

THEY LIVE AMONG US

Master woodworker creates handmade guitars

BY PAULA RISSLER AND J.D. ROGERS

Recently Paula Rissler and J.D. Rogers of the *Applegater* met with artist John Woods at his studio in Williams, Oregon. John has been a master woodworker for years, specializing in handmade guitars.

Paula: John, give us a little background on yourself and your family. How long have you lived in the valley, etc.?

John: My wife, Jan, and I have two children. Wendy lives in Montana and works as a buyer for an herb company. Jaxon lives in California and is a cinematographer for movies. Jan and I bought this property in 1972. We moved here from Laguna Beach, California. We are both avid gardeners. My specialty is growing garlic and Jan grows gorgeous flowers. Both Jan and I are retired now.

J.D.: The guitars that are in different stages of construction here in your studio are absolutely beautiful. As a guitar player myself, I appreciate the opportunity to see your process—your artistic ability is quite evident in these guitars. When did you decide you wanted to build custom guitars?

John: When I was in the service back in the 1960s, I bought an old tenor ukulele and started to play with some of my service buddies. I wanted to get a guitar but I couldn't afford a decent one. So I decided to build my own. 1969 is when I built my first one.

Paula: Did you take classes in guitar building?

John: No, I bought a book called *Classic Guitar Construction* by Irving Sloane. I still have the book—in fact, here it is. It was published in 1966 and got me going.

J.D.: You must have a favorite type of music and guitarist.

John: I really like all kinds of music; anything with guitars. My favorite guitarist? Man, that's a tough question. I guess Lee Ritenour.

Paula: What types of wood do you like working with and how long does it take to build one of these beauties?

John: This guitar is clear walnut and it is beautiful, but my favorite wood is koa, which is native to the Hawaiian Islands. Brazilian rosewood is also a good wood, but it is hard to get these days. It takes about a year to build a guitar. Here's one that I am working on now that has a cedar top. The wood came from the Biscuit Fire that burned almost 500,000 acres in 2002 in the Siskiyou National Forest.

J.D.: John, that is my favorite guitar. Can we work out a deal? It is great that you can use this local wood in something that is so beautiful.

John: I hate to break the news to you, but that guitar is going to a recording studio in Dana Point, California, where multi-instrumentalist recording star David Lindley records his music. This is the second guitar I've built for this studio.

Paula: Do you do repair work on guitars?

John: I did at one time, but there was just too much junk coming in that I did not want to work on. So I stopped doing repair work.

J.D.: Do you build mostly acoustic guitars?

John: Yes, but I also construct acoustic electric guitars.

Paula: You are so talented working with wood—do you do other types of art with wood?

John: I used to make bowls and boxes.



Look at the inlay on this cherry wood bowl. However, now I just concentrate on guitar building.

J.D.: Do you sell your guitars in music stores? What is the price range for one of these puppies?

John: It's just word-of-mouth; I sell directly to folks. As far as cost goes, it depends on a lot of factors—they can run between \$1,000 to \$5,000 dollars. If I won the lottery, I would just build guitars till the money ran out.

Paula: Thanks for showing us your studio and your gorgeous guitars.

J.D.: I know what I am putting on my Christmas list this year.

For more information about John Woods and his guitars, visit his Facebook page at www.facebook.com/john.woods.7796?fref=ts.

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Photo, top left, John Woods at work; top right, guitar in progress from curly koa wood with maple neck and ebony fretboard; bottom right, intricate inlay work.

"They live among us" is a new feature highlighting people of interest who live in the Applegate Valley. The Applegater is looking for a volunteer to take on this column each issue. If interested, please contact J.D. Rogers at 541-846-7736.

DURANDO

Deborah Smith, vice president of the publisher Bell Bridge Books, says: "Dolores brings tremendous insights to her stories. She has lived a long, fascinating life, and she draws from her vivid observations and personal experiences in a way that few writers can equal. Readers connect with her authentic descriptions and her



Dolores Durando's creations: Top photo, alabaster mountain lion; bottom photo, acrylic painting of Indian chief.

deep intuition for the diversity of human nature. When you finish reading one of her novels you feel that you've returned from a journey into a world that's very different from your own but also very familiar." Quite the tribute.

When Dolores finishes writing her fourth book, tentatively titled *No Greater Love*, she's quitting the writing profession, she says. Ha!

Love affair with miniature donkeys

Dolores bred, trained and showed Mediterranean miniature donkeys until 2009, winning untold ribbons for her expertise and dedication.

Always a writer, Dolores scribed many amusing short stories about donkeys that were published in the newsletter of the National Miniature Donkey Association, on which she was a board member for 14 years. (Read one of her short stories on page 16.)

Artist extraordinaire

So far we've established that Dolores Durando is a best-selling author and a beribboned owner and breeder of miniature donkeys. But let's not stop there. Because Dolores has always enjoyed challenges, she sculpts in unforgiving alabaster and paints with watercolors. Over the years, she has won first, third and several honorable-mention awards from numerous juried competitions. Even so, she considers herself to be an "ambitious amateur" who paints for pleasure, not glory.

The beginning

Hailing from what Dolores calls a "backward little town on the North Dakota-Minnesota border," she claims that

her family was "so poor we made church mice look prosperous."

In 1939, just after Dolores graduated from high school, the family picked up and moved to Spokane, Washington, where her 15-year-old brother brought home the biggest paycheck as a caddy at a posh golf course, and Dolores washed dishes at a Kress dime store lunch counter.

Ah, but she spent her evenings dancing and flirting with the soldiers from nearby McChord Field, learning all the latest dance steps like the swing and jitterbug, and relishing in the sounds of the Big Bands like Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller, who frequently played in Spokane.

When a relative told her that defense factories were hiring in California, Dolores leapt onto the next bus and found work at the Douglas Aircraft Santa Monica factory, first in the cowling department on the B-29, and later as "Rosie the riveter" on the wing flaps.

By day, news of the war boomed from loudspeakers, and women at home cheered when German casualties were announced. (Dolores always wondered if German mothers grieved the same as American mothers did when they got the heartbreaking news.) But at night, after working ten-hour days, six days a week, you could still find Dolores and her friends dancing to the Big Bands—an experience, she says, she will never forget.

Career in mental health

After the war, Dolores worked at the Van Nuys Veterans Hospital as a nurse's aide in the amputee ward until it closed,

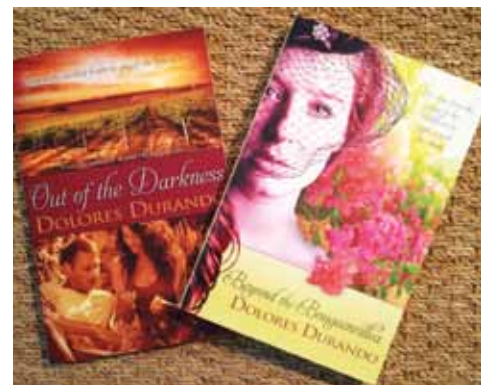
then moved to the San Fernando Veterans Hospital. Dolores would eventually become a licensed psychiatric technician at Sonoma State Hospital in Sonoma.

She, along with three of her four children, then established and maintained five homes for mentally ill adults, and served on mental health and addiction advisory boards in California and Oregon.

Dolores "retired" to the Applegate Valley 25 years ago.

So what's next on the horizon for this uber-talented woman? I'm holding my breath.

Barbara Holiday
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**Win free books**

Bell Bridge Books has generously donated several book sets containing both of Dolores Durando's published books for *Applegater* readers. Be among the first five to email us at gater@applegater.org to claim your book set. Pickup or delivery can be arranged.

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