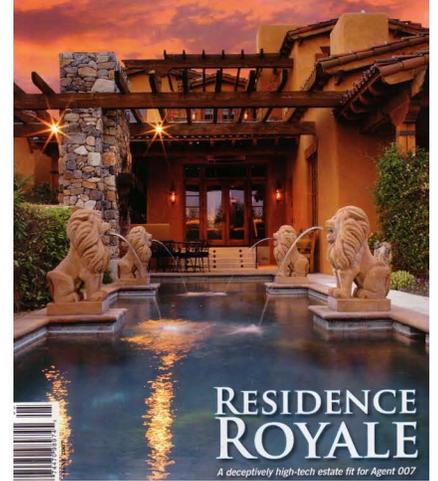


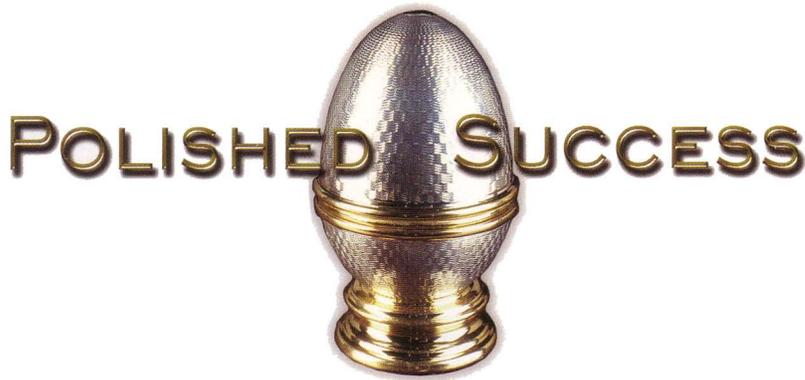
Arizona Home & Design

Featuring O'Meara Sterling May-June 2007

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Local silversmith enhances the lives of clients with enchanting art By Noelle Coyle

It may not look like much on the outside, but when you step into O'Meara Sterling in Phoenix, be prepared to enter a Santa's workshop of sorts. Machinery, mostly from the 1920s, lines half of the studio and still is in pristine working condition. In the main room, amidst an odd assortment of ovens, polishers and handmade tools, sits a stunning display of silver and gold works of art.

Stephen O'Meara was introduced to silversmithing as a child at summer camp. Developing a fascination with the field, he took advantage of opportunities to study silversmiths near his hometown in Colorado and went on to study sculpture in college. Several masters in silversmithing shared their knowledge with him, he says, because it is a dying trade and they were glad to see someone interested in it.

The majority of O'Meara's clients come by referral and typically order custom pieces. Some of the most unusual or unique requests include a bowl of sterling silver pistachios, a rubber band ball in bronze and a 15-minute hourglass made for a movie producer who requested an engraving on each side of the hourglass. (One end reads "Your 15 minutes start now" and the other, "Your 15 minutes are up.")

O'Meara's wife, Amy, who handles the public relations and retail side of the business, says she enjoys seeing ordinary things become beautiful.

"We draw on periods we've been inspired by and make it for today's market," she says. "[The pieces] aren't antique or modern—they're timeless."

O'Meara's art is different from other silversmiths because he uses techniques called "spinning" and "hand-raising" for bowls and vases. The process involves taking a flat circular sheet of silver and shaping it with a hammer, angling the piece one way and then another. He then hammers it all over thousands of times to create the texture he has become known for.

"No one does it this scale," O'Meara says, referring to a large vase. "[Other silversmiths] think I'm crazy. It takes at least 240,000 blows to get it into this shape."

Using this technique makes the pieces unique because exact replicas are impossible to make. It takes him anywhere from three to six weeks to complete a piece using this technique since the constant hammering can cause strain in his joints.

"Art is a reflection of human experience and inner beauty," O'Meara says. "When you look at art, it's an external feeling of appreciation, care or respect for yourself."

The O'Mearas enjoy interacting with customers and making new friends, agreeing they never lose thirst for learning.

"What I like about being an artist is hearing people's response," he says. "It can touch their hearts in a way they didn't know possible, and it's best when you make something people respond to. Some days I can't quite believe I've pulled it off." ■



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