

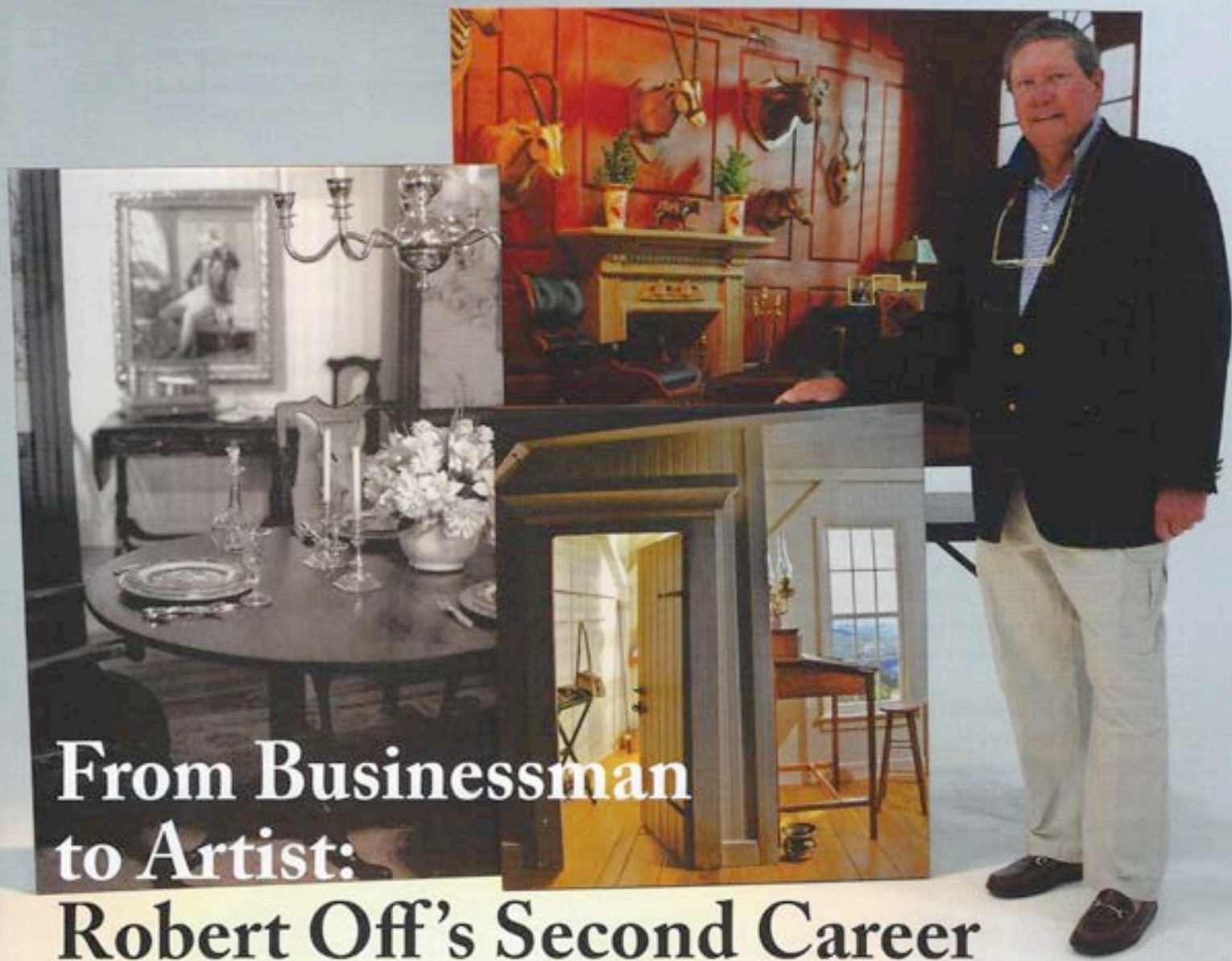
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FALL EDITION



FROM BUSINESSMAN TO ARTIST—
Meet Robert Off



From Businessman to Artist: Robert Off's Second Career

written by Daniel Brown

Stay busy – the mantra of those recently retired, or about to, is make or break for many, defining the line between boredom and a fulfilled life after retirement. With today's bustling business world fit for all ages and experiences, a hobby can become a profitable second business with a little intention and creativity. Cincinnati's Bob Off is the perfect example.

