



Continued from page 3

A: James: When I proclaimed this responsibility to bettering our world through art I largely meant that we all have this responsibility (bettering the world) in whatever we are doing in life. In contrast, try and imagine what the world may be like if we all left it a worse place. As I mentioned earlier, humans are largely effected emotionally to the stimulants around them and this is where our artwork comes into the mix. Christie creates an emotional bridge to people's soles in her tile works. The imagery, textures and colors seem to connect with feelings within the observer. Perhaps somewhere deep inside us all there is a sense of what feels right or real and the desire to be reminded of this. When someone decides to collect her work, it becomes a beacon — almost a talisman — within their home or office offering interpretive glimpses of the natural world and adding value to our role in it.

Christie: Hmm... interesting statement. I myself never really felt responsible, per se, to create things for anyone ... but I have felt drawn to create things. If I had to find the words to describe what it is about my husband's work that makes the world a better place I'd have to say this: The world would be a completely different place without James's work in it. The world has become a more unique and one-of-a-kind place with our works in it. James's essence rings true in his ornate, off-the-beaten-path creations. Folks just know a Mission Guild offering when they see one, even from a long distance off at a show. Many times people will just light up when they see our work; they stop and stare almost awestruck

and in wonder of how it can be ... how was it made ... is it old or new ... how could one even think this design up? These are just some of the things we've heard.



Apparently, we have a certain style that just happened along the way through nonstop creating, brainstorming and building. I'd like to also say that I feel strongly that both of our works on their own, and when combined into one, contain a piece of us — a bit of our soul, our life essence. We, in turn, will leave behind our legacy in our work. Our works portray our life, and every one of them contains our blood, sweat and tears, so to speak. We have truly felt best when creating what felt right... what we were drawn to and inspired by. We have even received stories from clients about how the piece they selected is reminiscent of a loved one now gone from the earth itself. I have seen folks brought to tears by a landscape tile mural or a pinecones spray tile triptych. I kid you not ... they will say how something within our work, or our work within our booth, just hits them and makes them pause, breathless and

speechless. These are powerful words to receive. It's an honor to be told these things. We both have felt blessed to be able to do what we do all these years and to be able to share it with the world.

Joe Kirchmyer is owner of Kirchmyer Media LLC, a communications company based in West Seneca, N.Y., and is also a RALA board member. You can contact him at jkirchmyer@verizon.net.



ROYCROFTERS-AT-LARGE ASSOCIATION CHRONICLE

:: OUR MISSION ::

The Roycrofters-At-Large Association was formed over 30 years ago by a group of East Auroran's that included several descendants of the original Roycrofters, including Elbert Hubbard's granddaughter. The Roycrofters-At-Large Association, Inc. has been entrusted with educating, fostering and inspiring through the continual evolution of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

■ SUMMER 2017 ■

Meet the Millers... two artists on a mission to leave the world a better place

By Joe Kirchmyer

I remember my first real introduction to the work of Mission Guild Studio owners and Roycroft Master Artisans Christie A. Schorf-Miller (clay) and James M. Miller (wood) during my visit to the 2015 Roycroft Summer Festival. There it was — their incredible Oaken Throne — that drew me into their tent like a moth to a flame. So, with the Summer Festival once again approaching, it seemed the perfect time to catch up with this creative husband-and-wife team to see where their work is taking them in 2017 and beyond.

Q: Rarely do you see one successful artist in a household, let alone two! You are truly defying the odds. How do you make it work?

A: Christie: Being married to our work and each other is no simple task, but I would also add with James and I it has come a bit naturally ... well on most days! James and I have actually worked together for over 23 years, starting first when we met at work while I was in my last year of college, and we have never stopped working together since. Our personalities just seemed to click and we both had a lot to offer, number one being a strong work ethic in general and a lack of fear to dedicate long hours to achieve the ultimate goal.

