



FORGING AHEAD

TWENTY FIRST CENTURY METALSMITH DESIGNS

Amid the strokes of a power hammer, the heat of a coal forge, and the blue and gold sparks flying like fireworks from a rotating grinder, a meticulous "metalsmith" attempts to unite the past with the present. In a 73-year-old tobacco barn in the middle of an Horry County cornfield, traditional meets contemporary, Victorian joins modern, old melds with new. Welcome to Grainger Metal Works, where classical blacksmith work is combined with modernistic designs and techniques.



ACCORDING TO OWNER CARL GRAINGER, THIS IS AN "ARCHITECTURAL METALWORKS SHOP!" "Architectural" includes railings, furniture, gates, interior and exterior features, and everything from the strictly functional to the elaborately artistic. A unique aspect of Grainger's craft is the fact that he does both forging—heating and hammering metal into shape—and fabricating—cutting metal and welding the pieces together.

Grainger began his career in metal in 1980, and took his first entrepreneurial step in 1988 when he and a partner bought a small metal shop in Conway. After a year of working at his own place, Grainger discovered Peter's Valley Craft Center in New Jersey where he took his first blacksmith course. The class, "Plant Forms in Iron," was an inspiration. While learning the art of forming leaves, flowers, and cattails, he says he "discovered what I wanted to do."

To broaden his skills, he enrolled at John C. Campbell Folk School, in Brasstown, North Carolina, which has a large blacksmith program.

Although he intended to take only one course during his first year, Grainger was "smitten" and ended up taking three or four classes. To further his knowledge of the trade, he sought to study under master blacksmiths, such as the late Francis Whittaker.

A self-proclaimed "metalsmith" who has turned metalworking into an art form, Grainger now creates designs that range from the simple to the complex, and he strives to produce work that is both creative and original.

According to Grainger, many people like the traditional or "Charleston look" on their gates and railings. This design is often seen on many older homes, and its dark iron fences add to the elegance of a structure. Some, however, prefer a more contemporary style, one that seems to fit with modern trends. One client wanted a Bahamian look, and the finished product was a wavy blue handrail sporting colorful tropical fish.

Looking at some of his ornate pieces, it's easy to marvel at Grainger's creations. The fine ebony grooves on an iron hand rail or the delicate silvery aluminum veins on a freshly forged leaf reflect both expertise and intricate craftsmanship. The process at which such beauty is achieved, however, is most difficult and requires more precision than generally imagined.

