

*Dreaming* • 20x24

# CLINGING TO THE LIGHT

*For this artist, the Cape's pull is strong, not just for its unique lighting but also for the fond memories it holds.*

By Kelly Cloonan

For artist Steve Allrich, the Cape isn't just a landscape to paint—it's a place with fond memories, where he developed his craft, met his wife and made lifelong memories that keep him coming back every year.

Allrich first visited the Cape in 1988 at 36 years old. After graduating from the American Academy of Art in his home city of Chicago, he had been living in central Massachusetts for a few years, painting dairy farms and field landscapes on the side while working full time.

He took a huge leap of faith, hoping a gallery on the Cape might see potential in those works. After venturing to Blue Heron Gallery in Wellfleet, he was set—he moved into the gallery owners' basement unit on a bluff in Truro that first summer, and the rest is history.

“The owners of the Blue Heron, Del Filardi and Harriet Rubin, kind of basically adopted me,” Allrich says. “I stayed with them for the summer, and I painted there, and I just had a blast. I hung out at the gallery a lot.”

Filardi, a sculptor, and Rubin, a potter, treated Allrich like a son, taking him out to dinner in Wellfleet and Truro and showing him the best spots for painting. They also introduced him to a host of artists and collectors.

“It was just a really, really great symbiotic relationship, and it was all against the backdrop of the Cape, which was very new to me. I hadn’t even seen it until I went there to show them my work that first time.” Allrich says. “It was just a very, very special summer.”

Allrich found himself especially drawn to the light the Cape has. At Bound Brook Island in Wellfleet in particular, he loved the way the light would bounce off the dunes. Back then, he could go and have the whole place to himself, he recalls.

“The dunes were just really unusual subject matter for the Cape, and very iconic. The shapes against either the sky or the sea was just very interesting, and boy, the light playing on them was so fascinating and beautiful,” Allrich shares.

Allrich’s work consists of expressive, bold landscapes that bring a grounded feeling of place and time. They rely on strong colors, textured layers and sometimes abstract renderings, mostly of coastal settings.

For many of the years when he lived on the Cape full time, Allrich dedicated himself to painting almost exclusively outdoors—at the dunes and other favorite spots in the area—rather than painting in a studio from a reference photo.

“I discovered, and fell in love with, plein air painting, and that became



*Winter Morning* • 18x24

a passion of mine for quite a while. I painted almost exclusively outdoors, and I've been doing it ever since," the artist says.

Since the lighting can change so quickly while painting outdoors, Allrich tries to finish a scene in an hour or two. And when he finishes, he often tries not to do touch ups in the studio to preserve the moment.

"I came to regard, pretty early on, these outdoor paintings as a record of a particular moment in my life. So I didn't want to go back and tinker with it too much. I found it very valuable to be able to look at a painting and go, oh yeah, that was Black Fish Creek, I remember that day. It's just like a scrapbook of memories," Allrich recalls.

Filardi and Rubin owned the gallery for over 20 years before selling it in the early 2000s. Allrich had stayed at the gallery since arriving in the Cape, and in the time in between, fell in love with his surroundings—and with a fellow artist, whom he married, painter Karri Allrich.

The pair met when Karri enrolled in a class Steve was teaching at the time at the then-Cape Cod Artists Association in 1991.

"We were simpatico right from the beginning," Steve said. Though the timing wasn't quite right the first time, the two crossed paths again in 1994, and later got married in Brewster at the Town Hall in 1995.

Allrich took a break from painting a few years later to move to the West

Coast to pursue a screenwriting career for a dozen years. It may seem like a big career jump, but Allrich says the two art forms are less different than they may seem.

"One thing that really struck me pretty early on is the similarities between writing and painting, in that they're both about problem solving to a pretty high degree," Allrich said. "You go through an initial period with any kind of art where you're just not very good at it, but having gone through that with painting and survived and come out the other side of it, I knew I could do writing too."

Allrich worked on several films, including writing *Honest Thief*, which stars Liam Neeson, released in 2020.



*Surfs Up*



*Clearing* • 30x24

*Afternoon Autumn**Tranquil Bay*

Around three years ago, however, Allrich is back to painting full-time.

“I went back to painting with kind of a renewed energy and I’ve been having a lot of fun with it since then,” Allrich said, adding, “What I’ve learned in the interim has helped me in my career since then, I think.”

