

It's getting a little cold now for the Gourdguy to be working in his unheated garage, but he says he can move most of his operation indoors. At right, top to bottom: A giant wood moth clings to the wall, held there by a magnet placed over a nail behind the sheetrock. Worick used a burning tool and dye to make the details in the wings and body. This past Halloween, Earl Worick carved a multi-faced pumpkin that was displayed at CVS. When he lived in California, his award-winning pumpkins and other carvings became an annual community event. Worick is also a jeweler. He made this necklace from abalone shell, ebony and walnut. And he can draw! Worick recently took drawing lessons from the Art Center in Orange.

the "jewelry" gourd. That's what he makes bugs from. An elongated banana gourd makes a good giant insect abdomen. These gourds come from California. He tried to grow some here, but was disappointed in the result. "They've got a lot of brown spots on them that won't clear up."

He looks at a photograph of a flower that a friend gave him. This may be his next project. "I think maybe I could do it, but it would take 50 gourds," one for each petal. "But I don't know if I want to go into that," he hedges. In his garage, high-end jig saws, a drill press,

sander and band saw stand at the ready. At the work bench the burning tool is poised for action. Behind a screen his dyes and markers await his hand. "It's getting cold now, so I won't be working much," he says. Still, he can do some work in his house.

"I love for people to give me a challenge," he continues, eyes sparkling. "I like for people to say I don't believe that you can do this or do that. And if they do, I'll probably break my neck to prove them wrong." He produces one of his signature capos. "I probably made 50 of these and never made the same style twice."

What's interesting here, is that none of his work is for sale. And so, the fact that it is unattainable, makes it priceless.

"No. I'm just showing them," he says of his unique collection. "I'll leave it for my children, because if I sold it I couldn't get that much for it," he continues. "There's no way I could make my money out of it because it takes me a long time to make things...Some people who work with gourds, they can do the same stuff over and over. I can't do that. I don't like production. So, everything that I do is absolutely one of a kind."

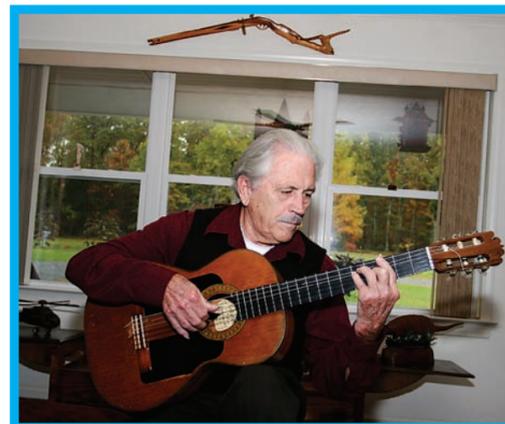


# ONE OF A KIND

When you walk, wide-eyed in wonder, into the art gallery that is Earl Worick's living room, it is easier for him to tell you what he has *not* made than what he has. He did not make the eagle. He did

fly perched on its scarlet petal. A tulip blooms. Bugs and a giant wasp cling to the wall, kept there magically by magnets placed over nails in the studs. From a twisted tree of vines hang gaily painted eggs. Birds' nests nestle.

Most, but certainly not all, of this work is pieced together from gourds. Nine gourds were required to make the tulip. The butterfly's intricately detailed wings were made from a large hard-shell gourd, into which Worick burned and dyed the distinctive monarch pattern. "Most



Earl Worick has been playing classical and Flamenco-style guitar since the late 1950s.

not make the dragons on the mantle. Just about everything else, he did.

Walking through this home near Lahore is something of a magical mystery tour. Under the picture window is a helicopter, a jet liner, a UFO and an armadillo. On a stand sits a calla lily with a monarch butter-

everybody likes the butterfly," he explains softly. Yes, most everybody does.

Earl Worick goes by the handle "Gourdguy." But this is much much more than some happy faces painted onto vegetables. He carves wood, makes furniture, crafts jewelry and draws pen and ink images.



