

PRESS RELEASE

MUSGROVE WILLOW PROVE THEY ARE TOP NOTCH

Third generation family run business showcase hugely successful exhibition and workshop as part of Somerset Art Weeks 09

From day one at the start of the Somerset Art Weeks 09, it became clear that the passion for and commitment to the world of willow that the Musgrove Family have, was also felt by the visitors that came to see exhibits from as far afield as New Zealand and the United States of America.

Over 1,400 people attended between 19 September and 4 October, a huge success by anyone's standards and enormously gratifying not just to the exhibitors and those running the workshops, but also to Ellen Musgrove who organised the show.

Musgrove Willows, based in Westonzoyland, was set up by Arthur 'Sam' Musgrove when he started cutting tree sticks for furniture back in the 1930's. Now three generations later, Michael and his wife Ellen cultivate over 60 acres of willow and employ master craftsmen to create every conceivable item out of willow and the exhibition was a showcase for the continuing success of Musgrove Willows.

Ellen said *"it was exactly what we were hoping for. It was great to see the willow in its natural form being worked on by our staff and then being woven and crafted by the exhibitors in so many different ways. It was quite an eye opener for many visitors."*

During the special preview that was held on 18 September, around 100 people attended including artists Ellen Mette Nielson from Norway; Jo Mills; Fiona Hingston and Ivor Hancock. Peter Yarker from the Worshipful Company of Basketmakers, (of which Michael Musgrove is the only willow grower to enter), attended along with representatives from the Basket Makers Association. Amongst the local dignitaries were Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP for Bridgwater; County and District Councillor Derek Alder and Parish Councillor Peter Evans. And in keeping with their community commitments, local residents were invited along to enjoy both the preview along with some delicious refreshments of local Cheddar, apple juice and cider from Burrow Hill.

The SAW 09 exhibition displayed over 160 works of 57 artists, all with their own unique style so that the show had an exciting assortment of diverse pieces that demonstrated just how versatile willow can be.

There was also plenty for the discerning eye to take home with a bounty of items for sale from across the globe. Together with the UK basket makers and willow weavers, you could also splash out on willow creations from Southern Ireland, Spain, Denmark, Norway, New Zealand and the USA.

Other than the remarkable willow artworks, Ellen also organised a large number of extra Workshops during the exhibition that included instruction on Tension Trays, Stick Baskets, Plant Climbers and garden structures, animal sculpture and 3d shapes. There were also workshops on hurdle making and basketry. The ten workshops were run by guest tutors Tom Hare, Charlie Lupton, Sarah Ayling and Izzy Beasley alongside the regular instructors; Sophie Courtiour, Jo Mills, Fiona Hingston, Rebecca Board and James Roberts.

On top of the special exhibition workshops, there were additional *drop-in* sessions with Maurice Fawcett , Sophie Courtiour and Stefan Jennings, that ran during the last 2 weekends of the Somerset Art Week event.

The Visitor's Book is a tribute to the hard work everyone put into the event; Elaine Thorneycroft, Bridgwater said, *"a really excellent display of fine work. Such an amazing variety of skill and creativity. I really enjoyed the exhibition and found it inspiring."*

Sally Goymer, Cheltenham who is Yeoman member of the Worshipful Company of Basketmakers and Membership Secretary of the Basketmakers Association said, *"the best exhibition of baskets I've ever seen in Great Britain"*.

Bridgwater College said, *"congratulations on such a dynamic exhibition."*

It is also worth remembering that Musgrove Willows run their usual courses throughout the year, where you can learn a host of willow crafts and with Musgrove's environmental policy that excludes the use of artificial colours, you can be sure that the different textures and colours are 100% natural.

They are also very enthusiastic for schools to visit the centre so the children can learn not just about the farming of willow but also the multifarious uses it is put to. There are also the rare breed ducks and some friendly goats to greet you, so plenty for all the family to enjoy.

Musgrove Willows is open every day from 9-5 pm (closed Sundays if there is no course running).

With the sound of success still ringing in her ears, a final word from Ellen:

"Our sincere thanks to all those who took part in the Exhibition, all those that taught courses and drop in workshops and to our very many visitors for making 'Working the Willow' an extremely successful event.

We have had numerous enquiries about a future event with many people hoping to take part who missed out this time round. So maybe we will do it again another year."

Company Overview

The Musgrove Family have been growing willow on the site since the 1920's and they now grow around 60 varieties on their seventy acre farm. The third generation business, run by Michael and Ellen Musgrove, predominantly grows *Black Maul* which is considered to be the best working willow and the most popular with basket makers.

Musgrove Willows, Somerset also offer a wide range of associated services such as workshops and courses, books, tools and kits. With their extensive knowledge of and passion for willow, you need look no further for all your willow needs.

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