Minis Make Maxi Magic

by Pam North

 In a big world where so much is out of our hands to control, it can be very satisfying and fun to create a small realm that is just perfect and exactly to our liking. That is the satisfaction of a doll house and all its tiny furnishings and accessories. The mini-world can bring maximum fun.

 Ron & Sue Frank make handmade miniature furniture, which they sell at their Etsy store, Doll's Delight. The couple met and married in St. Louis Missouri in 1983, while both were working at a chemical company. Ron holds a degree in chemistry, and Sue has a degree in microbiology. They moved to New Jersey to work at larger companies, but they found that were beginning to hate the rat race. After asking for sabbaticals for a year, they moved to Maine and decided to stay, living there for 25 years and raising two children. Ron worked as a boat builder on sailing yachts, and Sue was a technician at an eye doctor's office.

 Their first foray into the doll house world was to make furniture for their daughter's Barbie dolls, which lived in a closet serving as a doll house. That effort was the seed that later led to their making doll furniture for the retail market. Sue explained, “We began working together on doll furniture because Ron's woodworking skills and my sewing could come together in one loving item. Together, we primarily made wood items and quilting with a seasonal touch, and started doing craft shows. We love changing décor for the four seasons. Besides,” Sue laughed, “the winters in Maine are very, very long, and you need to do something to prevent cabin fever.”

 Weary of the frigid winters in Maine, and having become empty-nesters, the Franks yearned to move somewhere that was warmer but still had four distinct seasons, and the middle-south seemed perfect. They moved to Tennessee in 2007, and then started an Etsy shop called Lightly Seasoned in August, 2012, to sell the crafts they had previously sold at shows - jewelry boxes, neckties, and doll furniture. They had to learn where their own niche was in the doll house furniture market, settling on creating affordable, fairly simple and more basic styles. “Everything is sturdy enough to play with, yet elegant enough to be treasured,” Sue said. They branched out into accessories, shadow box rooms, and dioramas. It didn't take long for their doll furniture section to include over 100 items, becoming so large, along with their growing customer base, that they decided to open a separate shop on Etsy in July, 2014, focusing just on the miniatures. They named it Doll's Delight, and they began making many different size ranges of furniture and accessories. They now offer 1:4, 1:6, 1:12, and 1:24 scale miniatures. One startling product they create are 1:6 coffins to fit Gothic fashion dolls, and also even full-size shelving in a coffin shape, the latter which is featured in their Lightly Seasoned store for human-scale items. Ron continues to do all the woodworking, and Sue takes care of the sewing, photography, business-end details, and Etsy listing. “We both hate painting,” said Ron, “so we take turns on that part. We still have day jobs but plan to retire soon, and will continue to sell online to supplement our Social Security.”

 Sue ended by saying, “The best part of making miniatures is that it is something that complements both our craft passions. Ron can work with wood and develop new patterns, and I can sew, work on staging, and promote the business end. It is something we can do together, and that has bonded us, and definitely has helped keep our marriage so strong for 35 years.”

 Their future plans include creating higher-end miniatures with more detail for those collectors with more discriminating taste and to continue taking custom orders for special pieces.

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