

The Tin Lady of Peoria County

By Mary Daniels
Tribune staff reporter



LORI DANIELS
Tin tile glazer/
Mapleton, Ill.

Lori Daniels and Stephen White "met cute," as they say in film scriptwriters' parlance. He was eating an apple turnover in the parking lot of the Kane County Fairgrounds and Lori, then-owner of a Rockford shop, almost ran him over with her truck. Better be careful, roll up the window, he's after the moneybag, her traveling companion warned. Instead, he helped her set up her booth, later sent her roses. Sharing the love of antiques soon led to sharing their lives.

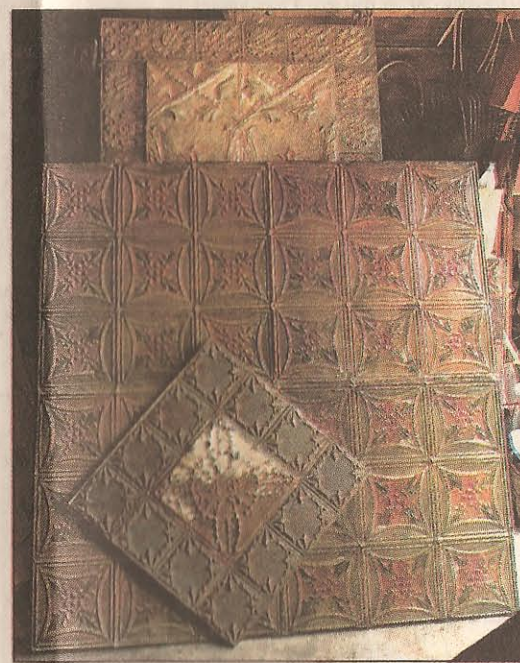
In the mid-'80s, she moved to White's 6-acre farm in Mapleton, Ill., outside of Peoria, about 150 miles southwest of Chicago. There they meshed their diversified antiques collections as well as their menagerie of animals, which currently includes a wide-ranging variety of dogs and cats. As dealers/partners, they were successful, doing 42 shows a year until the economy slowed down the antiques market three years ago.

Serendipitously they discovered a new direction, and began an entirely new enterprise, cutting up salvaged vintage tin ceilings from historic buildings, framing and then glazing the pieces so they take on the appearance of enlarged Arts and Crafts ceramic tiles. Here's more on how it happened.

Discovery channel: Tin turned Lori Daniels and Stephen White's lives around. After three decades of success as antiques dealers, the market had slowed to a crawl and they found themselves in financial arrears. "Three years ago, the house was in foreclosure," says Daniels. "They were repossessing our vehicles. As the last one disappeared down the driveway, I poured myself a glass of champagne and went out on the deck to pray." Days later, some visitors came to the farm and looked at the ornate vintage ceilings Daniels and White had salvaged from the old Bergner's department store in Peoria and installed as ceilings in the two additions to their farmhouse. "Just paint one piece for us, to go on our wall," they said. Daniels heard what they said as channeled from a divine source and got busy.

All-out fancy: The original tin ceilings were made

PLEASE SEE TIN, PAGE 7



Tribune photos by Charles Osgood

"Architectural salvage is really hot," says Lori Daniels, who turns tin ceiling tiles into art pieces that resemble Arts and Crafts ceramic tiles, "and this follows that trend."

TIN: Tin tiles glazed to perfection

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

right after the Civil War, from the 1860s to the early 1900s.

"That was the height of the Victorian period, which was highly fancy," says Daniels. But come the Industrial Revolution, the variations of styles went wild. "There are so many different styles, not only Victorian, but there is also Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts. Today, the supply is limited, because a lot of it was not saved. We have more of a variety of tin than you will ever see in your life in one place."

It takes two: The whole process starts with panel preparations. "Steve goes down to the corncrib and assembles the tin," says Daniels. "We lay it out like a puzzle. He makes a frame. We build two trims around each piece. We do this part first. Then I go out to the garage and glaze it. I hand-paint different areas. Only one glaze (a glassy or glossy coat, often of color, applied to a surface to modify the effect) can go on per day and at least 10 glazes are hand-painted on each tile. I hand-mix all different types of paint."

Extreme makeover: The ceiling tin often looks the worse for wear when the couple starts out with the pieces. "It has rust holes, flecks of paint and rips. I fix them. I mix an epoxy to fill the holes. But I try to keep some of the integrity of the piece," Daniels says. "Remember, they had to nail these tin panels to the ceiling, so there are a lot of nail holes. When salvagers bring the ceiling down, they kind of pull on the tin panels and often rip them."

The finish line: Daniels' tin panels are painted in such a way, they remind the onlooker of other things, such as vintage ceramic tiles as seen through a magnifier.

"I collect the ceramic tiles that influence the tin," she says, showing a visitor four or five of them, in colors from cobalt to earthen beiges and greens. "These are Trent tiles out of England," she adds. "They were placed around the fireplaces. Majolica [ceramic ware] has the same colors. Fiesta Ware influences me, too, also Tiffany art glass. I am very influenced by Arts and Crafts designer William Morris and [architect] Frank Lloyd Wright's arrow windows."

Weather as co-designer: No two of Daniels' tin panels are the same, and there is a good reason why. When she begins the glazing process, she says, "I can't reproduce my own glaze. I can't copy my own work. There's no formula. It depends on the condition of the tin and the weather."

She points to the mottling and melding of one glaze under or against another, and explains "that is the result of a cool day."

Pointing to one where there are a lot of black speckles in the glaze, she adds, "This is the result of a 90-degree day. . . Dampness, humidity, all come into play. There is no way to predict what [the weather] will do. There are some days when it is too hot for the glazes to turn out well." So she gives it a rest.



Tribune photos by Charles Osgood

People use the glazed tin panels "for headboards, entryway pieces for the house, garden art or over the fireplace," says Lori Daniels (shown outside her Mapleton barn, with her husband, Stephen White, in the background).



Let there be glaze: Daniels' unique glazes came about through sheer serendipity.

"I was just playing in the garage with paints and resins and I dropped a blob of a mix on the tin. I thought, 'That is exciting,' and started mixing." How does she know what glaze enhances what pattern? "I look at each piece, and it speaks to me," she says.

Beyond big hang-ups: People use the glazed tin panels not only on the wall like paintings, Daniels says, but "for headboards, entryway pieces for the house, garden art, or over the fireplace. Sometimes people give me their fabric and I bring it all together to make a personal piece for them. The 3-foot-by-3-foot, the 4-foot-by-4-foot and 5-foot-by-5-foot pieces are the favorites. . . Some people want them even bigger. People in the city have big walls you don't know what to fill them with."

Tin is in: "Architectural salvage is really hot, and this follows that trend," she says, explaining the popularity of her work, which is sold across the nation. But what will she do when the



tin gives out? "When there's no more tin, we will be doing something else. One thing flows into another in life."

Lori Daniels' glazed tin-ceiling tiles cost from \$10 to \$20 for individual tiles to \$2,000 to \$3,000 for the larger pieces, six feet square, at Pasquesi Home and Garden, 990 W. Northwest Hwy., Barrington, 847-381-5511, and 1045 S. Waukegan Rd., Lake Forest, 847-234-6776; Toms-Price Home Furnishings, 303 E. Front St., Wheaton, 630-668-7878, 725 Milwaukee Ave., Lincolnshire, 847-478-1900, and 374 Old Orchard Center, Skokie, 847-675-9400; and at Richard Honquest Fine Furnishings, 1455 N. Barrington Rd., Barrington, 847-382-1700. The American Antique Tin Emporium is in Mapleton, Ill., 309-565-4876.