Shortly after meeting and getting to know each other we went on to create our first business and we have been working together ever since. James and I have somehow seemed to find a balance in our lives. I joke a lot with new clients about this and many are pretty much stunned by the fact that a husband and wife could handle working together all these years, every day, all day long. I make a point to always smile and mention that we have separate studios and they're in separate buildings — the key to success!



One other thing I like to say to people we meet at exhibits is that this is truly a labor of love. We really love what we do and each other. I guess if I had to nail it down to a couple of words to describe how we make it work, those words would be 'Dedication, Respect, Communicate and Compromise,' for both the sake of the business and the relationship.

Q: You're collaborating on a new piece and you reach a point where you disagree with how the job should proceed. Who wins?

A: Christie: Well, that's an easy question to answer... I do! The fact of the matter is that James and I do run into these types of situations a lot, and

especially before every show when we each are a bit more free to run wild with new ideas in our studios. However, we do need to rein it in a bit from time to time. In reality we need to make a living, not just make art. Every so often a new idea may arise which might be a bit too outside the box for the market. I honestly tend to be the heavy in that department when it comes to swinging the ax on a major run of offerings.

What we have tried to do is allow each other the ability to have artistic freedom, but it also needs to be kept to a certain percent within the booth or exhibit. Perhaps we will have 25 to 30 percent new and extreme designs at our next launch combined with about 70 percent more tried-and-true selections that work for almost any client. We also allow each other to throw in the 'off the wall' selections here and there knowing they may be attention grabbers more than fast sellers; again, we keep it to a minimum in order to test the waters. I think all of these different types of works, traditional and extreme, have created who we are and how we are recognized by our followers. They've grown to expect it.



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Board Meetings

Board meetings are regularly scheduled for the second Tuesday of the month. The first 15 minutes of the meeting is reserved for member comments, after which the board will enter a closed session. Contact the RALA Coordinator for details.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings,

I think that this season is probably the busiest season for the Roycrofters At-Large Association, Inc. as a whole. In the midst of preparing for our Summer show to be held at Parkdale School in East Aurora, we're also deeply involved in preparing for the 24th annual Roycroft Chamber Music Festival on June 10, 11, 16 and 17th at St. Matthias' Episcopal Church at Main and Maple Streets in East Aurora.

The summer show is always successful—I know that I've always enjoyed not only looking at what our fine participating artisans and others bring to sell, but also walking people through the show who've never attended. They're always impressed. Like other years, there will be some ongoing demonstrations by Roycroft Artisans in various media from glass to wood. Please join us!

On the chamber music side, there has been a shift in musical leadership, which has inspired not only our musicians but our audiences as well. If you're not familiar with chamber music, these concerts provide a lovely introduction to the fine art of classical music that's presented in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Our musicians are both local professionals (often BPO members), as well as others who travel from across the country to participate in what they consider to be a wonderful opportunity to play with each other. We're just lucky that we get to be the beneficiaries of their talents and efforts. Additionally, tying both side of the RALA house together is violinist Andy Jennings, who comes to us from Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he is on the faculty of both the University of Michigan and the world-renowned Tanglewood Music Center in Massachusetts. One more thing—Andy is a native East Auroran, whose father and grandfather were deeply involved in the Roycroft artisan experience. Presale tickets are \$15.00 and are available at Tops (East Aurora only), Elm Street Bakery, The Roycroft Inn, the Power House on the Roycroft Campus and A Snail's Place. Tickets at the door are \$20.00.

I look forward to seeing you at both of our events!

Martha Buyer
2017 Roycrofters At-Large Association President

2017 CALENDAR

ROYCROFT SUMMER SHOW
JUNE 24 & 25, 2017 10AM-5PM
PARKDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
141 GIRARD AVE, EAST AURORA NY 14052

Meet the Millers ...continued from page 1



Q: Your commitment to the Roycroft mission is very apparent. What does the Roycrofters-At-Large Association mean to both of you?

