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FERRY AWAY

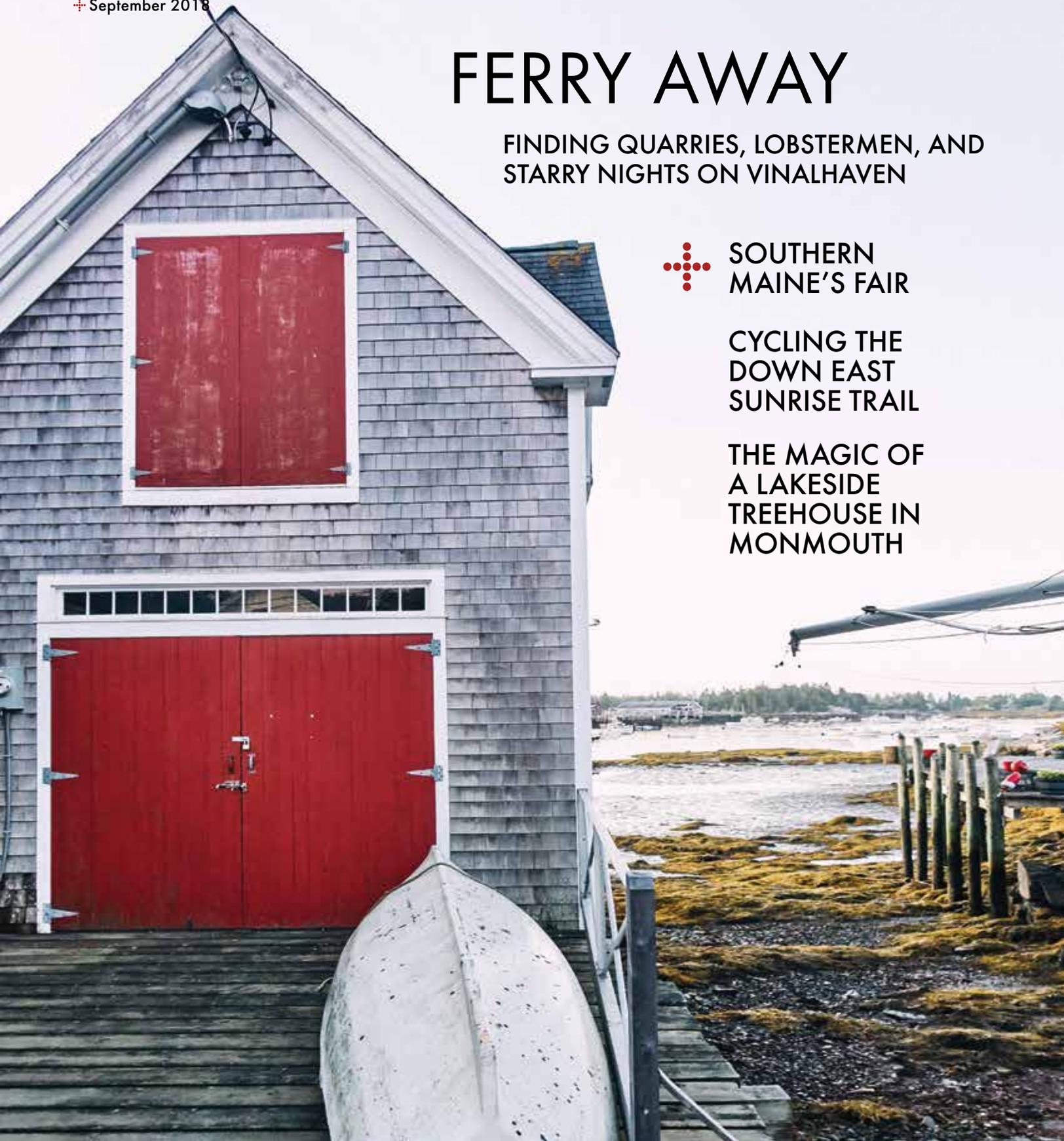
FINDING QUARRIES, LOBSTERMEN, AND
STARRY NIGHTS ON VINALHAVEN



SOUTHERN
MAINE'S FAIR

CYCLING THE
DOWN EAST
SUNRISE TRAIL

THE MAGIC OF
A LAKESIDE
TREEHOUSE IN
MONMOUTH



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BECOMING

JANE
DAHMMEN

HOW THE NEWCASTLE ARTIST WENT FROM DOUBTING HER WORK TO SEEING HER BRIGHTLY PAINTED BIRCHES HANGING IN GALLERIES ACROSS THE STATE

