



A ceramic bowl in the Clementine Hunter series shows the harvest of cotton that the artist remembered from her childhood.

Folk art in the family



ABOVE: Inspired by the folk art he collects, Doug Gitter and his family designed a collection of ceramics.

RIGHT: Cathy and Chase Gitter, left, with Annie and Doug and the family's King Charles spaniel, Gus, Annie, 13, was showing the family's Clementine Hunter-inspired ceramics collection at the Atlanta Gift Show when she was approached by scouts from Oprah Winfrey's magazine.



Clementine Hunter-inspired ceramics among Oprah's favorite things

BY R. STEPHANIE BRUNO
Special to The Advocate

Annie Gitter stood at the counter of the Gitter Gallery booth at the Atlanta Gift Show, chatting up would-be buyers and introducing them to the line of Clementine Hunter ceramic pieces that her family had developed. One pair of prospective customers seemed especially enchanted.

"I asked them where their store was, and they told me they weren't with a store, that they were with a magazine," the 13-year-old entrepreneur from Metairie recalled. "When I read their name tags and saw 'Oprah,' I couldn't believe it."

That was just the beginning. The scouts took their find back to Oprah Winfrey, who named the Gitter Gallery's Clementine Hunter line one of her "Favorite Things" for 2013 and included pictures of one of the pieces in the December issue of Oprah Magazine.

Since then, Entertainment Tonight, USA Today, the Huffington Post, CNN, the "Rachael Ray Show" and US Magazine have all come calling, enthralled by the work of the renowned folk artist herself as well as by their careful translation into accessible ceramic platters, plates and bowls.

Doug and Cathy Gitter, Annie's parents, developed the line after receiving permission from Hunter's estate in Natchitoches. Doug Gitter had become immersed in the culture of self-taught artists 25 years ago when he was a law student at Loyola University in New Orleans.

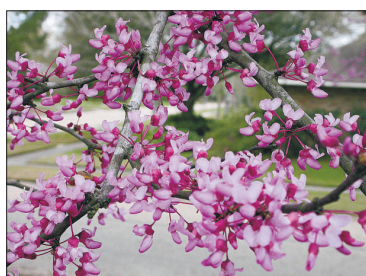
"Other guys in my class would be going on hunting trips on weekends and I would be going to rural Alabama to meet a self-taught artist I had learned about," Doug said. "It was my father who got me interested in art way back then."

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Advocate photos by VERONICA DOMINACH

"Baptism on the Cane River" in ceramic and canvas. A percentage of the proceeds from the sale of Gitter's ceramics goes to Clementine Hunter's estate to further promote the artist's work.



Native to the Southeast, the Eastern redbud adds color to February landscapes. Plant this deciduous tree in front of an evergreen plant or structure so its flowers will stand out and contrast with the background.

Prized plants

Garden Club names redbuds, cedars as Freeman Horticulture Medal 2013 winners

BY R. STEPHANIE BRUNO
Special to The Advocate

One of the most appealing aspects of our climate is the fact that we can garden year-round (as long as you don't mind perspiring a little over the summer months).

But just because our gardens aren't now dormant or, worse, buried under a foot of snow, doesn't mean that we don't have garden interests in common with our northern neighbors. A quick look at the Garden Club of America's 2013 awards re-

veals trees and plants that can thrive here in Zone 9 as well as in cooler climates.

A good example is the Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), which was awarded the Freeman Horticulture Medal for 2013. The award is the only one made by the Garden Club to a plant (although other medals are awarded to people) and is named in memory of Montine "Tina" McDaniel Freeman, a longtime New Orleansian and member of the New Orleans Town Gardeners.

The award recognizes native

plants which are "under-utilized but which possess superior ornamental and ecological attributes."

The Eastern Redbud possesses both. From March through May, blossoms of deep pink and purple appear on its bare branches in shades of pale to deep pink and purple, creating a dramatic display against its dark, smooth bark. Characterized by the club as a "harbinger of spring," the Eastern redbud leafs out after blossoming, with leaves eventually turning dark green, then yellow in the fall

before dropping.

Native Americans boiled redbud bark to make tea to treat whooping cough and derived an astringent from the bark to treat dysentery, according to the USDA. Flowers were fried and eaten. Bees harvest pollen from the flowers, butterflies and hummingbirds feed on the nectar. Seeds provide food for Bobwhite quail and songbirds.

The tree is even somewhat fire tolerant — it will regenerate after a fire, sprouting from its

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Don't cut the leaves on potted amaryllis

My son gave me a potted amaryllis for Thanksgiving and I followed the instructions that were included. It has a flower stalk in the center of the leaves but I am having a hard time keeping the long leaves in place. Can I cut the leaves shorter to make the plant more manageable?



