

Profile

Barry Remley

The founder of Salvations Architectural Furnishings in Silver Spring has made her mark transforming trash to treasure

By Sally Kline

Photography by Jay Mallin



It would seem wrong to label this pretty, mild-mannered 59-year-old an iron maiden. But how else would you describe a suburban mom of three with steely determination who has fashioned cast and wrought iron into a successful company? From a one-time lark two decades ago and a mere \$10,000 in seed money, Barry Remley concocted her own cottage industry to establish Salvations Architectural Furnishings. A basement-based home business for its first 10 years, with Remley then

doing all the work, Salvations has gone on to reinvent found vintage metal pieces into fine furnishings, mostly tables of various sizes. They are for sale in some of North America's most important to-the-trade design centers and appear in the homes of celebrities like Rosie O'Donnell and the highest level politicians, plus some 30 American embassies and consulates around the world.

The journey from hobbyist to flourishing creative businesswoman has, you might say, tested her mettle. But by staying true to her original concept and timing well into a hot current trend—of valuing classical metal handiwork and eclectic textures in design—this self-taught 21st-century craftswoman has remained inspired by the intrinsic beauty of 19th-century craftsmanship.



An array of antique architectural elements hangs in Salvations's Silver Spring studio (above) waiting to be turned into tables, fire screens, headboards and lamps. Barry Remley (left) designed this custom artifact console (below) out of an old balcony railing from Italy. The table, which measures 84 inches long, was topped with marble.



And yet it launched by accident.

"My husband needed furniture for his office in 1986," Remley remembers. "Our friend Donetta George,

who owns the Brass Knob in Adams Morgan, had recently opened her store (which sells architectural antiques). It had only been open about two years at the time. We ended up buying all the wood casing molding and interesting carved wooden doors and brackets that had been salvaged from a convent downtown and designed furniture using those pieces. It looked great, and it was a lot of fun."

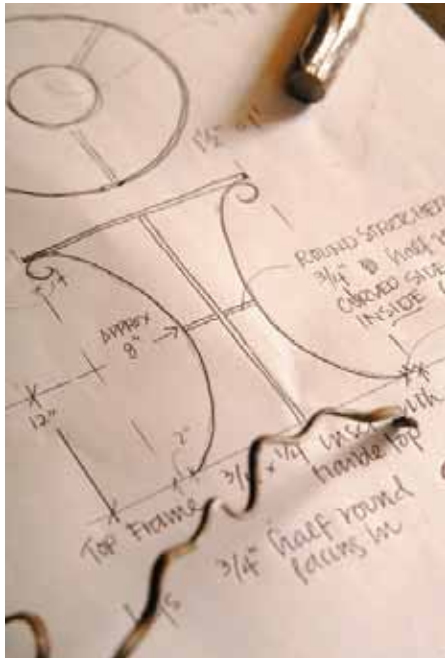
Even though she wasn't a designer and had no formal training relevant to the work, the Chevy Chase, Maryland, housewife realized she was on to something.

(continued on page 62)

Profile

Continued from page 60

“My youngest child was four years old and starting kindergarten. And it just seemed like a neat thing to do. I quickly moved out of doing wood furniture because I had to hire a carpenter for that and the antique wood, once it was stripped, got



Remley makes detailed drawings of her designs for her blacksmiths to follow (above). A blacksmith forges a detail (right) that will end up on one of Salvations's oculus consoles (below). The table incorporates optical lenses in its design.

very dry and became problematic to work with. And I really loved the old cast-iron pieces. So I started doing tables.”

With the help of local blacksmiths and after a lot of trial and error, Remley refined her concept. Dug up with the help of vendors like the Brass Knob, estate sale and flea market “pickers” and other sources, she would take mostly 19th-century iron balcony fronts, heat registers, and other decorative exterior elements like roof cresting and repurpose them into tables—often with custom-made glass or limestone tops—as well as a variety of uncataloged custom pieces such as headboards, mirror frames, lamps, fireplace screens and drapery hardware.

She set about to learn her craft, taking drafting classes at Mount Vernon College

and drawing classes at the Corcoran. She also developed some 20 multi-layer paint finishes preserved in a beat-up secret “recipe” binder still used today. Remley then had to devise a distribution system.

“It took a while to figure out our market, that we were only going to target architects and designers because we didn't want to be running a store,” Remley explains. “It kicked off with friends who had influential friends on Embassy Row. They would throw cocktail parties, invite designers who might be interested and I would take the items there to show.”

The Alexandria, Virginia, native has since grown her establishment to include two full-time finishing artists and a presence at the prestigious High Point International Home Furnishings Market. Her pieces are currently available at the main design centers in Washington, DC, New York City, Philadelphia and Toronto plus in Washington-area retailers The Kellogg Collection and Hollis & Knight. The average hand-finished coffee table costs about \$3,500 retail. Other retail pieces by Salvations Architectural can range from a small \$700 side table to \$6,000 to \$10,000 for a large custom piece.

The look of old cast and wrought iron antiques is in vogue these days, and mass-market catalogs have jumped on the bandwagon offering knock-offs made from aluminum. But these products are not the



same as the real thing, Remley says.

“We don't reproduce. Our customers want the history, the story behind the pieces and the one-of-a-kind aspect of having a table that's made of, say, a balcony from Paris over a hundred years ago.” Fantasies of Montmartre during La Belle Epoque notwithstanding, the original pieces also have a detail, a delicacy of pattern and style that no machine could stamp out. And Remley's special finishes preserve, correct and/or re-create that genuine patina of age.

(continued on page 64)



Dimensions

Women sculptors of the Washington DC Metropolitan Area

January 13 - February 26, 2006



Blue Rift by Margaret Boozer Stancill brown stoneware, porcelain, slip 13" x 5" x 1"

Zenith Gallery est. 1978
413 7th Street NW
Washington DC 20004

www.zenithgallery.com
202-783-2963
art@zenithgallery.com

Profile

Continued from page 62

Nationally known Washington interior designer Sue Burgess enjoys both the authenticity and the versatility of Remley's tables and drapery hardware. She's been buying them for her clients for 15 years. "They are so versatile and transitional. They work for classical or contemporary and can fill in for any design bent. And Barry gives such great feedback and insight. I can really rely on her as a design expert," she says.

"That's one of the things I look back on, very gratefully. If I had been a single mom trying to support myself, I'm not sure I would have been able to do this business. It took a good five years of putting every penny I made right back into it so I could experiment and try more things," says Remley.

This year, her 20th anniversary in business, Remley will nearly double her exposure. To-the-trade designer showrooms in



A salvaged balcony front from France now embellishes Remley's artifact fire screen.

Boston, San Francisco and Laguna Beach will begin carrying her pieces over the next few months. The design community has also recognized her contributions. Last fall, Remley was awarded the Denzil

(continued on page 66)

DEERFIELD DESIGNS



Custom Painted Tiles • Custom Wall Finishes • Handpainted Furniture
Ellicott City, Maryland • 443 535 9000
www.deerfelddesignsonline.com