

COLORADO
expression

architecture & design

O F T H E W E S T

Beautiful spaces and the people who design, live and work in them.



shop girl

Living Design Studios in Boulder handcrafts custom pieces out of any metal imaginable, forging it into limitless functioning art for residences and commercial spaces. By Nancy Clark

At the back end of an industrial park along Arapahoe in Boulder is a white two-story concrete warehouse accessible by a door that opens onto a Thoreau-esque scene of grazing cows. Where there should be a metal handle on the inside of the glass door, there is none, which in itself is ironic given what happens one level up, in Jessica Adams' Living Design Studios' showroom.

Living Design Studios (www.living-designstudios.com; 303-442-2614) features ventilation hoods and sample metal tiles that only hint at the variety Adams and her creative team can produce. From kitchen range hoods to backsplashes to deep sinks, cabinet door insets (replacing glass), hand railings, fireplace surrounds and entry doors, custom work spans

every metal possible from copper to stainless steel, aluminum, zinc, bronze, wrought iron and brass.

Housed in an 8,000-square-foot shop, the studio has 11 employees, including four core fabricators, all of whom are "phenomenal designers," according to Adams. Among them are a structural steel expert, some of the best stainless and aluminum welders in the state, and a blacksmith—each of them contributing to the output of designs and products that Adams sells nationwide.

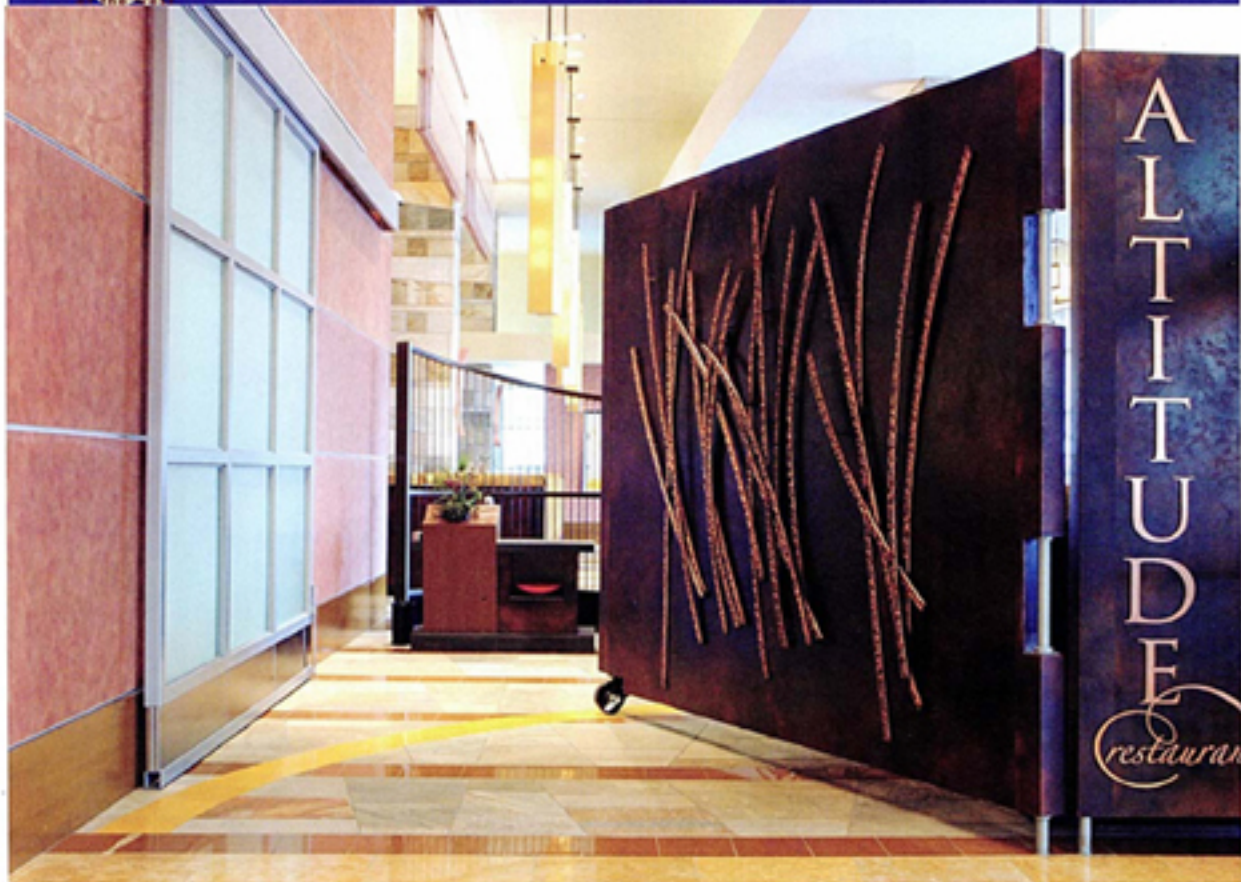
At First...

