

Sand Sculptures

Designs by Don Broadhecker

WRITTEN BY SAM SCHUNK
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY DON BROADHECKER
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Photo by Kelli Tindall

Many of us may remember making sandcastles as one of our favorite memories from times spent at beaches here on the Gulf Coast and all over the world. For Don Broadhecker, these trips with his family began as an opportunity for him to construct more elaborate sand sculptures for his children to enjoy. As he shares, "Living in New Jersey with the shore so close and 3 daughters who loved going there, vacations were always at that destination with sand sculptures always part of it. It always bummed me out that, after all the time making one, the elements, rain, and wind would destroy them in short order."

Through his professional experience, he eventually discovered a new technique that helped him to extend the life of his sculptures. Don says, "My working career was basically in construction, involving all facets therein, with my final 18 years focused on tile work. I was lucky enough to be self-employed by a high-end builder based in Pennsylvania whose clients usually went to the extreme in designs and products, one of which was pebble/stone shower floors/accent walls where the pieces had to be fitted into the spaces. It stuck in my mind to incorporate that into the sculptures."

"By this time, our vacations were in Florida, beginning in Captiva and Sanibel, and then staying in Nokomis for the past 20 years. Our treks down gradually increased in time which allowed me to do larger sand sculptures and gave me the time to fit shells onto the sculptures which protected them from the elements."

Being such a meticulous, hands-on craft, it's not surprising that each of his sculptures involves considerable time and effort, especially with his new technique.





Don says, "It definitely increased my time to finish them. Not counting the time that it takes to collect the appropriate shells, the sculptures themselves take 50 to 60 hours to do. Shell pieces are set as tight as possible with at least two contact points on adjacent pieces. They're basically locked in place. It's a tedious process, but it's satisfying to finally see them done. I had one of my sculptures last for close to five months before a storm came in and washed it away. Sand crabs and birds do some damage, but people are the main problem. For some reason, I have had a couple of my sculptures destroyed before we were on our way back home."

When asked why he makes these beautiful artworks, Don replies, "For a lot of reasons, I do them, including enjoyment for myself, my bride, friends, locals, and people from the USA and travelers from overseas. It's cool that they come by every year to see what's being made and that we can have some interesting conversations. We've made a lot of friends over the years, and we stay in contact with quite a few of them throughout the year."

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