



French of All Trades

Perhaps most recognized for her still life paintings of wine bottles and cigars, Heather A. French is a Central Florida artist of many talents. Working primarily in oil paint on canvas and watercolors, French has been commissioned to paint everything from people's pets to their personal life stories.

Although she has been an artist for over 20 years, French painted her first bottle of wine in 2003 at the suggestion of her fiancé, a wine sommelier. Recognizing the appeal of the work and her interest in the theme, French continued to focus on wine. Soon thereafter, she was inspired to paint wine crates, the subjects of one of her most popular pieces of artwork to date.

A vacation to Dominican Republic introduced French to the cigar culture. A trip in 2006 to

Honduras gave French firsthand access to the production facilities of Rocky Patel Cigars—one of the top cigar makers in the world—and ignited her interest in painting cigars paired with wine and spirits. In 2009 French began painting spirits when her fiancé's business expanded to distribute liquor in addition to beer and wine.

At Parsons School of Design in New York City and Atlanta College of Art, French originally studied to become a portrait painter. She switched subjects to still life painting while earning her Masters at the University of Pennsylvania. French's reasoning behind the switch: "People don't want to hang pictures of strangers in their home." "Plus," French points out, "with portraits you are painting 100% for someone else—and it can be difficult to know exactly what they're looking for. You can tell more about a person by

painting the objects they love than by a picture of their face."

You may have seen French's art around in local establishments like Sand Lake's Corona Cigars, the Winter Park University Club, and Lakeridge Winery, where in 2006 she was awarded her own wine label. French's work has also appeared at Walt Disney World. She painted her first poster for Epcot's annual International Food & Wine Festival in 2003. In 2007 she was again invited to provide artwork for the Food & Wine Festival, this time painting two posters for the event. Most recently Disney selected French to paint a poster for Epcot's 2009 International Flower & Garden Festival.

Outside of Florida, French's largest display of original art can be seen outside Chicago at the Hammond Horse Shoe Casino. French's artwork has been featured at Alan Wong's restaurant in Oahu, Hawaii and wineries around the country like Rosenthal in Malibu, King Estate in Oregon, and Wente in California.

In addition to artwork that features wine, cigars and spirits, French has been commissioned to paint a variety of subjects. David and Christine Walker of Heathrow are avid collectors and commissioners of French's work. In fact, the couple's recent home redecorating has been heavily influenced by French's art: "Many of our choices on wall color and fabric come from the paintings, which we are making the focal points of the rooms."

The Walkers own French's original 'wine crates' painting and commissioned her to create a four-foot by six-foot painting of a Napa vineyard. Their favorite piece of artwork from French depicts the story of the Walker's relationship. It incorporates their preferred wine, their love of golf, their favorite vacation, their Connecticut heritage, and even bunny figurines to commemorate the couple's nickname for each other ("honey bunny"). According to Christine, the painting "also reminds us of when we first met Heather and fell in love with her work."

French's works out of her Central Florida home studio with her beagle is by her side. Information on her original paintings and commissions can be found online at HeatherAFrench.com or by phone at 407-232-0431. For those who are interested in a giclée, French modifies or adds items to paintings to ensure every piece is still one-of-a-kind. Matted prints of some of her work can also be purchased on her Web site.

"I am so fortunate to do what I love," says French. "I look forward to continuing to find inspiration for my art in my personal life, my travels and my clients."

