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SOUTHCOAST Artists Index

This story was collected through our partnership with the SouthCoast Artist Index, led by Ron Fortier.

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Pietragalla**

RON: Like first of all, state your name

MICHAEL: Your name

RON: This is a very good start. State your name, how you prefer to have your, your last name pronounced. You have a company name, which is not always usual for artists and artisans. And we'll just take it from there.

MICHAEL: Well, my name is Michel Pietragalla. That's the proper way to pronounce it. My company, if you want to call it a company, it's Floating Sone Woodworks which is actually to translate, translation from English. The Italian of Pietragala is "the stone that floats.

RON: Yeah. Okay, so okay, I always thought I meant stone rooster. I guess that would be Gallo. I don't know.

MICHAEL: Rooster is what, chicken is galena? Yeah, I don't know what rooster is. But "gala" G-A-L-A means to rise above, effervesce, to bubble—

RON: Oh, that's really good. Yeah, those are all great, great terms, especially for for —

MICHAEL: Very optimistic.

RON: Exactly, exactly. So did you start off as a woodworker?

MICHAEL: No, I started off when I graduated from Swain school in 1972. was a painter. And they didn't teach photography there, but I was also a photographer. So I started out as a visual artist, classically trained. And soon afterwards, I got hired by my landlord who started to teach me carpentry. So I went from carpentry to, you know, fussy trim work and eventually evolved into furniture making. I make a lot of things out of wood.

RON: Yeah.



MICHAEL: Just you know, sculptural things, carvings, furniture, little embellishments of carved things in my furniture... Stuff like that.

RON: So that's that was a really, a good well, I guess the back in the old days, used to call it a bread and butter job for, for a painter.

MICHAEL Yeah, being a carpenter. Exactly. Kind of like what if you, if you see some of the other swing grads nowadays, like Chuck Hauck, Don Wilkinson. I mean, they're already they're visual artists, but they're working with their hands to make a living.

RON: Okay. Now. We're hoping to reach a broad audience. So the Swain School means nothing to, hopefully, to the people on the fringes of this broad audience. So could you explain what the Swain School was all about?

MICHAEL: Well, I don't know a lot about the history of the school. I know that it was founded...I'm gonna say, what in the 1800s. The Swain Free School - it was primarily a school that young women went to, to learn fashion design. And eventually it grew and grew and grew. It has always been on the corner of Hawthorne and County. Up until when it was sold, all the buildings were sold, when it went down the toilet. But, it was quite a very active, small private school. It was a great place to go to school, especially in the 60s when things were changing and developing..Swain was changing and developing and growing very quickly. It was it was a great school. I mean, my graduating class was I think 12,13 people so everybody got to know everybody

RON: And these are bonds that still exist today?

MICHAEL: Oh yeah. Yeah, it's like it's still you know, when, when you tell people you went to Swain school, some people have heard of it, like you said, and some people haven't, as you said, and it's always fun to reconnect with the "Swainees", as we refer to each other.

RON: Yeah. Now the, the painting part of your life have you...Do you still paint.. return to what occasionally, or?

MICHAEL: No, I haven't really painted much, but my drawing is invaluable as far as even when it comes to design. You know, furniture design. Some of my carvings, actually, kitchen utensils, spoons and spreaders and cheese knives and things like that and you know, to try to come up with something that's unique. You know, you see things and you don't want to copy that, but you say oh, that's a great idea. How can I embellish this? So the drawing aspect is is is very valuable, that learning that has become very valuable to me. And I still take a lot of pictures. One of the only reasons that I got a smartphone was to get the camera that comes with my camera that comes with it and I'm just clicking everything. One of the things I do in the wintertime - we have some of the most beautiful sunsets in this part of the country here in New Bedford. And my studio windows face west. So I'm like a moth to a flame. I mean, I'm just taking pictures of beautiful sunsets and I post them on you know, Facebook and the Hatch Street Studios page, my own page and just you know, look at this is it this beautiful just to try to share it with people.

RON: Yeah. As far as the woodworking now, when you're doing the utensils, the spreaders, and I guess the salad sets and, and other things –

MICHAEL: Cheeseboards.

RON: You know, from a marketing standpoint these are probably your entry level items. You know, they're less expensive than obviously buying an entire table that you've designed and built. But there's an interesting organic feeling to them just by looking at them. What's that all about?