Above, every bit of this blooming calla lily with a monarch butterfly was made from gourds. Below, crafted from a vine, this snake is so realistic that you naturally recoil from it.



He uses dyes and leather, and Japanese markers and burning tools and clay and abalone shell, walnut and ebony and you name it. It's colorful, intricate, a little twisted.

Tour the living room again. Here's a table; there's a stool; over here, a music stand; up against the wall, a guitar stand. He made and inlaid them all. Some things are fanciful, the product of an out-of this world imagination, like the "snake eating a snake that's coming out, and he's eating the snake that's eating him." Speaking of snakes, how about the one made from a vine? It is so realistic, you instinctively recoil from it.

Other things are grotesque, like the clay figure of a crystal ball fortune teller smoking a cigarette. Or how about the faces carved into apples that are then dehydrated. This "Appy Family," as he calls them, has shriveled into a stick-mounted collection of....well, it's hard to describe. Then there's the ladybug in combat boots. And what about the multi-limbed humanoid piece he calls "Animal Man," with horse hoofs and a snake for legs and long necked cranes for arms, all carved out of one piece of wood. Where did he get THAT from?

"I don't think of it as carving; I think of it as shaping," says Earl. "For instance, I don't take a block of wood and start carving, like a lot of carvers. A lot of work I've done, nature gave me a head start. And I would see something from what nature had done, and take it from there and just enhance it to where it was obviously to what I thought it should look like."

The vagaries of nature have



Above, Earl Worick at age 10. He grew up in Nasons during the Great Depression and attended school in Unionville. Below, the young and restless, Earl Worick dropped out of Unionville High School and eventually traveled all over the Far East. He learned to speak passable Japanese, played classical guitar and later became a manufacturing engineer in California.



inspired many an artist, but here's an artist who has gone way beyond and into a new dimension. Earl Worick is not just the Gourdguy; he's an artist, a craftsman, an engineer, a musician, a world traveler, a seer, an author...truly one of a kind.

His story is as varied as his art. It starts in a log cabin in Nasons in 1931 where he was born, right across Clifton Road from the Leland Park Memorial. He grew up during the Great Depression in a modest, four-room cinderblock house with his twin brothers and sister. "We were on relief at one time. It was a terrible time."

He went to school in Unionville, and dropped out. "I, like my brothers, made a stupid mistake and skipped out of school. I was in the second year of high school," he says sheepishly. Instead, he and a cousin, nicknamed "Snake," went to Coyne Electrical School in Chicago and learned how to repair radios. When he returned, he landed a job at Altman Equipment Company in Orange. But he soon tired of that. "I always did want to leave Orange...So, I volunteered for the draft and went in the Army for two years."

He found that he was well-suited to military life. He volunteered for the Air Force and was assigned as a ground radio maintenance and repairman to an aircraft control and warning site two miles from the Canadian border. Cutbank, Montana is one of the coldest places in the entire country. In wintertime, the only way to get around was by snowmobile. He learned later that a serviceman froze to death after he was

stranded when his snowmobile broke down.

From this god-forsaken place, Earl Worick was assigned to Korea, just as the war was winding down. "When we flew over Seoul from Japan, you could still see smoke down there, buildings, from the war...We still had some activities up in the mountains and that's where I was stationed."

Next stop, Japan, then the Philippines, then back to Japan "all without coming back to the States." By now he had been promoted to sergeant. At one point during this stint, he was



Earl Worick is the soldier in the middle in this photo taken at Camp Cooke, CA.

awarded a citation for the way he handled the command, design and construction of a mountaintop radio relay detachment that was 69 miles away from the closest base. Every single piece of equipment, furniture and construction material had to come up the mountain on someone's back.

In the Philippines, he heard a virtuoso guitar player. He said to himself, "My God that's the way I want to play!...I had heard music on the radio and knew that I liked the guitar. But it just so hap-

pens my two brothers; they're twins, and I, never liked the local music. We always liked semi-classical music. And for some reason I took to the guitar."

