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Phoenix sculpture rises from Camp Fire metal



Bob "Wizard" Marzewski explains Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2022 how he created this section of his "Arising Phoenix" sculpture using burned and rusted yard art, long guns, a rake and a hand gun scavenged from his and his neighbors' homes in Thermalito, California after the 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise. (Kyra Gottesman/Mercury-Register)

By [KYRA GOTTESMAN](#) | Correspondent

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THERMALITO — Like the town of Paradise itself, Bob "Wizard" Marzewski's "Arising Phoenix" has grown out of the ashes and debris of the Camp Fire.

The 14-foot-tall sculpture, weighing about 1,500 pounds, is made from burned and rusted metal debris Marzewski scavenged from his home and the homes of his neighbors on Kibler Road in Paradise after the houses were destroyed in the 2018 fire.

"It took me about two and a half years to make it. There are still a few things I want to add so, I guess you could say it's still arising. Kind of like Paradise, it hasn't fully arisen — yet," said Marzewski.



Marzewski and his wife Gwen, who were living in Campbell, had purchased their Paradise house 18 months before the fire. Their plan was to relocate there once they retired. Excited about their upcoming move, the couple was spending weekends meeting their new neighbors and moving their most “precious possessions” into their Paradise home. Marzewski was seven days away from retirement and his wife was two weeks away from retirement when the Camp Fire raged through Paradise on Nov. 8.

“We’d been enjoying every single weekend there. We were getting to know our neighbors. It was such a friendly place and the pressure was so much lower than we were used to. You could just feel your blood pressure go down about 10 points every time you were there,” said Marzewski.

It was a month after the fire that the couple were able to see for themselves the devastation and complete loss of their home.

“Being in the dark for a month was hard. But people had sent us pictures, so it was jarring but, not too jarring to actually see that everything was gone except for the metal,” said Marzewski.

And it was that metal, the burned and rusting kitchen utensils and tools from which Marzewski got his inspiration for the “Arising Phoenix.”

“I saw all these tools and I was holding a putty knife in my hand when I thought about how it was going to take a lot of tools to rebuild the town. In a flash, I got the idea for making the phoenix out of the only thing left from the fire — metal — especially, metal tools. It was a horrible burnt out scene, but I began a scavenger hunt for common things like spoons and forks and sockets, any metal item, any tool that had survived and that people would recognize,” said Marzewski.

The sculpture which lives in the front yard of the Marzewski’s new home on Feather Avenue in Thermalito is made of thousands of pieces of metal. The wings each have 23 feathers made from different spoons. The claws are hay rakes and tent stakes. Other parts of the bird are made from circular saw blades, sockets, long guns, hammer and pick ax heads, post hole diggers, pipe wrenches, pliers, augers, sockets and knives. The right tail section is made from long guns, a hand gun and yard art including the metal head of an elephant, all done as a “nod to the GOP.”

A Burning Man devotee, Marzewski has been “building very, very large structures mostly from wood with crews of about 50 people to help out” at the event for more than 20 years. The phoenix would be the first thing he would create from metal with just his wife helping so he learned to use a MIG welder.

“I’m surprised it came out as good as it did. I’ve never built anything like it,” said Marzewski.

With the sculpture basically complete by the end of August, the Marzewskis decided to take the phoenix with them to the festival this year. They towed the bird to the desert and erected it with signage explaining what it was and the materials used to make it.

“Building it was cathartic for both my wife and myself. But we were surprised at how many people at Burning Man were moved by it. Some had lost homes in wildfires, others had friends and family who’d lost homes in fires and some were just moved by the devastation it shows and the hope it represents,” said Marzewski.

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