

OUTSTANDING IN HIS FIELD

When it comes to credentials, Bayard Brattstrom has plenty. The distinguished herpetologist, professor, photographer, consultant, author and artist spent more than 40 years teaching at Cal State Fullerton. When he left, he moved his giant lizards and his passion for anything reptilian to Nothing, Arizona, where, even at age 84, he says he still has plenty to do.

BY KATHY MONTGOMERY  PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN BURCHAM

BAYARD BRATTSTROM'S HORNED LIZARD RANCH is miles north of Nothing, Arizona, and it takes as long to travel the half-mile approach to Brattstrom's house as it does to cross the dozen miles of washboard road that precede it. There's so much to see.

Plasma-cut horned lizards point the way past the entrance, flanked by two towering metal rattlesnakes, past herds of turtles and crocodiles, elephants and giraffes, a giant Gila monster, a camel and an 11-foot-long horned lizard that Brattstrom says is the world's largest.

Mario de la Cruz created the monumental sculptures. Interspersed are dozens of "vignettes" Brattstrom created: cattle skulls hung from a paloverde tree marked "Skull Valley," a garden of wooden tulips behind a sign with two lips, and a "champion golf course" with a square of plastic turf and a teapot indicating the "tee."

Brattstrom is proof that a serious person doesn't have to take himself seriously. A renowned herpetologist, Brattstrom retired after a distinguished teaching career spent mostly at California State University, Fullerton.

A pioneer in the fields of herpetological fossils and temperature regulation, Brattstrom has a list of publications that runs 14 pages. One, on amphibians and reptiles of the La Brea Tar Pits, is considered a classic. Another may be the most-cited single paper in the field of reptilian thermoregulation.

But, as his bio points out, Brattstrom has also written about "art, fish, birds, mammals, cactuses and warm-blooded plants." He has published a book of poetry and a dictionary of Australian slang, consulted on films, and testified in an attempted-murder trial involving a rattlesnake. And his photographs have appeared in books and magazines.

Brattstrom first saw Arizona in 1942, when he crossed the state on the *Super Chief*. He collected Arizona amphibians



and reptiles in the 1950s, and he took his classes to a spot near Ehrenberg for more than 20 years. As he neared retirement, Brattstrom and his late wife began exploring Arizona, looking for a place to retire.

They wanted space, quiet and the freedom to build a solar, straw-bale house. "She wanted saguaros; I wanted saguaros," Brattstrom says. "And if we had junipers, I would love that, too."

After three years, they found 640 acres in Western Arizona, with plants and animals representing three deserts: Mohave, Sonoran and Great Basin. It had everything they wanted: saguaros, junipers and a diversity of amphibians and reptiles.

They named it Horned Lizard Ranch, built a house and moved in during the winter of 2000.

Collections cover every horizontal and vertical space of Brattstrom's home.

