

MAKIN' IT

'We like all our work to have its natural color.'

Donna and Andy Hammer

BOTANICAL ARTISTS

By Jean Scheidnes
 AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Donna Hammer and son Andy Hammer mat and frame decorative studies of real pressed flowers, leaves, grasses and vines gathered from yards and open fields. They call their art, simply, botanicals. The Hammers first sold them in art shows at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Last August, they opened a store, The Common Goods, to sell botanicals and other decorative items including pottery, jewelry, glassware and candles.

The Common Goods
 4101 Guadalupe St., Suite 200,
 323-0240



Mark Matson photos FOR AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Some people are leaf people and some people are flower people, but Donna and Andy Hammer create botanical art for both.

American-Statesman: Where did you get the inspiration to make these?

Donna Hammer: I needed subjects for a drawing class once, in the mid-'90s, and plants were readily available. Drawing teaches us to really see and appreciate. That led to a desire to preserve nature's beauty and have a way to be able to bring it indoors to enjoy. Andy got involved about four years ago.

Andy Hammer: I get inspiration from the area landscaping.

What materials do you work with?

A.H.: Plants, flowers and grasses. Mat-board, handmade papers, backing papers and boards, artist glues and U.V. spray.

And tools?

D.H.: We work with blotting paper and phone books for pressing, glass and mat-board cutters, sandpaper, paint, hanging hardware and varnish for frames. And reference books.

What's the process?

D.H.: We harvest — on dry days — and immediately press the plants, weighting them down for weeks. We choose a frame and cut mats to fit, choosing colors and styles to complement the subject. We arrange, glue and spray the plants with a U.V. fixative to help the plants keep their natural color. Also, we handwrite the plant name on each piece. We also assemble using U.V. glass. Nothing is ever dyed a color. We like all our work to have its natural color.



A.H.: Each one varies. On average though, I would say about four to seven days after the plant has been pressed.

Is it lucrative?

D.H.: The artwork is a popular item in our store, because it is a rare offering in the area. It is time- and labor-intensive, but we are able to keep the price reasonable because the two of us do all labor, including the matting and framing.

A.H.: We have created and sold approximately 240 different botanicals between the two of us. I would say about 200 of them are in homes here in Austin.

What's the most popular or most requested type?

D.H.: Interests are as diverse as our customers. Some prefer ferns, leaves, or grasses while others love the bright flowers.



Donna Hammer glues a Chinese tallow leaf in place. For wildflower enthusiasts, the Hammers also work in bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush, left. All the botanical artwork comes with the name of the flower or plant written on it.

How long does it take?

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