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# JEWELWOOD

*Woodworking artisan creates a gem of a product.*

By Ann Hauprich

Cindy Weed never could master Rumpelstiltskin's art of spinning straw into gold. But this gem of an artisan has managed to do the next best thing. She turns wood into jewels without the aid of fairy tale magic.

The transformation from coarse lumber to shimmering nuggets that resemble precious stones entails hours of painstaking labor at Cindy's home-based workshop in Enosburg Falls, Vt. It is essential to this mother of three that every earring, necklace and fashion accessory she designs and crafts is worthy of its Jewelwood trade name.

Although Cindy purchases her wooden "diamonds in the rough" at lumberyards in the United States and Canada, few are cut from trees native to North America. What might, at first glance, be mistaken for cheap kindling stacked in a corner of Cindy's rustic workshop is, in fact, expensive samples of exotic woods from places like Africa, Asia and South America.

Despite many years as a woodworking hobbyist, it wasn't until quite recently that Cindy learned of the existence of the beautifully colored and patterned exotic woods in which her Jewelwood business is rooted.

She had worked in a factory making wooden toys in the '70s and later made a lot of wooden country craft things for family and friends—out of pine and oak mostly. It was a fluke that she happened upon a piece of African zebrawood while visiting a lumber business in Quebec during the summer of 1987.

Cindy recalls being spellbound by the light brown wood with its striking dark brown zebra-like stripes. That same day, she was introduced to a

piece of peach-colored wood with shiny translucent flecks that resembled mica. "I was captivated by the light and dark, peachy reflective grain, which I later learned was a distinguishing characteristic of African leopardwood," she says.

With husband, Jim, on a total disability pension and three young children to support, Cindy could ill afford to buy the high-priced African woods. The average cost per board foot of most hardwood is less than \$1 compared with the \$8 to \$25 per board foot for most exotic woods. Yet something prompted the normally penny-conscious woman (who refers to herself as practical Cindy) to fork over \$15 for two tiny samples of African lumber.

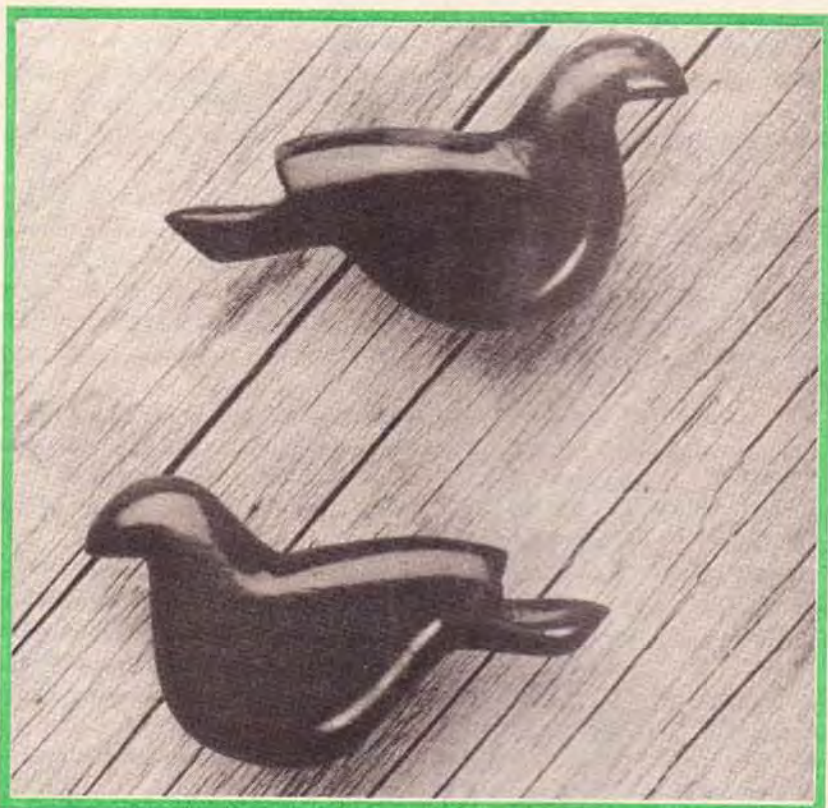
"I had made all kinds of wooden blocks, puzzles, Christmas ornaments and kitchen gadgets so I was familiar with using band saws, sand-

ers and drill presses. But I had never experimented with such expensive wood, and I will admit that I was a little apprehensive. It would be such a shame to see any of it go to waste."

