

Moss Landing artist Stella Page uses a unique decoupage technique to breathe new life into everything from handbags to furniture

The art of embellishment

By KATHRYN MCKENZIE NICHOLS
Herald Correspondent

Stella Page believes in dressing things up a bit — just to keep life interesting. And so she applies her embellishment techniques to just about anything she can get her hands on.



Page

Page, a recent transplant to Moss Landing, has long-standing family ties to the Monterey Bay area. Her Bohemian parents, Robert Page and Clancy Hathaway Page, helped build Big Sur's legendary Nepenthe restaurant. Her mother's family is related to the Weston clan of photographers and artists, and Page is delighted to be close to her

"I've always been prolific," said Page, whose lines of collectible handbags and compacts have become all the rage in celebrity circles. "I've been doing at least one piece a day for years."

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Part of the Holiday 2005 collection from Stella Page includes these handbags and compacts, sold at local shops such as Pacific Tweed in Carmel and at the artist's Moss Landing studio.

cousin, Carmel artist Jana Weston, once more.

Page moved her home and base of operations to the little harbor town last year, and now has a 5,000-square-foot studio there, where in addition to the handbags, also creates custom-made, one-of-a-kind furniture for clients upon request.

"Embellished items are making a comeback," said Page. "Embellishment is very popular, and also things that are handcrafted."

Her particular style — a sort of fine art collage applied via decoupage — is

Please see Artist page D6

Artist

From page D1

undeniably unique.

Furniture decoupage has been around since Victorian times, but Page gives it a fresh twist with her Asian and Latin American-inspired lines.

Coming to Moss Landing has been a homecoming for Page, who moved here for several reasons: first, to escape the over-caffeinated hubbub of La-La Land, and secondly, to be closer to her mother, who lives in Santa Cruz.

Now she's able to explore her family connections in the area, in addition to the other benefits that come with living in a beautiful, less-traveled place.

After 25 years in Los Angeles, "I was tired, physically and mentally," said Page. "It was time for a life change. It's turned out to be a very good move."

In addition to coming full circle in her own history, Page is also going back to her roots in embellishing furniture.

Some of her first creations, more than 25 years ago, included chairs, trunks and footstools. She also decoupaged bicycles, high-heeled shoes, and just about anything else she could find at thrift stores that seemed appealing.

What separates Page's art from being just craft is the quality and quantity of images that she applies. The pictures are often layered, as is collage art, and often the central images top off intriguing textural backgrounds.

Page also chooses strong themes — for a long time, she used images of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo in her work. Japanese, Chinese and Turkish imagery are current favorites.

Despite the rave reviews from family and friends, Page for many years kept her art as a hobby and made her living as a waitress — continuing to work on her creations before and after her shifts. She worked for many years at the famed Langer's Delicatessen in Los Angeles, serving up knishes and pastrami on rye.

"During that time, I was honing my skills," Page said. "And it was cathartic."



Four of these Stella Page-designed "roundabouts" are used inside Buzbee Studios hair salon in Carmel.

She took the plunge into full-time design five years ago with grand ideas — and grand results.

Page established herself at the California Market Center in downtown Los Angeles, a hub of cutting-edge West Coast fashion and design. At its hundreds of showrooms, wholesalers seek out fresh looks in clothing, furniture, gifts and decor.

Page's limited-edition handbags were "discovered" and placed at several exclusive Los Angeles boutiques, where they caught the eye of celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Demi Moore. Other fans are Dina Ruiz-Eastwood and Maria Shriver.

To many of us, the purses — which are in the \$300 to \$600 price range — seem pricey. But they're relatively inexpensive compared to other designer handbags, which can cost thousands of dollars.

With the help of several dedicated employees, Page is now supplying her wares to stores in the Bahamas, United Arab Emirates and Cabo San

Lucas, Mexico, as well as numerous Southern California locations.

Locally, you'll find Page's bags for sale at Pacific Tweed and Buzbee Studio, both in Carmel, and The Clothing Store in Pacific Grove.

In fact, it was for Buzbee Studio that Page created several pieces of embellished furniture recently.

"It was a 1960s-era hair salon and they bought it 'as is,'" said Page. For instance, she applied her art to several existing "turnabouts," sort of cupboards on casters that hold beauty supplies, which had come with the salon.

"They're totally functional," said Page, who uses a polyurethane coating to protect her designs.

She has also embellished baby furniture with an animal-print background for a home in Pacific Palisades — and that's something you don't see every day.

"I use leopard like most people use basic black," said Page.

For information on Stella Page Design, see the Web site www.stellapage.com or call 633-5503.