

Open the door to creative entry for home

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Shannon Williams' passion for woodworking is opening doors across Santa Cruz County.



Shannon Williams installs a hinge on a custom gate he designed for Davis and Monica Terrazas. Williams created a gate that would blend with the home's siding. He is looking into installing a self-closing hinge. (Shaminder Dulai/Sentinel)

Williams, owner of Williams Gate Works, creates custom gates that boast everything from hand-carved artwork to designs that incorporate bronze, copper and stained glass.

Adding a gate to a home's entryway or garden changes the feeling of the space, he said.

"If there's something really creative about it, people are really drawn into it," said Williams, 44, a general contractor who's worked in the trades for more than 20 years.

He's always enjoyed working with wood, he said, and often made gifts, such as mirror frames and jewelry boxes, for friends and family.

"You start out with this rough block of wood and can shape it into almost anything," he said. "It's an infinite thing"

Williams combines creativity and craftsmanship working with different types of wood. His designs include Japanese-inspired garden gates made from bamboo, cedar and bronze, and arch-top gates made from

mahogany or teak. He incorporates old-growth redwood into some of his projects, but does so in an eco-friendly way, using reclaimed wood from old wine barrels.

"You're reusing it â€” it doesn't go to waste," he said.

People want gates for different reasons, he said. Some use gates as a focal point to lead to a home's front door or garden, while others use them along with hedges to create privacy.

"It defines spaces and barriers," he said. "With the way I construct my gates, they look good from both sides"

With prices ranging from about \$700 to \$2,200, depending on how ornate the customer wants the gate, Williams said his products are considered by most to be specialty items.

"It has a beauty to it, and it has function," he said.

Williams, who credits longtime friend and master woodworker Chuck Pyle with teaching him much of what he knows, works with local landscapers and landscape designers. He said there's an incentive to create quality products.

"Santa Cruz is a huge word-of-mouth type of town," he said.

Kent Tara, owner of Tara Deck and Fence, met Williams a few years ago when he was looking for someone to create a custom gate for a customer.

"I needed a really good gate-maker, someone who did really fine work," he said.

He said he got more than he could have asked for, and that Williams has become his go-to man when he's in need of a custom gate. Williams goes beyond his clients' expectations, he said. They expect one thing, but get something even better.

"His customers aren't pleased, it's beyond that. They're ecstatic," he said. "In their eyes you can see they weren't expecting the quality they receive"

He said Williams' carpentry is exemplary, and his painting near-perfect. He's a master craftsman with an eye for aesthetics and a strong work ethic.

"I have never met anyone who does exactly what they say they're going to do," he said. "With him, every time he puts something up, it's a Maserati"

Williams, the father of 2-year-old twins, has a growing family as well as business. His mother, Patty Williams, moved to Santa Cruz to be closer to her new grandchildren, and now lives in a home on her son's property. She's also become a part of his business as well, creating the stained glass used in some of his gates.

"It's nice to be able to work with her on that level," he said.

Patty said her son's interest in art began as a child, and that he's always been hands-on with his projects. He's always enjoyed sharing his work with others, she said.

"Everybody that knows him has a jewelry box," she said.

Patty said Williams aims to create unique gates that reflect his clients' visions. As his craftsmanship has improved over the years, he's become more meticulous with each project he takes on.

Many of Patty's stained-glass designs feature landscape themes, such as flowers and hummingbirds. She said she wasn't satisfied with the first piece she created for her son, but that everything changed when she saw it incorporated into the larger picture.

"When I saw it, I thought this really works wonderfully," she said.

Williams has become a perfectionist, she said, and will spend hours and hours creating the gates he envisions. He takes pride in his work, and finds great joy in creating each unique piece.

"He's so happy when he's in the shop working on the gates," she said. "He's like a little kid"

He builds his gates with mortise and tenon joints, a way of joining pieces of wood together without using bolts. He integrates other techniques that make room for the natural contraction and expansion of the wood, such as creating floating panels to avoid cracking and popping, and weep holes to allow for water to drain.

Each gate is constructed so that the outer frame is where the strength is, he said. This allows him to carve, paint or incorporate artwork such as stained glass or copper into the center.

"It allows a lot more creativity," he said.

For more information about Williams Gate Works, visit www.williamsgateworks.com or call 426-8506.

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