He became the only American member of the Kyushu Classical Guitar Society. He performed recitals; practiced 40 hours per week. On the advice from his teacher to reposition his right hand, he suffered nerve damage to his index finger, an injury that affected his playing the rest of his life. "All those years it never got back to normal," he says, disconsolately.

By now, this hayseed dropout from Nasons could speak passable Japanese, was playing and performing classical music, and preferred to hang out with the locals in Ashiya, Japan than with other Americans. He'd been on mountaintops and in jungle bottoms. He'd been to the coldest place in the 48 contiguous states, and now he was going to the hottest...Gila Bend, Arizona. "I'm telling you when we were coming out of Phoenix, coming down Route 80, I think it was, it was like going... in... to... an... oven."

So, when he was discharged, "I decided from there I wanted to go back to Japan. I kind of missed the Far East." He hopped a freighter and spent several months on his own in Japan, eventually returning to Orange. He landed a job at Virginia Metal Industries. It lasted all of two weeks. "I just couldn't hack it," he shakes his head from side to side. "There was something about it I didn't like."

He saw ad in the paper for "an advisor to the South Korean Army." He applied for the job with Litton Industries and became a contract technician. "I worked on radio relay sites on the highest mountains in Korea."

In 1967, Earl returned to the States and settled in Mountain View, California right in the heart of what would become Silicon Valley. He sent for his Korean-born wife, Suki. They had three daughters together before separating. A fourth daughter, from a previous marriage in Japan, recently found him on an Internet search. "We had been

separated for 45 years."

Back in California, where he lived for three decades, "I was getting tired of working on the benches and repairing radios, and I wasn't keeping up with the technology. So, I just bailed out. And in California, I got the most basic job you can get as a receiving inspector...I worked myself up from an inspector to a supervisor and then finally to a manufacturing engineer, and I never had any engineering schooling," he says. "I went to college at night for about three years... I studied English and math at night and became very interested in it. And all of my daughters are very good



Earl Worick, on the left, was the only American member of the Kyushu (Japan) Classical Guitar Society. His teacher Imai Tsuneta stands next to him.

with English, and we'd compete with each other and correct each other...I really am never happy with my education and still, to this day, have a problem with my English that comes from being born with people with no education." Yet, he managed to write a 200-page memoir.

It was while Earl was in California that he started carving. Actively following the classical and Flamenco guitar scene, he made key-changing devices, known as capos, for guitars. "And then that went on to making miniature guitars and different artwork having to do with guitars for guitarists. That got me going, and just one thing led to another."

Earl fetches his nylon-string classical guitar from the one-of-a-kind stand, puts his left foot on the one-of-kind footstool and plays Greensleeves. He follows that classic medieval tune with some Flamenco percussive flourishes, perfectly manicured fingernails sounding like castanets on the soundboard. Here, in this living room, he's not five miles away from where he was born and raised almost 80 years ago. But in his mind, he's in a smoky bodega in Spain.

He came back here in 1996, to take care of his brothers, one of whom has since died. "I'm kinda lookin' out for him," he says of the survivor. He

chuckles about their sometimes thorny relationship. "We have a lot of trouble because we just don't meet on the same wavelength." That's because Earl has been all over the world while his brother has hardly left the county. "As long as I stayed away from Virginia, when I came back, nothing had changed," he shrugs.

"I knew when I was a young guy that I was different from my brothers. I didn't like what they liked. I didn't

care all that much for hunting. I was more into mechanical and electrical stuff...I looked at things differently, and every time I'd see something I'd try and figure out a better way to do it, and that's the way I've been ever since."

He misses mechanical drawing, reading blue prints, designing and making fixtures. "I loved that kind of work," he says passionately. I love for people to come to me and ask me to do something; try to figure out a better way to do something. That was right up my alley."

He strolls into his gourd-strewn garage. Did you know there are 31 different species of hard-shell gourds? There's even a tiny variety called