

Metalsmith artist finds formula for creativity, financial success

Living Design Studios sticks to budgets, customer wants

BY CAROL MASKUS

Staff Writer

BOULDER – Jessica Adams has found the formula that removes the word “starving” from the term “starving artist.”

Adams is one of those artists who knows how to work for a broad audience and customize their art according to what customers want.

As founder and creative director of Living Design Studios in Boulder, Adams’ metalsmithing shop made \$990,000 in 2007, and this year’s projected revenues are \$1.3 million.

She attributes her success to the philosophy of the company.

“Our philosophy is to meld the vision, budget and requirements of our clients with the qualities and limitations inherent in each metal to produce the best final product.”

Most artisans use their clients’ projects as a way to express themselves, she said, but Living Design Studios focuses first on the client’s vision and then builds a design from there. As a result, the studio has no definitive style, and style changes according to customer.

Because of this flexibility, Adams and her team have done projects like cladding 500 square feet of copper dividing walls

for Altitude Restaurant in Denver, creating a roof inspired by Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi for a home in Golden and converting three full-sized wine coolers to look like a medieval iron gate for a showroom in Chicago.

In Boulder, the studio’s work can be seen at Frasca Food & Wine, the St. Julien Hotel & Spa, Hotel Boulderado, Pasta Jay’s, Friends’ School, a bus stop on Pearl Street, Aish Kodesh, the Jewish Community Center, Ambiente Design Center, McGuckin Design Center and Washington Mutual Bank. Other projects can be seen throughout Colorado and the U.S.

Adams has been working with metal since she was 15 when she began as a jeweler. She continued to study jewelry in college at California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, Calif. and took a two-year apprenticeship in France.

“It was while I was living in Europe that my work transitioned from jewelry to large-scale pieces that were integrated into the architecture of a building. When I returned to the states I worked in a bronze-casting foundry where I learned many of the techniques we use for large-scale metal work.”

She founded her studio in 1998 as a sole proprietorship, and the studio was incorpo-



PETER WAYNE

Jessica Adams, owner of Living Design Studios in Boulder, uses a variety of iconic pieces in her metalwork purchased by commercial customers and individuals.

rated in 2001. It has grown from one to 17 employees, and it is still growing (Adams is seeking a salesperson). She has people

in marketing, management, accounting, design and especially fabrication. Last year

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the studio completed 130 projects, and Adams needs help with fabrication.

The studio occupies approximately 12,000 square feet on east Arapahoe Avenue that includes offices, studio space and a showroom. The showroom is technically open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday, but Adams prefers people make an appointment, so someone can be there to show people around. The studio will participate this fall in Open Studios, an annual event in Boulder where artists open their studios for public viewing.

Living Design Studios also has an office in Aspen, because it does some business there, but the office has no showroom or studio. All fabrication is

done in Boulder.

Prices for the studio's work ranges from \$500 to \$250,000, depending on size and level of complexity. Custom vent hoods for ovens, which form a significant part of the company's business, range from \$4,000 to \$10,000.

The studio continues to move forward with several projects, such as a steel stringer (a structural piece that forms the underside of a staircase) and a stainless steel railing in the shape of a double helix for a loft in Denver. Other projects include a forged bronze sculpture for a water feature, wrought iron railings and aluminum gates for a home in Aspen and a number of custom vent hoods.