



# Q&A

with Carolyn and Don Madvig of

## sleeping dogs studio

*“I think passion is key.”*

—Carolyn Madvig

**How did all of this start? I know that’s a big question, but, in a nutshell . . .**

CAROLYN: That is a big question!

Well, one year, while we were both working full-time, Don made collaged holiday ornaments. I thought it looked like fun, and decided to work on a larger scale and make collaged, decoupaged plates. For fun, we sold them at a local art fair, and pretty much sold out, which was a great surprise! We decided to approach a few local stores with our merchandise, and the response was great.

By March of 2010, we were both working in the studio full-time. Since that time, we’ve added a cadre of another 25 wonderful stores across the country, begun playing a larger role in the artist community in Bloomington and across Indiana via committee work, and generally are enjoying our full-time commitment to the studio!



**Did you ever imagine that you would be owning a studio, running a business?**

DON: I thought about selling my artwork to people. I always wanted to be an artist, and that’s what I went to school to do. I got my B.F.A. from Univ. of Illinois.

CAROLYN: I guess I expected that Don would have a studio, and that I’d be on the outskirts. However, back in college I made and sold handmade cards for fun...just to friends, rela-

tives. My real dream was always to have a no-kill shelter for dogs and cats – so there is an obvious connection to “Sleeping Dogs” there, and it remains a dream to have a larger, country studio at some point where I can have more animals.



**How much time do you spend in the studio, and what is your daily schedule like?**

DON: I’m the early riser. I like to be working by 7 a.m. I put in anywhere from 2–10 hrs., depending upon what has to be done, and what else I have to do that day with soccer. I can’t work all night anymore!

CAROLYN: I think I am pretty typical in that when you are starting a new business, you pretty much work full-time, every day, 16 hours a day! Except for some help from our son, it’s just Don and me.



**What are your plans for the future, say, in five years — what would you like Sleeping Dogs Studio to look like?**

CAROLYN: I feel fortunate that we took the time to make a clear business plan — and our mission is as real today as it was when we started the business.



I would say that our plan is to stay beautiful, functional, and affordable. These factors really drive the work we do. I understand that art does not need to be beautiful to be “art”... but we want to make beautiful, uplifting art—it’s our “niche.” I also want people to be able to use it — thus, the frames, the boxes, the earring holders, the cards...how fun to be able to have art that you can not only enjoy, but also use every day! And lastly, affordable. I want to know that anyone can buy our products. We’ve had pressure to increase our prices on occasion, and we’ve resisted.

DON: I would like it to be stable and productive, but still growing both artistically and as a business. That’s my goal.

**The most satisfying part about working for yourselves? Is there a down-side, too? I know some people feel disconnected, sometimes, from the social atmosphere at a large workplace . . .**

CAROLYN: One of the things that has been the most interesting and validating to me is to meet and learn more about artists all over the country, and find out how much more suited my temperament is to this type of work; and how many ways I am like other artists when it comes to dreams and interests.

DON: The most satisfying part about working for ourselves is the creative freedom, the ability to experiment, and seeing if I can do it to my satisfaction. I do so many other things with the public via soccer, I don’t feel disconnected from a social atmosphere.

**A lot of people would like to enter into their own businesses, selling online, through Etsy and Artfire and other venues. Do you have any advice for someone thinking about launching a business?**

DON: You can’t do it alone!

CAROLYN: I think passion is key.

DON: Find a partner that fits with your weaknesses and vice versa. That’s what works for us. No one person is typically good at creative work, at business models, working with the public, etc. With a partnership like ours, all needs of a new business can be met, using skills that one or the other of us has.

CAROLYN: Never give up, and do LOTS of homework.

*“Ironically, one of the things that has been the most interesting and validating to me is to meet and learn more about artists all over the country, and find out how much more suited my temperament is to this type of work; and how many ways in which I am like other artists when it comes to dreams and interests.” –Carolyn*

**When you are not working in the studio, how do you relax? Is there time to relax? I hope there is.**

CAROLYN: I do not relax currently — that’s more or less accurate! I hope to do so after this first year is behind us. But I guess there are two exceptions. I do relax when spending time with the dogs. They perform an incredibly valuable role in that way! And we both love having the freedom to schedule our work around our son’s soccer schedule. To be able to attend any game we want to is very freeing.



**If you could change one thing regarding the studio, what would it be?**

CAROLYN: I can’t think of anything I’d change. I also wish I could take credit for that, but a lot of it was dumb luck.

DON: I would like to have a bigger studio space. Having a separate space to work is key, I think. I also might have tried to start the studio earlier in life.



