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High Art

Taking a spin with the country's premier weathervane maker.

BY ANNIE GRAVES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELIZABETH CECIL

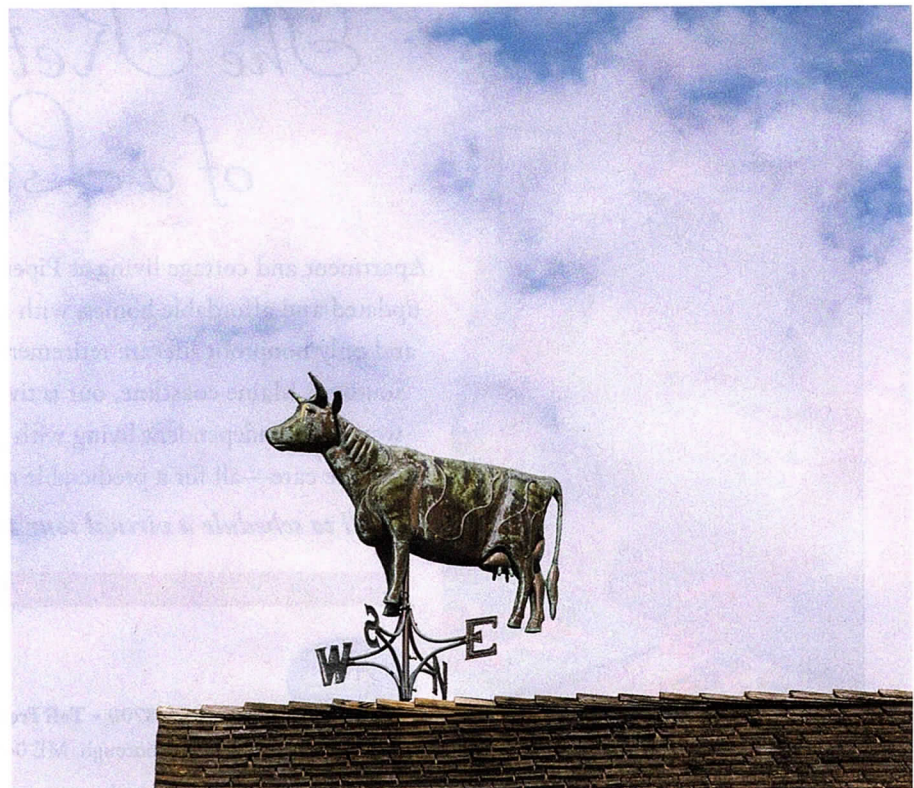


Look up. The wind is about to change. You will know this because the sky is filled with bluefish, mermaids, and a West Chop lighthouse, all spinning in agreement, changing direction on cue. Just like that, the intangible becomes tangible—the breeze is suddenly on display, its very intention defined.

Such is the power of weathervanes.

They are everywhere on Martha's Vineyard, thanks in large part to the industry and imagination of Tuck & Holand. Sparks fly in Anthony Holand's studio—a combination workshop and gallery space in the town of Vineyard Haven, where he has lived for more than two decades. It is also where Holand, now 43, first apprenticed with renowned metal sculptor Travis Tuck; that was back in 1998, after Holand graduated from college in Washington state, where he grew up working on his family's 7,000-acre farm.

Tuck had made his first weathervane in 1974 for fledgling filmmaker Steven Spielberg, who was then filming *Jaws* on Martha's Vineyard and wanted to set a great white shark spinning atop



LEFT: Anthony Holand at his Martha's Vineyard workshop, where he creates weathervanes for a clientele that includes Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Carly Simon. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: A piece inspired by *Where the Wild Things Are*; a fitting topper for the Vineyard's Agricultural Hall.

Quint's shack. It marked Tuck's career shift from earthbound sculptures to sky-based ones. By the time Holand began his apprenticeship, Tuck was considered the world's premier weathervane artist, and would remain so until passing away in 2002.

Theirs was an instant connection, Holand says. That summer, he had returned to a seasonal job repairing bicycles on Martha's Vineyard. Business degree in hand, he'd actually preferred art classes: sculpting, metal sculpting, and bronze casting. "There was an ad in the *Vineyard Gazette* for an apprentice metal sculptor, which was what I had wanted to do all along. I set up an interview, and it didn't take long to know it was going to be a pretty good fit," he says. "And I really wanted the job—I mean, what are the odds?"

