Dollhouses Down Under

by Pam North

Love of dollhouses often has its seed in childhood, and so it was with Australian, Pamela Nelson, whose father made one, complete with an electric light, for her. Later, she decorated one for her two daughters. It wasn't until Nelson retired in 2010, from a career as a graphic artist for an advertising agency, however, that the passion finally took hold, as she searched for something to fill her leisure time. Remembering how much she had enjoyed her prior experiences, she embraced dollhouses again, working with an A-frame house made by a friend. “ I have no idea what scale it actually was,” she remembers. Turning a spare bedroom into a craft room, she then started working on a Greenleaf kit, the *Harrison* model, knocking out windows, and adding walls and doors. “I have no formal training,” she said, “just a brain that likes to solve stuff.” Her family doesn't get involved much with her hobby. “They don't care much; they cannot see the joy I get out of creating. Not to worry, though, it's for me.” Her husband bought her an Ozolo scroll saw and a Dremel drill to help her turn her ideas into reality. After three years of working on and finally completing the *Harrison* house, she started another house, a simpler one with a beach theme. She knocked out windows, added walls, and made doors to customize it. Another Greenleaf model, the *Garfield*, also was added to her acquisitions as a future project.Nelson finds that she has some difficulty obtaining kits and materials where she lives, and mostly has to order what she needs from eBay and somewhat local miniature stores. “I'd like to buy things from the United States,” she said, “but the postage is so horrendously expensive.” She has joined a local miniatures group to share her interest with others, and to learn from their experiences and acquired information. The club has annual exhibitions, which serves as inspiration for Nelson to complete her own houses for those displays. The *Harrison* has a Victorian theme, which took some time for her to decide upon, and her choice was dictated by a gift of a special stove that she had received as a gift from her daughter. It became the central focus of the kitchen. She made curtains, kitchen cabinets, doors, and a chimney for the stove, and the kitchen is her favorite feature of that dollhouse. The project turned out well. “My friends want to move in!” Nelson joked. She continues to find tutorials to help her to increase her skills in making furniture from bits and pieces of wood. “I love those light bulb moments, like how do I make a copper range hood for the stove? By beating copper paper with a meat mallet.” She is always on the lookout for new ideas, and said that when she makes something, she usually “has several goes at it” until she is happy with the result.She learns from the process. “I used a glue gun with great gusto on the roof of the *Harrison*, and it's going to be hard to eliminate the excesses. ”I don't fancy doing the roof of the *Garfield* in shingles, so I sourced some fake corrugated iron for that purpose. The theme for it will be a *Victorian Australian Homestead.”* She thinks creatively, sometimes using cut-up egg cartons for shingles, and “pop sticks” for flooring. Her method is mostly trial and error to achieve the effects that she wants. She finds that the hardest part of making a house from a kit is deciding what to do first, and that often involves making changes from the kit's design. Altering room sizes, getting walls straight, adding features such as fireplaces, chimneys, and other extra features. take added time and effort, with attention to detail. Luckily, her concepts and changes seem to mesh, and she is satisfied with the results. Determination to think it through and get it right seems to be the formula for success for her.Nelson described what making dollhouses means to her: “It fulfills a creative need inside me, to make stuff, and it's so much quicker and more enjoyable than doing a real-sized house.”When asked if she intends to sell her *Beach House*, she replied, “That's what my family ask. I have no grandchildren, so I cannot save my house for them. At the moment, it's on display, but when I finish it, things might change. I have no idea how much I might sell it for, or if there's a market for it.”Nelson has reached the stage that many hobbyists do. “I really would like to build a studio out in the garden,” she said, “I am finding that the room I use at the moment is getting a bit crowded. I also have a very sneaky suspicion that the *Garfield* will not fit through the door when it's finished! I am on the lookout all the time for houses to re-do, and they take up room!”