

Filling the home with functional art

By **Jim Cornelius**
Editor in Chief

Objects of art take on special meaning and purpose when they are practical, functional implements of our everyday life.

Waking up in the morning to a steaming mug of coffee in a hand-thrown mug or stein crafted just down the street in Sisters by Ken Merrill or Mitch and Michelle Deaderick makes that morning ritual a more meaningful, richer experience. You can serve an entire meal in handcrafted works of art from such craftspeople, adding depth to the experience of everyday life.

You can stoke up the fire in your woodstove with a poker you pick up for next to nothing at some big box store, but it's nothing at all like using a hand-forged set of fireplace tools crafted at Ponderosa Forge in Sisters.

Jeff Wester makes all sorts of functional art — from hearth tools to drawer pulls, from wine racks to light fixtures. Blacksmithing is ALL about functionality. It grew out of a frontier tradition where art for art's sake wasn't a practical possibility — but you could sure make the tools of everyday living beautiful.

And just about anybody can tell the difference between artisan work and mass-produced "stuff."

"It's pretty easy for people to tell, even if they don't know anything about the craft," Wester said.

Whether it's a rifle or a musical instrument or a set of fireplace tools, he said, a mass-produced version "might work almost as well — but it doesn't have the feel."

In traditional blacksmithing, everything has a purpose — form following function.

"That's what I try to stay true to," Wester told *The Nugget*.

Art can lie beneath your feet, in a Turkish rug purchased at a bazaar in Sisters. Art can be simple and comforting — candles with essential oils or handcrafted throws and pillows like those Kara Lappe offers at Sisters Cascade of Gifts. And it can just be fun.

"We have good towels (with sayings) that make you laugh," Lappe said, "things that you can have in your kitchen that make you giggle to start your day."

Or it can be at your fingertips as you turn on a light.

Susie Zeitner has made her reputation creating glass art that makes absolutely unique light fixtures, from sconces to chandeliers. But she doesn't stop with her own work — her entire home is created around unique materials and functional art.

She cast stepping stones using the rings from old wine barrels, and made fencing

out of scrapped skeleton remnants of steel from CAD cutouts.

"I'm a scrapper from way back," she said.

Her range hood and stove backsplash are crafted from sheetmetal she treated with muriatic acid to give it a rugged, aged finish.

"I used that instead of tile in the kitchen," she said.

The entire project of creating her home and workshop was about incorporating unconventional materials and uses in exciting ways.

"If something caught my eye and seemed fun, I found a way to work it in," she said.

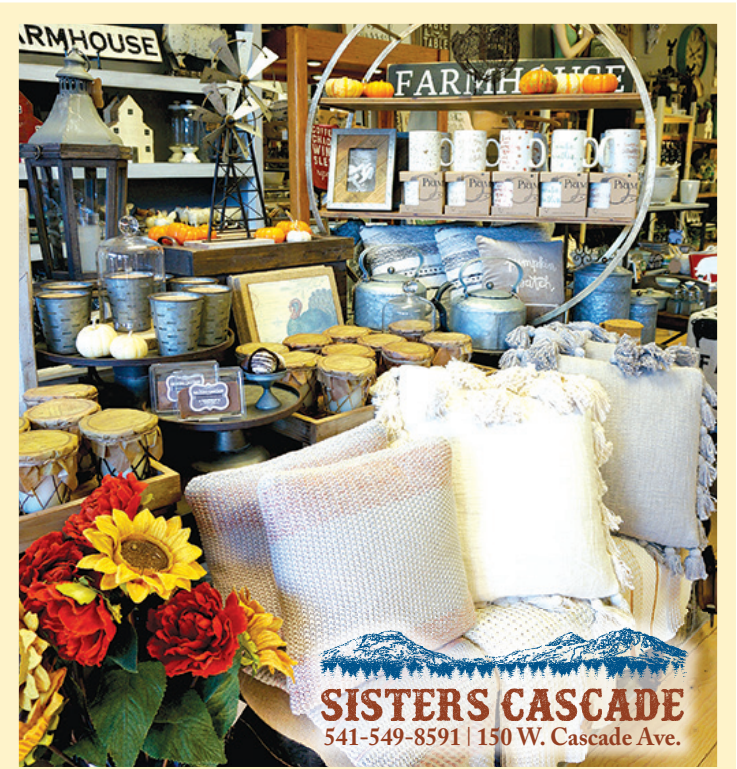
The spirit of functional art is to incorporate the look and the feel of genuine craft into the small moments of everyday life — and Sisters is full of creative people who are doing just that, and can help others do the same.

Ultimately, surrounding ourselves with functional, practical art helps us make art out of our own lives, moment by moment.



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Susie Zeitner has made her entire home a showcase of functional art, created out of "found" materials and objects.



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