

ART AND ARTIST: Joseph Furey shows off his apartment, including (above l.) an unconventionally decorated ceiling. ANTHONY CASALE DAILY NEWS

This apartment is a work of art

ONE DAY last fall, Vincent Kelley, a Brooklyn landlord, opened the door of Apartment 5, on the third floor of the four-story brick-and-limestone building that he and two partners own in Park Slope.

And his jaw dropped. "It was like Ali Baba walking into the cave," says Kelley now, turning a key to open the door again.

The door swings open and inside, covering every wall and ceiling in the five-room apartment, is what Didi Barrett of the Museum of American Folk Art calls "a truly spectacular" example of primitive environmental art.

She means that Apartment 5 itself is a work of art.

The amazing thing, to Kelley and everyone else who has seen and marveled at the sight, is that not even the neighbors knew about it.

The artist who created it — an 83-year-old retired high

steel worker named Joseph Furey — moved last fall, leaving behind a collage of thousands of mussel and clam shells, dried beans, painted cardboard cut into bow-tie and heart shapes, tiny mirrors and bits of tile, animal cutouts, scraps of wallpaper and plaster of Paris chickens glued to virtually every inch of space. All of it painted

Instead of a spontaneous eruption of decorating, he thought it all out, which makes him a real artist."

All well and good, but Kelley's problem is: What to do with a piece of property that also is a piece of art?

"I'd like to preserve the art," he says, "and some museums want me to preserve it, but this is a business."

The problem is in trying to remove the artwork from walls and ceiling that are solid plaster. "We're trying to think of some way to save it, but so far, we're blank."

If the art is extraordinary, so is the story of its creation.

Furey and his wife, Lillian, lived in Apt. 5 for 50 years, rearing three children there.

He retired in 1971, after a career that included working on the Golden Gate and George Washington bridges. Furey began using shells, tiles and other bits of material to make picture frames and knick-knacks.

Six months after his wife died in September 1981, Fu-

rey plunged into his project.

"It was an outlet for his grief," says son Joseph Jr., a data control manager who lives in Orange County. "He'd done a bit before Mom died, but after her death, it seemed like he couldn't stop."

Furey collected the shells every Friday at a neighborhood deli. He found the other materials on the street.

And day after day over the years, Furey cut, molded, painted, glued and mounted the stars, squares, bow-ties, hearts, birds, animals and other designs. He used scaffolds to mount the fantastic patterns on the ceilings.

"If this was a freakout," Kelley says, "it was a great freakout and God bless."

His children knew what Furey was doing but were not sure it was art. "I'm happy for Dad," says Joe Jr., "but it wasn't my kind of art. To me, the Sistine Chapel is art."

Then last spring, a junkie broke into the apartment and attacked Furey, injuring his

hands during a struggle over a ring he wore. It was the second time that he had been attacked in the apartment.

At this point, Joe Jr. convinced his father to move in with him; his wife, Geraldine, and their children.

Furey left without mentioning the art to anyone. That was, until Kelley, who had never met Furey, sent a worker to inspect the apartment.

"The guy called me and said, 'Vince, you gotta see this place,'" says Kelley. "I said, 'Sure, sure,' you know how it is when you're doing a dozen things. Then one day last fall, I went — and wow!"

He asked an artist he knew to take a look. The artist, raving at the treasure, called Millstein, who called other art experts.

In the meantime, Kelley was trying to locate Furey.

