



The Studio OF JOHN FAWCETT

By Vicki Stang

In late May, after a four-day drive from their home near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, John and Elizabeth Fawcett happily drove through the gates to their home in Clark, Colorado. It's an annual event that includes pulling a large horse trailer occupied by the couple's two horses and all of Fawcett's paint supplies. "We looked like the Beverly Hillbillies," he says with a laugh.

Located on a 52-acre ranch the Fawcetts named Double LL—which Fawcett says stands for Lucky (me) and Lizzie (Elizabeth)—the property is 25 miles north of Steamboat Springs. Willow Creek runs through the ranch and attracts deer and elk, while the view overlooks the Zirkel

wilderness mountain range. From his studio at one end of the house, Fawcett can see the sun rise in the morning and catch the Alpenglow at sundown when the mountains light up in a pinkish orange glow.

Just as he has two homes, Fawcett has had two careers. For 20 years, he ran a veterinary practice, dabbling in art in his spare time. Finally, in 1996 he decided to make a life change, sold his practice, and began to pursue art full time.

"Our dream was to live in the West," he says. "We had worked in Colorado during our college years and liked the area. We found this property, and it was too good to be true. We bought it; it was just raw



land. When I sold my practice, we started building here. It took us two summers to finish it. We built the barn first and lived in a 10' by 10' tack room with our three Labradors. Elizabeth was a real good sport to put up with that."

Now married for 48 years, the couple lives—and works—well together. "Elizabeth does all my watercolor framing, matting, and glass cutting," Fawcett says, adding that she does so in an area in the walkout basement of their home. "She wants to get fired and retire, but I won't fire her."

Fawcett initially painted in watercolors and later began to also work with oils. His subjects have remained constant, no matter the medium, as he beautifully captures contemporary and historical cowboys as well as Native American scenes. Not surprisingly, horses figure prominently in his paintings.

"I've been doing this for a long enough time that I look at my composition or photographs and know if it will be a great watercolor or a great oil," he says. "I love the fluidity and happy accidents of watercolors. With oils, I love the impasto of the paint and the richness of the colors. I can look at images and know which medium will lend itself best to a particular painting."

Fawcett's studio is situated at the west end of the two-level house, which was built with square milled logs. Natural light floods the 20' by 22' studio, coming in through French doors and windows on three sides of the space. "My number one goal with the studio was to take advantage of the views," Fawcett says. "Unfortunately, we were unable to have north facing light because of the way the house is situated."

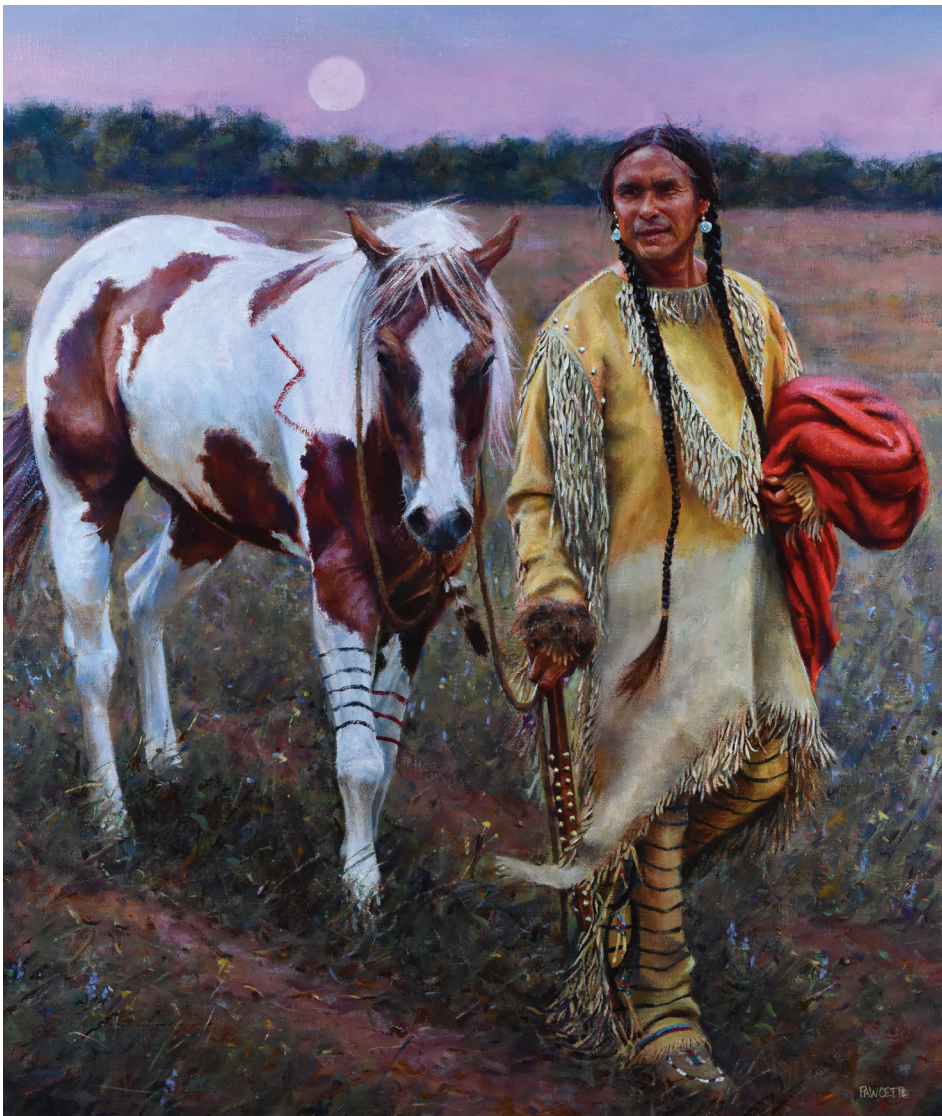
The studio has just the character and coziness Fawcett had hoped to achieve. The walls are pine while the floorboards are oak that came from an old tobacco barn in North Carolina. "Our builder said, 'You're going to need more flooring because we're going to have to cut out the knots,'" Fawcett says. "We said, 'No; we want that character.'"

