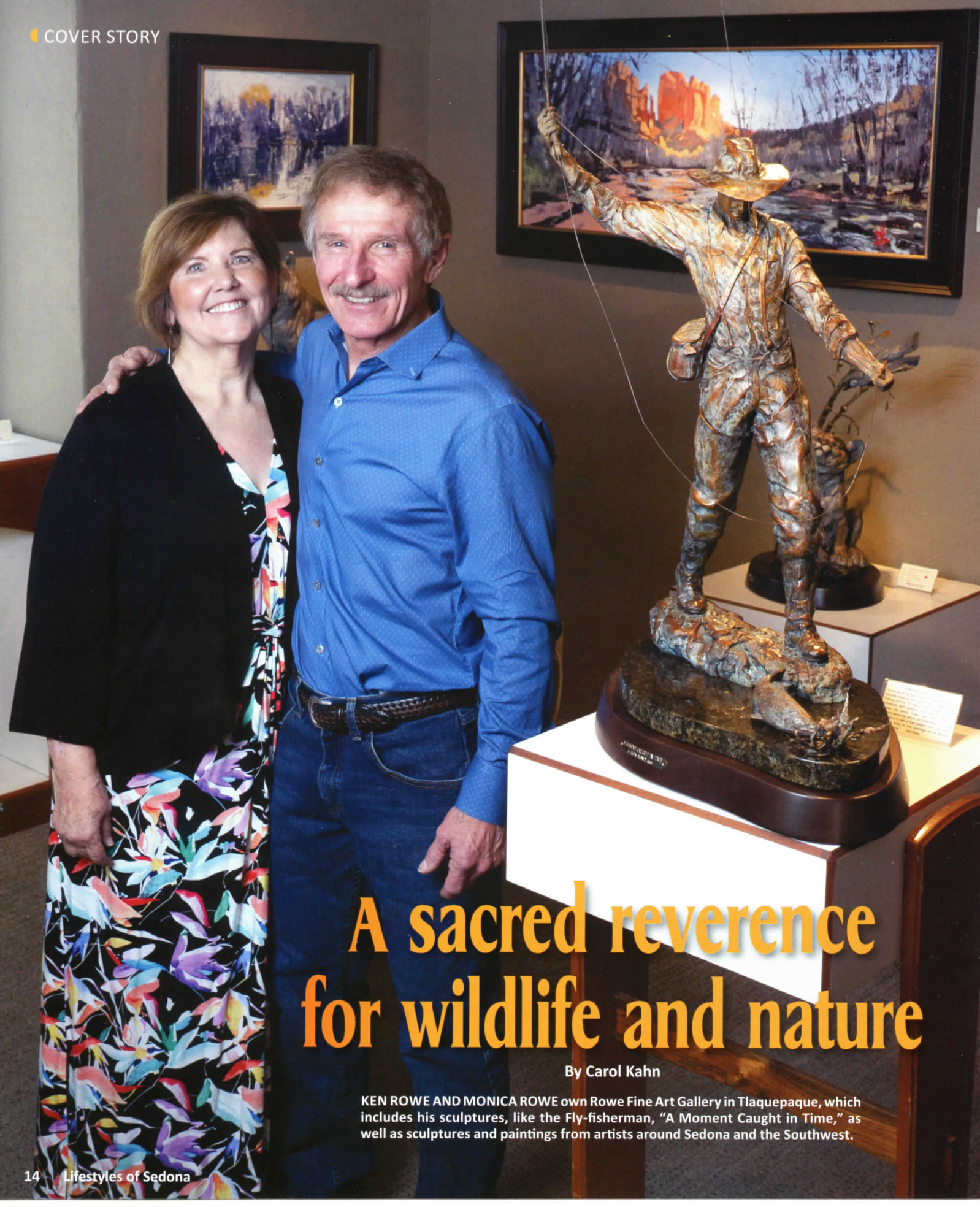
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# A sacred reverence for wildlife and nature

By Carol Kahn

KEN ROWE AND MONICA ROWE own Rowe Fine Art Gallery in Tlaquepaque, which includes his sculptures, like the Fly-fisherman, "A Moment Caught in Time," as well as sculptures and paintings from artists around Sedona and the Southwest.



Photos by David Jolkovski/Larson Newspapers

**KEN ROWE** works on his most recent sculpture of a hummingbird in his gallery (above). Rowe says that he spends a lot of time researching his animal subjects to make sure that they are completely accurate. Rowe sculpts an intricate flower that he will place on the sculpture (below). Rowe's work imbues the story of the hummingbird in flight.

**K**en and Monica Rowe, owners of Rowe Fine Art Gallery in Tlaquepaque arts and crafts village, have lived in Sedona for 27 years. Their gallery sits below the bell tower among the sycamore trees where his wildlife sculptures are displayed throughout since its inception in 2010.

