

Whimsical Collections

BY CHELLE ELLIS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHERRI MCCARTER

Whimsical Collections of Hernando became an overnight success more than a year ago. Offering handmade and hand-painted custom chandeliers, the company has seen a strong demand this year that seems to grow with each passing week.

Sherri McCarter started the company with her husband Kevin after decorating a nursery for her nephew.

"A baby was suddenly available for adoption to my brother and his wife and I only had two weeks to get a nursery together," McCarter recalls. "I wanted to make it special because they had waited for that for so long."

The blessed event birthed the first "whimsical" piece — a vintage circus chandelier adorned with small clowns atop gray elephants and designed in a style similar to a teacup chandelier.

That piece generated requests from friends and family for lamps styled in fish and rabbit themes. McCarter then listed her first designs on e-bay with the promise that she could match any existing décor, a statement that would result in the 41 themes she offers today.



"After listing the chandeliers, my business exploded," McCarter explains. "E-bay is a great place to test a product."

McCarter got so busy she had to purchase a kiln to help her produce the four to five lamps she makes each week. The former stay-at-home mom had little knowledge of ceramics but seems to have suddenly found her niche.

A few of her newer themes include a funny and cute frog court with matching harlequin motif, funky leopard-print high-heel shoes with feather-trimmed lampshades; and a fairy tale princess whose carriage is wrapped in yards of clear crystals. McCarter designs, paints and customizes the ceramics while Kevin creates and wires each lamp to suit her designs.

"I make it pretty and he makes it work," McCarter jokes. The couple builds each unique lamp from scratch to ensure the two processes complement each other. "Using existing chandeliers didn't work because nothing pre-made looks right."

The chandeliers are surprisingly affordable, ranging from \$200 to \$400 for a five-arm piece, depending on the number of crystals included in the design. Chandeliers of this caliber are generally listed around



\$900 or more in high-end boutiques and catalogs. The savings fuel the buyer's frenzy.

"I make one lamp per week for one of my customers," McCarter relates with a laugh. "She loves them so much, she gives them away as gifts to her friends and family."

In fact, many of McCarter's clients are repeat customers, returning for more items to match a prior commissioned project. Additionally, she works regularly with four designers around the country, creating chandeliers to match the motif of rooms they decorate.

The McCarters recently enlisted the craftsmanship of family friend Lynley Talley from Germantown, Tennessee. She paints accompanying ceiling medallions to match the lamps. All this effort results in a whimsical and unique piece that serves as "jewelry" in a well-designed room.

McCarter plans to maintain the same pace. Three stores have offered to sell McCarter's line, but she chooses to continue as now to keep her prices affordable.

"I love designing them and matching people's existing décor," McCarter assures. "The feedback I get from my clients is very rewarding."

McCarter boasts pages of praising feedback from her e-bay clients. One customer thanks her for "making her daughter's room a dream," while another says she "smiles every time she walks in her room."

Whimsical Collections' designs will be featured in a booth at The Ultimate Design & Décor Event for 2005 at the Desoto Civic Center from Friday to Sunday, Oct. 21-23. Event details can be found at www.desotomag.com/event/.

Contact Sherri McCarter at 662.429.1077 or place your order through the company's Web site at www.whimsicalcollections.net. *



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