by *Kate Gardner*
Photography by *Matt Cosby*

Before she was Jane Dahmen the artist, Jane Dahmen was uncertain about how her passion factored into her life. She was a wife, a mother, and a college graduate. The nagging question she kept coming back to, though, was whether she was an artist. She painted, so surely she must have been. But her name and her art were not known. She didn't sell her work, and it didn't hang in galleries. She just snuck time here and there to push a brush across a canvas.

When Dahmen applied to be shown in a gallery in her early thirties and had to write her occupation on her application, she felt uncertain because her job was raising her kids: "I'm a housewife who paints, so I figured I'd call myself an artist," she says some 40 years later. The gallery owners didn't agree: they said she was just a housewife with a hobby. Dahmen grabbed her work and cried as she drove back home to her husband and two kids.

Dahmen felt conflicted about whether to continue painting. Not only was she doubting her talent, but she says it felt selfish to take time away from her children to focus on her passion. In the end, the judges' criticism made her more determined. "I

knew that, not only could I call myself an artist, but I could do good work," she says. Calling herself an artist wasn't easy, and it was something Dahmen continued to struggle with for years. She initially kept her artist identity in a box separate from her mother and wife identities, she says, because it was easier to see the different roles that way. Over time she learned that it was possible to be two things at once, even if they seemed contradictory. "I'm a mother, I'm a wife, I'm a painter, but they all have to be integrated," she says. "It's important because they're all part of who I am." Calling yourself what you are makes you stronger, she says, because you'll have less doubt when people try to undermine you.

Following this mindset eventually allowed Dahmen, a Newcastle resident, to hang her work in galleries and make a living as a painter. Before moving

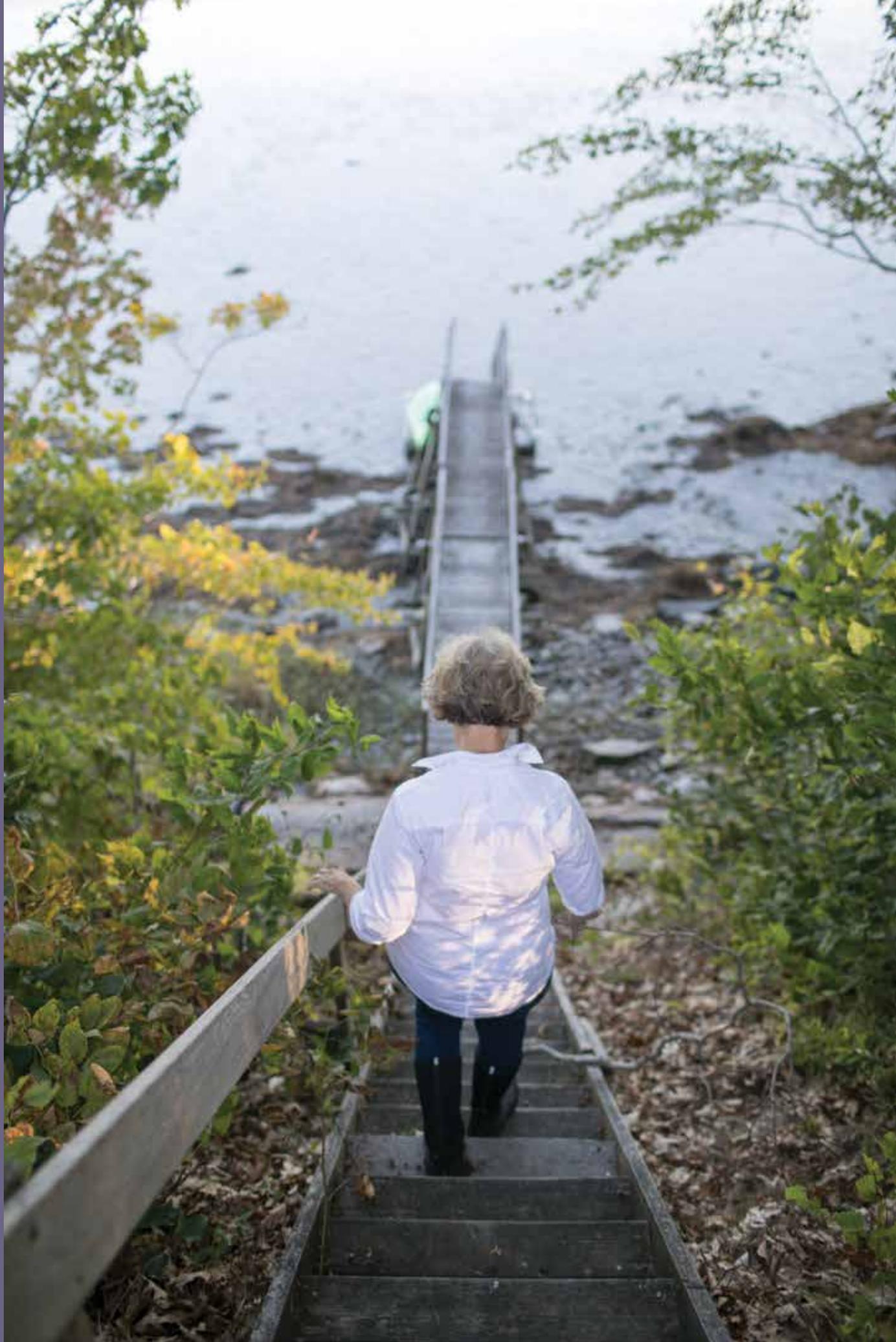
to Maine, she painted images from out on the water looking toward land. Over the past couple of decades, though, she has developed a fondness for painting images through trees, looking toward the water. Her signature style features thin, willowy birch trees in the forefront of canvases that are often taller than she is. "It's interesting what triggers