After much deliberation, Cindy opted to make a 1-inch square pair of earrings as a gift for daughter, Olivia. "They look fairly primitive when compared to what I turn out today under the Jewelwood product name, but then I have learned a lot through trial and error and by reading everything about woodworking and jewelry-making that I can get my hands on."

Now, almost five years later, her designs range from delicate, tiny hearts to dangling ovals. The retail prices of \$10 to \$30 reflect not only the cost of the exotic woods used, but also the many hours spent handcrafting each individual pair.

"These are not really something



*The bird pins have been sculpted from snakewood from Guyana and Brazilian bloodwood.*





*Cindy's husband, Jimmy, helps her don a Jewelwood pendant made of lilac wood, the same wood used in her earrings. Note the jewel-like appearance of the wood, which is one of Cindy's favorites.*



*Top: Cindy screws fasteners to the backs of Jewelwood barrettes made from a wide variety of woods. Left: Waiting for the magic of Cindy's skills are some of the wooden "diamonds in the rough."*



you can mass produce and I am not a robot so I can only work so fast. I shoot for 50 pairs of earrings and 100 barrettes a week as a minimum, but occasionally my back hurts so much from the long hours of standing and leaning over machines, I have to go back out to the workshop at night to meet my quota." And there is no little sorcerer around to lend her a hand.

A typical day begins around 9 a.m. as Cindy strolls from her century-old home on 240 panoramic acres in the foothills of the Green Mountains to the 16 by 30-foot workshop just a few steps from her front door. The spacious outbuilding, a former milking parlor, was converted to a wood-working center by husband, Jim, about a decade ago to accommodate his custom window- and door-making business. He was forced to fold his business in the mid-1980s after becoming severely disabled by a

spinal condition. Cindy stresses the loads of expertise, knowledge and support he has contributed to her fledgling Jewelwood enterprise.

Heated by an old Vermont barrel wood stove, the workshop is equipped with a multitude of power tools including drill presses, a radial arm saw, a table saw, a planer, a joiner and some fast-paced rotary sanders. There is even a built-in vacuum cleaning system and a mammoth dust-collecting box to keep the air as free as possible of construction debris.

Each necklace, barrette and pair of earrings begins with a sketch of an original design by Cindy, who loves experimenting with new shapes, sizes and textures. No two Jewelwood objects are alike. And their creator is continually fascinated and a bit amused by reactions to her wooden gems.

"You have to understand that wood as a jewel is new to the senses so many people are skeptical that what they're looking at is actually wood. Another common reaction is to assume I've painted or drawn on the wood. People are astonished to discover what they're looking at is the exotic wood's natural grain enhanced by sanding and polishing.

Her children—Baxter, 15; Ben 14; and Olivia, 11—are enthusiastic about their mother's home-based enterprise, but can't really pitch in and help with production because of the level of skill and danger involved.

To achieve the desired finished product entails many steps, each one requiring an eye for detail and a skilled, steady hand. One wrong move and rare wooden gems can become little more than expensive

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## ■ SOAPFACTORY

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with trimmings from bars so we package them in these bags. They make ideal washcloths you can use in the shower." Waste not, want not.

The making of natural soap is at once simple and complex. Penny shows me a handmade, rectangular wooden tray almost as large as she is. "This is what you mix a batch in. The chemical reactions in the early stages can be dangerous so you have to be careful. It can eat right through clothing, but actually, doing it is pretty straightforward. A tray like this makes 96 bars."

Next, she shows me again that wicked-looking contraption with multiple blades. "This is for cutting after the mixture has hardened. The whole process for one set of bars takes a couple of days. All sorts of things can affect it, like humidity, so you have to give it careful attention.

"An awful lot goes into creating our product besides the actual making of the soap. The drawstring bags the bars come in are really works of art. They have to be hand-sewn and the designs on them are changed regularly. We use a lot of different skills. I think half of my time is spent running around to all the people who have a hand in putting this together. This town has a remarkable concentration of talent and I have been able to tap into that to make the business a success."