And indeed, what *are* the odds that you'll get to spend your days making



The mallets Holand uses for the repoussé work on his weathervanes have custom-made tips for specific uses and projects.

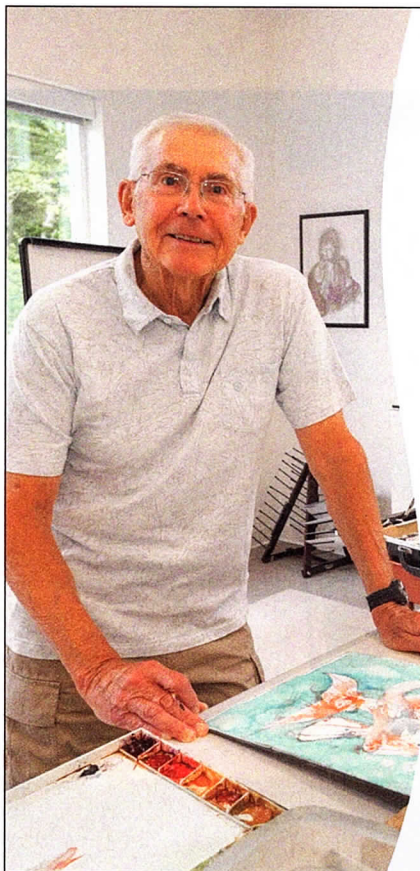
schools of shimmering bluefish? Twin Hellcat fighter planes, to hover over the Nantucket airport terminal? An osprey, or a fly fisherman set against a rising moon, or a Mockingjay insignia to fly over the home of an agent who'd worked on *The Hunger Games*?

"I took right to it," Holand says. "Taking a drawing, turning it into a paper pattern and then into a three-

dimensional object." Tuck taught him the technique of repoussé—heating sheets of copper metal, dousing them in water to make them malleable, and then hammering out shapes from the reverse side. "The metal is so soft, almost like butter," he says. "As you work it, it becomes hardened, back to the rigid state where you want it. Every hammer blow is unique."

The first weathervane Holand made was a moon and stars. "I got a map of the moon and put the craters in—I wanted them in the right places," he says. "And then I actually made these two little astronauts, with tiny gold face shields, and put them on, too! And then someone came in at one point, and said, 'Well, you know they didn't land there, they landed over here....'"

His laugh bursts out, unfettered, delighted. It perfectly echoes the imagination that seems to practically vibrate



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off the walls of this studio. There are eagles about to pounce, a metal rib cage lounging on a workbench, a hanging anvil (oh, Wile E. Coyote), a drawing of a seahorse that fills an entire wall. I ask him about a captivating metal scene titled *Where the Wild Things Play*, a riff on Maurice Sendak's children's classic. "It's a sign that goes out on a guesthouse here," he says. "There's a little weathervane that goes on top, of Max and the boat." It's one of a handful of pieces he caretakes seasonally, this one for a client who had nine grandchildren under 12 at the time the sign was made. "They were the wild things!"

He admits it's fun to look up and see his work around the island. There are, of course, the famous clients, like Beverly Sills and Steven Spielberg, who came back for a 4-foot velociraptor from *Jurassic Park* to grace his Long Island home. But there are Tuck & Holand weathervanes spinning all over the world. The wait list is two to three years, and for good reason: There's more than a hint of alchemy involved in transforming a sheet of metal.

"Most weathervanes are fairly simple, fairly flat," he says. "With sculpture, you can take a piece of metal and make a nice sculpture, or you can take a piece of metal and give it life. And I think that's the real skill: to be able to give something life."

But there's one more essential skill, capricious as the wind: listening. "That's one of the best parts of this whole thing," Holand says. "I really get to know people. The weathervane is telling their story, in a way. If it's for a house, it's like the cherry on top. It's not just 'a' dog; it's the best dog you ever had. Not just 'a' Lab; it's your three Labs running down the beach. Or the Wild Things, a reminder of your nine grandchildren who ran around in the summer and enjoyed being here. You're making an heirloom. A memory that will be around for generations." tuckandholand.com