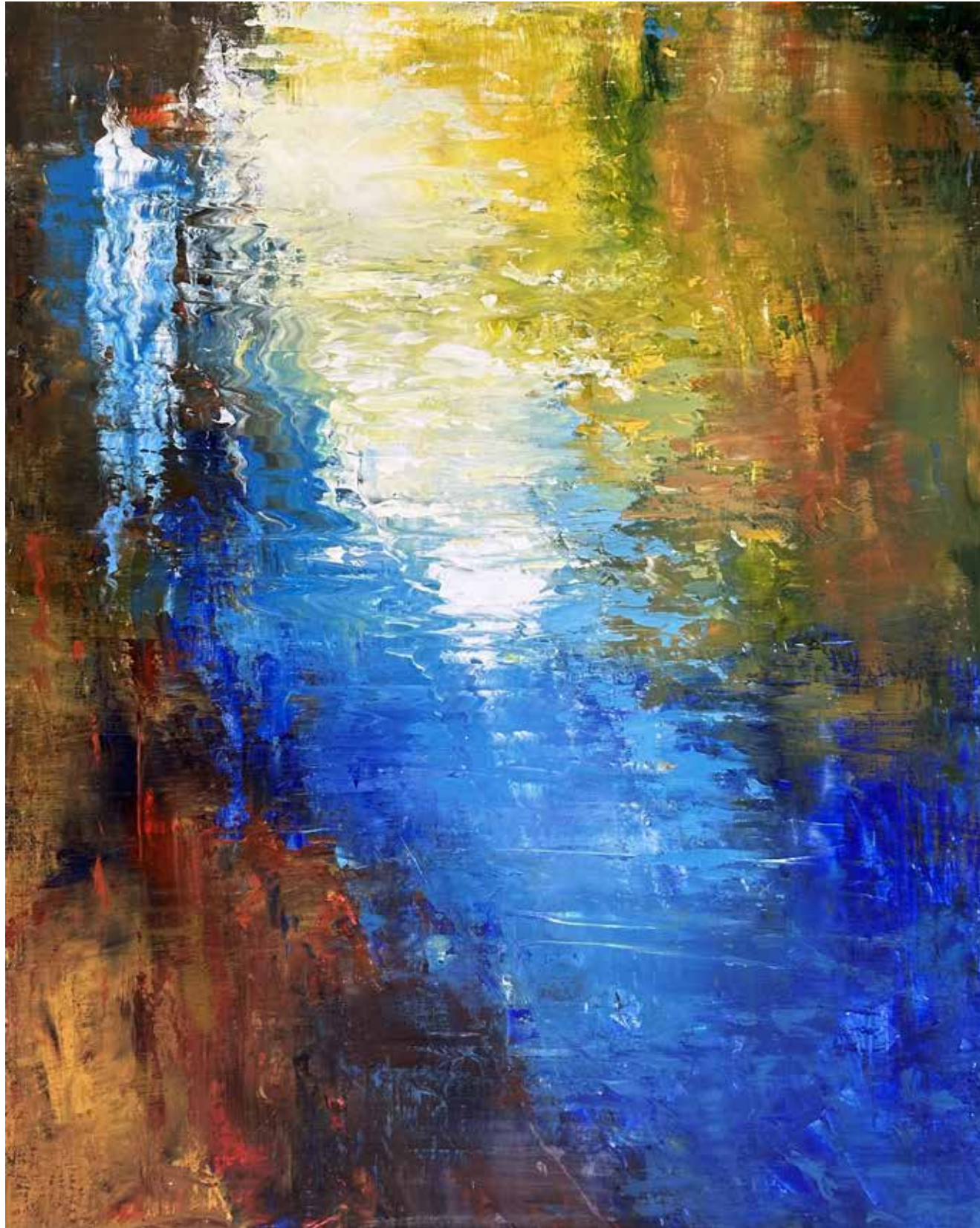
Allrich now lives with his wife in the northeast corner of Connecticut, but the pair come back to the Cape several times a year, both to bring their work and to paint, enjoying a place they are so fond of.

Even though he no longer lives in the area, Allrich still finds himself focusing predominantly on scenes from the Cape. He paints more in his studio now, too, often relying on his imagination and familiarity to depict the Cape’s natural scenes, he says.

Part of that draw is the natural beauty he loves capturing in his art, but Allrich says much of it has to do with the fond memories he has of the Cape.

“I find myself gravitating to the subject matter and the particular light that the Cape has. Some of the motifs are just so, so strong in my memory. Part of it is, I think that I have such emotional memories connected to the Cape. That’s a big part of it. I’ve tried to get involved in other landscapes and lived in some beautiful places, but the Cape always has pulled me back,” Allrich said.

Outside of their art, the pair love to revisit their favorite outdoor spots on the Cape—whether it be the woods, marshes or dunes—to take photos, both for fun and



*Autumn Reflections*

to serve as reference photos for their work. They travel all over the Cape, from Falmouth all the way to Provincetown, to seek out the best spots. Allrich also loves exploring restaurants and galleries and has a sweet spot for Provincetown in particular.

Allrich is also the author of *Oil Painting for the Serious Beginner*, which was published by Watson-Guptill Publications in 1996 and has sold over 50,000 copies. 🏠

*Kelly Cloonan is a freelance writer for Cape Cod Life Publications*