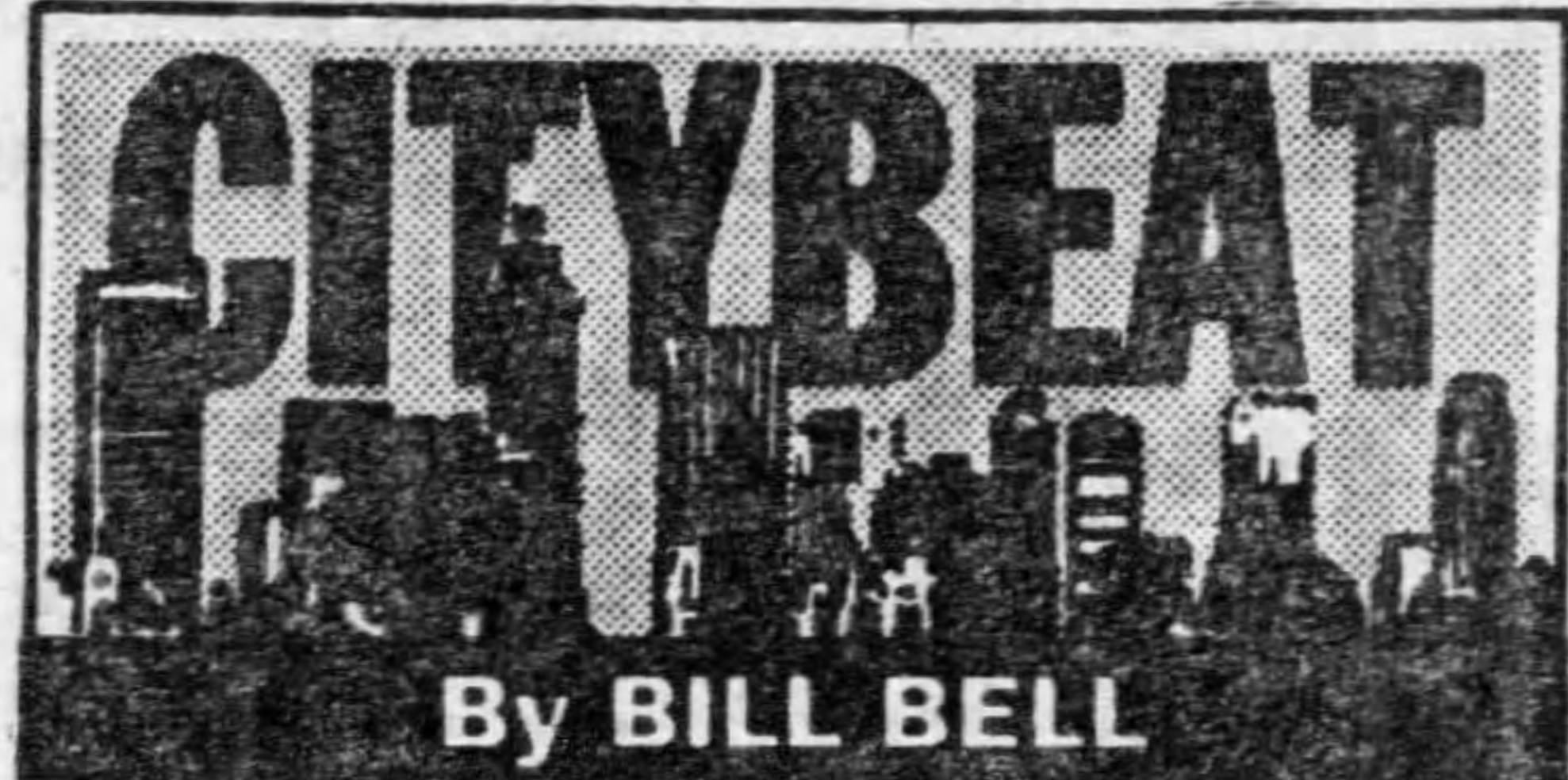
"I called everybody in Brooklyn with the same name," he says. "I asked the local priest. Nobody knew him. Finally, I went to the post office and a guy said, 'I'm not supposed to do this, but this is the address.' This is how I found him."

Now, the Smithsonian, a Los Angeles environmental art museum, Museum of American Folk Art and others are interested in Furey's art.

"I can understand the excitement," says Geraldine Furey, his daughter-in-law. "It was like an archeologist discovering a mummy that no one knew existed."

FUREY IS in good health, except that his hearing is failing. He now calls himself an *artiste*, giving it the French pronunciation. But he is not putting shells on the walls of his son's home.

"We redecorated the house last year," says Joe Jr., "and we explained to Dad that shells don't go with the new decor. He understands."



with varnish, or daubed with dots or streaks of paint.

"To me, he is as real as Pablo Picasso," says Kelley, a partner in Davis Kelley Associates. "Maybe more real."

And an enthusiastic Barbara Millstein, curator at the Brooklyn Museum, offers this professional assessment: "It is the iconography of a life.

Sammy Davis Jr. aide a 'mob target'

By JERRY CAPECI

Daily News Staff Writer

A turncoat Mafia capo has told the FBI that a New York talent agent and a reputed New Jersey mobster once discussed killing Sammy Davis Jr.'s manager, the Daily News has learned.

Michael Franzese, a Colombo family capo, also has informed authorities that two mob bosses told him the killing of Mafia chief Paul Castellano was a "cowboy-style" hit orchestrated by John Gotti without the blessing of the Mafia's ruling Commission.

Franzese, the highest-ranked New York mobster ever to testify as a prosecution witness, gave those bits of information to the FBI two months ago.

He admitted he had become a "made" member of the Colombo fam-

ily in 1975. He said he was never involved in any killings but learned of several after they occurred; one involved a close associate who was the godfather of Franzese's son.

The FBI report of the interview gives no reason talent agent Norby Walters and reputed mobster Thomas (Corky) Vastola "wanted Sammy Davis Jr.'s manager murdered," but it says they were dissuaded by Franzese.

"Franzese stated that he interceded during the conversation and basically stopped this situation from getting out of hand," the FBI report states.

A federal court jury in Chicago currently is weighing racketeering charges against Walters.

Walters, 58, is charged with using Franzese to strong-arm managers of

singers Michael Jackson and Dionne Warwick to hire Walters as a booking agent or to retain him after they wanted to drop him.

Walters' lawyer, Robert Gold, called Franzese a "slick, cunning, manipulative liar."

Franzese said he had learned about the Castellano slaying from Mafia bosses Carmine (Junior) Persico and Anthony (Fat Tony) Salerno in 1986 when he first was jailed in a \$15 million gasoline-tax ripoff that eventually got him a 10-year sentence.

"He was told that the murder of Castellano was not sanctioned by the (Mafia) Commission and that Gotti... had made the move on... his own, more or less 'cowboy-style,'" said the report.