MICHAEL: Well, I don't know, I find that to be people like to grab and feel and touch these objects like they're a piece of sculpture. Of course, I work on them so they're so smooth. And like you said, the tag the, the organic shapes of them. When I do outside fairs or Open Studios, things like that, more people come up and they touch. They'll pick it up and they'll touch it and they'll grab it. And I feel like saying you know it's gonna cost you \$10 to touch that. I'm sorry. \$25 To touch \$15 If you buy it.

RON: If you buy if you buy it –

MICHAEL: But I don't know. What do you mean? I mean, it's just something that comes natural to me. Even the furniture people always like to touch it. They touch the top they feel the corners they, they touch the handles. Which if I've done something that's been carved. I think people are just naturally drawn to it and I don't prevent them from touching, you know, signs out to say please touch. Yeah.

RON: So it's the tactility that they just want to, I guess, validate their assumptions. Oh, that you know-

MICHAEL: I just find it's like human nature. They just they just see a shape. And I mean, I guess I could take an independent poll and look and see which shapes people pick up and touch more than others.

RON: That would be interesting-

MICHAEL: Maybe the curved spoons or the curve long handled spreaders are probably more interesting for people to touch than just a flat looking cheese knife.

RON: Yeah, of course.

MICHAEL: You know. We're not on video so it's hard to show what we're talking about.

RON: Well, we have pictures that we can put on the pod page. What else do you do besides the utensils...There are boxes and other – way up the line-

MICHAEL: I have treasure boxes that I make. You know, of course, that is unlike the cheese knives and spreaders. I mean, I make the same design over and over again out of different woods. And let me throw in here that everything all those things are made out of recycled wood. You know, wood that I've come to make smaller pieces out of bigger pieces, when I make a table or a chair or whatever I make. There's always leftover pieces. And it's just kind of a ...it's just kind of a thing with people who work with wood. They're always left over with smaller pieces, and they put it in a bucket or an old milk crate or say "someday I'm going to do something with this." So I've decided to do stuff –

RON: Kind of in Italian kitchen too - you never throw anything out.

MICHAEL: Right. So the same goes with the treasure boxes that little scraps of walnut or birdseye maple or purple heart or whatever, that they're too small to do anything else except maybe make a top of a box or a knob, some adornment, an inlay or whatever it is and the boxes themselves are all one of a kind.

RON: Why they might be called treasure boxes?

MICHAEL: Well, because, I don't know I couldn't think of any other name to be honest with you. They're not jewelry boxes. They're keepsake boxes. They're boxes that a man or a woman or a young person can have to put whatever they want to put in it. One box I mean it has sort of a false tray inside that you lift that out and it's like a hidden compartment underneath. Which I think, I mean, I've always been fascinated by boxes you, you see a box with a lid on it. And you always want to open it, which is another thing that people do when they're on display.



They always want to open it what's inside in the book, it's little dividers or it's it's purple inside or whatever.

RON: Pandora had that problem. Yeah-

MICHAEL: Exactly. Maybe that's how but I call them treasure boxes because they're just, they're, you know, they're not made for men or women. Anybody specific, it's just you want to put your treasures in it –

RON: Whatever those treasures may be –

MICHAEL: Here's the thing for you, whatever those treasures may be, be your eyeglasses. It could be–

RON: --- shells from the beach, beach glass, right? Things that mean something but have a high emotional value but probably have no monetary value whatsoever.

MICHAEL: Right. Right. Or it could be, you know, separate compartments that you know these are my, my old wristwatch or you know my Mickey Mouse watch when I was a kid. You know, for a woman you know, especially earrings or coins or rings or doesn't matter.

RON: Yeah, treasures—

MICHAEL: Treasures. Old tickets from the 60s—

RON: Yeah, which are fetching some big dollars now.

MICHAEL: Yeah.

RON: Moving up the scale in your, in your production in your catalog so to speak. What's ,what's next? Above the box is known. We already started to go into furniture now or..

MICHAEL: Well, yeah, I mean working small is good because... it's not necessarily any quicker than making a piece of furniture, because I do get very detailed – I'm very detail oriented. There's a lot of time and a piece of furniture. There's a lot of time in a box. There's, there's time and making the kitchen utensils, but I guess the next step up yeah would be the furniture.

