



Making Hardware Into Art

Artisan Belinda Beaudoin makes sure that when you walk into a beautiful room, the hardware catches your eye. **BY KAREN LINGO**

Belinda Beaudoin believes you can experience pieces of art when you pull open a drawer or cabinet door. "People put a lot of thought into the cabinets, the countertops, and the floor, but not the hardware," she says. "I'd like to change that."

At Atelier B, her studio in the Texas Hill Country, Belinda designs and casts exquisitely detailed pulls and knobs that can dress up even the most beautiful furniture. Her high-end hardware bears designs inspired by both nature and her love of mythology. "I'm partial to designs with an Art Nouveau feel," she says.

Belinda's been working in metal since about 1990, but she's been an artist far longer. While living in Dallas in the late 1980s, she designed and built specialized props for the Dallas Theater Center.

In 1989, Belinda moved to Rhode Island where she began making and selling metal jewelry. Wanting to do something more functional, she developed her line of decorative hardware in 2001 before moving back to Texas in 2003.

She works in a house made of steel that she shares with her husband, Neal Baron, located outside of Fredericksburg amongst the wildflowers in spring and the bronze wild grasses in autumn.

The first name of her company means artist's studio, or workroom, and Belinda takes that title



TOP: All of Belinda's designs come in an ultrafine pewter-and-silver metal.

ABOVE and RIGHT: These knobs and pull are featured in the Ginkgo line.



Belinda's studio is a house made of steel.



After the mold, she carves the details.



Polishing a finished Bird in Hand pull

seriously, creating shiny, sensuously shaped handles with the look of small sculptures. Such art comes with a price: Belinda's pulls range from about \$20 to nearly \$400.

"Everything is made by hand," she explains. "There's no mass production, and we don't job out anything." With a small staff, including Neal, each of Belinda's meticulously crafted pieces gets old-fashioned, individual attention.

Belinda's work differs from cheaper pulls commonly found in hardware stores because of the techniques and materials she uses. Besides handcasting her pulls, she casts in "a higher-quality, ultrafine pewter with silver in it," she says. "The silver rises to the top and makes a very white and bright finish." The end product is pure and has no toxic chemicals.

Atelier B hardware comes in suites, or sets, designed to be used together in the same space. "A lot of customers want to do more than one room; they want to do the kitchen and the pantry, for example," Belinda explains. "The hardware doesn't all have to be the same in both rooms, but the items from different suites should complement each other."

Belinda holds each finished piece and looks at it with a critical eye—and with obvious pride. It is, after all, a work of art. ■

To purchase Atelier B products, visit atelierb.com.

How Belinda Makes Art

THE MODEL

She makes a model by laying out her design on a half-inch-thick sheet of metal.

THE CARVING

Then she carves the shape, sometimes directly through a sketch glued to the metal. "Everything is carved into submission."

THE MOLD

Belinda uses the finished model to craft a rubber mold for making the basic shape of every subsequent piece.

THE CAST

After each cast metal piece leaves the mold, Belinda carves the fine details back in before polishing the final product. "We finish it to accentuate the three-dimensional, or the sculptural, aspect of it," she says. "Finally, we seal everything with a clear varnish."