

# THE HUNT

SPRING 2018  
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*Life in the Brandywine Valley*

*All*  
**ABUZZ**

*Plus*

Early painted portraits  
Handcrafted furniture

A barge cruise through the Loire Valley





# WEATHER OR NOT

THANKS TO A LOCAL SCULPTOR, SPECTATORS CAN ALWAYS  
TELL WHICH WAY THE WIND BLOWS AT WILLOWDALE.

BY EILEEN SMITH DALLABRIDA | PHOTOGRAPHS BY TESSA MARIE IMAGES



J. Clayton Bright at Willowdale, his creation looming in the background.

**H**igh atop the course tower at the finish line, there's a distinctive weather vane that's also a work of art. It has become part of Willowdale's history, a signature piece since the first meet in 1993.

Sculptor and painter J. Clayton Bright of Chester County created the stylistic design of three galloping horses and their jockeys at the request of his friend Dixon Stroud, Willowdale's race chairman. "The weather vane grew out of a discussion we had," says Bright, who agreed to take on the project at cost. "It's one of those fun kinds of projects."

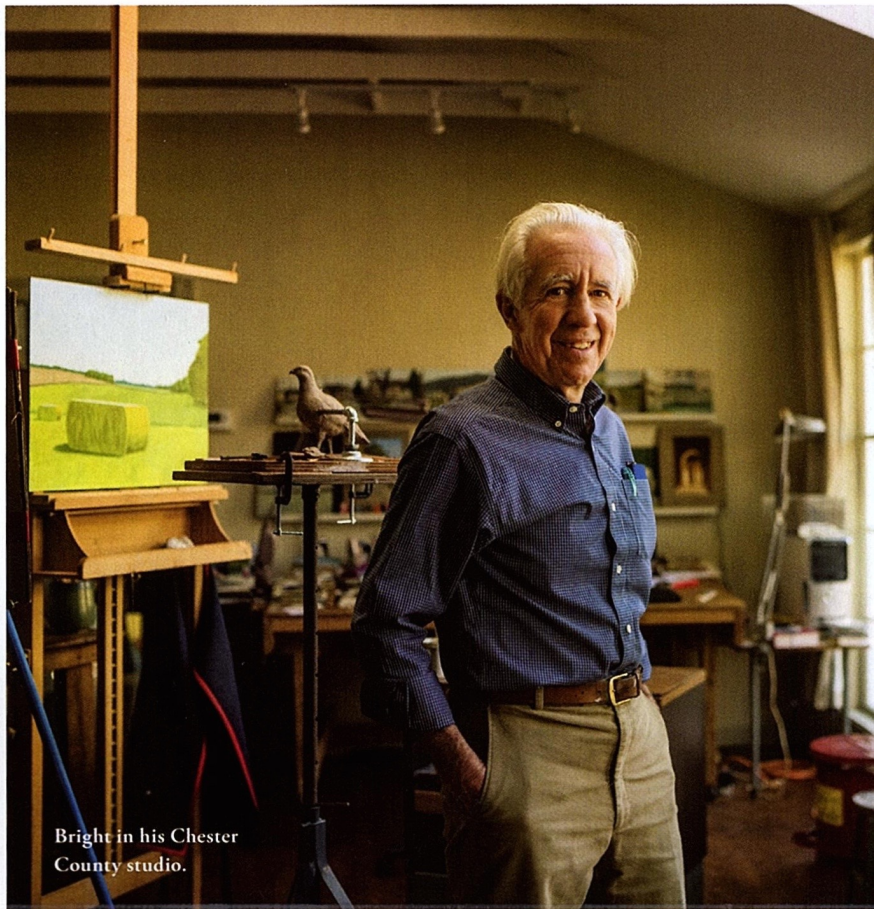
He drew inspiration from the natural artistry of the setting and the horses. Aesthetically, he views the arc of a water jump as more graceful than the up-and-down dynamic of a timber fence. He likens it to ballroom dancing. "I always think of the field taking the water jump as a flow of water coming down and effortlessly flowing over the fence," he says. "Because of the water jump's breadth, the horses hang at the peak of their jumping arc while they glide forward over the of the fence, before they start to extend their front legs in preparation for landing. That split second is as graceful as a couple dancing a waltz, when they pause for a note or two before slightly changing direction."



In designing the weather vane, Bright tried to capture the feeling of the horses moving as a body over the fence. But when he drew a packed field of a half dozen horses and riders, his vision didn't translate well. "There were too many legs and too many heads and not enough clear bodies. It was hard to make sense of what's happening," he recalls. "That's when I got the idea of using cutouts to define the bodies. I also reduced the number of horses to three."

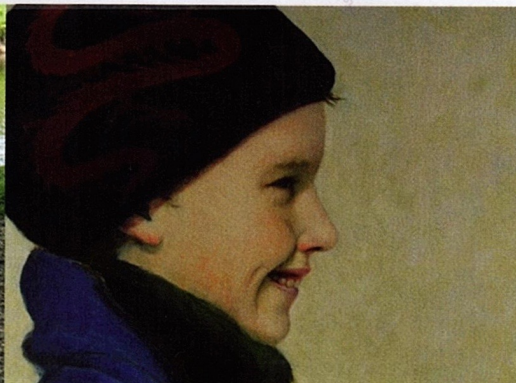
Bright's best-known work is "Miss Gratz," a life-size bronze cow installed on the river's edge as a part of the permanent collection of the Brandywine River Museum of Art in Chadds Ford, Pa. His works can be found in private homes, corporate collections and museums throughout the United States, Europe, South America and Japan.

He has been at work for more than 30 years, creating works small and great, ranging from 3.5-inch bronze sculptures to images larger than life. He is a painter, too, whose works include landscapes, street scenes and still lifes.



Bright in his Chester County studio.

## SPECIAL PROMOTIONAL SECTION



Bright's "Miss Gratz" (left) can be found at the Brandywine River Museum of Art; his painting "Boy With the Dragon Hat."

Stroud is an admirer and has collected various pieces over the years. "Clayton Bright captures the moment, movement, action, thought," he says. "His sculptures are real."

Crafted from stainless steel, the weather vane is cut with a laser and water jets at a foundry, where it was spray-painted black "to increase the silhouette." Stainless steel also won't oxidize, an added benefit.

The design blends art and science. The end that points into the wind has the least resistance, while the heavier end points back, much the way an anchored boat

swings into the wind. "From the ground, it doesn't look very big. But it's eight feet long," he says.

Installing the piece more than 30 feet above the ground was a daunting task. "A guy came with a cherry picker truck but it became clear that he couldn't reach high enough," Bright recalls.

Hugh Lofting, the Chester County timber framer, came to the rescue, bringing over his crane and hoisting the weather vane into place. Bright has designed a number of other weather vanes, most of them in the shape of foxes. He also fulfilled a commission

for a weather vane in the silhouette of a locomotive.

He's currently at work on a sculpture of a life-size turkey vulture. "They are cool looking big birds, nice contrast between their heads and their feathers, the sort of thing we see by the side of the road here in Chester County."

A lifetime Willowdale member, Bright is looking forward to this year's meet. His keen artist's eye will be trained on the course. "Parties are nice, but I like to see what the horses are actually doing," he says. "It's a beautiful race meet and I am a visual person." SL