Born and raised in Hawaii, Jessica Adams got her introduction to metals through an "amazing, talented and dedicated jewelry teacher in high school," she says. She continued her metal work at California's College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. Midway through college, she took a trip to France to visit her sister and fell in love with the country and all its influences, apprenticing with a group of artists from a variety of backgrounds and trades. Returning to U.S. soil meant that Adams had her pick of where to

Right: A stunning fireplace surround attracts attention in a bank lobby.







Custom metal work adds flair in both commercial and residential settings.

live. It wasn't so much that she picked Boulder, but while visiting a friend there she felt she was given a sign that Boulder was where she was supposed to be: the zipper on her suitcase broke. Lucky for us, she soon landed a job in a local foundry, which "contributed greatly to the work" done today at the studio.

Even luckier is the fact that Adams coaxed a roofer to give her a piece of copper sheeting, which jump-started her in metal arts in Boulder. Using a technique called raised-relief/repoussé, Adams created a design in the copper and gave the piece to a Realtor friend who had sold a home to clients and wanted to gift them with something special as a housewarming present. He then commissioned Adams to make another piece like the first one for himself.

Off and Running

There's nothing like word-of-mouth to promote any business, and in Adams' case, the personal referral system worked like magic. The new homeowner contacted Adams to ask if she'd be game to live the Gunite





Hand railings are fabricated by skilled metal workers with meticulous attention to detail.



walls of her existing swimming pool with copper. With no tools to her name, Adams had an epiphany: she'd strike a deal with the homeowner that, yes, she would build a copper-lined pool on the condition that the homeowner buy all the tools Adams needed, giving them to her upon completion of the job, and pay \$8 an hour for her services.

"I figured that at \$8 an hour she wouldn't get nervous watching me studying the pool, trying to figure out how I was going to do what I said I could do," recalls Adams. It didn't hurt that the homeowner was a local independent architect; once the swimming pool was completed, she and Adams began working together on other projects.

Lee Hill Hoods

Living Design Studios' custom range hoods have become so popular that Adams, seeking a way to make the hoods affordable to even the under-\$1 million homeowner market, created a line of eight semi-custom copper hoods, christening them Lee Hill Hoods. You can literally design your own



Metalwork ranges from sculptures and decorative designs to handsome functional products.



hood by choosing from a selection of finishes/patinas, shapes and texturing. Accompanying pot racks are optional.

Overall, "We do finishes/patinas on our metal work that exceed what any other metal shop, outside of a bronze casting foundry, can offer," Adams says. "This is to the point that some of our pieces are as simple as a sheet of metal with a patina that is so exceptional that it is art and requires nothing more than a frame." In addition, Adams points out that many shops are unaware it is possible to weld copper, which is something her studio "excels at."

Shy by nature, Adams admits to enjoying brainstorming with clients, learning what they want in the metal art that will become part of their lifestyle. Managing the sales and overseeing the output from the warehouse keeps Adams occupied, but underneath her desk is tucked a pair of workman's shoes, the kind someone on a highway crew might wear on the job—the boots she wears when working the metals herself.

"Sometimes we get a project and I just can't help myself. I have to get my hands dirty," she says. 