RON: And what kind of furniture do you make?

MICHAEL: Mostly tables. I find that tables are utilitarian ... You know, people always want a table to put something on. You've got this table here. You know, they want a side board or a hall table someplace to throw the mail or the keys when they come in. Maybe they want to draw on it, maybe they don't want to draw, you know.. I make some pretty basic tables. I make some tables that look like they came from another planet. You know, it's just organic. Taking elements from - mostly Asian design. That's, that's what's mostly influenced me.

RON: Okay. It's kind of interesting. I mean, when you you're talking about the tables, all of a sudden it was the kitchen table, there was a side table, there is a dining room table. There's a candle table lamp table, and it goes on, but they're all tables, but they like the chairs - chairs are pretty much a chair you sit in. Although, I'm still trying to figure out what an occasional chair is – it's sometimes a chair, sometimes not...

MICHAEL: Right –

RON: They actually have those, right, that they flip over and actually become something - but yeah, that is that



is an interesting, that is an interesting concept in that - now you also go up in the case furniture right? Which people - I know that term because I used to work for furniture guy –

MICHAEL: Yeah, casework being like cabinets, standing cabinets, or --

RON: Box cases

MICHAEL: Right - things like that. I've made a few things for people at the Hatch Street building and actually to display that, there's a ceramicist, who asked me to make some things so she could take her workout and display it. And, you know, outdoor shows, these things so she could put her pots and cups in them. So yeah, I mean, I work with people and come up with unique designs.

RON: Now you've been doing this how many years?

MICHAEL: I've been doing just the furniture probably since 1997.

RON: Okay.

MICHAEL: So quite a while.

RON: Yeah.

MICHAEL: You know, I've even taken, I've had people come to me and they said that they have an antique cabinets that looks like it came out of an apothec, an old apothecary, you know with a an oak top and heavy, thick oak doors with beautiful trim on them. You know, this was my aunts or my grandmother's or whatever and I really don't want the whole thing, but I wonder if she'd make a liquor cabinet for me or a cabinet for my daughter's TV in her dorm. You know, which and I've done these things –

RON: So repurposing –

MICHAEL: Right.

RON: So we repurposed – you, you built from use the term scratch –

MICHAEL: Yeah –

RON: Based on design the you present or something that they described to you that they wanted based on their tastes or their needs. For function?

MICHAEL: Right here's like I said, here's a here's a row of cabinets with drawers and doors and what can you make from this? So that's when I go home and I draw. I put my head to work and then my drawing skills come back.

RON: Right, right. There's also the refinishing part; you're trying to refinish. There's a fine line between refinish and restore, right?

MICHAEL: Yes, refinish and restore. I'm working on a table right now that sort of an arts and crafts design. And it needed some TLC some, some things – a leg was falling apart, which was repaired years ago. And I'm working on that right now. I fixed one side and then I went to the other side and said oh, here's a loose leg and I tap that leg out of its joint with a rubber mallet. And I was holding the other side of the table and then the leg on



this side just split apart –

RON: Oops!

MICHAEL: So what was done was that two pieces of wood was glued together to make a thicker piece, which was done in the olden days, you know, because it was a cheaper way to make furniture. When I make furniture. I don't like to do that. But sometimes you can't get pieces of wood that are that thick, so you go to pieces together. So anyway, the glue had dried out the old high glue from the old days. So now I call the customer and say guess what? I found this, it's like taking your car and to be repaired. Okay, go ahead and fix it.

RON: Right.

MICHAEL: So I do that.

RON: Yeah, it's the old weak against strong... as soon as you repair the weak and make it strong, now you'll have ...whatever is adjacent to domino theory. The way -you're located, where are you located now?

MICHAEL: I'm at the hatch Street Studios.

RON: Okay, what is that?

MICHAEL: That's an old mill building, originally it was owned by a gentleman who was very much an entrepreneur, and he wanted to start sort of an incubation for small businesses to grow there. He charged little or no rent. And it was his ,his idea that people would grow from there and a lot of people actually did start there. And they've grown and they've gone on to industrial park and whatever and their, their business has, has grown like crazy. I've been there since 2001. I first started working there for another furniture company. And then got into my space with another skilled person. We share that studio for a number of years. And eventually he went on to get his own place. So actually the, a lot of people were referred to us as hash links - being an incubator as links.