GROUND WORK
BOB SOUVESTRE

Forced bulbs grown indoors often stretch for light. Flower stalks are weak and leaves grow long. Do not cut the leaves. Try to arrange them so all the leaves receive sunlight.

Once the flower dies, cut the stalk. And when spring arrives plant the bulb outside in a sunny

to partially sunny spot.

My 'Cabaret' ornamental grass is all brown. Is it OK to cut the leaves during winter?

Yes, no harm will come to the plant. But I like the foliage to remain until mid-February because it rustles with winter breezes and I enjoy the sound it creates in the landscape.

I collect Christmas trees around the neighborhood and take them to my fishing camp. Is one type of tree better than another for attracting fish?

I don't know. The fish are looking for cover and because Christmas trees have been pruned, they are densely branched, making them perfect habitat, so I would not think it matters.

I recently built a small lean-to greenhouse to protect my plants during the winter. They looked good last month but now they look sickly and leaves are turning yellow. Could it be the fumes from the fiberglass that I smell when I open the door? Please help!

Fumes are unlikely. Only clear fiberglass is recommended. If a colored product was used that could be the problem.

Plants will drop leaves if they are not acclimated to a new growing environment due to a change in light intensity and exposure and temperature. A cold draft or proximity to the heater can injure plant foliage.

If the greenhouse is tight and not vented on sunny days it may get too hot.



Advocate file photo

Forced bulbs like amaryllis reach for the sun, so keep their leaves long and separated.



Advocate photo by VERONICA DOMINACH

Folk art hangs in the breakfast nook of the Gitter home in Old Metairie.

FOLK

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Doug Gitter's dad, Dr. Kurt Gitter, is a prominent art collector who specializes in Asian art, some of which is on display in the dining room of the Gitter home on Sycamore Drive in Old Metairie. Thanks to his father's encouragement, Doug discovered a genre of art that moved him deeply and then set out to learn as much about it as he could.

"That meant visiting the artists at their homes and talking to them about their lives," Doug said. "I visited Bernice Sims in Brewton, Ala., and Toby Hollinghead in Opp, Ala. I visited Jimmie Lee Sudduth in Fayette, Ala. I met Malcah Zeldis when I was a second year law student and had a clerkship in Manhattan. I got hooked."

Today, the Gitter family home is filled with works that Doug purchased from some of the artists he met. Sudduth, Sims and Hollinghead (who makes Christmas ornaments for Annie and her brother Chase every year) are all well-represented. Howard Finster's "Elvis at 3" hangs on a wall leading from the kitchen to the entry foyer, and one of his Coke bottles is on the kitchen wall.

"Finster was a preacher, and he said God spoke to him. He realized that no one was listening to his sermons, so he started painting to convey the Lord's word," Gitter explained. "That is why his art is inscribed with Scripture and every piece is numbered."

What emerged for Gitter

through decades of visiting, meeting and studying self-taught artists is a deep-seated reverence for their passion for artistic expression.

"It didn't matter that they couldn't buy canvas or oil paints; they used whatever they had available," Gitter said, "Take Jimmy Lee Sudduth.

He used mud, mixed it with house paint and used his fingers to paint. They didn't even think of it as making art, just expressing themselves."

One of the best-known and most respected folk artists, Clementine Hunter didn't begin painting until she was 50 or so and living on Melrose Plantation in the Africa House, but once she got her hands on paints and brushes, she couldn't stop.

"Most of her pieces were memory paintings — images drawn from her experiences as a young girl, working in the cotton and cane fields in the late 1800s," Gitter explained. "Her paintings depict life in the south before farming became mechanized, when everything was done by hand. She would paint narratives that would show cotton being picked, then baled, then going to the gin, all on the same painting. No one else painted that, and certainly no one who had actually done the work."

In the process of coming to know her works and those of other self-taught artists, Gitter began to feel a sort of calling himself and made it his mission to find a way to spread the word about the artists and have their work appreciated. There is no better way to see it that their works live on than

to make them available affordably, not just in museums or private collections.

"I started by going to all of the estates of artists whose works I had come to admire and getting a license to reproduce some of the works as high quality giclée prints, each created with nine layers of archival inks," Gitter said. "Sometimes that meant chasing down dozens of heirs, but the result was a collection of canvases that are affordable and make it possible for more people to be able to get to know and appreciate the work."

