



# the Evolution of an artist

W.M. (BILL) RADER  
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BY ASHLI SHACKELFORD WHEATON

Herb Rader was born the son of a painter. His father, Bill Rader, didn't serve in the ranks with Van Gough or Monet, but he could have easily been considered a master at his trade of painting signs and billboards, in addition to the interiors and exteriors of some of Middle Tennessee's most prestigious homes.

At the tender age of 12, Herb began spending his summer vacations helping his father paint. The father-son duo painted signs, billboards, walls and shutters during the hot summer days of Herb's teenage years. Herb recalls observing his father at work, committing his techniques to memory, and imitating his every move. "Dad taught me everything he knew," Herb remembers quietly. "He was also a carpenter, which helped me learn about furniture."

Upon graduation from high school, Herb saw it only fitting to begin working with his father on a full-time basis. And so began his life's work, a new artist emerges, and slowly evolves.

For 20 years, Herb Rader worked diligently at mastering the art of decorative painting. "I did period finishes, wall washes, and glazes at first," he recalls. Most of his work was done in large homes, and occasionally, a homeowner would commission him to restore a piece or two of furniture. "I really liked doing the furniture," he admits, "I always wished I could focus solely on that aspect of the business."

These days Herb is concentrating on the furniture he loves so much, and

less on the decorative painting he relied on for so long. "I so enjoy working with people who appreciate fine antiques and old finishes - people who know how to look for the lines and the age in these primitive pieces," he beams.



Consequently, Herb and his wife Tanya, a MIS consultant at Vanderbilt, seek out unusual architectural pieces and aged antique furniture that has been damaged or neglected. This talented artist takes what some would consider trash at first glance, and turns it into treasure. He is also gifted with the ability to take newly constructed pieces and make them appear as though they could have easily belonged to your great great grandmother.

"My clients show me pictures of things they like and I duplicate them; I might be able to find the piece, or I can make it," then he adds, "It has taken 20 years of observing furniture and finishes and the way old pieces of furniture age to perfect my skill."

Behind the eight-foot fortress that surrounds Morton Square Antiques (Herb's business) and the Rader's charming cottage, you'll find benches made from old six-panel doors, headboards

made from pieces of old wrought iron fencing and signs, and tables made from beam supports. Restored turn-of-the-century baby carriages, pie safes, wash stands, and ice boxes can also be found in the Rader's unique showroom.



And don't worry if the piece you love is fire-damaged, missing a vital component, or is rotted out in places. Herb can transform even the ugliest duckling into a beautiful swan.

Only his talents don't stop there. Herb also creates decorative hand-painted murals, wall and ceiling scenes, and a vast array of finishes ranging from fossils to hand-painted stenciled wallpaper to stone. One of the most amazing displays of his work can be found in a local paint store. On a flat wall, Herb hand painted a gold framed portrait of the "Blue Boy" holding a Porter Paint can. The wall is finished to look like

stone, with a three-dimensional column on either side.

Obviously, this humble artist possesses the patience of Job. His work often involves days of distressing his surface, followed by days of bringing it back to life. And when



he is finished, his lucky customer has a true original.

It's safe to say that Herb Rader has begun a revival. His canvases take many forms. But whether an ancient wardrobe that is falling apart or a brand new wall in a brand new home, he takes his time and manipulates his subject with various processes to capture the period from which it came; or the period from which the owner wishes it came. Antique furniture, old forgotten fences, and boring walls - AWAKE! New life awaits at the hand of Herb Rader. ☒