Bob Off's favorite childhood hobby is extremely similar to his chosen second career, after his retirement as commercial/industrial real estate broker. Just as Bob's personality and character are consistent, his creativity blossomed since retirement, emphasizing his interest in all things visual and miniature.

As a boy in Pittsburgh, Bob took on his father's passion – painting miniature soldiers. Bob's mother was stricken by polio when he and his two sisters were still in grade ➤

school. As she was often away seeking treatments, and the elder Off wanted Bob not only to have a way to pass long blocks of time, but to remain self-sufficient and carry on a family tradition.

The soldiers connect directly to Bob's current passion and second career - the invention and fabrication of what he calls "roomboxes", miniature rooms which he designs and fills with all things miniature (furniture, artwork, dogs, lighting, wallpaper—anything that might go into a room). The main difference between the childhood soldiers and the roomboxes of today is Bob's decision to exhibit and sell the boxes. He accomplished unusual success as an emerging artist in a complex and difficult art market. Truly, it is fair and accurate to call Bob an artist now.

Bob and his wife Mardie lived in their Indian Hill house for many decades, where they reared their two children, Ellie, 35, now a San Francisco/Silicon Valley business executive, and son Warner, 33, a lawyer with the downtown Cincinnati law firm Dinsmore & Shohl. Recently married to wife Emma, also a corporate lawyer downtown, both share Bob's particular love



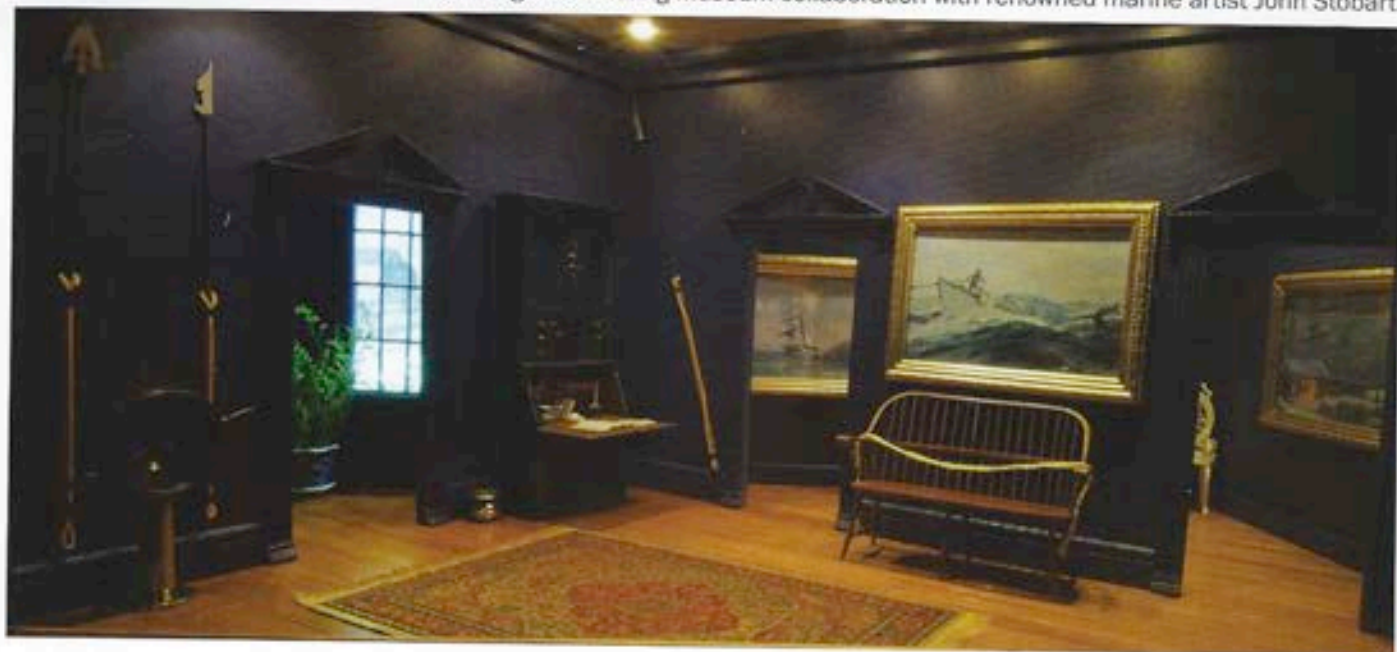
of contemporary art and American historical prints from the mid-1800's.

