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* Indicates cover story

Dancing the

STEEL

By Myrna CG Mibus
Photos by Aaron Schomburg

with Jennifer Wolcott

Metal and glass artist Jennifer Wolcott's materials are the same as other metalworker's materials: steel, oxyacetylene welder, sandblasters and metal benders. It's what she does with them that makes her work stand out. She cuts sections of pipe, bends and twists metal, welds everything together and ends up with a garden tower embellished with feminine, flowing lines. Graceful curves appear in her garden sculptures which are both practical and lovely. Her "grass sticks," long twisted strips of steel, add height and movement to the landscape, her double hoops hold up plants during the summer and are a focal point in the snow. An archway is more flying wing than metal structure. Sturdy and strong to withstand the wind it gently sways in the breeze, dancing in the breeze. ▶





"One of the things I get a

kick out of is starting with these

hard geometric things,

and making them get graceful."

“I like to say I’m dancing the steel,” she says as she uses her hip to help work the lever on a metal bender or her feet to stand on a metal hoop to encourage its shape. “One of the things I get a kick out of is starting with these hard geometric things,” she says as she cuts a chunk of water pipe into tiny sections, “and making them get graceful.”

If you can catch Jennifer in a still moment she’ll gladly tell you how, at an age when most people are thinking about retirement, she fired herself from her job and started a new career. More than likely, though, you’ll have to catch Jennifer on the move at her home studio in the tiny village of Waterford, Minnesota. And though she may enlist your help while she bends and pounds and welds, she’s more than happy to share her story.

Jennifer knew early on she didn’t want a conventional career. “In high school I refused to learn how to type so that I could not be anybody’s secretary,” she says with a laugh, her hands moving as she punctuates her words, her voice dancing with inflection. So she went to college to get an art degree, realized she wasn’t ready for it and dropped out. Over the years she worked several jobs,

all with a thread of art running through them, and worked her way up to a career as a mechanical engineer. Though she enjoyed her job, one day it hit her that her dream of being an artist had been tucked away too long.

Jennifer made a deal with her employer to cut back her hours so she could attend art school where she “just utterly absolutely fell head over heels in love with drawing, painting, print making, all kinds of things.” Then, the company she worked for closed. Jennifer decided to go back to school full time and finally realized her dream when she graduated with honors with a bachelor of fine arts degree in 2003.

By this time Jennifer was well-known for her art, for her sense of creativity and her ability to work with many materials. She was a sought after instructor in silversmithing, glass fusing and lampworking – but she still wasn’t creating art full time. Instead, she was spending more time sitting in a cubicle than working with her hands. Jennifer decided that if she really wanted to be an artist she had to make her move.

“So I fired myself from my job,” Jennifer says, “and bought a welder.” Why a welder? Jennifer sometimes asks herself the same question. “I think it goes back to refusing to learn how to type so I couldn’t be a secretary...there’s obviously some sort of engineering curmudgeon person in here that will not learn how to type!” she laughs.

Now, almost three years later her studio space has taken over much of her home and she’s creating art full time. And, even with today’s economy, Jennifer doesn’t consider going back to the corporate cubicle world she left. ▶

At an age when most people are thinking about retirement, Jennifer Wolcott started a new career as an artist.

Start your grill on

FIRE



SOUTHWESTERN GRILLED PORK TENDERLOIN

2 whole pork tenderloins
(1½-pounds total)
5 teaspoons chili powder
1 ½ teaspoons oregano
¾ teaspoon ground cumin
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tablespoon vegetable oil

COOKING DIRECTIONS

In small bowl, mix all ingredients except pork well. Rub mixture over all surfaces of the tenderloins. Cover and refrigerate 2 to 24 hours. Grill over medium-hot fire, turning occasionally, for 15-20 minutes or until meat thermometer reads 155°F. Remove from heat, cover loosely with foil and let rest for 5 minutes before slicing and serving. Serve warm.

Find more PORK recipes at
www.TheOtherWhiteMeat.com





Check out Jennifer Wolcott's
art at upcoming shows:

August 15th
Artswirl in Northfield, MN

September 12th & 13th
Defeat of Jesse James Days in
Northfield, MN

October 3rd & 4th
Sogn Valley Art Fair near
Cannon Falls, MN

October 24th & 25th
Southern Minnesota Studio Artour,
at her studio in Waterford, MN

For more information:

www.wolcottart.com

Instead, she thinks of creative ways to make her art and a living. She attends art shows, takes part in studio tours and teaches classes. She creates one-of-a-kind commissions for businesses and individuals. She mentors art students and works one-on-one with people, almost all of whom are women, who want to learn metalwork. Jennifer doesn't set out to empower women by teaching them how to weld, sandblast and use tools, but the women who have worked with her all agree that Jennifer has helped them with their creativity, their confidence working outside of their comfort zone and has helped reach their goals, whether they be an art career or making something for their home or garden.

Like the metal that she bends and shapes, the glass rods she puts in a flame or the pieces she sandblasts, Jennifer's life experiences continue to shape her as she creates art and shares her knowledge with others. And, just as garden sculptures become more and more a part of the landscape as their patina is enhanced by the wind, rain and snow, Jennifer is getting better with every step she takes as she dances the steel. *W*



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