Opposite: Artist Jane Dahmen picks lavender from her garden at her Newcastle home, which also contains her painting studio. **This page:** Dahmen holds freshly picked lavender.



Clockwise from top left: Dahmen works on a painting of birch trees, one of her favorite subjects. Dahmen's studio is where she spends most days at work. Dahmen paints a colorful landscape. **Opposite:** Dahmen walks down to the Damariscotta River behind her home. She says she's often inspired by Maine's coast.





your creative juices,” she says. “I find I’m always triggered in Maine. I’ll be sitting on my friend’s porch and look out and think I just have to paint that.” Being a painter has also allowed Dahmen to live life her own way. “I felt it was important to live my life even if it wasn’t how other people did it,” she says. This means fully integrating art into her life (she hosts artist talks at Damariscotta’s Lincoln Theater) and teaching her children to think creatively. The Dahmen household had no television (much to her children’s dismay), but vacations were carefree and involved bicycling around Europe with no itinerary. “We were without a plan, always,” she says.

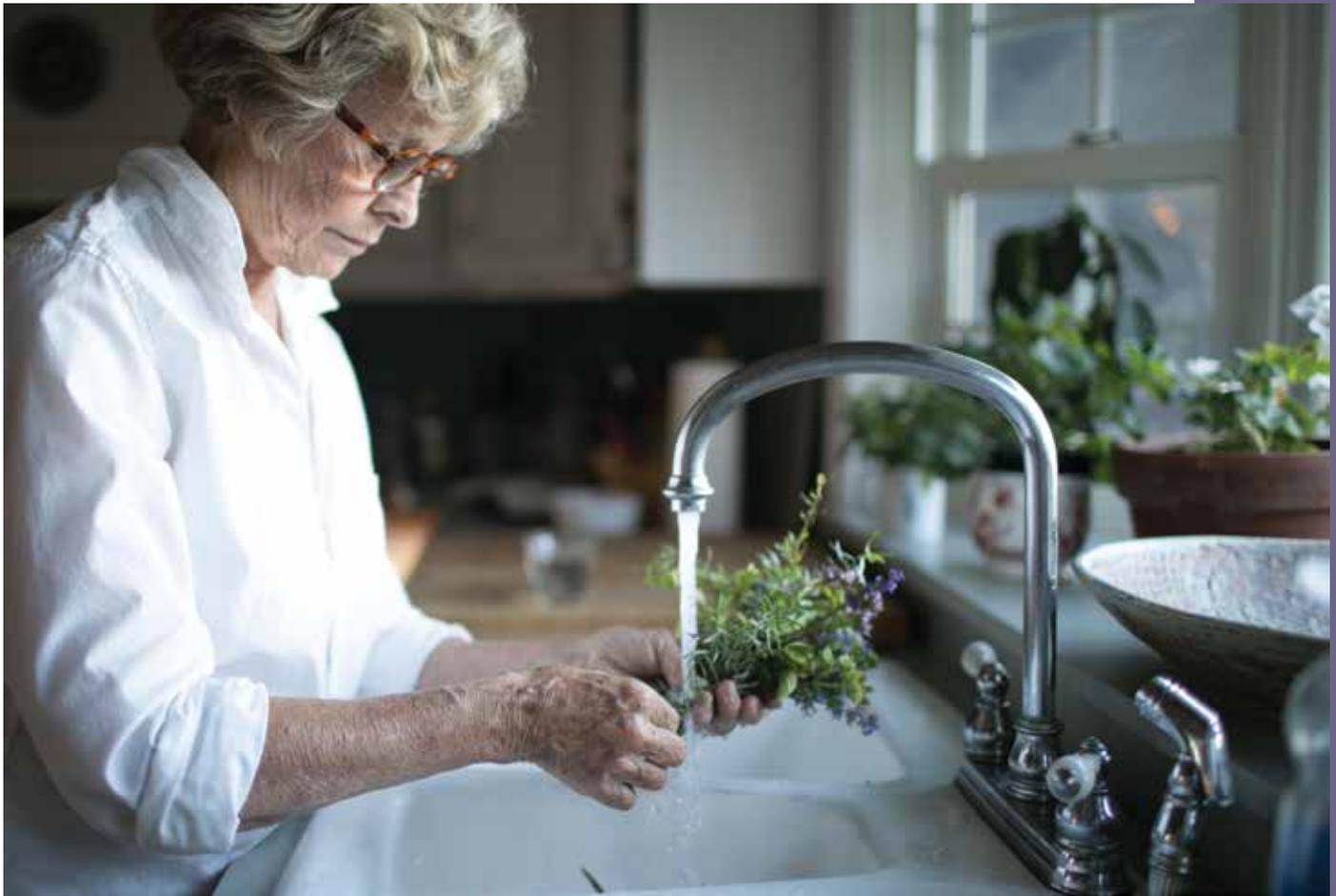
Marching to her own beat has seeped into Dahmen’s work as well, because as she says, there’s no distinction between

herself and her *art* self. Her colorful landscapes, most of which have been of Maine in the 18 years she’s lived here, and still life paintings reflect who she is and how she thinks. She says the images and their colors aren’t always true to life, but they’re in line with her own thoughts and ideas. “You can risk making a fool of yourself by being completely honest about how you see the world,” she says. Despite this risk, Dahmen enjoys her style. If anything, she wishes it were more