RON: Interesting concept.

MICHAEL: Yeah. You know, so they, they, they grow there, and then they go on. I just I've just stayed there. Okay, it's a great building. The new owner, Jeff Glassman, purchased the building about three years ago. And he's converted the second floor to more studios; the building is full now. It's crazy-full of all kinds of people. I don't know who half the people are at. One point in time I knew everybody. Now, it's like, you see a new face. It's like Are you here to see something Oh, no, I have a studio here. Oh, hi. How you doing?

RON: I've heard estimates of over 60..80 or more. At one point at its peak, near 90—

MICHAEL: I don't know I mean, it's it's I don't know how many studios there are. I know they're all rented.

RON: Right.

MICHAEL: A lot of studios have, like myself have studio mates –

RON: Right.

-

MICHAEL: You know. So yeah, I'd say any average probably about 70-75 people there.



RON: Right. I mean, just walking down the hallway, just like walking through this massive art gallery because designers have stuff hanging on outside—

MICHAEL: Right.

RON: It's kind of cool.

MICHAEL: There's stuff there's 3d in the hallway. There's 2d on the walls. It's, it's crazy.

RON: Yeah, yeah.

MICHAEL: In a good way.

RON: Yeah. Now, the New Bedford - has had been ranked, named and are ranked in four national, international, serious ranking resources, whatever you want to call them, as one of the most creative cities in the country. I think the first one started off in 2011 as a result of Professor Richard Florida, who came up with the idea of the creative economy. And he had a scale, a system, of -- that he applied in New Bedford met the criteria and I think they were like, somewhere around-- where they were within a 10 they weren't in the bottom and

MICHAEL: I heard they were third –

RON: Yeah, was it third? Yeah. I mean, but then again, it all depends on, on the survey because it's been all over the place. Do you believe that the city is one of the most creative cities on just, I'd say on the East Coast?

MICHAEL: Well, I grew up here. And I remember when downtown was the bustling, I mean, they were police directing traffic and you know, assisting people crossing the street on Saturday afternoon. It was crazy. And of course, anybody who's my age remembers on, I think it was Thursday night-

RON: Thursday nights was cruise --

MICHAEL: Was cruise night and you know, Purchase Street and Pleasant Street was the strip. It all died after a while, you know, with you know, the North Dartmouth Mall and downtown tried several things. The biggest shot in the arm to me was the Star Store and BCC and when I first moved back here, of course, like other people, I moved away but I came back and in like 1999 - 2000 things was still kind of dead. And then it got to be kind of a joke about five years later. It's like, there was so much to do. You didn't know where to go, what to do first. There was a so many galleries, you know, not just downtown New Bedford, but you know, DeeDee Shattuck and you know, Colo-Colo, and all these galleries. It's like, they were all having openings on the same night and say, Geez, I'm so tired now –

RON: Yeah

MICHAEL: I tired of doing stuff –

RON: Yeah, yeah. For those people on the fringe, not familiar with the area, BCC is Bristol Community College. And there was a Star Store –

MICHAEL: Star Store was –

RON: I guess

MICHAEL: Part of UMass Dartmouth –



RON: Right, but the Star Store was like New Bedford's its own Macy's or Jordan's –

MICHAEL: Oh, yeah. It was a huge department store in the day once. Yeah, that's where people went.

RON: If you got a job there --- if your dad had a job or your mom had a job there, it was like, wow, you're doing pretty good.

MICHAEL: Yeah.

RON: It was. It was a classy job. Yeah, you know, that kind of thing. So CVPA of the College of Visual and Performing Arts from UMass under under pretty much the drive of the state senator, Mark Montigny. You know, they took over that building, didn't let it get torn down. And everybody expected this, this instantaneous economic boom, all these students coming in. Oh, so all the all the all the merchants that were hanging on thought you know, oh, these kids you know, they're gonna they're gonna help me survive and then they didn't realize that that these, these kids, their students, they don't have a lot of money –

MICHAEL: Right.

