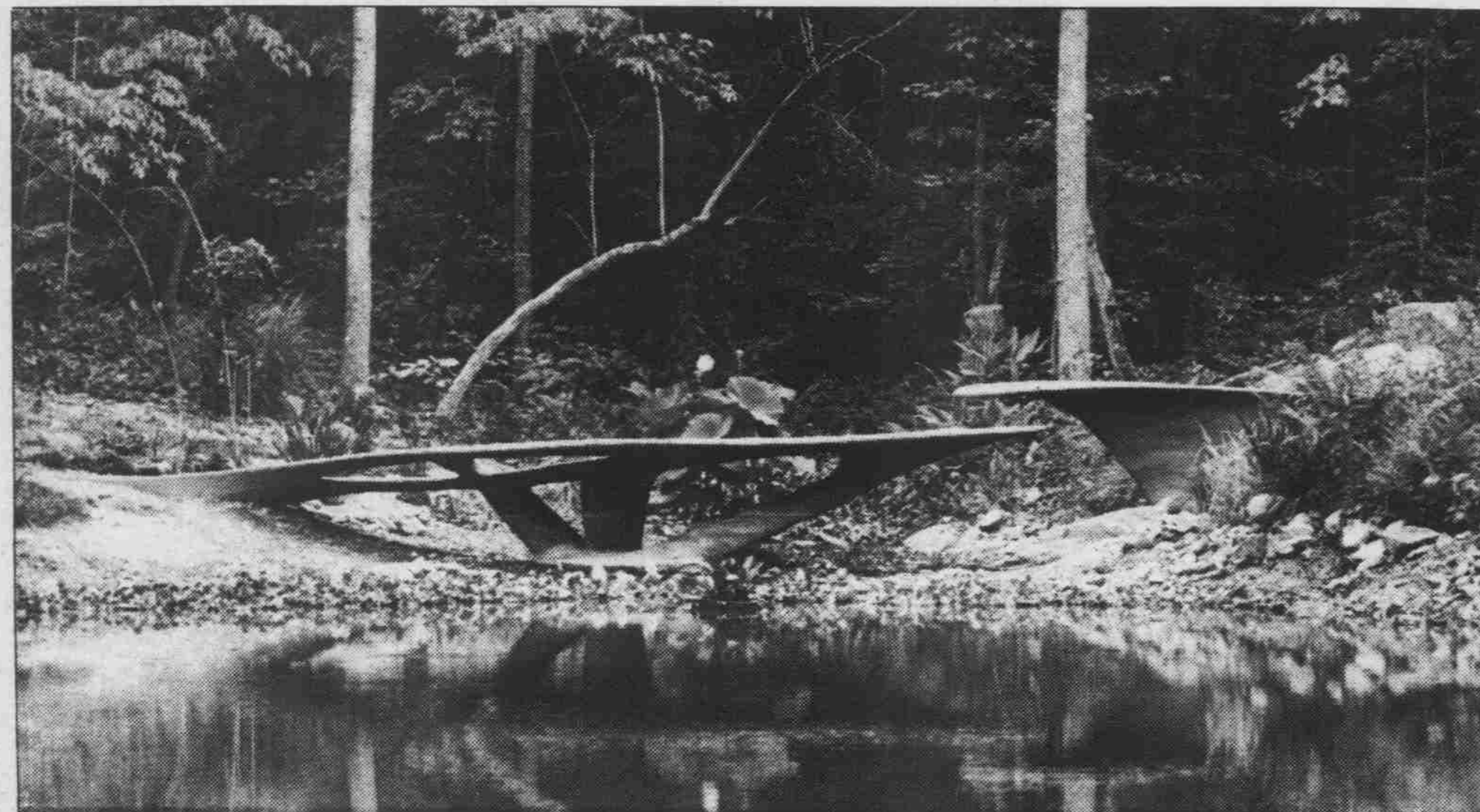




Sculptor Andy Fleishman works on his latest creation

DTH/Charlotte Cannon



One of his many projects: a bridge created for a private residence

DTH/Charlotte Cannon

# A GARDEN LIKE NO OTHER

By CATHY McHUGH  
Omnibus Editor

Shetland ponies graze near a small red barn in a field by the side of a road. In the shrubs behind them, various types of birds chirp, owls snooze and a pair of guinea hens sporadically create a cacophony worthy of a whole flock.

Further back weeping willow, weeping cherry and conifer trees dot the surroundings of a small pond where ceaseless ripples hint of frolicking fish.

This peaceful scene was specifically created, not as a habitat for the ponies, the birds or the fish, but for a different kind of animal. For art.

The statues standing in this outdoor gallery seem to strike commanding poses in this otherwise unpretentious landscape. The large cement structures dwarf the average person with their smooth, clean lines, while others, carved to exact detail, can be held in the palm of a hand. One serves as a functional bridge and spillway for the pond.

It's almost like entering a different world.

About five years ago, the owners, Andy Fleishman and Kate Smith, converted this once swampy part of their 22-acre property into a sculpture garden. They say the pond was originally intended to provide drinking water for the ponies. And the rest?

Andy Fleishman is a sculptor — the garden his showcase.

