

## **JAMES G. RYAN**

### **PIECE BY PIECE**

Precision and patience: that's what it takes to create a piece of art containing 500 tiny pieces of wood. In 1990, Jim Ryan read about intarsia in a woodworking magazine. The following year, he completed his first piece – a raccoon – and hundreds of intarsia artworks have since taken shape in his at-home shop.

The Savage man actually has more than 300 patterns at the ready and estimates that he's created more than 400 pieces.

Ten examples of Ryan's work are on display at the Savage Library and wandering through the rooms of his house reveals many more – from the little red cardinal that greets visitors just inside the front door to a large piece called "hidden Forest" above the living room sofa that challenges people to find the six animals located within the many pieces of wood.

A cross and dove are among Ryan's most popular creations and he has made and given away 80 to 100 of them. His personal favorite is an eagle flying in front of an American flag.

A former concrete finisher, Ryan said that the precision and patience needed in the line of work from which he retired carried over into what has practically become a full-time hobby.

While the pieces are usually made from purchased patterns, Ryan often improvises to make his artwork more unique.

"It gives you an idea," Ryan said about the pattern. "You don't have to stay with it ... I never do."

He even designed one of his own patterns – a tiger that earned the artist a blue ribbon in a Midwest art show and was featured in the August 2002 edition of Creative Woodworks and Crafts magazine.

"If you can make this one, you can make anything," Ryan said of his tiger.

Ryan doesn't keep track of the amount of time it takes to complete a piece because he's usually got several projects in the works at a given time. He also tries not to say exactly how many pieces are in a particular intarsia because "someone who counts better than me might come up with a different number."

The number of pieces depends on the intricacy of the design, as well as on the size of the final piece. A smaller intarsia can take about 50 pieces to complete, while a larger one, like the eagle that Ryan makes has upwards of 500 pieces.

He's currently working on a grouping of horses for himself and plans to tackle the Last Supper as his next big project.

And, while he used to teach intarsia, he finds it tough to keep students.

"You gotta have it in your heart or you don't have it," Ryan said

Savage Pacer

By Ruth Anne Maddox

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