RON: And then when classes were over, everything went dark again, because everybody went home. But at some point in time, it was like a chicken and the egg thing where okay, people didn't want to get apartments because they went oh, conveniences. So at certain point in time, we had conveniences and, and apartments, you know, lofts opening up, and I remember going to the first AHA..AHA is art, history and architecture. Lee Heald is the is the founder, director of it—

MICHAEL: Well, let me correct that. Actually. There's a guy who had this idea years ago. Excuse me for correcting –

RON: No, no no, it's good—

MIHCAEL: This guy credit because I've known - I knew him for years he passed away, unbeknownst to so many people. And that man's name was George Saulnier. And --

RON: Was he a former city councilman?

MICHAEL: Nope. No, no, he was an artist he did. etching on glass.

RON: Okay.

MICHAEL: He used to work in leather. He did some fine tuning of leather –

RON: George Saulnier --

MICHAEL: George Saulnier. He became homeless after a while and actually, he- I think he kind of enjoyed it. I bumped into him every once in a while and he literally would bump into me when I say that he would crash into my shopping cart –

RON: Yeah.

MICHAEL: At Market Basket for a joke. Because I'd be absorbed and looking at all of a sudden this is crash. It's Oh, it's George with his long, long beard and his cowboy hat. And he was the guy who went around and pitch this idea to people in the city. And unfortunately, he didn't get the credit that was due. So I just want to say right



now if this is going to be broadcast that remember that George Saulnier was the –

RON: I'm really I'm really grateful because, let me pause and do like a commercial so to speak. Yeah. These In Focus podcasts are part and parcel to The Artists Index. It's something, that's a brainchild of Jeffrey Martin from Spectrum Marketing Group here in the city of New Bedford and I, we started this oh my gosh, several years ago as The Artist Profiles, and the idea was about putting creating a directory of all the artists that were emerging, established and emeritus, you know, those who and not realizing back then even trying to get estates, but also trying to go back in time and picking up all of the artists that people forgot about. And George Saulnier is – wow –

MICHAEL: I mean, he's forgotten –

RON: Yeah.

MICHAEL: But not by all people. I mean, Lee Heald knows of him. Chuck Hauck, the President of Gallery X here in New Bedford knows of him. They didn't have the best relationship at times, but that aside, I mean George was a very creative person and with his glass and his leather he sold things a lot he was very involved with..with the association that's part of the New Bedford Art Museum now. There used to be downward crawls was –

RON: Oh, Artworks –

MICHAEL: Artworks. He was also very involved with Artworks.

RON: Right.

MICHAEL: So anyway, sad to say, he didn't get the credit that was due to him—

RON: Right.

MICHAEL: Not that he probably would have basked in it, he would humbly would have accepted it. His, his character deserves more looking into, that's what I'll -

RON: Well and then to go back to where we jumped off. I, you know, back in the early 80s, I worked at Freestones, which was the place to go to the restaurant in the city. It was there for like 30 something years. And I remember working there and thinking that you know, we were the only lights on at night downtown because downtown wasn't a place you really wanted to hang around back in the early 80s. And if you went beyond the, the edge of the light, that was cast by Freestones, you were taken, you know, taken a risk. But, you know, prior to that I worked for the Office of Historic Preservation and Tony Sousa with the city of New Bedford. We watched them the Rodman House from his location behind Freestones into it and to the side around and to where it is presently and that's another story for another podcast. But New Bedford was, was asleep, you know, after five, six o'clock that was it. And then going to the first AHA and seeing... I don't remember seeing crowds like that since the New Bedford Institution for Savings, major local bank, brought in Mitch Miller to do Christmas carols the sing-along, I mean the place was mobbed. It was absolutely amazing. Everybody was you know all the bars, were going to restaurants were going, little shops are going, little presentations and performances and, and it's still going now. How many years has been going?

MICHAEL: Oh, beyond 10. Yeah, I think it goes back to what you said about the merchants expecting this immediate growth. I mean, it started very slowly. I stopped, when I first came back to New Bedford and got my studio in 2001, it was very quiet. And I saw things grown. You got No Problemo. A bunch of guys, or I forget who the owner is. He started in that little corner which used to be the Peanut Store 100 years ago, and eventually grew and took over another little bit of real estate and other real estate...opened a bar got a liquor license. Other



places across the street we're now serving beer. So now the students had a place to go after class. Great Mexican food –

RON: Yep—

MICHAEL: Have a beer.

RON: Yep –

MICHAEL: Whatever.

RON: Yeah, and I don't want to say inexpensive but it was a great value. I mean, you get the goreditto, the burrito. Oh, my God. It's like a meal for two people.