Then Gitter got the idea of moving away from canvas to ceramics, a concept that took a while for Hunter's estate to embrace.

"I was intrigued by the idea of taking something that was two-dimensional and making it three-dimensional, finding the right shapes for the right piece," Gitter said, "The estate finally agreed as long as they had complete say-so and veto rights."

Thus began a five-year quest to develop pieces that met with the approval of the Hunter estate and fulfilled Gitter's own meticulous expectations.

The result is a group of nine pieces that celebrate the artist and offer an intimate look into her life.

"Celebrations were important in life on the plantation — weddings, baptisms, funerals — and all of those she painted many times," Gitter said. "All you have to do to do is study each piece in the collection carefully to understand the stories she is telling."

One example is "Pecan Picking." It shows women with bas-

kets catching the pecans after a man with a stick beats them out of a tree. In the tree on the far left, a youngster hangs upside down, shaking the tree to improve the harvest. Another, "Fish Fry," reads from right to left and shows the fish being cleaned, then battered, then cooked. The small details of everyday life depicted in Hunter's paintings and their ceramic counterparts offer insights into history more richly conveyed in images than in words.

Chase Gitter, Doug's son, is on board with the art collecting and also participates in the Gitter Gallery business. But he has marked off his own territory with a poster on his bedroom door of clown zombies, a warning that it is a no-folk-art zone.

Almost any other place else is game, though, and therefore many arresting works are on display in the two powder rooms downstairs.

Doug Gitter laments having to keep some of his folk art collection in a downstairs closet for lack of wall space, and recently came up with an idea that would yield more room. But Cathy Gitter has quashed the notion.

"What he wants to do is to brick in the two windows in the living room," she said. "He told me, 'We don't really need those windows,' but I had to draw the line somewhere."

To see images of the Clementine Hunter Collection, go to www.gittergallery.com

R. Stephanie Bruno is a contributing writer. Contact her at rstephaniebruno@gmail.com.

Woman, 84, wants marriage without the legal headaches

Dear Annie: I am an 84-year-old woman in love with a 92-year-old man. Since I'm rather old-fashioned, I do not believe in living with him unless we are married. However, marrying him could change our financial status. Is there any service that could be performed so that we may live together legally and not impact our children's legacy? — **In Love**

Dear In Love: Please discuss this with a lawyer who specializes in marital law. There are clergy who will perform religious marriage ceremonies that may not be legally binding, depending on the state you live in, whether you present yourselves as a married couple and whether your state recognizes this as a common-law marriage. (The same goes for any secular ceremony that pronounces you "married" without a valid state license. It could, in fact, be legally binding.) A lawyer also can discuss a prenup that will protect your assets for your children, allowing you to marry legally without worrying about your financial legacy.

Dear Annie: You've printed a few letters about married couples who are not enjoying a good sex life. I think there is more advice you should give on this subject.

First of all, married couples should not sleep in the same bed. Sleeping together causes people to become overly familiar with each other, leading to boredom.

It should be special. Therefore, in order to preserve a good sex life, each spouse should sleep in a separate room and use a separate bathroom.

As far as the physical problems, there are many possible reasons for a low libido. But for men, it's food preservatives, which often contain salt. Men who want to stay virile



ANNIE'S MAILBOX
SUGAR AND MITCHELL

must avoid packaged foods.

Besides over-familiarity and physical problems, there is the issue of what to do in bed. Couples who explore the Persecutor-Victim-Rescuer story are usually able to develop some very exciting scripts. This makes the bedroom experience much more intellectually stimulating and fun. It's not just a random experience, but rather a planned game that both people can look forward to. — **R.**

Dear R: You certainly have some interesting theories, some of which may be helpful. Of course, not all married couples can afford a spare bedroom and bathroom — in which case, that is impractical. And we have no information on salt-peter in packaged food and the impact those foods may have on a man's libido.

Even so, avoiding those foods may do nothing for a woman's libido, and that seems to be the more common problem. But we agree that playing fantasy roles in bed can add some spark to one's sex life, and we recommend it for couples who wish to try, as long as it doesn't become dangerous or abusive.

Email your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, c/o Creators Syndicate, 737 Third Street, Hermosa Beach, CA 90254. © 2013 Creators.com

Toddlers will have time to acquire formal niceties

Dear Miss Manners: I have a 3-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter. My best friend has two daughters, roughly the same ages, and is of the opinion that I must begin teaching my son "to behave like a gentleman."

For now that includes pulling out chairs for girls, opening and holding doors for them, standing every time they sit down at or leave the table, that sort of thing. Down the line this would expand to include actions like always paying when with a woman, whether or not they are on a date, and having her wait while he runs around to open the car door for her.

