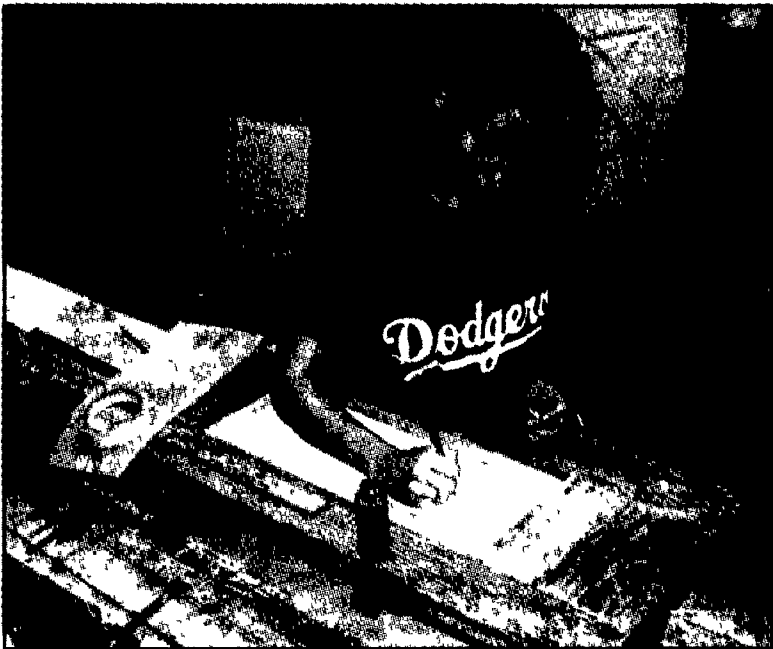


Lancaster Farming *Antiques Center*

Mother, Daughter Transform Architectural 'Junque' Into International Home Furnishing Sales



Store visitors often catch Melissa Nordhoff painting her signature designs on shutters, doors, and aged woods.

LOU ANN GOOD
*Food And Family
Features Editor*

EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Nancy Carson and daughter Melissa Nordhoff transform less-than-perfect antiques into furniture and accessories sought by clients worldwide.

The business evolved 16 years ago when Carson operated an antique shop in nearby Blue Ball. When a truckload of shutters was delivered to her business, her husband was skeptical that she would ever get rid of all those.

Carson was nonplussed. Her artist's eye saw potential. She painted a design on the shutter and placed it for sale.

Since then, hundreds of shutters painted with Carson's signature designs have been purchased for wholesale and retail purposes.

Carson's artistic talent is not limited to shutters. She uses aged spindles, tin ceiling tiles, old hardware, and endless architectural "junque" to create cupboards, entertainment centers, vanities, and her line of furniture and accessories.

Demand for her projects became so overwhelming that Carson stuck a paintbrush in her daughter's hand and said, "Paint this. You can do it."

Nordhoff could and did. Today, both daughter and moth-

er have several lines of furniture, which they sell at their two shops, Carson's Country Stew and Cornfields, which sit side by side along Rt. 322 and Grist Mill Road, between Blue Ball and Ephrata. They also sell internationally through trade shows and catalogs.

Stacks of shutters, old doors and windows are propped against the exterior of Carson's Country Stew. The look is deceiving.

Passers-by often surmise that the place is a salvage store. When they walk inside, visitors are surprised by the extensive collection of unique furniture and accessories such as a bed headboard made from an old fence or a dressing table fashioned from gingerbread trim, old mirror, window frame, and door.

"People say, 'You're a big secret. We never dreamed what was inside here,'" Nordhoff said of clients' exclamations of their first impressions.

The adjacent store, Cornfields (named because of the surrounding corn fields) is a ranch house turned into a garden and gift store. Each room follows a theme. Included is a garden room, country kitchen, shabby chic room, lighthouse-seashore decor, Dutch plantation, and a lodge style.

Mother and daughter each sticks to her own individual designs. For example, Nordhoff paints florals, fish, and roosters. Her mom paints herbs and every other kind of animal, bird, or made-to-order projects.

"It's so much fun to be able to paint something that a client

loves," Nordhoff said. "It's also wonderful to see our pieces in unexpected places when we travel."

Amazingly the mother and daughter duo do not hide their painting secrets. They teach and sell supplies for their painting techniques to visitors.

"It happens," Nordhoff said of people imitating their designs and selling them at competing markets.

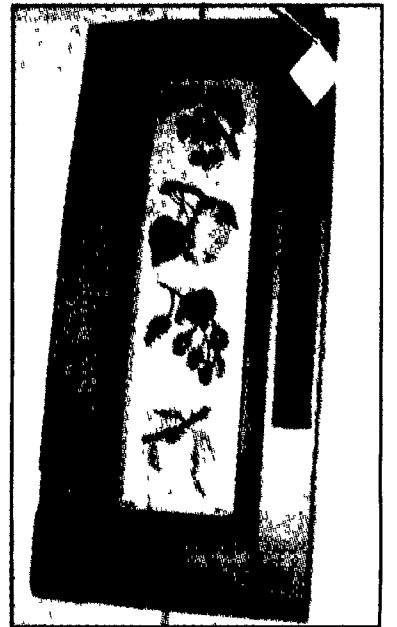
"But it often works in our favor, also. People realize how time consuming projects are to finish and are more inclined to buy finished products."