alternative. “I wish it was more unconventional, my art, but I’m always striving to express myself in a way that’s unique to me,” she says. Dahmen has found that most of her work comes out looking bright and happy, contradicting the notion that great work must come from a place of suffering. At times, this has made her question the worthiness of her work. As she’s gotten older, though, she’s



Dahmen stands outside of her home near the Damariscotta River. She and her husband moved to Maine 18 years ago.
Opposite: Dahmen started painting in her twenties. Now, in her seventies, Dahman has work in numerous private and corporate collections around the world.





realized that notion is not true. “My work sometimes looks happy, and people like it because it makes them happy, and I want to accept that,” Dahmen says. “I want to stop maligning that. Just because I create happy work doesn’t mean I haven’t suffered.”

Dahmen says art has always been her way of coping and working through issues. For that reason, she says, the process of finding inspiration, developing an idea, and actually painting brings her more joy and satisfaction than seeing the finished piece. “I love being in my studio every day, struggling to make something that satisfies me,” she says. “I need to be engaged. I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t have this.” That urge to paint is what has gotten Dahmen where she is today, and it’s what will keep her in her studio until she’s no longer physically able to create. “Life can be a long life, and it’s great to have a passion,” she says. As a painter—and a mother, a wife, a Mainer—she has no intention of slowing down. ✦



From top: Dahmen washes lavender in her sink. Plants and nature are often present in her paintings. A pile of paintbrushes and tools in Dahmen’s studio.

