

Husband And Wife Demonstrate Historical Crafts

Bavarian Folk Art By Elsa

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

MYERSTOWN (Lebanon Co.)

— Elsa Huber lives smack in the middle of Pennsylvania Dutch country, between Schaefferstown and Myerstown.

In her country home she has an art studio where she has revived an old-style Pennsylvania Dutch art called Bavarian Folk Art.

According to Elsa, this type of painting originated in the Alpine regions of Germany, Switzerland, and Austria during the 1700s.

"The bright, colorful flowers that are characteristic of this folk art are formed from a single stroke. Every stroke is actually a comma painted in a variety of positions, including an inverted S-stroke.

"If you can master the strokes in different positions, you can paint Bavarian Folk Art," Elsa said of the fancy, colorful painting.

"This type of painting was developed by peasants in Europe and is known for its inspiration rather than artistic ability," Elsa said.

The painting was found most often on soft wood pieces such as pine furniture. This helped to preserve the soft wood.

Many fine pieces were decorated in this style, although some pieces were quite crude-looking because the furniture makers lacked artistic painting ability.

Some of the more elaborate pieces included flowers, scrolls, and birds.

These designs are popular today on blanket chests, chairs, tinware, and wooden boxes.

Elsa said her own interest in the art was kindled while living in Germany with her husband John Huber in 1980.

After she married, her husband gave her some oil paints. Later, he encouraged her to take a class in Bavarian Folk Art.

"I signed up for the class just to please my husband," Elsa said. "But when I saw the paints and the designs, I was so excited."

Elsa discovered she had a knack for painting flowers and birds with the brightly colored paints.

During the couple's seven years in Germany, Elsa perfected her skill in Bavarian Folk Art.

At first, Elsa practiced pages and pages of basic strokes. Later she traced some patterns, but now she paints freehand.

When the couple returned to Pennsylvania, Elsa noticed that most Americans preferred softer colors rather than the bold colors used in true Bavarian Folk Art.

To please American tastes, Elsa adapted her color schemes when making gifts for the family.

About five years ago, someone asked Elsa to participate in a craft show. Her inventory sold out within a short period of time.

People praised her work profusely and after that, many people stopped by her home to buy things.

Their encouragement resulted in her showing her work at more craft shows.

Although she paints on almost any surface, she prefers to paint on old things.

"The art is so old, I think an old piece complements it," she said.

Some favorite surfaces for the folksy art are milk cans, pie tins, cheese boxes, coal buckets, irons, wooden spoons, and cast iron pieces.

Elsa's artistic interest was evident as a child when she begged her grandmother to teach her to

crochet and sew.

When Elsa was 16 years old, she painted an outdoor scene. Her mother and other family members said it was "so beautiful." Then her mother's cousin, an artist, stopped by. When he saw Elsa's painting, he said it was too pretty.

Crushed, Elsa did not paint again for many years.

"Now, I understand what he meant. It needed depth and work. It was too fakey looking," Elsa said.

The folksy look of Bavarian folk art suits Elsa just fine.

Her work is available at her home studio called Bavarian Folk Art by Elsa, R.D.#2, Box 433L, Myerstown, PA 17067 or call (717) 866-6152.



Elsa Huber displays items she painted in Bavarian Folk Art.



Elsa demonstrates the strokes needed to perfect the painting style of Bavarian Folk Art.



Elsa prefers to paint on collectibles or antiques. She said, "Because Bavarian Folk Art is old it complements older pieces."

Huberhaus Pottery Offers Traditional Redware

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

MYERSTOWN (Lebanon Co.)

— "A Dutchman is always on the go. He gotta stay busy," said John Huber of his reason for taking up a new line of work after his retirement from the army as a lieutenant colonel.

In fact, it wasn't until his retirement that John discovered he had an artistic bent to carry on the tradition of his forefathers — making redware pottery.

"I don't know if it's in my blood or if I picked up an artistic inclination from watching my uncle, the late Charles Huber," Huber said of his ability to deftly form bowls, pots, cups, and other pieces on the pottery wheel.

Huber is proud that he can trace potters in his lineage back to the Revolutionary War and beyond that to Stephen Huber from Burgsalach, Germany.

Redware pottery dates back to America's colonial period and is one of the earliest forms of pottery to be produced in the colonies.

"In the early days, redware pottery was the primary type of bowl used in the area," Huber said.

Red clay was predominate in the riverbeds of eastern Pennsylvania. Usually each settlement had a potter who provided various sizes of plates, mugs, jugs, bowls, candlesticks, roof tiles, pipes and even toys for the early German settlers.

Redware pottery was simple, functional, and is often referred to as utilitarian pottery because it was used daily by the colonists. Old



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redware pottery was glazed only when necessary and simply decorated, if at all.

The problem with redware is that it is very porous and chips and breaks. As travel became more advanced, potters were able to accumulate clay along the coast, which produces a higher quality product that is harder and less able to chip.

For this reason, potters stopped making redware in quantity about the mid 1800s.

"Being Pennsylvania Dutch

says a lot. We're unique, from the values we picked up to the work ethic," said Huber, who was raised in Schaefferstown until he was in 10th grade. His family then moved to Florida.

"My Pennsylvania Dutch accent was so thick you could cut it with a knife. That wasn't very popular among my schoolmates in the South. I tried desperately to get rid of it," Huber said without a trace of the accent.

Then he lapsed into an accent so

thick and heavy, evidence of his Schaefferstown heritage as he said, "But if you are Pennsylvania Dutch, no matter where you go, you can always turn it back on, no matter what."

Sometimes when Huber demonstrates redware pottery making, he dresses in historical garb and talks Pennsylvania Dutch in his most authentic accent.

Huber said that during his Army travels around the world, he longed for Pennsylvania. "I guess I got a

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