A Doll Shop Memorial

by Pam North

German-born Gabriele Layne grew up being exposed to many kinds of handicrafts. In the late 1980s, she began collecting dollhouse miniatures - tiny furniture and accessories in 1:10 and 1:12 scales from toy stores and catalogs. Miniature magazines were available in Europe, and she visited the Miniatura in Birmingham, UK. She purchased Items from talented artisans over the years, building her collection.   
 While in Germany, she had visited museums with exhibits of tiny rooms and kitchens, with accessories in play sizes for children. She had fallen in love with the beautiful copper, pewter and ceramic pieces, as well as the tiny food items made of clay. This inspired her to make dollhouse accessories, so she invested in some polymer clay from a local craft supply store. Her friend, Helga Vogel, a doll artisan living in Giessen, Germany, asked Layne to make some food items for Vogel's larger dolls and antique miniature shops, specifying the sizes needed, and Layne began modeling bakery breads, sausages, and cakes.

In 1992, when some friends who were attending craft shows in and around Frankfurt, Germany asked her to participate, Layne was undecided if dollhouse miniatures would be the right thing for regular craft shows, but to her surprise, the people who attended were fascinated by the tiny food items. Children were especially intrigued, pulling their parents over to her table to point out the miniatures they admired.

Layne retired from a career in Germany as a cartographer (mapmaking), which involved drafting by hand. After residing in Frankfurt am Main until 1997, she and her husband moved to Texas. She met other miniature collectors and artisans there, joining the Miniature Club of San Antonio, and other groups. These activities opened a whole new world for her of making and collecting miniatures, and traveling to shows and meetings with other enthusiasts. Initially she had been collecting miniatures that were not specifically for dollhouses, displaying them shadow-box style in an old printer’s tray. Her second career, in the USA, was working for a Mutual Fund Investment Company for many years. In a corporate environment, on a computer all day, left very little time for a hobby, but by 2010 she was fortunate enough to be able to retire and finally enjoy her passion for creating miniatures.

Her family members are very supportive of her hobby, and are always amazed by her creativity. When she started teaching at a S.A.M. Wonderful Workshop Weekend in 2015, her husband accompanied her to help. Her granddaughter, now nine years old, is her biggest fan, as she is old enough to understand the intricacies of scale. She has her own dollhouse at Layne's house, so that she can redecorate to her heart's content.   
A special creation is one Layne calls *Nada’s Doll Shop.* It evolved from a dollhouse kit, the *Buttercup Cottage Corona*, that had remained unfinished for over ten years, sitting in a box out in the garage. She had bought it because it wasn't overly large, and not too intricate to assemble. While working on it, she tried to visualize what theme to pursue for the two-story building. A thrift shop was her first thought, or a toy shop perhaps, but she finally chose a doll shop because of the many dolls she had collected. All of the furnishings were made using scraps from her wood box. She designed a garden with landscaping, and flowers made of plastic and silk. The dolls, not all of which were dressed,required her to do some costuming. The porcelain dolls are almost all by Nada Christensen, with others by Marta Reeves and Sandra Stacey.

Layne used a variety of materials in the piece: primer, satin white spray paint, granite texture spray paint, acrylic paint, textured wallpaper, dollhouse wallpaper, coarse sandpaper, coarse sand from a model railroad supply store, green flocking, silk and plastic flowers and plants, dollhouse molding , blue fabric, computer printouts for the sign and Nada’s photo, a plastic cherub and metal stand, an assortment of scrap wood pieces, wood banisters, and acrylic cuts for the counter. The shingles were made by cutting sandpaper into strips, notching them, and adding granite spray to give them dimension. Painting and dry brushing completed the roof cover. Preparing the pieces was very time-consuming; it required a lot of sanding and painting to give it a smooth surface. The trim, windows, and door needed a good primer and two coats of paint to give it the desired look. “Filling in the gaps between the assembled parts with wood putty was not one of my favorite tasks!” she joked. Once she had decided on the theme, it took form as she had envisioned it. She had wanted to try out some landscaping, since most of her previous pieces were room boxes or cabinets with no place for a garden. “My favorite parts about this piece are the window seat with the baby dolls in baskets and the sitting doll, Making the counter display case, and dressing up the dolls and the baby carriage was fun to create.”

While searching for some more of Nada Christensen’s dolls on the Internet, Layne learned that Christensen had passed away in March, 2016. They had met at a San Antonio doll show. Layne named her doll shop after her, placing a photo of her inside. Layne's intention is to keep the piece, displaying it in her home and perhaps showing it at her local library to promote the hobby of miniatures.

Layne is focusing on doing more 1:24 scale projects, admitting to having several more unfinished kits in her tote box. She will be doing more teaching at workshops and club meetings, and intends to travel to shows.