Penny is very conscious of the need for change. "You can't stand still. Right from the beginning, word-of-mouth was the main thing that kept boosting our sales. It led stores and sales representatives to us, but they always want something new, every spring and every fall.

"Fragrance is a prime example. We are constantly experimenting, looking for new ones or different combinations of old ones.

"And then there's design. American country has been losing popularity. French and English country is now in favor." She holds up one of the drawstring bags. It has an intricate network of curved stenciling

around the goose emblem. "See, we're making it more dainty and elaborate. Little things like that are vital. If you don't stay on top of the details, you are out of business."

Penny is very much in business. "We are all over the country now. My folks were bowled over not too long ago. They went into a store in Alaska, and what was right on display? Calico Goose from Maine!"

Why do people buy natural soap? "It has advantages over commercial soap. The ingredients are different in important ways. We keep the glycerin in, they let it drain out. Also they keep salts that we get rid of. These differences have important results." She has letters from some people with skin problems who claim her soap is the only one they use that doesn't aggravate their condition.

"Our soap doesn't jelly up into a lump or crack or dissolve as fast. It lasts longer, plus the unique fragrances and special packaging make it a wonderful gift item. As good a product as it is, you wouldn't give a relative or friend a bar of Ivory for their birthday, would you?"

And what of the future? "Well, I have recently remarried to Anton Fuller. I hope to keep expanding the business and adding new products. There is so much to do. I'd really like to go back to college and finish up that degree, too."

Penny also intends to continue giving adult craft courses in stained glass, basketry, soap-making, etc., in the Augusta and Topsham schools. She teaches groups in the Soap Factory itself, runs annual open house sessions at the farmhouse and continues the major renovations she has been doing on her home.

The multitude of possibilities doesn't rattle Penny. Her technique is to just keep moving all day from one project to another. By the time the sun sets, everything seems to get done.

Earning a living isn't her only reason for all this activity. It gives her a chance to grow and change. "And that's what life is all about," says Penny with a big grin.

As we emerge from the door of the

Soap Factory, Penny seems to be groping for a way to sum up the many different things we have been talking about. Finally she finds words. "I think the greatest benefit of all this is what it says to my children. It tells them the American Dream is real, that it can happen if they are willing to make it happen."

This is what drove waves of pioneers out across the prairies. But Penny has shown that you don't need a covered wagon and you don't need to trek over the horizon to find the Dream. You can find and build the Dream anywhere. You can even build it right here in Maine, in an old blue-trimmed farmhouse, just north of Bowdoinham.

For more information, write to Calico Goose Soaps, R.R. 1, Box 1315, Bowdoinham, ME 04008. ▼

## ■ JEWELWOOD

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firewood. And so the concentration involved is enormous. Protective goggles must be worn to shield Cindy's eyes from flying splinters, and earmuffs diminish the often deafening noise of the power tools. A dust mask or respirator protects her lungs from the toxic dust contained in some South American lumbers.

Cindy's personal favorites include burls and spalted woods. Burls, she notes, are abnormal growths, usually on the side of a tree. Spalt, on the other hand, is a decaying fungus that gets into the wood under certain circumstances and creates wonderful grain patterns. Though not an exotic wood in the classic sense, Cindy is also fond of cuts from lilac bushes. It has beautiful purple grain and is very hard and fine-textured. "It's a great eye-catcher and a real favorite with the ladies," notes Cindy.

Among the greatest challenges facing Cindy is the marketing of Jewelwood—knowing in which craft shows, stores and galleries to feature her work. As a novice entrepreneur, she once spent weeks preparing for a big show only to learn there were no



indoor spaces left. Undaunted, she confidently invested \$135 in the last available outdoor space. A freak snowstorm turned her visions of dollar signs into lumps of coal as potential customers hurried past her tent to spend their money inside where it was warm and dry.

Insisting on an indoor booth at the next show proved a wise decision. Prospective buyers took their time examining her product and many eagerly handed over cash for the novel wooden jewelry.

From that point on, Cindy was bound and determined to make Jewelwood work. She began subscribing to a variety of fine arts and craft magazines and devoured every library book she could find on woodworking, jewelry-making and small business management.

Best of all, galleries of distinction are starting to take note of her product. Jewelwood is now featured at the Vermont State Craft Center in Windsor, Vt., and at the Northwest Gallery of Fine Woodworking in Seattle, Wash., as well as at other locations across the United States and Canada.