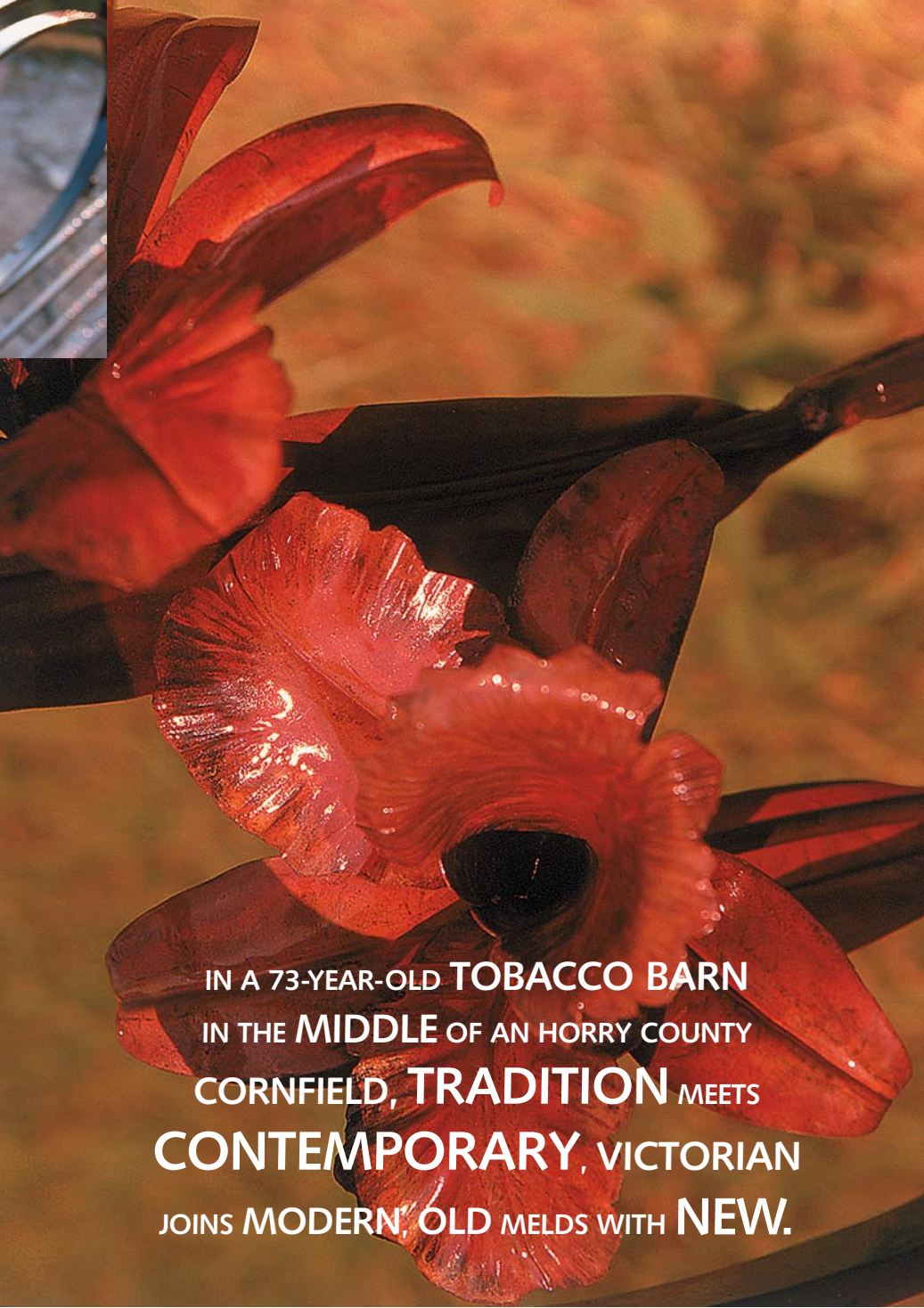
When Grainger begins a project—say, a handrail, the piece most frequently requested—he attempts to visualize a design suitable for

the space where the piece will be placed. While design catalogs are available, Grainger enjoys envisioning a one-of-a-kind original. After pondering the setting, he then pulls out his sketchpad to draw designs for his customers. He tries to give potential buyers two or three design choices, ranging from the simple to the elaborate.

Depending on the job, he can use a variety of techniques and metals, including steel, bronze, copper, and aluminum, to achieve his goals. Almost every project lands on one of his "fab tables" at least once. It is on these dark brown tables that he draws his intricate patterns in white soapstone. He then heats, cuts, or shapes his metal to make it fit into the chalky sketch.

Grainger may forge an aluminum flower with the swift, consistent strokes of a hammer upon an anvil. Or he might weld several metallic pieces together, forming a unique shape, or fasten a shape to an ornate background. He will occasionally use color in his work, something that other blacksmiths tend to stay away from. "I combine the ways of the old with the ways of the new," Grainger says, summing up the purpose of his craft.

Despite the unique nature of his trade and the high demand for such special work, Grainger admits that he prefers to stay small and local. He also deliberately keeps his company at a modest size, employing only five others because he



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enjoys being able to "touch" every part of his work. Another reason for staying small is Grainger's strong devotion to home and family. "Marti is a great inspiration for me on many of my projects," Grainger says of his wife of 24 years who helped him establish his business. "I've always let her critique my designs to get a woman's perspective." His most prized piece is a headboard he designed and forged for her. "Two weeks of design time, several critiques, and 180 labor hours later, "Always and Forever" was created and given as a gift of love that I hope will be passed on for generations after me as a family treasure," says Grainger.

The couple live on a farm that has been in his

family for decades, and he works in a tobacco barn that was built in a community "barn raising" in 1929. Grainger wishes his ancestors could see what he is doing in the same shop where they labored so many years ago. Like the old logs that make up part of his shop, Grainger's traditional hammer and anvil reflect the blacksmiths of years gone by. And like the shop's glimmering new metal addition, his computer-assisted designs, high-powered tools, and modernistic thinking bridge the gap between the ancient and the conventional, fashioning a style that incorporates generations of art, combines the traditional and the novel, and thus creates a new aesthetic craft.

Big City Flair, Small Town Charm



Innovative



Casual



Fresh



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 Lunch: Tuesday-Friday 11:30-2
 Dinner: Tuesday-Saturday 5-9:30