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WIDE WORLD OF CRAFT

WOVEN TOGETHER

In Jacksonport, 10 miles north of Sturgeon Bay, a bright green house peeks out from behind tall pines. A sign at the end of the driveway beckons you to turn off the road and check out Martinez Studio, in a charming metal-clad building behind the home.

Don't be put off if the studio seems empty; a bell rings as you open the door, and within minutes, a cheerful Sandra Martinez will burst in and greet you like an old friend.

Here the painter and her weaver husband, Wence, make and sell their nationally recognized work. (They were recently selected as 2017 Balvenie Rare Craft award finalists.) On the top floor, Sandra thrives in a messy studio, while Wence's large loom, laced with an elaborate work-in-progress, fills a tidy section of the main gallery whose walls are covered with his work.

The duo also collaborates on large, colorful tapestries with symbolic designs, which Wence weaves based on Sandra's paintings. They exhibit all over the US, including at the Smithsonian Craft Show in Washington, DC, in April. Their art-focused lifestyle is one they've built following years of hard work, with Door County playing a key supportive role.

"Almost 30 years ago, my dear college friend suggested that the imagery from my paintings might look interesting if it were woven," Sandra recalls, explaining how she met her husband. "She was right."

This suggestion, plus a series of serendipitous events, led the Milwaukee native to the Mexican weaving village Teotitlán del Valle near Oaxaca, where Wence grew up. They fell in love immediately and



Art brought Sandra and Wence Martinez together, when Sandra, a Wisconsin native, visited Mexico to collaborate with her future husband.

began a successful international collaboration that quickly led to marriage and family. Like most artists, they struggled to make ends meet, but the friends who helped them find each other, both Door County residents, had another life-changing suggestion.

"Girl," Sandra recalls them saying, "if you come up here, you can work like a dog for the summer, save all your money, and then you'll be free." The winters, then, could be dedicated to making art.

The couple has made Door County their home for 24 years.



LEFT: Wence Martínez's *Hawks* (2005) graces a wall of the studio gallery he runs with his wife, Sandra Martínez. He wove the tapestry on a traditional treadle loom with hand-spun Oaxacan churro wool. He wove *Tronco* (2007, far left) based on a design by Sandra.

RIGHT: *Conectados Códice 231* (2016) is another collaboration by the couple. Their daughter, MaLena, and son-in-law, Jacobo, apprentice under Wence, producing versions of Sandra's designs along with other work.



The Martínezes turned a two-story garage into their studio gallery. Many of the area's craft venues are housed in refurbished buildings.

Their daughter, MaLena, and her husband, Jacobo Martínez, now apprentice under Wence, carrying on the family's weaving tradition and helping Sandra realize more of her designs in woven form.

Sandra says Door County not only allowed them to survive, but also to flourish as full-time artists. It's a nurturing environment that helps tourists loosen up, too.

"They cross the bridge, and it's like everything drops away. All the professional shields and masks, and their persona from their life is informed now by

going for a walk in the woods, going for a swim, discovering things," she says. "They're happy. They had a good meal. They had nature. And they find a way to connect with people directly that doesn't involve the potential attitude of a city gallery. [Door County is] an incubator for everyone. And now we're seeing that explode with restaurants and great little businesses where people are saying, 'I'm going to give it a shot myself.' "

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