Fawcett and Elizabeth also





Ledgerbook Tales, oil, 30" by 40"



Fast As Lightning, oil, 24" by 20"

chose wormy chestnut from Pennsylvania for the studio doors, which have latches rather than doorknobs. "We wanted it to look like an older homestead," he says. Adding to the studio's character is a wood-burning fireplace and a variety of Western items that include two antique saddles, Indian artifacts, and Kachina dolls that Fawcett's mother collected in Arizona.

Paintings in various stages of completion are scattered throughout the space. "I have six or seven works in progress right now," Fawcett says. "With oils I do a block-in in burnt sienna and let it dry. Then I start laying in color. Sometimes I'll go over the piece three or four times from top to bottom. If I need to let an oil dry, I'll set it aside and start working on something else. With watercolors, I'll draw it on my watercolor paper and then start it and complete it."

Fawcett takes countless photos and often takes elements from each to compose a painting. He might use a background from one photo, a figure from another, and a sky from a third. Those photos are on his computer, and he refers to them as he works. "I can zoom in on images and look at the detail of something I'm painting," he says. "I might zoom in to capture a horse's eye, for example.

"I'll do maybe three or four thumbnail sketches, then draw my piece on linen mounted on a Gatorfoam board. I might do 50 paintings a year. Some larger ones—oils—might take six weeks but I can finish a watercolor in a couple days."

While most of the paintings in his studio are ones he has created, Fawcett has one done by another artist—a New Mexico scene by Peter Hurd. "He was Andrew Wyeth's brother-in-law," he says. "Wyeth is high up on my list of heroes." Also on display in the studio is an eclectic mix of Western memorabilia that includes a pair of snowshoes, a Henry rifle, and a branding iron.

On a typical day, Fawcett heads to the studio at 5:30 a.m. to start painting. He later makes time to go for a horse ride and then returns to



Spottin' Strays, oil, 24" by 36"


his studio for the afternoon. Of the early morning hours, he says, "I like it because it's a quiet time. People aren't calling or coming over, so I can concentrate. I love painting. If I'm away and don't paint for several days, I start getting the shakes."

Fawcett's paintings have earned him a myriad of awards, including the Purchase Award at the 2021 Quest For the West at the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis, Indiana. He will exhibit at that show, which opens September 9, again this year as well as at several gallery shows this fall.

Until he and Elizabeth return to Pennsylvania in October, Fawcett is enjoying his studio and the beauty of Colorado. "My paints are out, and my apron is on," he says as he ends



Slumber, oil, 11" by 14"

the conversation and returns to doing what he loves best: painting. 

Vicki Stavig is editor of Art of the West.