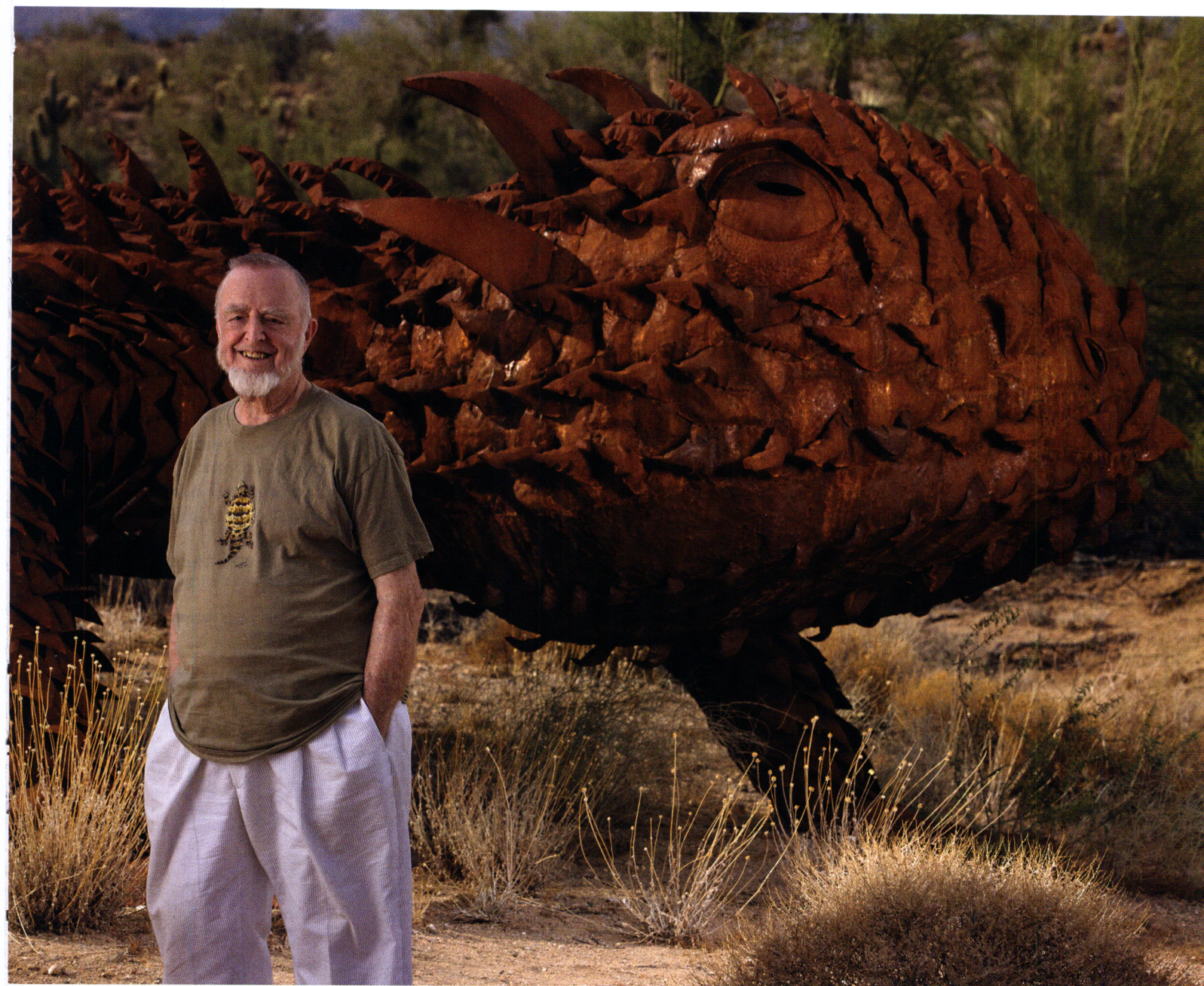
"Being a herpetologist, I like collecting frogs and lizards," he says, leading a tour. "There are lizards on pots, lizards on bowls. And then I have fetishes: frogs over here, lizards over there. These

are the horned-lizard fetishes. They're made out of everything. There's one out of pipestone from Minnesota, where there are no horned lizards, but that's all right. Here's a roadkill horned lizard and a horned lizard with a motorcycle track over the middle. I have horned-lizard puppets. I even have Navajo rugs with horned lizards.

"I have fun," he says. "All this is for fun."

BORN IN CHICAGO, Brattstrom lived near the Museum of Science and Industry and visited almost weekly. He also spent time at the Field Museum of Natural History, Shedd Aquarium and the Art Institute of Chicago.

During junior high and high school, Brattstrom lived in Hollywood. He collected snakes and lizards in the hills, and sometimes he caddied at the Bel-Air Country Club. Every now and then, he'd hide a snake in his school chalk box or the golf bag of an unsuspecting golfer. He kept the snakes in his room until one escaped.



Then, at his mother's insistence, he built a shed for them outside.

Brattstrom's first career ambition was to work for a circus. Then, later, for a zoo. He read a half-dozen books per week from the public library, learning science from Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes, but found very little about reptiles and lizards. The field seemed wide open.

Brattstrom published his first paper as an undergraduate at San Diego State University. Working at the San Diego Natural History Museum, Brattstrom became interested in teaching. "I was a shy, low-self-esteem kid," he recalls. "When I started doing nature walks, I realized I had something between my ears. It was fun telling people things about the world. That's why I wanted to teach."

He got interested in fossils while working toward his master's degree at UCLA. Beginning with the tar pits, Brattstrom collected small boxes of unidentified bones no one else was interested in and published dozens of papers. His major professor, Raymond B. Cowles, was "the super-granddaddy of all temperature regula-

tion," and Cowles got him involved in that field.

A few years after earning his Ph.D., Brattstrom landed at the newly opened Cal State Fullerton, staying for nearly 40 years. When he retired, Brattstrom relocated his entire office. He replicated it exactly, down to his Royal typewriter. His desks are cluttered with manuscripts for three books and a handful of articles.

Former students and colleagues visit, sometimes to conduct research. Brattstrom tries not to, but he can't help himself.

"I watch these antelope ground squirrels and go, 'Bayard, don't draw them.' But I can't *not* draw them. Now, I have a complete ethogram for antelope ground squirrels. By the way," he says, pulling out an index card, "where did you say you saw that gopher snake?"

Brattstrom also builds sculptures of rusted metal and records his stories, typing out each one Jack Kerouac-style, in a single burst. "I just started about a year or so ago," he says. "I'm up to 161."

At 84, there's still much to do. Brattstrom shrugs, saying philosophically, "What happens will happen." **AH**