

Village Farm owners dabble in antiques, painting

BY BETH HEMMINGER
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"Folk art decorative painting is apropos in the '80s with art interests growing in antiques, handicrafts and vintage art pieces," says decorative painter Debbie Wentz of Carlisle.

Debbie and Alan Wentz are the owners of the Village Farm, a retailing and wholesale supplier of ready-mixed background paints for the decorative painter, completed decoratively painted reproduction furniture, and other antiquated home furnishings; and also a flock of sheep.

Ten years ago, Debbie took her first lesson in decorative painting from artist, Jennie Piece of Mechanicsburg. Ever since her first lesson, she said she has been "caught-up" in this art form and over the years has steadily been perfecting her skills.

Debbie explained this art as painting on metals and woods with flat paint in Williamsburg colors; for example dry town green, barn red or Lancaster yellow, to name a few. These Williamsburg colors give the pieces an authentic look.

Artists of decorative painting usually paint on baskets, boxes, trays, tin ware and furniture. She stated that any type of picture can be painted on the items, but usually most artist paint folkloric scenes, flowers and birds, usually used in the 17th and 18th century by the artists who developed this art form so long ago.

With such enthusiasm in the art, Debbie began thinking of a way that she could turn this interest into a business. Husband Alan, saw Debbie's possibilities in a business and the couple began looking into depth at the business sale of the craft and found that it was as difficult for fellow craftsmen as it was for themselves to purchase fine quality ready-mix background colors because the former manufacturer liquidated his business.

The supply of the ready-mixed background colors was dwindling fast, said Debbie. And to have the colors mixed in a local paint store was extremely expensive.

The Wentzes decided to begin the venture. Their first step was looking for a paint manufacturer who could produce the flat alkylid finish paint. After continual searching, the couple found a manufacturer in Harrisburg to fill their need and the business was on its way.

As the months passed, Debbie said she saw a change in the business. No longer were the only customers decorative painters as had been the Wentzes original idea, but other people were stopping at Village Farm to purchase finished decorative painted reproductions and antique furniture.

Debbie said, "I never realized their was such an interest in the finished product, but it is really exciting."

So, during the past year Debbie and Alan have added finished and unfinished reproduction doll furniture and reproduction country antiques to the Village Farm inventory.

Debbie and Alan, both antique lovers, look at auctions, antique sales and shops for their reproduction inspirations and original Village Farm items. Alan, in his spare time is the wood craftsman, and has produced a crib, settle and dresser for their doll furniture line. He has made the items from either pictures or from copies that they purchased at a sale. Then, Debbie uses her handicraft of painting the decorative folkloric scenes on the furniture, giving each piece the look of long, long ago.

Their line of antique reproduction doll furniture will soon be seen in an advertisement in the National Doll Magazine.

Another unique 17th century home furnishing being revived by the Wentzes is a 'candle box.' Debbie explained that the candle boxes were used at that time to store the extra candles in the winter and all the household candles in the summertime from the heat. Hay or straw was placed in the trough of the boxes working as a buffer against the heat.



Village Farm decorative painter and owner Debbie Wentz and her wood craftsman husband Alan stand with their daughter Heidi who holds a favorite Dorset lamb. Alan Wentz, a 4-H Extension agent, helps his wife in her business in his spare time.

Debbie has given these century old boxes a new name — 'gift boxes' — for their revival in the 20th century. She said that they don't have to be used just for candles, they can hold anything from pencils and pens to nuts and bolts.

Other projects still in the idea stage for the Village Farm are: producing an acrylic water base paint for the hobbyist who is after an extremely fast drying paint; opening up the shop for lessons to be given by nationally recognized decorative painters who would teach classes for several days then tour with the students through colonial and Dutch areas of Pennsylvania.

Debbie and Alan both feel that their life on a farm and their geographic location of colonial Carlisle have greatly influenced their idea for this type of business venture and has provided them with the background for a beautiful reproduction line of furniture and home furnishings. The couple agree that if they lived in a suburban area, a decorative art business would have been impossible. They have utilized many of the unused sheds and buildings on their farm into storage areas and a shop. Debbie said, "I really love the country lifestyle and try to blend its beauty into all my decorative art."

Along with the country beauty, Debbie works towards creating an authentic antique look in each of

her pieces and has searched out the advice and help of long-time artists. One such artist is Andrew Loy, a relative of the Wentzes and a decorative artist for 50 years. Loy developed a variegated rose for furniture decoration that is painted with only one swipe of the brush.

Debbie studied and learned this technique from Loy and now uses the variegated rose as her trademark for Village Farm.

She enjoys painting on new wooden and tin items as well as old items that she has discovered at flea markets or rummage sales. When she purchases an item with fragments of paint remaining, she first has to remove all of the old paint. She places it in boiling Spic and Span water, an aid in paint removal. The, she sands the item until it is paper-smooth.

Sanding is the most important part of decorative painting said the

artist. The surface must be smooth so the paint will flow on smoothly with no laps or brush marks. After the painting of the item is completed, Debbie seals in the colors with a minimum of 10 coats of varnish or more will keep the paint and color intact. She said if fewer coats of varnish are used, there is a possibility that the paint will chip and the color fade.

A story about Village Farm would not be complete if the pet sheep and horses were not mentioned. Heidi, the youngest of the Wentz children is the sheep herder and exhibits her prize winning Dorsets at the local fairs in 4-H and Open competition.

Debbie said, "Having pets like these are just another pleasure of living on a farm." And she added, "These animals have all become a part of my paintings at one time or another."

Sewing authority to talk at Farm and Home Center

LANCASTER — Marjorie Arch Burns, a nationally known authority on home sewing and fashion, will present a Fashion And Sewing Seminar at the Farm and Home Center, here on August 24. The Seminar is being coor-

ordinated by Doris W. Thomas, Extension home economist with the Lancaster County Extension.

Burns learned her trade from Edna Bryte Bishop, the founder of the Bishop method of clothing construction. Burns co-authored several books with Bishop and has also authored ten of her own books on sewing and fitting.

Marjorie Arch Burns is independent. She does not represent any company in the sewing industry, therefore is free to express her own beliefs about what is best on the market today. With her wealth of experience as an educator, speaker, author and sewing expert, she is considered by many to be the greatest sewing authority today.

The seminar will include a potpourri and expertise on inspirational ideas for sewing including: current trends in tailoring; quick designer looks, keeping up with the importance of grain; quality ideas and secrets for simple and successful sewing of all types of garments and new, very simple sewing projects and boutique ideas.

For more information about the Fashion And Sewing Seminar, write or call the Lancaster County Extension Service and request a flyer describing the seminar.



The Wentzes' business all began with Debbie's love of painting. Here she paints a new addition to her product line - the 17th century candle box.



Alan produces the antique reproductions for the business in this wood shop at the Village Farm.

Homestead Notes