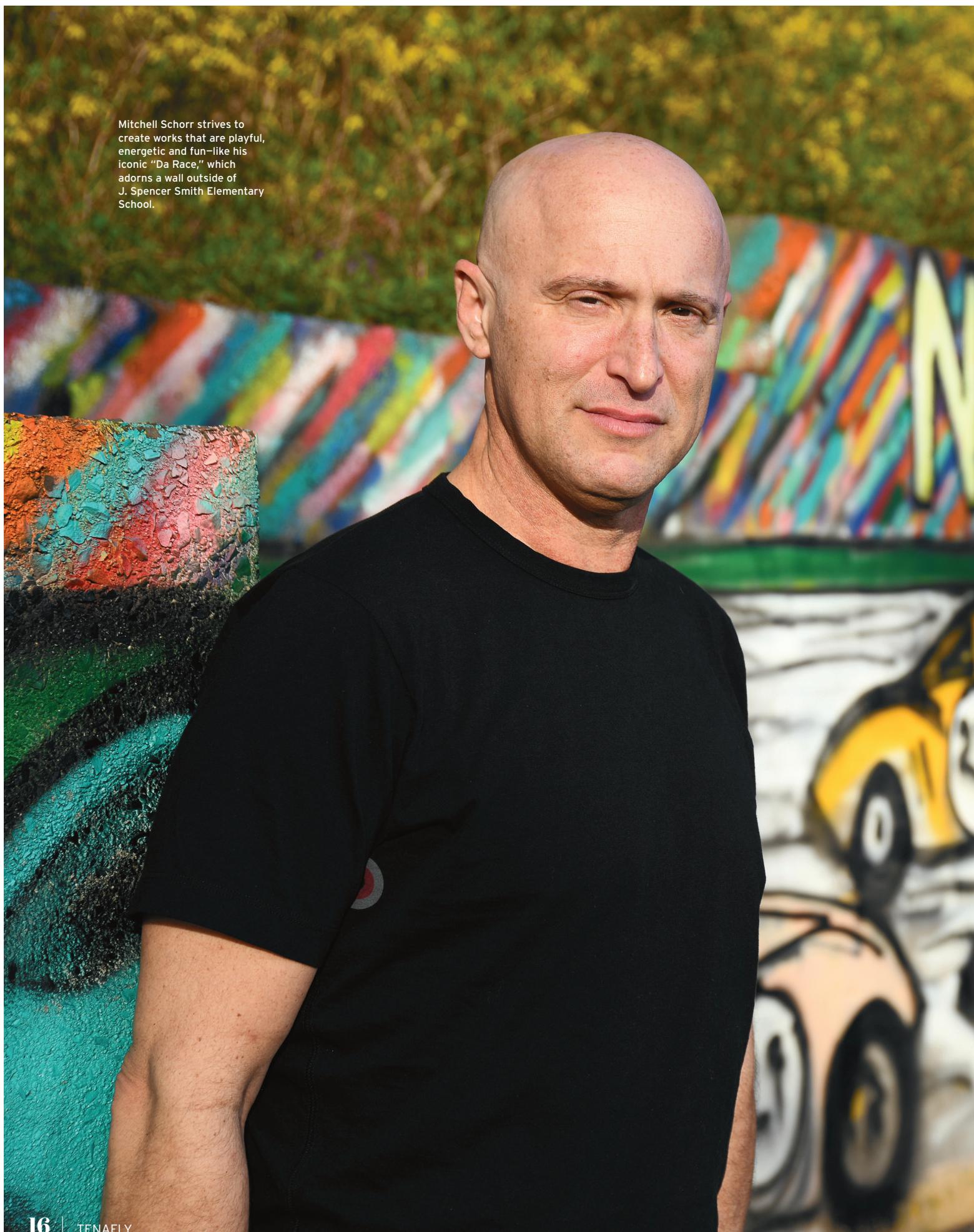


Mitchell Schorr strives to create works that are playful, energetic and fun—like his iconic “Da Race,” which adorns a wall outside of J. Spencer Smith Elementary School.







# Painting the Town

Mitchell Schorr has displayed his artwork around the world—and brings his joyful urban murals to Tenafly.

BY RAINA WALLENS

**If you live in Tenafly**, you're undoubtedly familiar with Mitchell Schorr's artwork even if you don't know the artist.

Have you ever wondered about those dynamic diagonals bursting with color on the back wall of Triumph Tae Kwon Do? Or the echoes of the same vibrant tones adorning Fine Wine & Spirits and a Railroad Avenue gallery storefront?

