

the feel of color



"Wind on Water," oil on wood

Local muralist Loretta Domaszewski drawing praise, notice

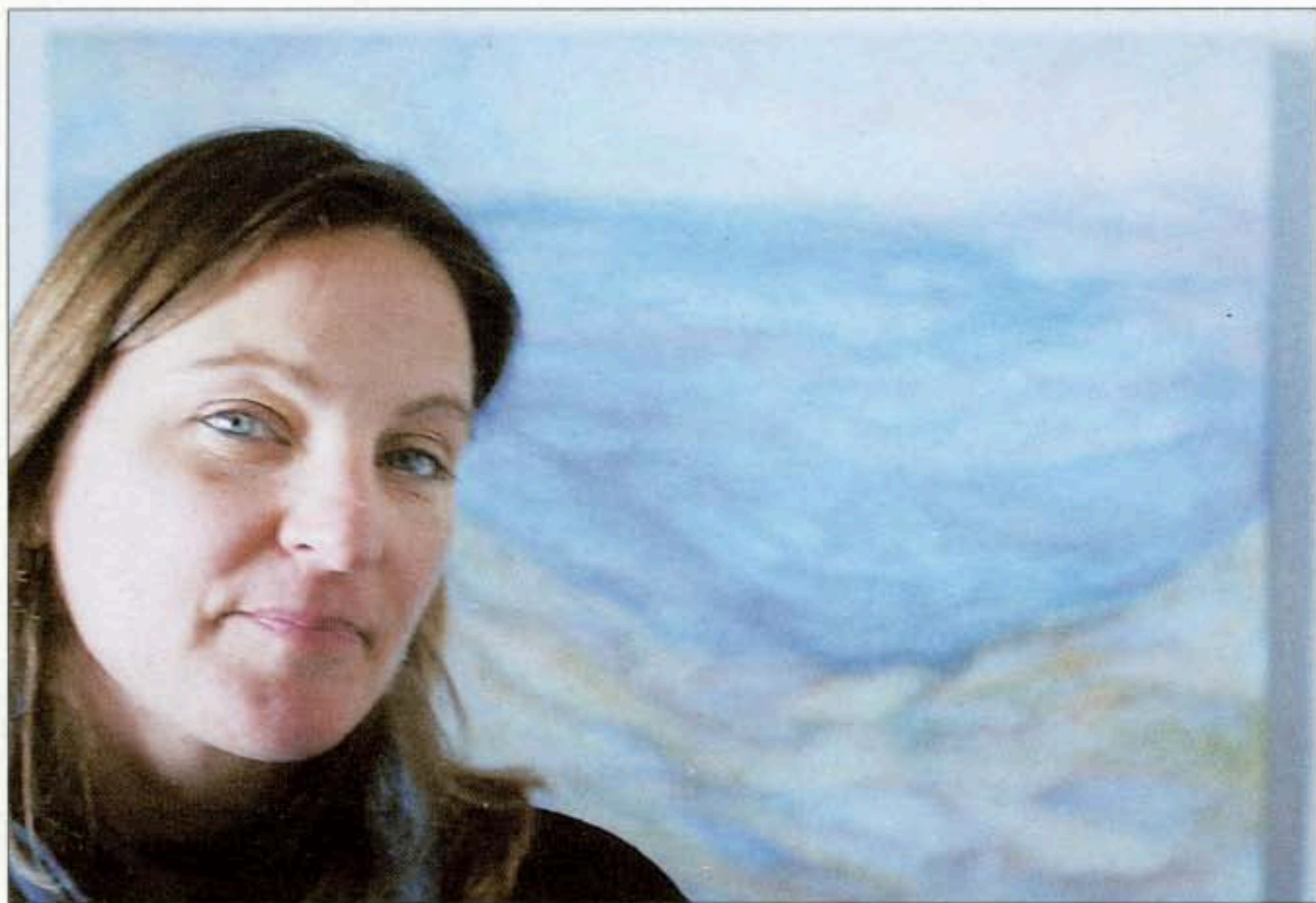
In the
studio

BY MICHELE CORRIEL

Limiting Loretta Domaszewski's work to a particular style is much like trying to catch sunlight in a jar. Color and the relationships of color run throughout her paintings. The hues traverse through layers of translucent shades. She often dips her brush into the fantastic, portraying rich pastel landscapes or whimsically striped tents, canvas flaps lifted from a breeze.

