

# 2014 Design Contest Winner Tony Krysinisky

by Sandra Buckingham

There is one unique landmark that says “Cedar Key” like nothing else does. It’s the most sketched, painted and photographed structure in town, instantly recognizable to anyone who has visited this tiny island city on Florida’s Gulf Coast.... and it is slowly but inevitably, year by year, crumbling into the sea.

“It” is the Thomas Guest House, also known as the Honeymoon Cottage - a tiny wood-framed, stilt cottage built more than 60 years ago as a weekend getaway for the Thomas family of Gainesville. It perched like a miniature island 300 feet from shore, connected to land by a long narrow boardwalk, also elevated over the water on stilts.

The Thomas Guest House would have been in its prime and, one imagines, full of weekend seaside joie de vivre, at the time of the very first Cedar Key Arts Festival. However two decades later, in 1985, the cottage was mostly destroyed by Hurricane Elena. Every year since then, time and weather claim another piece of what’s left. Its remnants will likely not survive another bad storm, let alone a hurricane. This endearing structure was chosen, while it still stands, as the theme image for the 50th anniversary of the town’s annual fine arts festival, now called the “Old Florida Celebration of the Arts”.

Florida artist Tony Krysinisky winner of the 2014 Design Contest for the festival, rarely does contest art, but he says that when he learned what the theme was for 2014 he just had to submit an entry. He has been coming to the festival for the past five years, and like many visitors, fell in love with the time-warp feel of Cedar Key and its unspoiled natural surroundings.

“Oh, my gosh,” he said on first discovering Cedar Key, “don’t tell anyone about this place!” Too many people will come, and that will spoil it.” That’s high praise from an artist who, although born and raised in New York, has spent most of his adult life in Florida. Originally drawn to this state by the lure of its surfing beaches, he ended up staying for an undergraduate degree. After doing graduate studies in fine art in New Orleans, he returned to Florida and now lives with his wife and son on Perdido Key (“the beach boonies” he calls it) on the Panhandle near Pensacola.

Like many artists, Tony has painted and drawn throughout his life. For a time he also had a career as a computer graphics designer, but now he makes a living full time as an artist, selling pieces through his website and a selection of art festivals. He picks only places he likes (Cedar Key being one of his favorites), and usually makes the itinerary a family trip with his wife and son.

An interest in woodwork has always gone hand in hand with Tony’s love of painting. While looking for a way to incorporate a tactile texture into his art, he found a technique that involves engraving the outline of an image onto a tempered hardboard panel, then applying colors in layers of acrylic glaze. This has become his favorite medium. The works have a distinctly coastal vibe to them, with the imagery, color and quirkiness one associates with sea-side Florida.

For his winning entry, Tony decided to imagine the cottage as it once was, in its heyday, instead of rendering it as the relic it is now. He found a few archival photos that show its original structure, then looked at historical summaries of that period to get a feel for the times. The 1950s were a bit of respite between the horrors of World War II and the anxiety of the coming Cold War. It was a time for hula hoops, transistor radios, modern jazz, Elvis and rock ‘n’ roll. Half the homes in America had a black and white TV, capturing network signals from the air with rabbit ears or rooftop antennas. And the launch of the first artificial Earth satellite, Sputnik, began the space race.

Tony's poster piece captures that whole vibe perfectly, with its happy colors and sand dollar skies infusing the evening calm with an upbeat energy. How cool a retreat is this stilt cabin built hundreds of feet out over the Gulf waters! Its windows and open door cast a welcoming glow into the warm night. There's a speed boat berthed underneath, a TV antenna on the roof, a beach umbrella for daytime shade and colored lights for night time fun. A satellite orbits overhead. A few other Cedar Key icons complete the scene - the background silhouette of Atsena Otie, dolphins cruising the still waters and, of course, the obligatory pelican sitting on the roof.

This image will be widely used to promote the 2014 Arts Festival, appearing on postcards, posters and t-shirts, all of which will be available for purchase at the festival. In February, the Cedar Key Arts Center will host an exhibition of all 24 entries in this year's design contest.

Mark your calendars for April 12-13, 2014. It's the perfect weekend to drive out to the very west end of SR 24 and visit Cedar Key. Hang out with artists, take in the coastal atmosphere and see for yourself what's left of the Honeymoon Cottage before it slides under the waves.

For details about the Old Florida Celebration of the Arts, check out [www.cedarkeyartsfestival.com](http://www.cedarkeyartsfestival.com). More information on Tony Krysinisky, including a gallery of his works, can be found on his website, [www.tonykrysinisky.net](http://www.tonykrysinisky.net).