These creations are Schorr's work, and they might have made you stop and smile. If so, this was entirely Schorr's intention.

"I want it to be fun," Schorr says, as we stand outside of J. Spencer Smith Elementary School, the site of his biggest public artwork in Tenafly. The mural here is titled "Da Race"—a playful, energetic depiction of jovial ice cream trucks and colorful cars in whimsical, competitive motion.

Schorr painted his first incarnation of "Da Race" almost 20 years ago in the Bowery of Manhattan, alongside big-time artists such as Kenny Scharf and Shepard Fairey. From there, "Da Race" took off: Variations of the mural have been displayed in over 100 locations throughout New York City and the world, elevating spaces that would otherwise be drab and depressing.

Schorr's intention is for "Da Race" to feel interactive, as if the viewer is part of the action. So, every time someone views "Da Race" in a new place, a different car is in the lead. Sometimes the ice cream truck is the presumed winner. At Smith School, the racing cars each have distinct numbers such as 1 through 5 emblazoned on their exterior, and one car has a K, for kindergarten—a playful wink from Schorr.





### Childhood Inspiration

The idea of “Da Race” grew out of Schorr’s oil paintings of ice cream trucks. A connection to happy childhood memories is often a theme in his artwork.

“The ice cream trucks are all about fun memories of being a kid—what appears to be free ice cream,” Schorr says. “It’s not free, but it kind of felt that way as a kid. At the end of the day, I just want to make happiness.”

The depiction of movement and energy is another through line that courses through much of Schorr’s art. “Da Race” is intentionally painted in quick and loose strokes so the mural

looks and feels fast, as a race does.

Most business owners in Tenaflly immediately welcomed Schorr’s artwork, but Schorr persisted for five years until he obtained approvals to paint at Smith School. Once he did, the response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic and supportive.

The positive accolades are not a surprise. On a gray day, “Da Race” adds much needed brightness and humor, and on a blue-sky afternoon, Schorr’s colors shimmer.

A New York City native, Schorr and his wife, Olya, were pulled to Tenaflly because of its excellent schools. They moved here seven years ago, when it

was time to send their older son to elementary. (Yes, you guessed it, he went to Smith School.)

Schorr appreciates the town’s competing characteristics of having an abundance of nature while still being so close to New York City. “It doesn’t even feel like the suburbs,” Schorr says. “It feels like the country.”

He’s a big fan of the Tenaflly Nature Center. And in areas where elements are not necessarily so picturesque, Schorr has been more than happy to brighten things up. He loves contributing to the community. Currently, he has his eye on the alleyway adjacent to the CVS in town.



### Beyond “Da Race”

“Da Race” is clearly Schorr’s most iconic piece of public art. The mural is painted on the roof of the building that houses Schorr’s studio: 520 8th Avenue in Manhattan. You can view it from above using Google Earth.

“Da Race” graces Detroit’s riverfront, where it’s so large that if you stand in just the right spot in Canada, it can be viewed with a telescope. Schorr even once painted “Da Race” live on Rockefeller Center, commissioned by Ferrari for its 70th anniversary.

Schorr exudes as much energy as his paintings, and his work is by no means limited to “Da Race.” In fact, he considers himself more of a fine artist who works in-studio with oil paints than a street artist.

Like his murals, Schorr’s oil paintings exhibit themes of happy memories and movement, and some cover the same subjects as his street art. But he’s completed several series that veer in different directions.

One such series is his chef paintings, which led to Schorr meeting chef and restaurateur David Burke years ago. Burke is a big supporter and often displays Schorr’s paintings in his restaurants.

Schorr’s work from his rock and roll series was on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Mezzanine Gallery as part of its 2019 Play It Loud exhibition, and an ice cream truck painting is part of Detroit Institute of Arts’ permanent collection. Schorr’s art has been featured in The New York Times, Miami Herald, ARTNews and many other outlets.

But what Schorr finds especially gratifying is when people remember his work. As if on cue, a parent shares his appreciation to Schorr as the artist leaves Smith School.

“There are so many people out there making art,” Schorr says. “So to remember any of it, with all that’s flooded into our world—I take that as a compliment.”

More of Schorr’s artwork can be viewed at <https://mschorr.info>.

*Raina Wallens is a writer and Tenafly resident who first met Mitchell Schorr when their sons were in preschool together. She has written several young adult books under pseudonyms, and her essays have been published in many publications, most recently Zibby Mag.*