MICHAEL: Absolutely. It's all good – there's a plug for No Problemo. Fresh food.

RON: Yeah. I remember. There was the Peanut Store which was an icon you know, it was a keystone of the downtown back then, before even Joe Jesus bought it and that's another story. And I remember, then it was an insurance agency that started in there. And then these two kids with a look like a sunbeam griddle. That's what it was. And a little side which still exists today. This little tiny handmade side, it couldn't be larger than a business envelope. And I was like, oh, yeah, that's kind of cool. We I wish him luck in from that those beginnings. And one of my students was involved from BCC, Bristol Community College. And when I walked in there and he looked at me he said, Yeah, I know you're disappointed in me. I'll never forget that. It's like really? No, I mean, this is like very cool. I mean, you find your own path, you find your own way. So it has become very, very, very vibrant. And I noticed that there's in between 2015 and 2017. I was away, you know, overseas for about a year and getting re established in several different ways, life-wise and everything. And you know, having fresher eyes and noticing that all these little islands that we used to have, are now all being connected by bridges. And there is really this incredible vibrancy downtown in the historic district. I'm not even going to try to it's the National Whaling –

MICHAEL: Oh-

RON: New Bedford National Whaling Historic... I can never ... Oh, my God. Somebody will correct me. But, so that was another, another notch in the city's belt to come back to a point of, what we're still got a way to go to chase the greatness of the city at one time was the richest city in the world twice—

MICHAEL: Right—

RON: Once for whaling and once for textiles. So as an artist and as an artisan, because you're both, what's your take on what's going on now? And what...You know, can you use some spidey sense to look into the future?

MICHAEL: Well, I mean, I look back at the past and, of course, we've reminisced here. I used to work at the peanut shop to him as a kid, but that whole vibrancy that was downtown New Bedford is here in a different way. Unfortunately, some of the retail stores aren't doing too well. Galleries come and go, which is sad. People, you're not buying enough Art in New Bedford, so get out your checkbook and get down there and buy some stuff. They're doing some great things, trying to access the waterfront again. Route 18 was, I think, the worst thing a lot of people will agree – was the worst thing that ever happened to downtown New Bedford, as it blocked the waterfront from the downtown area. We're getting a lot of tourists now a lot of boats, they're coming in. And they have to cross this this this highway to get to where the cool stuff is. The cobblestone streets and the restored buildings, that again, thank you well for not letting these things being torn down. They're working on Route 18 right now, which is great. What do I see for the future? Growth?



RON: Yeah.

MICHAEL: I think they're on the right track.

RON: And speaking of right track, do you think, finally I mean, we're both old enough to have been hearing most, most of our lives because we're not dead yet. The railroads coming back, the railroads coming back, railroads coming back. And now supposedly it's – I mean they're rebuilding the rail, the lines, the doing all the trestles. We're gonna have two stations in town now. One downtown, I think –

MICHAEL: For people to argue about whether or not to have a station on Church Street or someplace else, I think that's a good argument, because at least it's positive. You know, there's a train station coming where it's going to be we don't know.

RON: Yeah, but the argument isn't what the heck what the heck do we need one for, it's like where it should be?

MICHAEL: Right

RON: So they're becoming involved in investment.

MICHAEL: Exactly.

RON: Okay.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I've been hearing about this train since I moved back to New Bedford. People are like oh yeah, hum, whatever. I guess it's a lot closer than it was because for the past 15 years, least they've been repairing track. Like you said, rebuilding trestles, rebuilding bridges-

RON: Yeah—

MICHAEL: doing things like that, which is great. I see a lot of improvement with the infrastructure in the city.

RON: I mean, I still remember the lab, the waning days of the railroad and in living in Europe for a year.. I mean you don't really give up the car. I mean, you just don't know what you're doing yourself. It's so much easier to go to Boston, you pay them, give the man the ticket. You sit there you can read you can sleep you can do whatever you want. There's no stress, there's no strain.

MICHAEL: Right.

