



The Detroit News
homestyle

Friday, June 29, 2012

*Forging
beautiful
designs*

**Always-elegant wrought iron
makes a big statement indoors. 8H**

Glenn Haege:
Modifying the home
with seniors in mind. 10H

Kate Lawson: Key lime pie
in honor of Nora Ephron. 14H



around each other in
tion at Larkston Metal

Larkston Metal Design



Austin Iron Works

architecture are also found in the design of the wrought-iron gates



Austin Iron Works

is a bit of a misnomer, since most craftsmen use steel, stainless
the metals of choice, as in this decorative piece used on a landing.

Handcrafted ornamental metalwork makes a style statement indoors

MARY G. PERTONE
ALBANY

Black iron is red-hot. Ornamental wrought iron need not be relegated to the outside perimeter of a house, as a fence or gate. The black metal looks as much at home inside a modern 21st-century house as it does in an English Tudor.

"The beauty of ironwork is that it can be as simple or as ornate, as you want," says Steve Austin of Austin Iron Works in Kansas City, Mo. "Ironwork is a conspicuous way that lets a homeowner convey a sense of style and yet has been one of the classic, constant elements in design throughout the centuries."

In the ancient world, dating back to 1400 B.C., it was the Hittites who first created handcrafted wrought-iron pieces. When America was settled, it was iron that was considered one of the most valuable resources of the Colonies.

In 1585, a deposit of iron discovered by the Raleigh expedition on Roanoke Island, N.C., provided the ore for many wrought-iron pieces in early America.

Under the skillful hand of a blacksmith and the heat of a forge (a furnace that can reach 2,000 degrees), wrought iron can be cut, twisted, spined and bent.

Today, the term wrought "iron" is a bit of a misnomer, however, since it is rarely iron that is used to create the signature black metal pieces. For most craftsmen, steel, stainless steel and bronze are the metals of choice used to make ornate basins, decorative gates, fireplace screens and other architectural details.

And yet, ironwork continues to forge its way inside houses. Austin, who has been in business for nearly 40 years custom designing and constructing wrought iron pieces, says the ironwork needs to match the architecture of a home.

"Although wrought-iron pieces should be beautiful, the aesthetics should never compromise its function," he says. "The wrought-iron piece must first work in the space and serve its purpose."

Austin says design motifs from other cultures, including Spanish, Russian, Germanic, can also be seen in wrought-iron pieces.

Details such as arches, ellipses and

Sources

- Artisan Blacksmith of North America (ABANA), www.abana.org
- Larkston Metal Design, Ann Arbor, www.larkstonmetal.com; (734) 429-3726
- Austin Iron Works, Kansas City, Mo., www.austinironworks.com; (800) 454-7706

circles found in a home's architecture can be mimicked in a wrought-iron design, as well.

Austin's favorite wrought-iron designs incorporate influences from both the Art Nouveau and Art Deco design periods, which can include organic forms, such as flowers or butterflies, set in a geometric or repeating design.

Wrought-iron pieces can be found from grand staircase handrails to decorative curtain rods, and Austin says there are premade pieces which come from overseas, including Mexico and Italy.

However, handmade pieces, constructed by artisan blacksmiths, still appeal to homeowners who want the one-of-a-kind craftsmanship that is evident in wrought iron.

Austin says people considering a custom-made wrought-iron piece should consult the Artisan Blacksmith Association of North America, or ABANA, for qualified referrals.

Because ornamental iron is custom-made by hand, most of the expense is in the labor. However, there are also price differences between materials that are used. Steel averages \$11 per pound, stainless steel is around \$16 per pound, while bronze costs \$16 per pound. Austin says consumers can expect to pay at least \$65 per linear foot for a custom-designed staircase banister.

For people who want to accessorize with premade wrought-iron pieces, expect to pay around \$100 for a pair of quality candlestick holders. Wrought-iron curtain rods are also popular and range from \$200 to \$1,000, depending on detail and ornamentation.

The metal used for wrought iron is fighting a losing battle with oxygen and



Blacksmith Scott Larkston of Ann Arbor made this rose-themed railing of forged steel and bronze for a private residence.

rust never sleeps, especially with pieces that are kept outside. Black is the most durable and traditional finish color for wrought iron. The lighter the color of the finish, the more likely rust spots will show through.

Ornamental iron can be treated with the following to prevent rusting:

- Oil-based enamel paint. Iron is covered with a primer, then with paint. The paint can be brushed or sprayed onto the metal. Wrought iron can also be submerged in a process called dip-painting. This allows the paint to cover all cracks and fill crevices in the wrought iron.

- Powder coating. Very fine, dry, plastic powder paint is sprayed onto the metal surface. The wrought iron piece is then placed in an oven, where it is baked at a high temperature. While in the oven, the powder paint melts and becomes the finish.

- Chemical patina. This is an acid-induced coloration of the metal (such as a mottled bronze color). The metal can then be sealed with a clear urethane, beveled linseed oil or paste wax.

- Two-part polyurethane epoxy paint. This paint system inhibits rust and strongly adheres to the metal, flexing with its expansion and contraction.

When maintaining wrought iron, if any rust appears, the piece needs to be cleaned down to the bare metal and coated again. Do not try to just paint over rust, as a rust spot under paint will continue to corrode the metal.

Depending on how wrought iron is constructed, it can give a home a more refined or rustic feel. "Often, the wrought iron in a home is the finishing touch and is like jewelry in a home," Austin says. "That touch of black can anchor a space and give it a look of sophistication."



Wrought iron adds weight and sophistication to this staircase's banister complements both wood and stone.