Their most frustrating experiences are having people copy their tradeshow catalog pieces and assigning work to third-world countries and them importing the finished pieces.

"We can't compete with the labor prices of other countries," Nordhoff said. "But when the pieces are side by side, clients can see the differences and are willing to pay higher prices for American-made pieces. Ours are actually made from antiques and are better quality. Ours are one-of-a-kind pieces. We are constantly coming up with new designs. Everything we do is hand made. We do not use spray paints or assembly-line methods."

The lines of furniture include:

- Furniture fashioned from rough sawn wood and embellished with antique latches and other hardware.
- Furniture fashioned from new wood made to look old.
- Furniture fashioned from bits and pieces of old architecture such as balusters, lintels,



Painted shutters such as these may be used as end tables, wall hangings, or as cupboard doors.

fenceposts, and knobs.

The furniture is available in three styles that Nordhoff defines as lodge, rooster, and shabby chic.

Eight employees work inside the store. Nordhoff and her mom do the painting and designs. Melissa's husband Greg refinishes the furniture. Carson's husband Ken delivers furniture. In addition, 10 retired men act as "pickers."

"They know what we need and the prices to pay to find what we want," Nordhoff said.

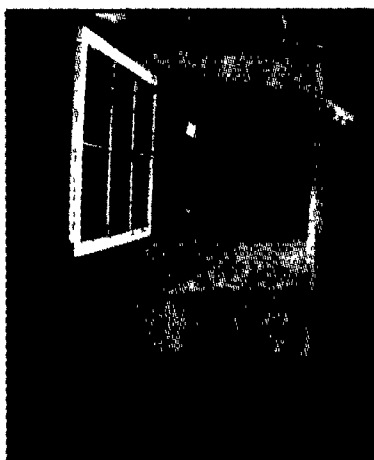
The popularity of shabby chic and rustic styles has spread internationally and is reflected in the prices old architecture demands at auctions.

"We are no longer able to purchase old shutters and pieces at give-away prices," Nordhoff said.

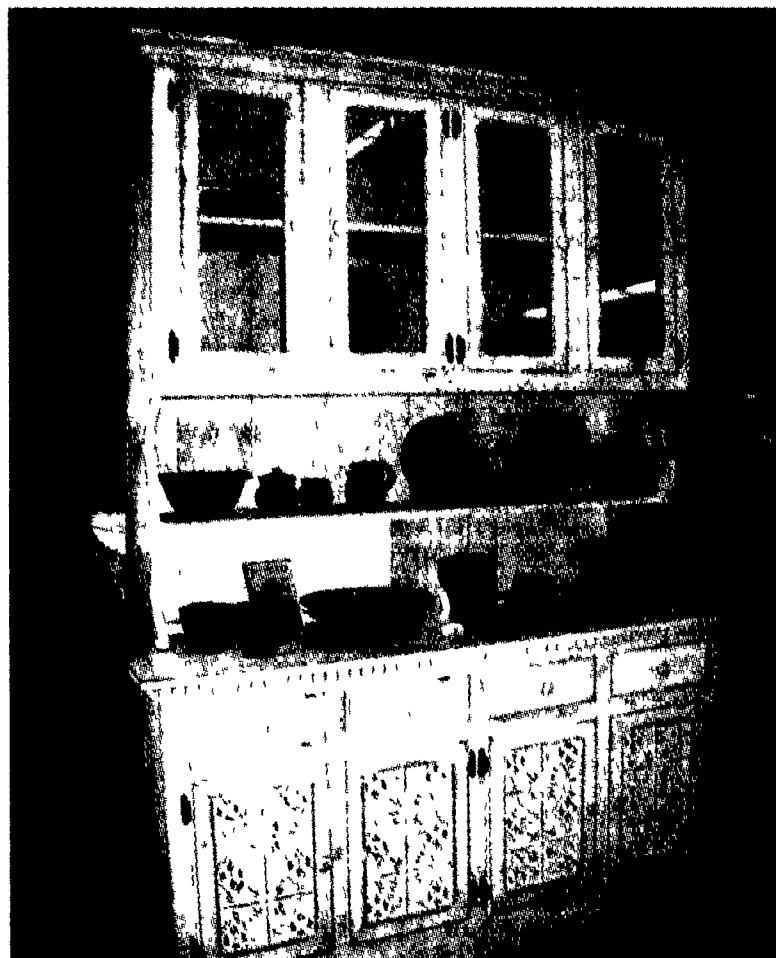
The two shops, Carson's Country Stew and Cornfields, sit side by side along Rt. 322 and Grist Mill Road, between Blue Ball and Ephrata. For more details, call (717) 354-7343 or (717) 354-2628.



Antique hardware and hand-rubbed finishes add an extraordinary flavor to the furniture.



Rustic looks and painted florals attract a wide array of customers.



Clay pottery and other accessories accent the hand-crafted pieces.



Instead of a factory-made entertainment center, customers can select one-of-a-kind designed by Nancy Carson and her daughter Melissa Nordhoff.