

FACES OF BODEGA BAY

Meet Ren Brown

Ren was born in 1947 in Berkeley, California, where his father taught Japanese History. His mother had been born and raised in Japan. So it seemed natural that the family lived first in Hong Kong and then in Japan when Ren was a young boy.

He remembers being about seven years old and going to school in Japan, where he learned enough Japanese to get by.

About two years later, the family returned to Berkeley. Ren became interested in print making while in high school. After graduation, Ren attended Swarthmore College, a small Quaker College in Pennsylvania. He had his first show there in 1966 featuring Japanese stencil prints. He traveled to Japan during the summer when he was about 20 years old and then earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History.

Ren believes one of his main accomplishments during college was self assessment, which led to his acceptance of being gay. While at Swarthmore, the Vietnam War Draft Lottery came into effect. Ren registered as a conscientious objector which required a two-year tour of duty in a civilian capacity. Ren worked in a hospital and became a respiratory therapist, a job that he did for about 20 years. While working as a respiratory therapist at Children's Hospital, Oakland, he met Robert DeVee, an impressionist painter.



Ren and Robert purchased a home in Jenner, CA and then decided to purchase a Bodega Bay commercial building in 1989. After extensive remodeling the Ren Brown Collection Gallery opened in February 1990 featuring contemporary Japanese prints and ceramics, as well as work by local artists, jewelers and potters. The Gallery has two floors of beautifully displayed art and a framing workshop on the second floor. (1781 N. Highway One)

Ren and Robert remodeled the house located in back of the Gallery. Of course, it includes many pieces of Japanese art along with some of Robert's paintings. The gardens are also done in a Japanese motif and include a koi fish pond in the front yard, a teahouse and a stone garden. Ren and Robert were together for 35 years; married in August 2008, and Robert passed away in January 2017.

Ren is active in the Redwood Rainbows square dancing club in Sebastopol. He enjoys square dancing, as it involves physical movement in a social environment and requires quick thinking. Ren says happiness comes when you live where you choose, are self-employed, are involved with the arts, and do gardening—which is why he chose this occupation and this community. He enjoys teaching people about art and helping aspiring artists. Ren joined Rancho Bodega Historical Society (RBHS) and became an RBHS Board member.

Ren says the ocean, the stars, the quiet and the wide array of interesting residents are what make Bodega Bay special for him. -- Susan Teel ■