RON: It's it's, you know, it's an altered lifestyle, but it's a much better kind of a lifestyle as well. And it also, it's not just about us getting out of here. It's about people coming in-

MICHAEL: Right. That's where I think be a big shot, another big shot in the arm for New Bedford. Both for merchants and for the artists. You get these people who come in from the outside and discover this jewel. You know, it's got a great history, and I'm, I'm so tired of reading stuff about New Bedford being like one of the scariest cities to go to. They're number three and scariness...it's, you know, come on, and it's no worse than any other city—

RON: No, no, I mean, this they said the same and say the same about my wife's hometown of Detroit. I remember going to Detroit to meet her family and people saying, Do you really want to go there? Yeah, and I got



there and it's like, Oh, my God, this is such a great place.

MICHAEL: You can say about Boston. You can say it about providence. Yeah, probably say it about Cambridge—

RON: Right.

MICHAEL: So yeah, you know, every city has places that you don't want to walk in after dark –

RON: Right.

MICHAEL: So don't walk there.

RON: Don't go there. Yeah, it's like Henny Youngman. Doctor hurts when I do this. Don't do that!

MICHAEL: Right. Yeah,

RON: Yeah, that's...That's great. So you brought up a point that's, that's been gnawing at me for a long time. And I actually wrote an article for South Coast for Art Scope magazine, about this, you know, we have these accolades that were placed in for credible surveys, national international surveys. And yet, the last classic, and what I mean by classic gallery is a gallery that is run by a gallerist/curator. They have solo shows they have group shows. They represent some of the people that they, they exhibit and but it was a gallery that was their only business. We have other galleries now and there's plenty of them in Hatch Street Studios building that are actually hybrids. You have an artist's studio and they have a gallery of their own work, and sometimes they have there, other people exhibiting there and so on and so forth. And there are other forms of hybrid galleries, but a classical gallery that was very last one. And that's a whole another story, was the Colo-Colo run by Luis Villanueva, who had some phenomenal top notch, big-city feel, presentation shows with international artists, they're not just the local the local folks and he decided he was going to have to make some readjustments because he saw a shift, a seismic shift in the art world as it is. And so we have all these people producing work. I'm assuming they're exhibiting it someplace else, if not just on online. And the sales, I mean, I'm a painter. It's so totally different here. I was doing okay, in Europe. Of course, I wasn't there long enough, but in the first four months of being there, I already had three shows lined up. That kind of vibrancy, the kind of thing where people would ask you, what do you do? Hello, nice to meet you. Oh, I'm a painter. You are? Have I seen your work? Is your work currently being exhibited? Where is it? Here? Oh, you're a painter. You make a living doing that?

MICHAEL: What's your side job?

RON: What's your side job?

MICHAEL: You must be a teacher.

RON: You must be a teacher. Exactly.

MICHAEL. Exactly. Yeah. So well, I feel the same way. I mean, being a 3D person. There's another person in my building who makes furniture. And it's kind of a running joke. I mean, we have all these great ideas. And we make these, furniture, these pieces of furniture. We make prototypes out of plywood and then make the real thing whatever and you exhibited at certain places and it ends up in your home or in a corner of your studio with a blanket over and you have a second job.

RON: Yeah.



MICHAEL: It's not just painters. So excuse me? I don't know.

RON: No, I it's funny when you said that. It's like you know how many paintings how many paintings can you stuff under your bed?

MICHAEL: Exactly—

RON: Before you have to lift, lift its legs. Maybe you can make a business just making leg lifts are so bad. So little steps up on the site like the, the colonial times.

MICHAEL: Just you know, renting lofts for people who can store their paintings.

RON: Yeah, yeah. Well, you have a tenant in Hatch Street. He's, He's also a friend of mine and colleague. Who's this he's an incredible collector, Dr. Richard Connor. I hope to get him on the show as well. And one of the things that he alerted me to, is estates. How many artists who have passed away have hate to use the word saddled, but have saddled their family with massive amounts of work that they don't know...you know what these people will making money during their lifetime, but now, their, their network is, is disconnected. The family never paid attention. Do you throw it away? It's too much to store.

MICHAEL: Well, here's, here's another sidebar. Another very talented artist, Nancy Hayes—

RON: Okay.

MICHAEL: Was a ceramicist. And now is a painter—

RON: Okay.

MICHAEL: My God, her work is phenomenal. She's trying to, she can't give her work away. I mean, it's not that she's not exhibiting and I understand what his work yeah, but at one point in time, she thought maybe it would be a good idea to see if some place like Harvard University would want my work and I would bequeath my work to them. Well, they said sorry, no, thanks. We don't have any room or whatever. Some people can't give their work away.