"I am pleased that I can do something I like from my home and it's nice to get recognition from strangers for the work that I do, but what still means the most to me and gives me the most pleasure, by far, is my family. It may sound funny," giggles Cindy, "but I almost have to discipline myself to be lazy. It would be very easy to become a workaholic, but I don't want that for me or my family."

Therein lies the real magic behind the lady who transforms wood into jewels.

Those interested in learning more about Jewelwood of Vermont should write to Cindy Weed, R.D. 2, Enosburg Falls, VT 05450. ▼

## ■ STATE DOLL

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**Row 2:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn.

**Row 3:** Hdc in next st, work 2 hdc in

each of next 2 sts, hdc in next st, ch 2, turn. (6 sts)

**Rows 4-5:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn.

**Row 6:** Hdc in next st, work 2 hdc in next st, hdc in next 2 sts, work 2 hdc in next st, hdc in next st, ch 2, turn. (8 sts)

**Rows 7-11:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn.

**Row 12:** Hdc in each st across, fasten off. (8 sts)

**Sleeves (Make 2):**

**Row 1:** With yellow, ch 12, hdc in 3rd ch from hook and in each ch across, ch 2, turn. (10 sts)

**Rows 2-4:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn. (10 sts)

**Row 5:** Hdc in each st across, fasten off.

**Collar:**

**Row 1:** With yellow, ch 28, hdc in 3rd ch from hook and in each ch across, fasten off. (26 sts)

**Construction of Blouse:**

With right sides together, place top of 1 front to top of back so ends are flush. Stitch in place. Repeat with other front. Fold sleeves in half and stitch together. Place between sides of blouse at top. Mark spot where bottom of sleeve rests. Stitch each side up to this point. Place each sleeve inside blouse. Stitch around opening, securing sleeve in place. Turn right side out. Stitch collar in place. Stitch buttons evenly down front of blouse. Place Velcro in opening.

## VEST

**Back:**

**Row 1:** With gold, ch 12, hdc in 3rd ch from hook and in each ch across, ch 2, turn. (10 sts)

**Rows 2-7:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn.

**Row 8:** Hdc in each st across, fasten off.

**Front (Make 2):**

**Row 1:** With gold, ch 2, hdc in 3rd ch from hook and in next ch, ch 2, turn. (2 sts)

**Rows 2-3:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn. (2 sts)

**Row 4:** Work 2 hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn. (4 sts)

**Row 5:** [Hdc in next st, work 2 hdc in next st] 2 times, ch 2, turn. (6 sts)

**Rows 6-7:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn. (6 sts)

**Row 8:** Hdc in each st across, fasten off.

**Construction of Vest:**

With right sides together, place top of front to top of back so that ends are flush. Stitch in place. On each side, stitch sides together  $\frac{1}{2}$ " from bottom. Cut 24 pieces of brown yarn, each 8" long. Fold each piece of yarn in half. Insert hook through first bottom stitch on vest. Catch loop on hook and pull through. Catch ends on hook and pull through loop. Repeat with each stitch on bottom. On each piece of yarn, place 3 beads: brown, yellow, brown. Knot end.

## SPLIT SKIRT

**Rnd 1:** With gold, ch 30, join, ch 2, hdc in each ch around, join, ch 2. (30 sts)

**Rnds 2-6:** Hdc in each st around, join, ch 2.

**Row 7:** Hdc in each of the next 15 sts, ch 2, turn. (15 sts)

**Rows 8-9:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn. (15 sts)

**Row 10:** [Hdc in each of next 4 sts, work 2 hdc in next st] 3 times, ch 2, turn. (18 sts)

**Row 11:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn. (18 sts)

**Row 12:** [Hdc in next 2 sts, work 2 hdc in next st] 6 times, ch 2, turn. (24 sts)

**Rows 13-15:** Hdc in each st across, ch 2, turn. (24 sts)

**Row 16:** Hdc in each st across, fasten off.

Fasten gold to 16th st of Rnd 6. Repeat Rows 7-16. Stitch edges of legs together. Cut 48 pieces of brown yarn, each 3" long. Attach to bottom of legs in same manner as vest. Weave 12" ribbon through top of skirt so that it ties in front. ▼

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