

1/28/62

Beautiful Creations Have An Added Something; They Sell

By Ron Reeves

"It's nice to be able to be creative and have something beautiful which sells," is the opinion of Mrs. W. B. Wilcox.

She and her husband are Santa Cruzans of only two weeks, having come from Malibu to continue their business of manufacturing table tops for the decorator trade. During the past two years the couple has turned a home project into a full time business.

The tables are generally started with a 3/4-inch chipboard base, which is cut to size and shape. Onto this base a wide variety of materials are placed, to be covered with polyester resin, a liquid plastic.

Three layers of resin are applied, each layer being sanded after hardening, with the final coat buffed to a high shine. The embedded materials are permanently sealed under plastic, which is between an eighth and a quarter of an inch thick.

Materials used for the decorator layer in the plastic include pseudo gold and silver leaf which is indistinguishable from the real thing; Kapiz shell, a thin, translucent, silvery oyster shell from the Philippines; crushed glass in dozens of colors; crushed stone; and even semi-precious stones, such as snowflake obsidian, agate, jade and chrysocolla.

The couple share a rare combination of talents, as Wilcox has been working in plastic plants for about 12 years. He at one time turned out most of the transparent freezer tops seen on market frozen food chests before the open-air type was invented.

Mrs. Wilcox is an artist who attended the Art Center school in Los Angeles and did commercial art work along with her oil painting. She has the artistic know-how and sense of design and Wilcox has the knowledge of using plastics.

They worked on several projects in plastics, including hanging decorator lamps and lamp bases, before hitting on table tops as a full-time commercial project.

"We played around with these at home, just for the fun of it," Mrs. Wilcox said. "Last year our sales quadrupled themselves at least. We feel like we have a tiger by the tail."

The current turnout is approximately 100 table tops per month.

The tops sell through decorators at from \$10 to \$16.50 a square foot, which means that a table of three by five feet would run from about \$150 to \$247.50. As a result, they usually go into only the best of decorator schemes.

Decorators generally send only a vague description when ordering a table top. There will be a general idea of the room, and sometimes a wallpaper, cloth or rug swatch, requesting a table top to match. Here is where the Wilcox intuition of color and materials coordination come in.

New SC Industry Features Creativity



Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Wilcox, foreground, have set up a table manufacturing plant at Santa Cruz, turning out unique decorator tables made with liquid plastic resin. The couple moved their expanding business from Malibu to get out of crowded Southern California. They are hoping that the sale of their product will continue to develop, even though Santa Cruz is away from the decorator centers of the south.

There have been some unusual requests for tops, such as when they embedded fossilized fish and antique playing cards, but these are exceptions.

"The decorators are trying for a color effect or something to carry out the theme of the room," Wilcox said. They are not in the business to preserve items by covering them with an impermeable resin, but rather to produce tables which will fit custom designed rooms.

Mrs. Wilcox admitted that she is most curious as to where the tables go. She knows some are distributed to movie people, others to posh bars and hotels, and some have ended up in mobile homes and others in airplanes. But most of them go into the hands of dealers and aren't seen in their final location.

She said they now have an order for 40 small table tops which will go into the Space Needle being constructed for the World's Fair set for this summer at Seattle. These tables are being made in an antiqued gold design to match the wallpaper which will be used on the restaurant's walls.

When the tops are completed, the surface is not as hard as some commercial materials, such as Formica, Wilcox said. But again, the surface is thicker, lasts longer, and can be buffed back to

brilliance if scratched or scraped, he said.

The plastic resin is a fairly new material, coming on the American market just before World War II, when it was used mainly with fiberglass for the making of boats. During the war little of it was used, but it has now come into its own many purposes, including decorative items.

The Wilcox business, which is being operated from rented quarters at the corner of Potrero and Amat streets, is somewhat of an experiment now. There is a question as to whether sales will hold up when the production plant is located as far from Southern California decoration centers. The couple said they were tired of city life, and picked Santa Cruz as an ideal spot, from the points of natural beauty, climate and fewer people.

As the business is handled through agents, Wilcox is hopeful that they can become established with a Santa Cruz headquarters, and has plans to expand the facilities. Currently Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox and three employees handle the table top manufacturing.

PEACE CORP

Lim
mem
Corp
ects

Explosion Of No Is

Pa
star
As
Palo
has
In
Calif
gy,
far