RON: Yeah, I know the feeling.

MICHAEL: It's crazy. Well, they look great in your office!

RON: Yeah, this is ,this is a given a plug. Jeff came up with a concept called Gallery SMG. And he said like we've got all these offices. You know, we have this really nice office and we have all this wall space. So something a little bit different. Yeah, it is a hybrid where every we haven't failed scheduled yet. So every month, every six weeks or so we're gonna invite somebody to come in, hang up their work. And then we started talking about doing, you know, traditional gallery opening and so on and so forth. But, you know, even when galleries were doing well, the only people would ever see at gallery openings were was each other.

MICHAEL: Yeah, that's, that's the same. Don Wilkinson. Oh, god, what's his name? The sculptor. He had a studio in Center Street... John —

RON: Oh, John Mangum.

MICHAEL: Yeah. John Mangum. Came up with that. That that phrase. Yeah, the openings are great, but we



see the same like 20 people at every opening.

RON: Yeah. So with that in mind, why not create a like the Chamber of Commerce has these business after hours. It's a networking event.

MICHAEL: Right.

RON: We okay, we know that other artists going to be let's try to invite curators, gallerists, state buyers, art consultants, anybody that's involved in the art industry in fact, that's, I guess, a relatively up and coming term the art industry because that's basically what it is. They said that art produces the creative element in this country, produces enough revenue it it's close to what the agricultural industry –

MICHAEL: Really?

RON: I need somebody to look that up, but wow. It reminds me of a scene from Forrest Gump where he's in a hospital and he's laying on his stomach because he had been wounded. That famous scene where Bubba gets killed and he's in Vietnam, and he's looking at ice cream cone and a gentleman, a gentleman said to him, so what are you in here for boy, he says I got shot in the buttocks. And the, the other character says Well, you got yourself a million-dollar wound and he looks at and goes, well, the government must accept that check. I haven't seen a dime!

RON: Mike, this is great. Any parting words, anything you've got your 15 minutes of fame, so to speak, you know, this is an opportunity, a soapbox to, to say something about you, yourself, specifically and your craft and your art and

MICHAEL: Really? Yeah, okay.

RON: I mean, give me your address your phone number?

MICHAEL: I mean, yeah, visit my website, floatingstonewoodworks.com. I'm also on Instagram and Facebook.

RON: We will have all that on the little sidebar thing for –

MICHAEL: Okay

RON: Podcast.

MICHAEL: I'm still making furniture, restoring furniture is a little bit of bread and butter. And the kitchen utensils and cheese boards are always, you know, unique gifts for the holidays and birthdays and weddings and hostess gifts and all that good stuff. But yeah, keep those commissions coming in. Because that's where the real bread and butter is.

RON: Exactly, exactly. Mike, thank you so much. And I'm gonna, and now that we're at the end, I'm going to tell you that you are our first official guest—

MICHAEL: Wow!

RON: Because it's taken a long time to try to get you know lives arranged and schedules and so on and so forth. But you are our first official guest and this has been great because I think if I want I play this back –



MICHAEL: You know, had all the mistakes are!

RON: Well, we've got so many sidebars that we can go to and that's the whole purpose of this is to get people talking and, and sharing their memories and their thoughts and so on and so forth, because really once were gone, this is all that's going to be left of us is our work and this these recordings and so on and so forth. Hopefully that will help somebody in the future.

MICHAEL: Well, I know I gave a few plugs, which I think are well deserved. All kidding aside, I think one of the best things that ever happened was to have Jeff Glassman purchased this building and do what he did, because in sort of the state of flux Hatch Street was in when the original owners moved out, and we knew the building was for sale. People were starting to leave people, were starting to freak out. We were looking at what sort of gentrification is going to come here. They're going to raise the rent and kick us all out. Jeff came in, he's keeping the rents reasonable. And he's, he's done so much for the art community in New Bedford. And he's involved in so much downtown and other agencies, other, other groups. I can only say thanks to him. And a big thanks to George Saulnier for thinking of AHA. And thanks to the people who are running it today and keeping it alive.

RON: Great. Great. Well, let's have Jeff Glassman here too.

MICHAEL: Oh, absolutely.

RON: Excellent. Thanks so much.

MICHAEL: Thank you!