Bob came to Cincinnati from Pittsburgh in 1970, as a salesman for PPG Industries, which is when I met him. We used to spend Saturday mornings roaming around Hyde Park Square, always ending at The Miller Gallery, still there, where we often bought small watercolors and a few prints. Over the years, Bob has served on the boards

of both The Taft Museum of Art and The Contemporary Arts Center, as well as of numerous non-profits. He is one of the first people to manifest a genuine interest in the creative possibilities of the digital world, and one of the many reasons for his successes as an artist is his ability to market an entire package around the roomboxes. These packages include visual information, videos and other marketing tools which are so useful for dealers and curators.

Bob's marketing skills emerged during his long and distinguished career as a commercial real estate broker: during that time he worked with both small and large corporate clients and foresaw the profound changes that

New England Whaling Museum collaboration with renowned marine artist John Stobart.





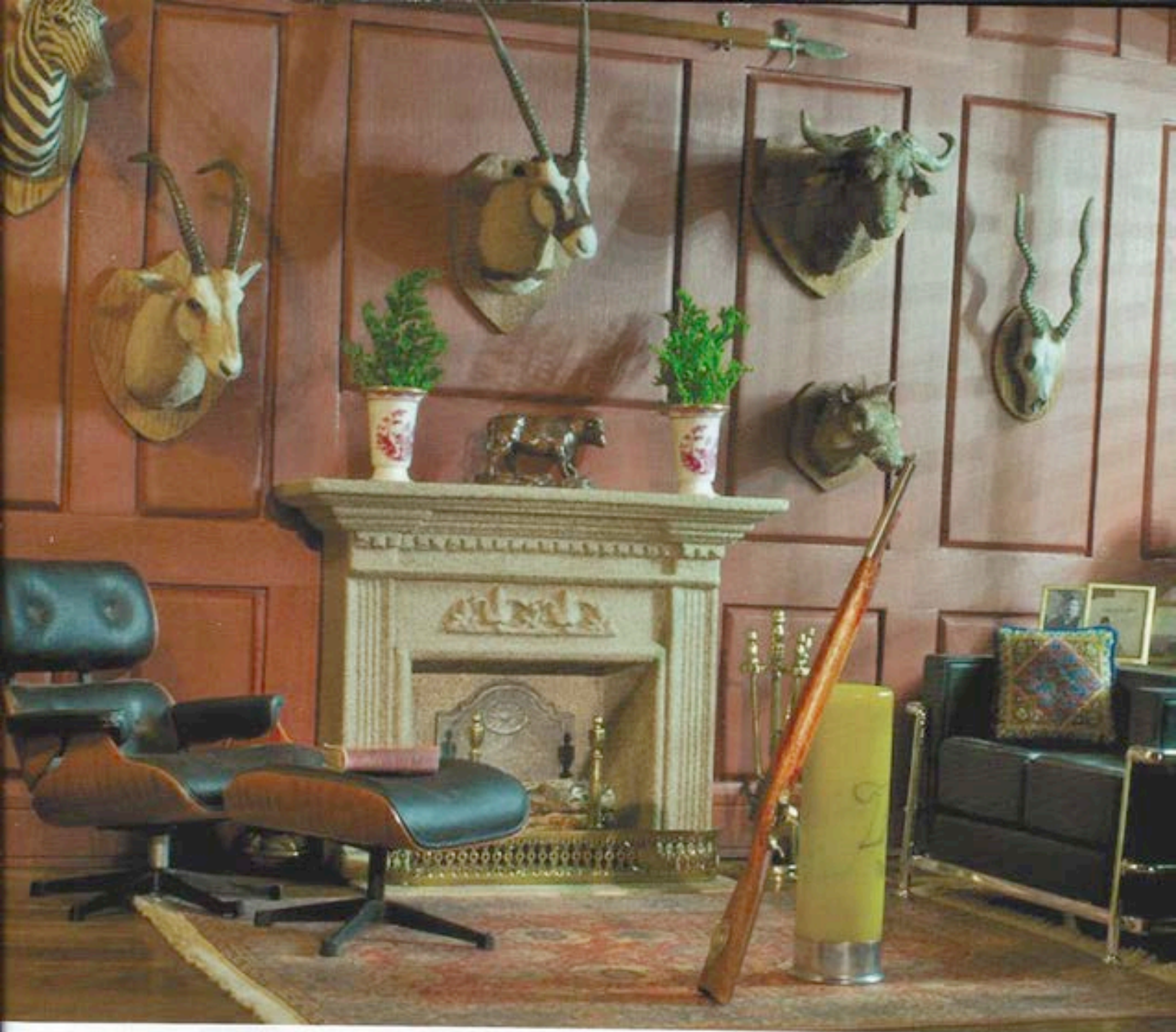
Bob working on his shaper machine making the crown room moldings for his newest roombox.