**What’s your favorite color or colors, your favorite medium?**

DON: I don’t have a favorite color, but I do like to use neutral tones with black and golds a lot. Collage is one of my favorite mediums, as is watercolor and drawing, pretty much any work on paper.

CAROLYN: My favorite color is red... but I like them all! I really enjoy putting everything together into a collage — whether backing for a card, embellishments on a box, etc., colors and designs that many would say don’t go together — yet clearly when it’s done it makes a unified whole that is really pleasing.



## A brief timeline of Sleeping Dogs Studio

### 1995

Don began making collaged ornaments for family and friends, and Carolyn followed suit by making collaged plates. They sold surprisingly well, and soon Don and Carolyn named their business “Paper Works”, and were beginning to enter art fairs and shows.

### 1998

The name of the business officially changed to “Sleeping Dogs Studio” in honor of their two homebody rescue dogs who inspire them each day. Products expanded to include frames and boxes, and retailers began to show an interest in carrying their work.

### 2000

Don became full-time in the studio, working not only on his painting and illustration work, but also more fully on meeting commitments for the studio related to an expanding calendar of art fairs and retail outlets.

### 2006

The studio was now averaging ten art fairs a year, and was found regionally in six regional gift shops and galleries.

### 2010

Carolyn joined Don full-time in the studio, and a full-fledged marketing push was underway. The number of retail outlets increased from six to thirty-one in three months. Representation became national, from Martha’s Vineyard to the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, from Portland, OR, to Florida. Growth is anticipated to continue throughout 2011 and beyond . . .



### How are the dogs? And do you have other pets? Have you had other pets?

CAROLYN: We have had an ongoing issue with cat allergies. Don is allergic, and while he eventually got used to the cat I had when I met him, we’ve not been able to have cats again. So we’ve concentrated on the dogs. We got Jasmine before our 16-year-old cat passed away, and when we realized that we couldn’t have cats again, we got Owen, our second shelter dog.

### Are the dogs always sleeping? Do they ever accidentally modify a design for you, and you like it more?

CAROLYN: They are very lazy dogs when in the studio! Not so much outside, but when they come in to the studio they are usually well-fed, well-watered, and have run around a little already...so they’re ready to be an inspiration only! I do visit them on the couch when I can’t come up with an idea –

DON: No, they are definitely not always sleeping. They love to bark at the UPS man, the garbage man, builders – but they don’t get in the way at the studio. The dogs haven’t ever modified a design, but the cat we had walked over one of my wet watercolors once...

### If you were a dog, what kind would you be?

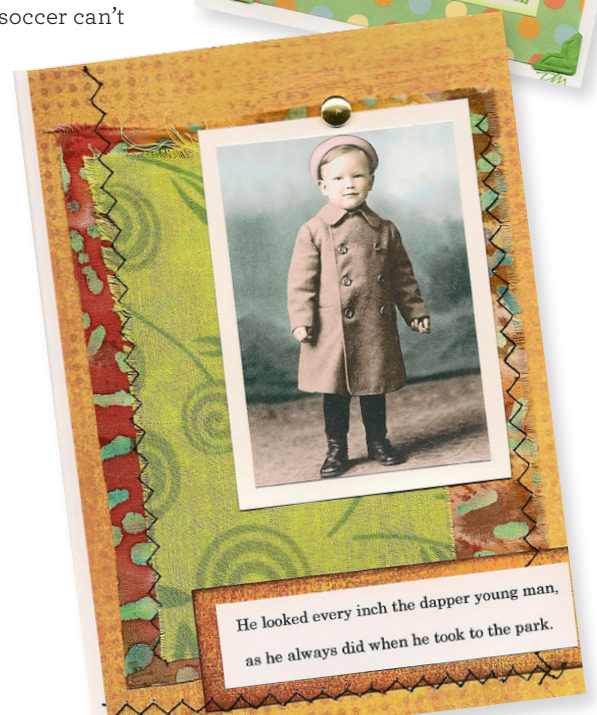
DON: Two kinds. I’d like to be a big German Shepherd because they are good-looking and strong. Or I’d like to be a Labrador retriever living in Maine where I could run down by the docks and swim in the ocean.

CAROLYN: I would be a mutt!

### What’s your deepest, darkest secret? Just kidding about the darkest part, but what is something that not a lot of people really know about you?

CAROLYN: OK, this is embarrassing – but it is true. I love the vampire/supernatural craze going on right now.

DON: It’s the combination of soccer and art and loving both, I guess. The people I know through soccer can’t think of me as an artist, and vice versa. Also, I love watching and feeding birds.



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