A: James: Being a Roycroft Renaissance Artisan for me is a reinforcement of values I have always possessed. As in any craft, to be successful (on your own merits) one needs discipline and drive. The structure that exists in RALA promotes these values by encouraging excellence in one's craft. Although I am certain I would have ample determination without being with RALA, I welcome the support that comes from being part of an historically vital part of the Arts and Crafts movement in America. The Roycroft mark is an important and recognized symbol of quality craftsmanship and originality.

Christie: I think one of the biggest things about becoming an awarded Roycroft Renaissance Artisan for me was that I became part of history, sealed into the timeline of both the Roycrofters-At-Large Association and the Roycroft Campus and community. James and I also have both felt honored to have been selected into this group as well as later awarded Roycroft Master Artisan status for both our works in clay and wood. It's a rarity that we would have two Master marks in one household. I think there are perhaps two or three couples within the group's history that are both RALA Artisans. We have enjoyed being part of such a prestigious and exclusive organization and work hard to educate and encourage new artisans as well as new members to join us and be part of this historic group. Being dubbed a Roycroft Artisan carries a great deal of prestige and we will always treasure this designation.

Q: You both knew, from a very young age, that art was a major influence in your life. But, has there ever been a time when you thought a different career path might make more sense?

A: James: it would be unnatural to not think of other careers or opportunities along the path of life. Thinking of options is likely the success mantra of the human species. I tend to think that most people choose paths based on emotionalism. We describe it as 'our calling' or 'it spoke to me.' My perception is that this is more of a human ability to make (largely unconscious) instinctive choices based on one's experiences and the belief of personal capabilities. Perhaps our brains are drawn to things we feel are within our grasp and then interpret the results as more pleasing and romantically nuanced because it's in our nature to do so.

Christie: I've just always been drawn to the arts, hands-on design and creation. It's what made me happy, and there has never been a shortage of ideas for new works ... just a shortage of time. There was a time way back — many moons ago — when I considered computers as a profession (pre-college/pre-internet), but it all came back to art in the end — computer art, computer design, marketing, creating — then courses in clay, sculpting, illustrating and viola, here we are.

Q: How do you juggle life in the studio with the necessity of life on the road?

A: James: After 20 years making a living solely as an artist, my hindsight is getting clearer all the time. Most of the first decade could be described as a campaign to conquer the first hill. We were fueled by our ideals and charged ahead in a furious thrust, seemingly unstoppable. Much was accomplished but at a cost ... burnout. A balance was lacking and the second decade of working in the arts sought to find this elusive balance. The synopsis is that we have found out that we have limitations. Who would have guessed? So today we are still pushing ourselves but more cyclical, producing large pulses of work and then time spent in decompression. The calmer periods regenerate the body and mind and give focus for the next push. Personally, I wish the miracle of the human

mind could be put into a better vessel, perhaps in an oak desk (with all-terrain tires) that could be easily repaired, upgraded and would last indefinitely.



Christie: It can be extremely challenging keeping up with life on the road and life in the studio. There's balance that somehow was achieved along the way but it's always tugging at you from one side or the other. We maintain a large online website catalog with a vast clientele located throughout the USA, a few gallery locations in East Aurora, N.Y. which we tend to throughout the year and approximately six shows/exhibits which we currently take part in from New York to North Carolina. It's more than a full-time job requiring many 14-hour days and six- or seven-day work weeks.

James and I both also have very strong family values — another significant trait for us both — and trying to balance family life on top of all this can be very challenging. We have a lot of relatives to consider throughout the year and are always trying to find time for everyone. I guess I'd have to say that no matter what we do we always do our best to make the most of our time whether it be near to home or afar. And when you enjoy what you do, that honestly changes the pressure on one quite a bit.

Q: James, you once said, "It's our responsibility to contribute to the bettering of our world through art." That's an incredibly ambitious goal. What is it about your wife's work that makes the world a better place? And Christie, please answer the same question about James's work.

Continued on page 4

