

Chesterfield artist specializes in sculpting wiener dogs.



PHOTOS BY KAREN ELSHOUT / POST-DISPATCH

Joy Beckner works on her latest dachshund sculpture of Lizzie (at right) in her studio in Chesterfield. Lizzie, 14, poses for Beckner who does other kinds of sculptures, such as the bust in the background, but her passion is her dogs, Lizzie and Edgar. Beckner will call this piece "Siesta" for obvious reasons.



Lizzie seems a bit puzzled by all of the non-moving dachshunds. They are bronze statues created by Beckner.

Dachshunds OF BRONZE

BY CYNTHIA BILLHARTZ
 Of the Post-Dispatch

Edgar and Lizzie do their best when racing for the front door of their Chesterfield home. But they are dachshunds with tubular torsos and short legs — an anatomical construction that keeps them from moving with any real finesse or speed.

Edgar, who is mahogany in color and barking fiercely, is the first to reach a visitor. Lizzie, who is 14 years old and Edgar's grandmother, is several steps behind. She's caramel brown with a light face.

"Lizzie has white hair for the same reason I do — she's old," says Joy Kroeger Beckner, matter-of-factly while closing the door. Beckner, 59, owns Edgar, Lizzie and a gorgeous head of platinum hair.

A glance around her home reveals several more dachshunds, sitting on chairs and lounging on sofas, each carefully occluded from the upholstery by a bath towel.

But these dogs aren't moving. At all.

For the past 14 years, Beckner has been scrutinizing her beloved Edgar, Lizzie and, before them, the now-deceased Anna von Pumpnickel Gesundheit, and sculpting oil-based clay

into life-size likenesses of them. A tedious 13-step process that involves making molds and pouring molten metals — much of which Beckner hires out-of-town craftsmen to do — eventually transforms those clay figures into permanent bronze sculptures with names like "Lord of the Couch," "Dreaming of Tomatoes" and "A Good Life."

Bronze statues of wiener dogs might sound silly, even cartoonish. But Beckner's pieces are so realistic they practically beg to sit on your couch and be petted. And petted they are by even the most discriminating art lovers.

Her collection has won numerous fine art awards including the National Sculpture Society Silver Medal, and it has been shown at the National Academy Museum. In 1999, her pieces were juried into the National Tour of the Society of Animal Artists.

Two of them, "A Good Life" and "So Good to See You," have taken up permanent residence at the Ella Carothers Dunnegan Gallery of Art in Bolivar, Mo., a gallery that includes work by Thomas Hart Benton and Andy Warhol.

When the Dunnegan gallery first bought Beckner's sculptures, they were displayed inside the museum with other artwork. But Beckner always suggests putting them in a setting natural for dogs.

So now, "A Good Life" lies atop the counter in the foyer where people can rub its upturned belly all day long, says Wanda Wainscott, president of the Dunnegan's board of directors. One regular patron, an artist from Maine, sometimes talks to the bronzed canine when he visits.

"It's precious. He's lying on his back with his stomach