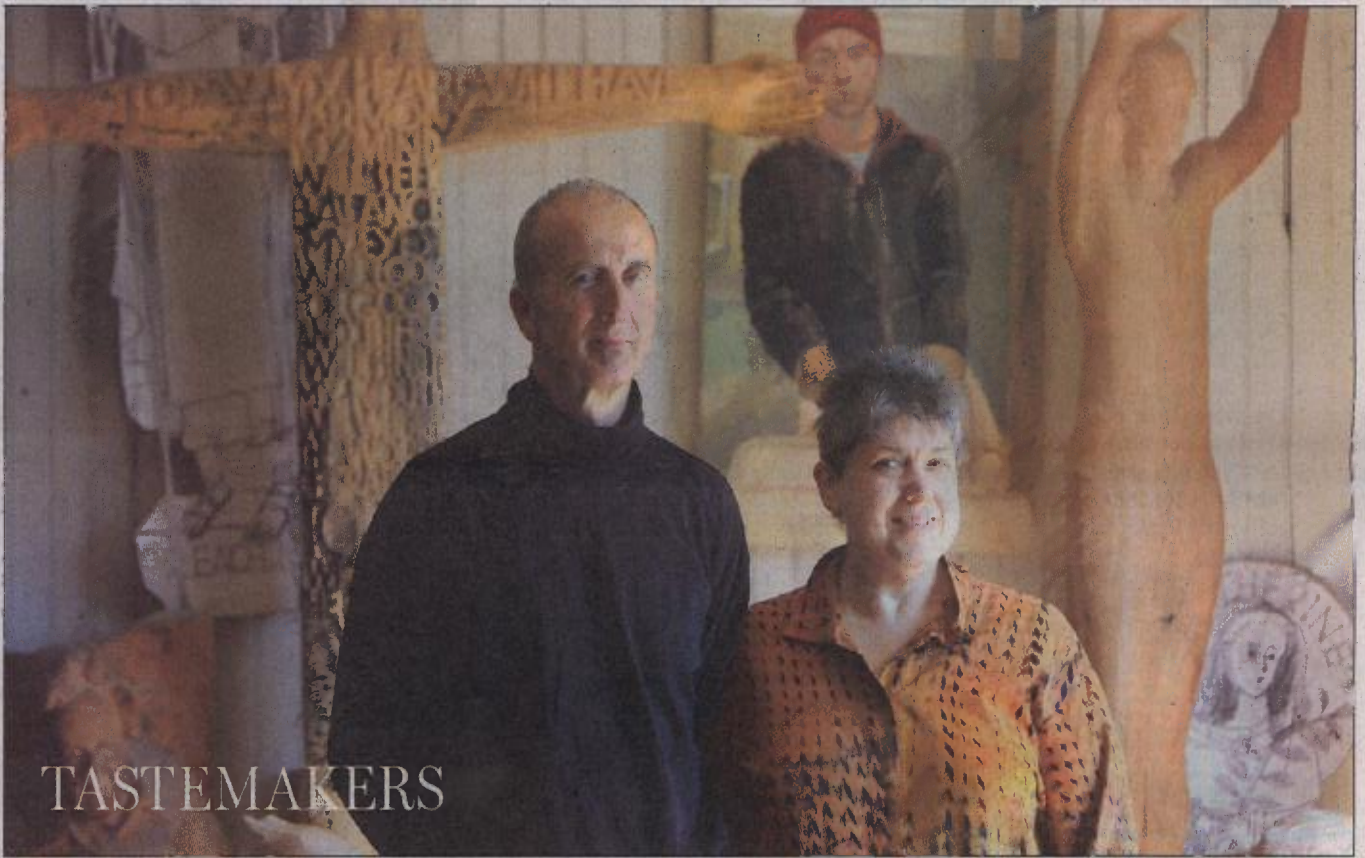


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## TASTEMAKERS

SCOTT SHAW | THE PLAIN DEALER

Wood sculptors Norbert and Victoria Koehn in the barn/art studio at Sanctuary on Green, a three-acre retreat where they live, work, run an art gallery and gift shop, and serve tea and lunches four days a week.

