

MASTER CRAFTSMAN



MASTER CRAFTSMAN LORI GUYER AND JOHN MEHRMAN, WHITE FLOWER FARMHOUSE

Something magical happens when two talents merge to become one creative force. Think Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Basquiat and Warhol; Gilbert & Sullivan, Simon & Garfunkel, Lennon-McCartney. Each member of these famous duos has his or her own brilliance, but few would deny the mysterious alchemy born of their bonds.

So it is with White Flower Farmhouse owner and designer Lori Guyer and woodworker John Mehrman. The North Forkers have forged an excellent partnership capable of producing some of the finest custom furniture and unique home accessories available on the East End. But it took some years before their talents intersected—and even longer for them to find a common groove.

“It’s my sickness, my addiction,” Mehrman says, noting that, for him, working with Guyer is less about money than it is about the joy of creating “functional art” for people who appreciate it. “It’s [about] providing something they’re really happy with,” he says, adding later, “I like what I’m doing.”

Neither Guyer nor Mehrman started in the business where they now thrive. She was a graphic designer and art director for *The Long Island Traveler-Watchman* newspaper with a knack for finding vintage treasures, and he was a math teacher with an obsession for woodworking. Each transitioned into a new life and line of work, eventually finding a vital counterpart in the other.

“I had three kids in three years,” Guyer says, explaining the catalyst for leaving the newspaper. Seeking new ways to make money—on her terms and, more importantly, schedule—she turned to a brand new online auction website where she could sell her yard sale treasures. “eBay had just started,” Guyer says. “I was selling any little vintage-y thing I could find.”

To her surprise, people really responded to Guyer’s aesthetic, so she spent more time customizing her finds and upcycling them, long before that was a word. Along with selling online, her restyled, repainted and refurbished furniture was a big hit at local antique markets. “Literally, I would sell out every time,” Guyer says.

Meanwhile, Mehrman was teaching math and heading toward a comfortable retirement. Along the way, his and Guyer’s daughters began attending school together.

After some time selling online and at markets, Guyer opened her first shop in Wading River, but it was a small operation within someone else’s venue. When word spread and business improved, she moved White Flower Farmhouse to Peconic. Eleven years later, in 2011, Guyer outgrew her space again and moved to White Flower’s current location, at 53995 Main Road in Southold.



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“During the process, people asked for decorating advice,” Guyer says, explaining how White Flower Farmhouse evolved from a retail business into a full-service shop, offering interior design consultation and custom furnishings for a discerning clientele.

As more people came to Guyer asking for items she didn’t have, she would work with them to find new ideas and solutions. It quickly became clear she needed a true craftsman who could implement the beautiful things she envisioned.

“I had a hard time finding somebody who knew how to make a farm table that looked good with structural integrity,” Guyer recalls. She went through several carpenters and craftsmen before finding the right partner. Lucky for her, Mehrman retired in 2008 and—because their daughters were school chums—she had already come to him for tips, repairs and ideas in the past.

“I’m sort of a wood mechanic,” Mehrman says, acknowledging his ability to make just about anything. But only Guyer’s vision steered him toward the often rough-hewn pieces he’s now regularly asked to make.

As Guyer remembers it, the first farm table Mehrman made was far from what she wanted. “It looked like a brand new table,” she laughs, explaining how the perfectionist had zero understanding of the vintage aesthetic they’re now famous for. “He planed and sanded off all the patina.”

Seeing Mehrman’s confusion, Guyer told him, “Leave the beautiful saw marks. Leave the scratches, the dents.” It took more cajoling, including some encouragement from Mehrman’s wife, but eventually he came to see beauty in imperfection. “He realized there’s something to be said about leaving the surface of the table,” Guyer says.

They now work together on all sorts of projects, using their combined genius to devise various designs, from concept to construction to final finishes. And while their furniture may embrace an imperfect look, both Guyer and Mehrman attest to the value of perfectly sound structure.

“He’s a mathematician,” Guyer says, describing Mehrman’s heirloom-quality creations. “You could pass it down from generation to generation—it’s going to last.”

Not far from White Flower Farmhouse, Mehrman’s home and workshop is a testament to his deep obsession with wood. Along with a garage full of power tools and massive electric saws, his property has a mill and more than 25,000 board feet of lumber—delivered, reclaimed or cut on site—stashed in several outbuildings. “It’s my sickness, my addiction,” Mehrman says, noting that, for him, working with Guyer is less about money than it is about the joy of creating “functional art” for people who appreciate it. “It’s [about] providing something they’re really happy with,” he says, adding later, “I like what I’m doing.”

—Oliver Peterson