Her work also reaches beyond the studio to expansive murals spanning walls and hallways.

Domaszewski spent her childhood at boatyards, salt marshes and beaches in Connecticut, then moved onto Nantucket Island before settling in Montana. Her intimate knowledge of water, and the ways of



artist portrait by Thomas Lee

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water, allows her to follow it in her art and with her heart.

One painting, done from her canoe in the marshes of Nantucket, embodies both immediacy and contemplation. The complicated blue pastel water distinguishes the ambient fall palette in the foliage and in the water life. It is a beckoning landscape, compellingly familiar.

"I play with abstraction and reality," she said. "And I love to experiment with colors."

Julia Becker, professor and chair of the art department at University of Great Falls, thinks of Domaszewski's work in terms of her ability to convey the world through color.

"She's definitely a colorist, more than she knows," Becker said. "She's able to work with the paint to actually create light; you have a sense that if you turned the lights off in a room the painting would glow."

Domaszewski revels in the chalky quality of pastels, and the multiple layers that come through in the pastels. But recently her work has gone down a different path. She's been making her own paints using natural earth and mineral pigments mixed with an oil or acrylic base.

"I'm always taking chances," she said. "And I'll keep doing that."

Incorporating textures into her landscapes, she mixes gesso with modeling paste, raising the surface of her canvas with a palette knife, sculpting the image then painting into it.

Sometimes she may use a clear acrylic to build up the line of the images, adding dimensions and then color.

"From the very first time I saw Loretta's work I connected with it," Becker said. "Part of that is because she has such a deep connection with the earth as a living body. The physicality of it, the shape and curves, the way light travels through water, the arc of a valley, the form and movement of the land, the patterns of a current. She speaks a universal language."

Domaszewski often uses the image of a tent in her work, which to her is a metaphor that embodies feelings of home and the transient nature of man.

"I felt attracted to tents for years," she said.

She found herself building constructs, small table models and working with the idea of bringing nature inside. Then, while working with children with cancer at a hospital in Boston, she decided to actually build a large-scale tent.

"I designed this tent, but it was more like a combination of nature and fantasy, which is something I often do with my work," she said.

