

Women's world

Miniaturists can become true craftsmen

By Susan Laity Price

Bob and Millie Birkemeier of Wheaton have passed the stage of mere hobbyists interested in miniatures and have become true craftsmen, reproducing exact copies of full size museum furniture to a scale of one inch equal one foot.

They started, as so many other miniaturists have, with gifts for their children. They both enjoyed working with their hands and had developed skills in various crafts.

It was natural for them to enter into their children's play by making model airplanes, model railroad layouts and dollhouse furniture.

As the Birkemeier daughters grew older their parents made more sophisticated furniture.

Since very few actual miniature patterns existed at that time, most of the furniture was made to scale using patterns for full size furniture.

In 1974 the Birkemeiers began selling their creations through consignment shops and at art fairs on the east coast, where they were then living.

Since moving to Wheaton in January of 1980 they have continued their business through mail order.

Bob does most of the woodworking. He says that accuracy in measuring and cutting are the keys to expert miniature work.

Bob emphasizes that if you want to achieve this type of detail you must invest in power tools. Most of his tools are especially made for the miniaturist by Dremel and Unimat.

The power tools enable Bob to work with harder woods such as cherry, walnut and maple.

For a catalogue of a complete line of miniature lumber, send a long self-addressed stamped envelope to Northeastern Scale Models, Inc., Box 425 D, Methuen, Mass. 01844. For an additional \$2

Creative crafts

they will send samples of the lumber they have available.

Millie finished all of the furniture. She uses standard furniture finishing techniques of stain and varnish applied with an air brush.

Sanding is an important and tedious part of the lovely finish Millie achieves. She uses small pieces of sandpaper folded to fit into tiny spaces.

Although the Birkemeiers continue to use full size patterns they also take many patterns from a publication for miniature craftsmen, "The Scale Cabinetmaker," from Dorsett Publications, P.O. Box 87, Pembroke, Va. 24136. Price for this quarterly publication is \$15 a year, annually.)

Another miniature magazine Millie enjoys is "Nutshell News," Clifton House, Clifton, Va. 22024. The price of this monthly magazine is \$22 annually.

Pictured at left are a few of the family creations. Here they are displayed in a vignette (platform and rear wall) which can show off a few prized pieces and also serve as a substitute for a complete dollhouse.

Bob and Millie made the table and chair. Their daughter painted the American primitive oil in the background.

Their daughter-in-law did the tole painting which decorates the tinware made by their son. Inside the foot warmer "live" coals glow red hot — all at one inch equals one foot!

(Susan Laity Price is a Wheaton resident who writes this column for *The Journal*.)



This reproduction of an early American room was made by Wheaton residents Bob and Millie Birkemeier.