



LIBERATING LOVE IN WORK:

## The Handwerk Shade Shop

BY DAVID KRAMER

**A**RTS AND CRAFTS pioneer Elbert Hubbard was quoted as saying “the love you liberate in your work, is the love you keep.” For Linda and Brent Willis, owners of the Handwerk Shade Shop in the Milwaukie suburb of Portland, Ore., those words could not ring more true. For more than 20 years they’ve been inspired by and devoted to the ideals that the Arts and Crafts movement was founded upon: following your heart and producing high-quality, well-designed handcrafted goods that can be appreciated by all for their beauty and simplicity.

The husband-and-wife team first opened The Handwerk Shop, a small antiques store in the quiet neighborhood of Sellwood in Southeast Portland, in 1993. Using the German spelling of “handwerk” was, as Linda explains, “a nod to the old-world craftsmanship that was the driv-



ing force behind the goods we sold.” They specialized in original Arts and Crafts antiques and accessories, as well as reproduction furniture that Brent designed and built himself.

Brent grew up in the bungalow-rich Portland neighborhood of Laurelhurst and was surrounded by old homes and antiques throughout his early

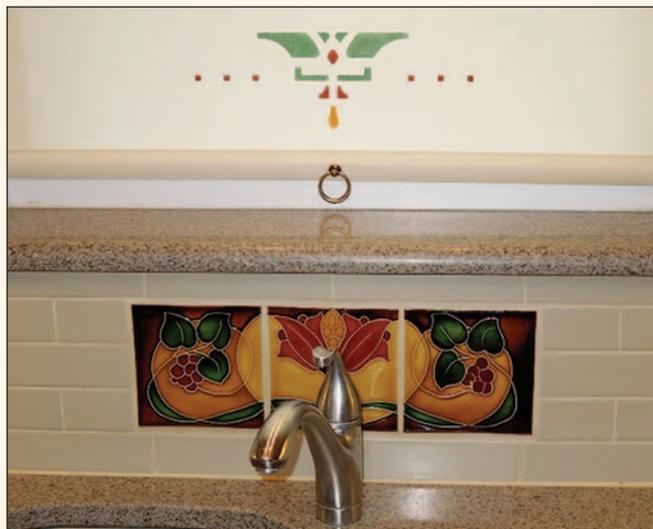
years. His fascination with and appreciation of antiques was ingrained in him at a young age.

“On the opposite end,” Linda says, “I grew up in beautiful new homes because my father was a developer and a builder. He always tried through his work to build not just new cookie-cutter homes, but homes with character, and he worked diligently to fulfill a vision of recreating the past. So in that way Brent and I shared a common thread.”

Linda studied art history in college, then went to work for a “very small old-fashioned shade shop” in her hometown of Olympia, Wash.

“Ever since then I’ve loved antiques and old houses. Part of my job was to go to people’s houses to take measurements of their window frames, and I quickly became completely enamored with older homes. A lot of the time people already had the original brackets in their existing window frames, so being able to supply them with new shades in the original style was appropriate, affordable and beautiful. It’s so fulfilling today to be able to continue the work that I began all those years ago.”

Drawing on that experience, she and Brent started crafting shades and selling them, along with furniture and accessories, at their store. After several successful years, “life got in the way,” as she puts it. “It got to the point where we had the woodshop, the brick-and-





mortar antiques store, and I was doing outside consultations *on top of* working at the shop. And of course we would go to the Grove Park Conference every year, as well as local shows here in the Pacific Northwest. Then we got pregnant and it was just too much.” They decided to downsize and ultimately close the store in favor of creating their own studio to focus exclusively on making shades.

After closing the store, they moved full speed ahead on building their shade business. They started advertising in *American Bungalow*, and the business took off. “Most of our clients find out about us directly from the advertising we do in the magazine,” she says.

Linda is the face of the company with customers, assisting them with figuring out what color and type of treatment will be appropriate for their particular style of home. Once an order is received, “Brent handcrafts the structure of the shades and does the stenciling and trimming in our workshop. We don’t subcontract anything. We do everything here using traditional cotton cloth, oil-based paints, Oregon pine wood rollers and heavy-duty springs, all crafted in the traditional way.

“We love what we do. It’s all part of how we live our daily lives. We’ve chosen this path because it affords us the opportunity to spend time together as a family and to work collaboratively with every client we have.



“We live in a 1937 Tudor home that was built for an Italian family here in Milwaukie. It’s a wonderful old home. We’ve lived here for 18 years, and we love it.”

While their work has adorned the windows of such notable buildings as the Pittock Mansion in Portland, the Susan B. Anthony House in Rochester, N.Y., and the Tiffany Reading room in Irvington, N.Y., Linda notes that “our favorite jobs are the ones that might be just four or five shades for someone who has painstakingly restored their own home. We love being a part of

that process. It’s not the name or the scale of the job, it’s the relationships we cultivate along the way that are most important to us.”

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