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Jane Taylor converts castoffs
into artwork at Cottage Garden
Antiques in Gainesville.
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Southern Living

Jane Finds Her Bliss



PHOTOGRAPHS: AMY JO YOUNG

Cottage Garden Antiques owner Jane Taylor formed her favorite word with discarded metal remnants on a simple plank.

In a Gainesville cottage overflowing with odd junk made into artful pieces, one woman welds, pounds, glues, and paints her way to happiness.

People who hang around with Jane Taylor—even for an hour or two—often leave her cluttered cottage convinced that she can do just about anything. “Ladies come here all the time and say, ‘Oh, I could never do what you’re doing,’ ” says Jane, stepping through a jungle of salvaged metal, tile, glass, and wood scattered around Cottage Garden Antiques in Gainesville. “I tell them, ‘Spend a day with me and find out. It’s fun, and you just might find your bliss.’ ”

Hammering at Happiness

Jane, who uses the word “bliss” often, is happiest when she’s pounding

on some discarded hunk of metal and dreaming up its next incarnation. It might be a rusted aluminum awning as wide as a storefront, an old section of iron fencing, or the brittle brass shards of forgotten house-address numbers. Jane focuses on finding each item’s potential, perhaps as rooftop angels, vine-wrapped trellises, or birdhouses like no others.

“I like to take things out of context and do something unexpected with them,” she says. “It’s amazing what people will throw away. I turn objects nobody wants into something that’s desirable—or at least something that makes me smile.”



Donning a protective welder’s mask, Jane converts old shovel tips and railing parts into a giant flower figure.

In Jane's hands, abandoned metal yard-chair backs emerge as useful conversation-piece patio tables. Tractor seats atop obsolete dairy buckets become portable fishing stools. Bed frames get rearranged into garden benches with skillets welded on as beverage holders.

"I make chandeliers from serving domes that covered food in fancy restaurants," says Jane, who also inverts tarnished silver cream pitchers and sugar bowls to shade the lightbulbs. Defunct salt-and-pepper shakers bolted to a section of a wooden door make eye-catching coat pegs. Slender goblets dangling from a tray by wire clink together as wind chimes.

Jane Things

All of this blowtorch creativity lay largely dormant during the years Jane pursued other paths. "After many years of working for others, I decided to take a leap of faith and pursue my dream," she says. "Now every day seems like a gift."

Constantly on the prowl for the kinds of discarded materials she hoards, Jane makes her rounds to antiques shows and flea markets. "Regular customers call me when they clean out their attics, offering me first dibs and wondering what I'll make out of their old junk," she says.

"I have a good friend I call 'Picker Bob' who owns an antiques store in Toccoa. He goes to auctions all over, looking for hardwood furniture to restore," she adds. "Bob calls the kind of stuff I like 'Jane things.' He's always bringing me wheel rims, heat-register covers, fireplace grates, broken plow discs, clunky block-and-tackle pulleys, and old crane chains."

Angels, Mermaids, and Buckets

The only thing not for sale at this 1940s clapboard cottage, which previously held a tractor dealer's forgotten storage, is the 7-foot-tall angel on the roof. Jane recycled a chicken coop's tin roof for wings, cemetery fencing for a robe, a clock frame for a collar, amber glass balls for a necklace, and a barrel ring for a halo.



above: Jane (left) welcomes an artist who asked to set up an easel and paint in the open-air showroom at Cottage Garden Antiques. **below:** Salvaged materials, creatively combined, render all sorts of whimsical results.



"I made her as a memorial to my grandmother Marguerite," she says.

Everything else crowding the little house and littering its grounds awaits buyers. Jane does commissioned work too. One client requested an elaborate mosaic mermaid, shown opposite. Interior designers and collectors find

her through word of mouth. Mostly, though, she opens her gate to anyone curious enough to wander in.

Birdbaths made from plow disks draw quizzical looks. Mop buckets and funnel-shaped tobacco-planting devices serve as flowerpots. Other piles of junk await inspiration.

"I turn objects nobody wants into something desirable—or at least something that makes me smile."

Jane Taylor

All in a Day's Work

Finding Jane behind her welder's mask or whacking away with her hammer takes some visitors aback at first. But the petite woman with short, wispy brown hair soon makes them feel comfortable. "I'm always glad to stop what I'm doing and see what they're interested in. If a customer draws inspiration from my work, I'm so pleased."

Jane drives a beaten-up 1973 Ford Ranger nicknamed "Zelda," complete with wrought iron cemetery fencing used for the truck-bed railing. The truck started out white, though that's hard to tell through all the accumulated rust, dust, and mud. "If Zelda ever



does give out on me," Jane says, "I'll pillage her for parts that I can make into something else."

She believes she's right where she needs to be. "It's like a customer told me once," Jane recalls. "A lady I'd never met came in and poked around a while and watched me. She said

she could tell I'm doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing. I think she was right. I've found my bliss."

JOE RADA

Cottage Garden Antiques: 1734 Cleveland Highway, Gainesville, GA 30501; (770) 297-7733. **Hours:** 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday.



This commissioned mosaic mermaid, fashioned from tile, mirror, and shells, accents Jennifer and Carl Romberg's pool house.