"We made the garden for the sculptures, not the other way around," he says.

A native of Brooklyn, New York,



Two of Fleishman's birdhouses

with a 1972 B.A. degree in psychology from the University of Buffalo, New York, Fleishman moved to Nova Scotia and began his career in artistic expression by making custom furniture. In 1976, he received the Canada Manpower grant to do independent study from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. The first piece he did was a detailed serpentine front made of cherrywood.

"Everyone else was making shelves or bookcases," he said. He continued making furniture for about three years before becoming interested in sculpting.

"I enjoyed making furniture, and it seemed like what I was going to do for the rest of my life."

But, after a visit to his brother in Chapel Hill in 1980, Fleishman decided he liked the Southern part of heaven enough to stay.

"Making furniture was just not a big enough medium for me to work in any more," he said. "Art was much bigger and less defined; like music, it's endless — you make up the rules."

"When sculpting, you're expressing a different thing," he said. "Furniture making has stricter rules — you can strive for quality, but it's never really a proper medium for expression. If you're going to make a piece of furniture, you should make good, beautiful furniture. That's a statement in itself. Sculpture allows for a spiritual kind of expression."

"I'd begin with an idea of something like a poem I'd read, and try to express a specific emotion," he said. "Each one takes a different amount of time. Mahogany pieces take longer because they have to be finished off."

Fleishman describes one of his smaller pieces, entitled "In the Beginning" as a small, round polished mahogany sculpture with snakelike lines on the top and a broken up structure underneath. "The effect was a jewel-like piece of potential, contained power," he said.

In 1983, Fleishman gradually began to work with cement. "It was very solid and structural to work with

wood, but I couldn't just open it up. Working with cement was a continuation of the wood — it took away the restrictions in my mind."

Now, Fleishman works almost exclusively with cement. "People still think of me as a wood sculptor although I haven't used it for a number of years."

He says that most of his sculptures have names, but he has not named any of his more recent ones. "Most were emotionally specific titles to begin with," he said. "But the longer I've been working the less interested I've been in specifics than in the form itself."

Fleishman says that once he has an idea, he begins a sculpture, and the amount of time it takes for him to complete it varies according to the size and the materials. When people commission him to do a sculpture, he discusses the project with them and they determine the scale and the location. But he generally comes up with his own ideas for his pieces.

Fleishman is currently working on a ferro-cement statue for Meredith College in Raleigh that will be placed in front of the student union and the new art building in late October.

"I've been trying to think of a name for this one," he said. "The last few I've done have just been called 'So and so's commission.'"

For his cement sculptures, Fleishman begins with a steel skeleton. "It's a boat building technique." The steel and metal mesh provide support for the cement which will be packed around it, following the shape exactly, he says.

Where does he get his ideas? "It always just amazes me — I work at a level that's not the same as looking at it," he says. "It's not as if I did it with my rational mind. One idea usually evolves into five others."

Although he says that people viewing his art should draw their own conclusions, he has noticed that they usually seem to interpret his pieces along the same lines as he created them.

The sculpture for Meredith College

is in the round. It consists of several curves, with classic lines that are similar to a Grecian urn, and, in the center, three separate lines arc upward before coming together as one. "Sculpting is very physical. With this one, your eyes flow with it so much it feels as if your body is moving. It almost becomes the movement of your body."

Fleishman said that the sculpture is too complicated to look at right now because the wires and mesh form complex patterns. "But people often want me to keep the sculpture's skeleton the way it is originally."

Before he began work on the sculpture for Meredith College in June, he made several carved statues. "Some artists tend to strive to perfect one type of a body of work that they will become known by," Fleishman says. "But I don't feel restricted by that. These carved ones look as if they were made of clay and then a mold cast for the cement, but I actually carved them as they were."

As with most true artists, Fleishman is not bothered that in today's world the amount of money a person makes seems to determine his level of success, or that some people still picture artists as starving individuals on the outskirts of society.

"Money is touch and go, but there aren't many people independently sculpting today," he says. "I work all the time, especially in the summer with its longer daylight hours, so I produce a lot more than part-time artists. There's the actual excitement of doing the work — things always seem to be knocking on the door demanding to be let into this world."

Fleishman also earns extra income by working as a technical consultant for The Chemical Industry Institute of Toxicology. He develops casting, mold making and filming techniques for a scientist to study the air flow through the nasal passages of rats. "It's fascinating work," he says.

His artistic endeavors have worn off on Smith, the co-owner of the recently christened Pony Maroney. With Fleishman's leftover cement, she began making and selling colorful flower-shaped bird baths, stepping stones with comical faces, and birdhouses. Now she's working on a set of benches formed in the shape of people. "I just picked up it by watching him do it," she says.

Fleishman and Smith say that although they welcome visitors, they want them to arrive with no expectations of what a sculpture garden should look like. "They should come for the surprise, to experience this whole world of feeling what a special and unique place this is," Fleishman said.

They plan to clear out the area of land behind the pond where another pond is located.

Anyone looking for a little art, a little adventure and perhaps a taste of a whole new, little world can write to Fleishman at Rt. 1 Box 203 K, Durham, N.C. 27705. Or call at (919) 383-7588.