Additionally, they represent 16 Southwestern artists in both contemporary and traditional artwork which include paintings, jewelry and sculpture.

The Rowes, both from Arizona, met when he was 25 and she was 23 at a country western nightclub and restaurant where he was taking his parents to dinner. Ken Rowe said "it was the night that he got lucky" at Mr. Lucky's in Phoenix, a



legendary music club on Grand Avenue.

Rowe said that he was not much into the bar scene, "but when this pretty gal approached me to dance, what was I going to do?"

As of April 26, the couple has been married for 42 years.

Rowe's mother was a painter and his father an engineer. He says he got the best gene pool from both. Rowe started his career in the drywall business during the 1970s when the construction industry was booming in Phoenix. He became a journeyman and was making a lot of money in a

lucrative business. One of his coworkers needed to stop by a taxidermist and Rowe went along.

"I've never been in a place like this — it was weird," Rowe said. "There are these mannequins on the wall — deer mannequins, elk mannequins, bear mannequins. I thought, 'man, that'd be cool to make mannequins.'"

Rowe said the manager told him "you can be an apprentice if you want to work weekends." So that's how it started — in that shop, apprenticing, doing taxidermy."

Rowe says that taxidermy is a higher art form than people think because taxidermists deal with variables and it can be a difficult process, however, Rowe wanted to honor the animal in the best

way possible.

The Rows opened their own taxidermy studio and he submerged himself in a profession that demanded an intense study of wildlife anatomy and physiology.

Rowe says that this in-depth knowledge is an extremely important quality to possess as a wildlife artist. Throughout his 14 years as a taxidermist, Rowe began sculpting with clay.

“But like most artists, they are working two jobs, two occupations to make a living, that’s what I was doing,” Rowe said. “But then I took a college course to see if I could succeed in sculpture or if I had a knack at it. It was that one of those golden moments in your life where God just says, ‘this is what you’re doing. You’ve just discovered what you’re going to do the rest of your life,’ and just like that — bing, it was just that instant.

“I was light on my feet. It just was an amazing thing. I still get goosebumps.”

Whether that moment was a divine intervention, as Rowe explains, it is his reverence for wildlife and nature that is sacred.

“My reverence for nature makes me believe in God,” he said. “It’s what grounds all of us, you know ... I want to share my experiences because they’re so profound to me and tell these stories.”

Rowe’s work draws viewers in, exuding a power from the viewer’s point of view about connection and interaction; a conversation between the artist and the animal Rowe sculpts. Rowe’s goal is to communicate — without words — reverence for his subject. As an inspired artist, he tells a story.

“I don’t know how it happens,” he said. “Maybe, because I have so much interest in the subject matter that I go in-depth a little bit more, I don’t know. But then having the firsthand



**BY BRUSHING** finished sculptures with wax, like this sculpture of a deer, Ken Rowe says that it helps the bronze pieces maintain a glossy appearance.

interaction with these animals, as you know, I mean, that’s got to be really a profound influence and in what I do.”

Rowe has sculpted a multitude of animal species in the wild: Deer, elk, bison, wolves, bears, owls, javelinas, mountain lions and bighorn sheep. His favorite is the grizzly bear.

“Well, I have to say for sure [my favorite] are bears, because I’ve had so much of a great interaction with them and the privilege of being able to work with some of the grizzly bears,” he said. “There’s nothing more awe-inspiring than handling something like that.

As large as they are and powerful, many of these animals can be intimidating, making some wonder if Rowe senses fear prior to meeting the animal for the first time.

“I just go in respecting the animal’s strength and power,” he said. “So, there’s a certain courtship that happens.”

Rowe said animals intuitively want to know “where

are you coming from? Or what do you want from me? What do you expect from me, what I expect from you happening?”

“Everything that we, as artists do, influences our artwork, whether it’s good or bad,” he said. “If you’ve been bucked off a horse and bitten and stomped on, your sculpture will look a lot different than mine — which I’ve never had anything but great experiences with horses.

“I just want to look at life that way. And all these animals have given me these gifts.”

On a trip to Alaska several years ago, Rowe said that his previous interaction with animals included seeing grizzly bears from a distance through his binoculars or going to a zoo and seeing them firsthand.

This time, he is in an enclosure with a grizzly bear, working with the bear handlers. As he set up his portable sculpting stand, the handler’s orders are to stay

next to the vehicle with the passenger door open. If something happens, he was instructed to get inside.

Rowe said he was about 50 feet from the bear and sculpted for three days. On the third day, the handler asked Rowe if he wanted to touch the bear.