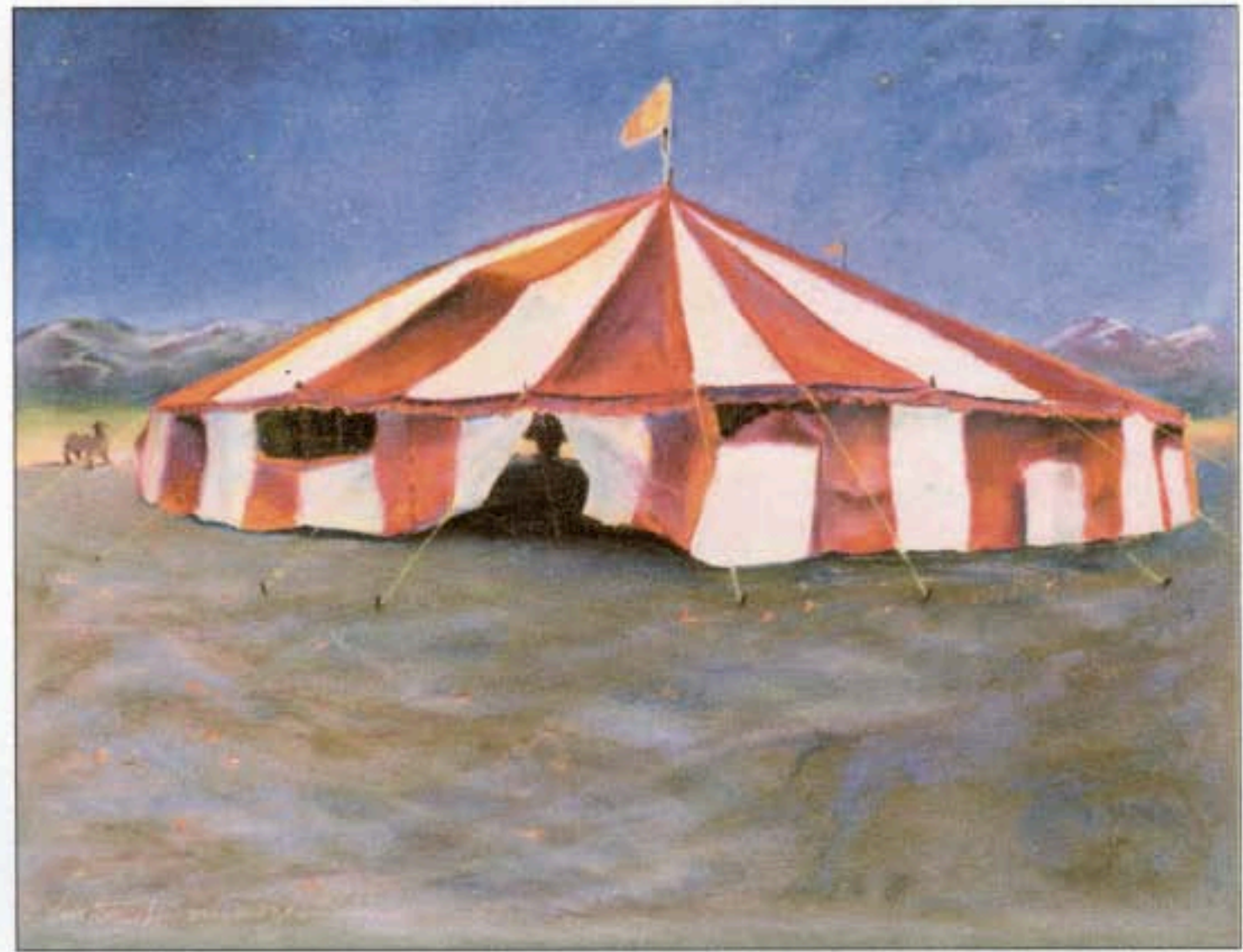
She built a 25-foot long veiled tent that had symbols and elements of all the four seasons inside of it, hanging down from the roof, so the viewer could actually walk through the cycles of the year. For Domaszewski it was a type of sculpture, an interior special experience.

"Then I started to think of the tent as a

transitory home," she said. "My work has a lot to do with that idea. Even in my paintings there are always pathways, journeys, walkways; there's usually something at the end, a light. And I started thinking of my life and my work as a journey — in many aspects."

Betsy Swartz, a local art consultant, is drawn to exactly that in Domaszewski's paintings.

"Her portrayal of a psychological journey comes through in her work," Swartz said. "Her use of color and shape are very intriguing, too, and so inviting. I just want to sit and look at them. It evokes some kind of emotion that makes me think about the artist as well as myself. I often find myself responding to her figures and what's happening in the piece."