technology was going create in the commercial real estate business. He understood the value of marketing long before it began to resonate with the general culture. When he approaches a gallery, museum, or charity with the idea of showing his roomboxes, part of his success includes branding and marketing of his artistic product, which he perfected in his business career.

After his early years in Cincinnati, Bob moved to Washington, where he worked directly for Larry Eagleberger in the State Department. Eagleberger reported directly to Henry Kissinger during the second Nixon presidency. Most ambassadorial appointments came through Bob's office, and he learned a lot of diplomatic skills in Washington where he also met his wife, the former Marjorie Warner, a Cincinnati also working in Washington. When they became engaged,



Bob's miniatures are everywhere. This is a photograph of a display shelf in the powder room of his home.



"The Game Room". The inspiration for this room came from an idea of a room where Hemingway would enjoy having his evening Scotch. It is a mash of the old and the new, with a Le Corbusier sofa and an Eames chair. The .20 gauge shotgun shell was included to show scale for the photograph.

they decided to live in Cincinnati rather than in Pittsburgh. They have both been involved in many civic activities and boards of trustees, and both enjoy spending time together and golfing.

Bob's interest in roomboxes started when he built a miniature doll's house for his daughter, then five. His miniature rooms are built into rooms all over the downstairs of the Indian Hill house. About seven years ago, when Bob was completely retired from his real estate career, he began to create these elegant and finely crafted roomboxes, making a workshop/studio in the basement of his house.

His enthusiasm for his new career is catching: he began to show his roomboxes publicly and professionally, first at Cecile Drackett's antique shop, Drackett Design, in Cincinnati, then at the Antiques Festival, and at a Delaware Art



Museum. He recently began to show his work at Eisele Gallery in Fairfax, with huge success. About a year ago, he met internationally renowned maritime painter John Stobart and persuaded Stobart to collaborate with him on a roombox with a maritime theme, which includes paintings by Stobart, and which sold, at the opening, and currently resides at The Kentucky Gateway Museum in Maysville, Kentucky. As of this writing, he is driving a recently sold roombox to a woman in Baltimore who bought one directly from his website.

Bob also attends and sells his work at miniature expositions and sales shows around the country with other miniature specialists, and has been going to international miniature workshops in Maine for the past four summers. These

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“The Locker Room”. This was inspired by the most interesting locker rooms Bob has seen throughout the years.





"Artist's Studio". Bob's impression of what Homer's studio would have looked like in Maine in the early 1900's. The flip of a switch takes the room from day to evening.



are both educational and networking opportunities for him. He lets friends and collectors know about his work through different emails and social media, which he creatively designs.

Bob's second career has energized and invigorated him, as well bringing his identity back to that piece of it which was first manifested in his childhood toy soldiers. His exhibition opportunities and sales have been unusually successful, and we anticipate the possibility of genuine fame, as his reputation and his artistic skills continue to grow. The boxes manage to seduce us with their lighting, their mood and their nostalgia, and their touch of surrealism, as he integrates elements of stage sets and design into them. His is an exciting new journey, and his second career is an inspiration to many others as boomers continue to want intellectual and aesthetic enrichment. This second career is a model for any aging person who doesn't want to fully retire.