I disagree with her. As gallant and romantic as such actions would be, I fear in the coming years he would be more likely to offend the women and embarrass the other men involved.

(Not that I think this is the way it should be, but I believe it is where our society is heading.) I am teaching both of my children to simply be courteous to others. Whoever gets to the door first opens and holds it for the person behind him (or

her). They both should stand while greeting a new person approaching the table ... you get the idea.

Gentle Reader: Indeed. Those are the standard courtesies of our time. Little girls who are being brought up to expect to have their bills paid by male acquaintances and their male bosses to rise when they enter the room are in for some big shocks.

Miss Manners admits to hoping that reasonable gallantry survives — in the social sphere only — but not by expecting it of 3-year-olds. Like toddlers in mini versions of dinner jackets and other adult clothing, that would be just a bit icky.

Dear Miss Manners: I have received a few Christmas cards with photos of tween and teen girls in string bikinis. I am a mother and this makes me cringe. What is your opinion?

Gentle Reader: That these cards were misaddressed.

Send your questions to Miss Manners at her website, www.missmanners.com; to her email, dearmissmanners@gmail.com; or through postal mail to Miss Manners, Universal Uclick, 1130 Walnut St., Kansas City, MO 64106. © 2013 Judith Martin

PLANTS

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roots (thanks to a deep taproot system).

In a home landscape, the Eastern redbud can be grown as a multi-trunked shrub or a small tree, but be sure to wait until blooms have faded to prune, as blooms appear on the previous year's growth.

The honorable mention award made by the Garden Club in 2013 is also a good choice for our climate. The Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*)

earned honorable mention for its "spectacular fall color" and the fact that it is "a beacon for hungry migrating birds."

Attracted by the sour, dark blue fruit are robins, several thrushes, the Northern mockingbird, red-bellied woodpecker, scarlet tanager, the cedar waxwing, and many more. Cavities in the trunk form nesting sites and the Black Gum is also a good honey tree, according to the USDA.

Although it is not a tree that can be cultivated in a home landscape, the Stinking Cedar (*Torreya taxifolia*) was award-

ed special recognition by the Garden Club due largely to its critically endangered status.

The evergreen derives its elegant common name from the strong, resinous odor released when its cones or leaves are bruised.

According to the United States Botanic Garden, the Torreya is "one of the oldest tree species on earth with fossil records over 165 million years old." It was one of the Southeast's most abundant trees in the early 1900s, but over-harvesting (for Christmas trees, if you can believe it), pollutants,

and fungal disease reduced the population to the point that there are now only about 200 trees remaining, making the species critically endangered.

In May, the Garden Club of America holds its annual meeting here in New Orleans and will announce the 2014 winner of the Freeman Medal, as well as honorable mention and special recognition awardees. Stay tuned!

R. Stephanie Bruno is a contributing writer. Contact her at rstephaniebruno@gmail.com.

New Orleans Area Home and Garden Calendar

SATURDAY, DEC. 28

CREOLE CHRISTMAS TOUR: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 1850 House Museum Store, 523 St. Ann St. Five historic houses dressed in Creole Christmas decorations, followed by the Creole Christmas Story and refreshments. Self-guided tours sponsored by Friends of the Cabildo. \$25. (504) 523-3939.

THURSDAY – SUNDAY, JAN. 2 TO 5, 2014

FRENCHMEN ART MARKET: Thursday to Saturday 7 p.m. to 1 a.m., Sunday 6 p.m. – midnight, 619 Frenchmen St. Weekly market featuring arts, crafts and other attractions.

Free. (504) 941-1119 or www.frenchmenart-market.com.

SATURDAY, JAN. 4

FRERET STREET MARKET: Noon to 5 p.m., 4521 Freret St. Market featuring dozens of vendors of original products, live music, and food. Free. (504) 638-2589 or www.freretmarket.org.

THURSDAY, JAN. 9

SIMPLY SILVER EXHIBIT: OPENING RECEPTION: 5 to 7 p.m., Longue Vue House and Gardens, 7 Bamboo Rd. Exhibition featuring

items from the Longue Vue collection and those loaned by private collectors. Free. (504) 293-4712 or www.longuevue.com

SATURDAY, JAN. 11

OCH ART MARKET: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., 1614 Ortha Castle Haley Blvd. Locally made crafts and unique items. Free. (985) 250-0278 or www.ochartmarket.com

To submit items to the home and garden calendar, contact R. Stephanie Bruno at rstephaniebruno@gmail.com.