“And the answer is, ‘yes, absolutely,’” Rowe said. “So, the protocol was that I was to walk behind the handler and reach around like it was his hand and let the bear smell it,” Rowe said. “When I reached around, the bear smelled the palm of my hand and started nursing on my hand instantly.”

“That’s a sign of acceptance from the bear,” Rowe said the handler told him. “When I walked around [the bear], I could not believe what I was seeing, the grizzly bear was massive.”

“I looked at my piece and thought it was lacking,” Rowe said. “At that same time as I’ve got my hand out, the bear exhales on my hand. It was like a draft horse breathing

on me. Then the volume and the mass of that animal made perfect sense to me. That sense of the air hitting my hand changed that piece and every bear piece I've ever known ever since." To Rowe, it is pure magic.

Taking a lump of clay and molding it into a shape of an animal takes talent, yet it's more than just artistic talent that Rowe imbues as he sculpts. He said all the senses are involved: Smell, touch and visual, and all influences his creative process.

"I think it is a sense of accomplishment to take just a chunk of clay and say, I absolutely love that animal. I must do it justice," Rowe said.

"And then when those pieces of clay come together and start adding up to the animal you have such reverence for — this is magic. It's like who needs to do drugs — it's amazing and the goosebumps I get all the time when I'm sculpting, it's



**KEN ROWE** sculpts a horse in the Village of Oak Creek. He prefers to be out in nature and work in close proximity to the animals he sculpts rather than working from a photograph.

just amazing."

Knowing how the muscles work what's going on under the skin is how Rowe sculpts the powerful movement of his subjects and explains it's like an architect looking at

a house — he knows what's under the roof.

"I can say, 'oh, there's the deltoid popping on that mountain lion as he hits that pose.' So, I guess that is the lucky part — my knowing

what's under the skin and how that moves," Rowe said. "Then even digging deeper, knowing how the bones are. So, if I get the skeleton right, I know I'm going to make something accurate .... I think I'm a little obsessive about anatomy because it intrigues me. I find it fascinating."

For Rowe, each time he sculpts, it's as if it is the first time. He says there is no guarantee the piece will come out as expected, but that it would be boring if it did.

He said he considers each piece a learning experience, whether it's a success or failure, the process is exciting. It's the storytelling process that he relishes.

The advice he received from a gallery owner at the beginning of his career, Rowe said, "will never leave my brain. Every time I do a piece, I'm telling stories. And I think a lot of times, we as artists, have an idea

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Carol Kahn/Larson Newspapers

**KEN ROWE** sculpts a lion and lioness at Out of Africa Wildlife in Camp Verde (above). His fingers craft piece of clay as he says he gives reverence to the wildlife he sculpts (below). Ken Rowe has lived in Sedona for 27 years and co-owned Rowe Fine Art Gallery with his wife, Monica, in the building below the Tlaquepaque bell tower since 2010 (bottom).



Carol Kahn/Larson Newspapers



David Jolkovski/Larson Newspapers

of something that's a little intimidating because it's beyond our comfort zone in terms of skill, like doing a fly fisherman or a cowboy. But now, having done enough pieces, you mature as an artist ... work instinctively ... and you develop your signature style."

Rowe says that he has no plans to retire or stop sculpting. When asked, it was an emphatic "No."

His next inquisition is Jericho, an enormous 5,000-pound rhino who loves to have his ears rubbed and resides at Out of Africa Wildlife Park in Camp Verde.

"I think I've learned the worst enemy of any artist is ego," Rowe said. "The minute you think you've mastered your profession is the minute you stop learning and I never want to stop learning."

"I think it's so important to look beyond the piece you're doing and know that there's another level you're going

to get to that you're even happier with. If you keep the frame of mind that you'll never master it. And I have enough pieces that humbled me to really keep my feet on the ground and know that it makes me appreciate the pieces that do come together even more."

"And so [when a piece is finished] that's when the chills run up your spine and you sit down and look at it and think, 'man that was a blast. What a great ride. It was exciting. It's scary. It's invigorating. And it's the uncertainty of not knowing,'" Rowe said. "I can take a chunk of clay and say, 'OK, I'm going to turn this chunk of clay and give the animal some reverence in my clay' and to be able to convey that is a total drug for me."

"There is nothing else that feeds my soul," Rowe said. "I get so much gratification from it ... sculpting has become what defines me." ■

# It's All About Nature



"VANTAGE POINT" | LIMITED EDITION BRONZE | KEN ROWE



VISIT WITH KEN AS HE SCULPTS WEEKLY IN THE GALLERY

*For more information or to view additional works by our award-winning family of artists, please visit [ROWEGALLERY.COM](http://ROWEGALLERY.COM). Check out our Livestream videos on our YouTube Channel: Rowe Fine Art Gallery  
Commissions Available Upon Request*

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