"Wanderer," pastel

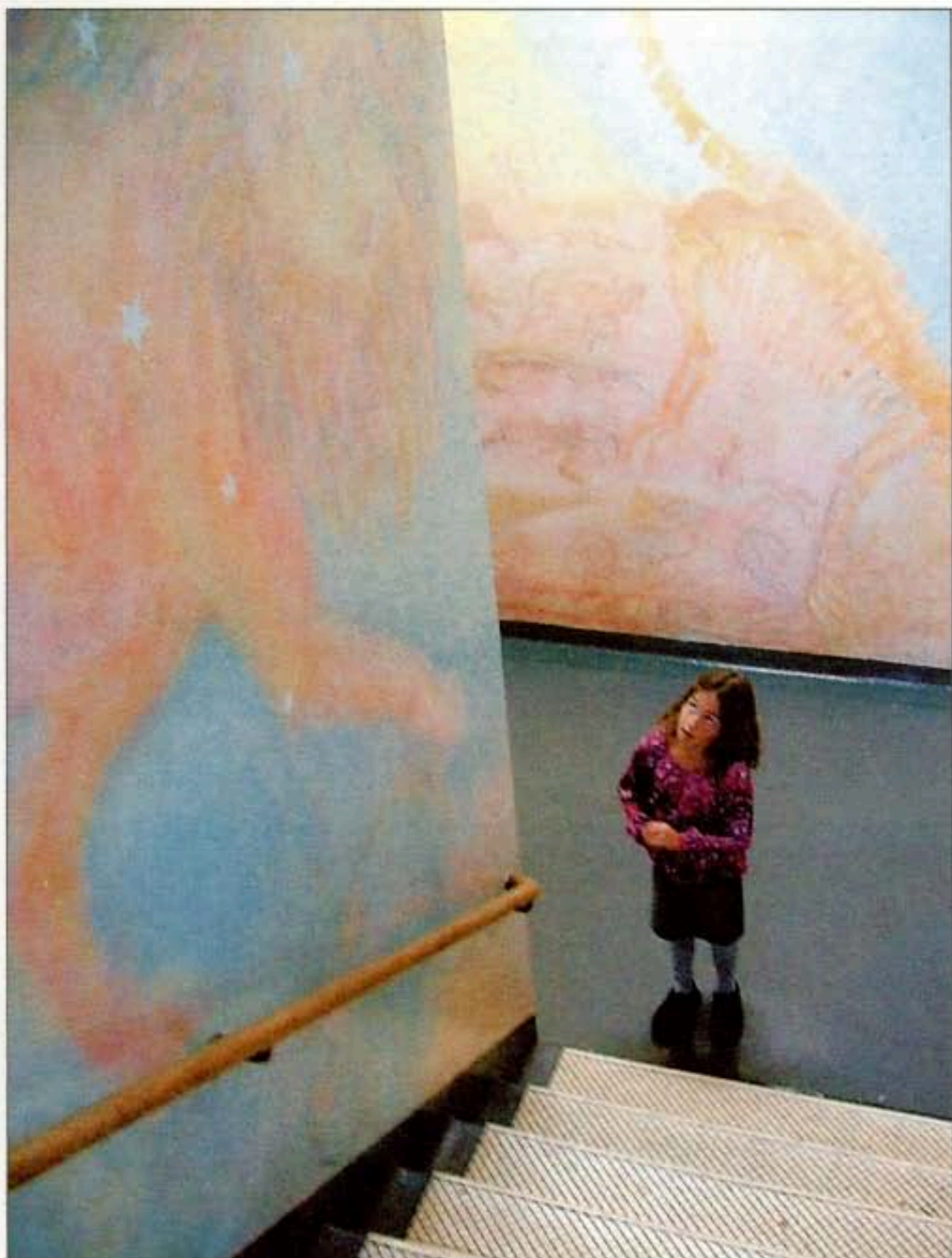
With every step into a new project, a new method, a different perspective, it is the process that Domaszewski finds attractive. Pushing from the confines of borders, she often finds herself going beyond the frame. So much so, that she's expanded her canvas past its edges onto the wall — painting large murals — around doorways, reaching down hallways and slinking up staircases.

Inside Hawthorne Elementary School, Domaszewski's work flows between floors, with fauna and flora, nebulas and dinosaurs, primitive imagery and high fantasy.

"I worked with the students and then freehand painted their ideas onto the walls," she said.



"Lazy 'W' Longhorns," oil, mixed medium on metal



Mural at Hawthorne Elementary School

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Which has led her into yet another area. Something she calls “atmospheric mural painting,” where Domaszewski creates individual wall treatments reminiscent of frescoes, using the natural minerals and earth pigments in an abstract, non-intrusive manner.

“The illuminated quality of light filters through the colors creating movement and depth as seen in the essence of water, air, fire and earth,” she explained. “I do multiple layers and each one is completely different, depending on the person and the room.”

Swartz said that she’s spoken to people who love the way Domaszewski can alter a room with her use of color.



"Autumn Marsh," oil on canvas



"moving waters," earth and mineral pigments on canvas

"Clients can't believe how she can change a room," Swartz said. "She just transforms it, almost from a Feng Shui perspective; she can change the energy of a space."

With a BFA from Tufts, as well as the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts, a K-12 teaching certificate from Brandeis University, her work shown in galleries from Boston to San Francisco, from New York City to Montana and New Mexico, Domaszewski's work is on the verge of breaking out.

"She creates such a strong sense of place,"

Becker said. "She has the ability to include the sensual experience of a place, the feeling of the wind and the warmth, the smells and the memory — it's all there."

"...She's a master with the elements of visual design with light, color, design and shape. But she's also able to push it into an emotive realm where something else begins to happen." ©

Michele Corriel is a frequent contributor to At Home.