# Their home is where the art is

**Joanna Connors** | Any day now, hundreds of daffodils will pop up among the stone and wood sculptures in Victoria and Norbert Koehn's gardens in South Euclid. The bamboo near the new patio will stretch new green shoots toward the sun. Deer will climb the hill from the Nine Mile Creek wetlands below the Koehns' house to graze on delicate spring grass and drive Norbert crazy. | "One day we counted 20 deer on the lawn," he said one sunny morning last week. "They love our grass because in all our years here, we've never put any chemicals on it." | The deer have loved a lot in Norbert's organic garden. Outside of the fenced vegetable garden, only the daffodils — evidently the brussels sprouts of the deer kingdom — have survived their all-you-can-eat smorgasbord.

The Koehns' three-acre property is just nine miles from downtown Cleveland and only yards from busy South Green Road. But on this morning, it feels like a rural retreat or a step back in time to 1910, when the house was built and the surrounding property was a Jerusalem artichoke farm.

Now the Jerusalem artichokes are gone — except for the ones in the soup bubbling away in the kitchen — and the property has become Sanctuary on Green, a combination home, art studio and gallery, gift shop and Bavarian tearoom serving soups, lunches and sweets along with dozens of varieties of tea.

For 30 years, lovers of all things Christmas have made an annual pilgrimage to the Koehns' holiday shop, one of Cleveland's hidden treasures.

From late October through the end of December, they decorate the first floor of their house like a scene out of "The Nutcracker," serve cookies and tea, and sell their own sculptures and carved creches, works by other artists,

and Christmas ornaments and decorations from around the world.

In July, after transforming Norbert's studio at the back of the house into a cozy restaurant and installing the patio, they opened the gift shop and tea studio. This year, they expanded even further, opening in March.

Norbert, 56, who has moved his art studio entirely to the barn at the back of the property, supplies the kitchen with organic lettuces, herbs and — come July — tomatoes. Victoria, 55, does the menu and cooking, creating dishes she learned when she was still a teenager, from the owner of a bed-and-breakfast in the German town of Oberammergau.

She first went to Oberammergau when she was a senior at Beaumont high school. Her father, a German teacher who had lived in Germany, had urged his artistic daughter to do her senior project at the Bavarian State School for Wood Sculptors there. When the school failed to respond to two letters from him,

Victoria and her mother decided to go anyway. They arrived at the famed school unannounced.

"I said, 'Hi, my name is Vickie and I'm from America and I want to learn wood carving,'" she said. "The director of the school said, 'OK, be here tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock.'"

She met Norbert her first day there. He was from a town near the former East German border; he was in the school's master's program; and he made quite an impression on the American girl.

"I don't remember this, but the nuns at Beaumont tell me that I returned and stated to them that I was going to go back and marry this guy," she said.

And so she did.

She studied at the school for three years, earning a journeyman's certificate in wood carving — the equivalent of a bachelor's degree — while Norbert became a master sculptor.

They married and came to Cleveland in 1977, hoping to make a life as artists.

And so they did, despite the

hardships and vicissitudes of earning money from art. Working mostly on commission, they carved distinctive and beautiful sacred pieces for local churches and synagogues.

They designed the restoration and carved a new altar and other pieces for the historic St. Peter Church downtown — whose congregation is celebrating its own final Mass today before the Catholic diocese closes the church — and a new ark to hold the Torah at Temple East. Their work fills dozens of places of worship around the country.

They also do secular work, including a granite sculpture for "American Idol's" Simon Cowell. They sell some of their pieces in their shop, along with paintings by their son Aaron, now 26, and even an occasional carving or sculpture by their son Sasha, 28, who has just launched a Web-based art gallery, [scurio.com](http://scurio.com).

After living on the grounds of Beaumont for many years as artists in residence — Victoria also catered school events — they found the house on South Green Road in 1990. Over time, they restored the grounds and built their sanctuary, where their cooking and their art feed the stomachs and the spirits of all who enter — even the deer.

*The Sanctuary on Green is at 1936 South Green Road, South Euclid. It's open 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. Go to [sanctuaryongreen.com](http://sanctuaryongreen.com) or call 216-691-1936.*

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: [jconnors@plained.com](mailto:jconnors@plained.com), 216-999-4307