

# PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

THE MAGAZINE OF SOUTHWEST LIVING

## TUCSON STYLE

The Barrio  
and Beyond



## David Flynn

quest

artist



ELLIOTT JONES

## forging ahead

Text by Catherine Hobbs

**D**on't expect David Flynn to shoe your horse—that's a farrier's job. This blacksmith is more likely to take the discarded tools of a farrier and turn them into small sculpture or to twist and hammer hot metal into a clean-lined side table. After all, underneath the coal dust and soot is a trained artist and teacher.

Flynn considers himself first an artist and then a blacksmith because of his educational background and his approach to designing new works. In 1987, he received his M.F.A. in sculpture from the University of Arizona; and previous to that, he had

completed undergraduate work in art education.

More important to him than his schooling, however, was the year he spent working alongside sculptor Fred Borchardt. Borchardt was blacksmithing in Tucson and doing "big hammer work," which really grabbed Flynn's attention during his master's degree studies. Also at this time, Flynn was teaching Beginning Sculpture and Three-Dimensional Design at the university. Borchardt's 250-pound Nazel power hammer offered Flynn the opportunity of working on larger pieces such as gates and bed frames, rather than simply

*Above: Artist/blacksmith David Flynn combines coal forging with big hammer work to mold steel into Southwestern furniture and accessories.*



*Clockwise, from top left: Wall sconces often are fashioned from pieces of copper and steel, as seen here. • The 22-inch-tall "Tammy" table features such details as curved claw feet and traditional joinery. • With its padded interior compartment, the "Martin" table provides storage for small collectibles.*



**NUEVO**  
**SOUTHWEST, INC.**

16001 N. Greenway - Hayden Loop • Scottsdale, AZ 85260 Phone (480) 489-1667  
11013 N. Scottsdale Rd. • Scottsdale, AZ 85254 Phone (480) 368-0660  
e-mail: nuevow@bigplanet.com • www.nuevosouthwest.com



The "Cattails" floor lamp boasts delicate glass sconces.



Our Striking, Idea-Filled Showroom May Knock You Off Your Feet . . .  
... but we'd rather it inspire you instead!

**Professionals and Home Decorators:**

Find the newest trends in flooring, at all price levels, in stunning settings, plus knowledgeable design and color assistance too.

To the Trade and Open to the Public  
Expert Installations Available

**480.892.8144**

350 East Elliot Road • Chandler, AZ 85225

Since 1991  
**WESTERN STATES FLOORING, INC.**

[www.westernstatesflooring.com](http://www.westernstatesflooring.com)

Western States Photography 480.888.8844

pounding out steel by hand. This was a dramatic change and heavily influenced the Minnesota native's blacksmithing future. "Fred still is, to this day, a great resource," says Flynn.

Next, Flynn taught high school art for several years before moving to Oakland, Calif., to smith alongside artist/blacksmith Michael Bondi of Michael Bondi Metal Designs. Here, Flynn further honed his skills, practicing techniques and gaining more knowledge.

From there, he spent time as the resident artist/blacksmith at Smokey Hills Artisan Community in Osage, Minn., where he demonstrated for tourists various traditional blacksmithing techniques. To earn a little extra money in the process, Flynn began making small metal fish and attaching them to willow sticks with fishing line. He then sold his five-dollar "fish sticks" to admiring children; sometimes he brought in as much as \$100 in a single day. He also reeled in his wife, Tammy, who admired his dedication to the craft.

In 1998, the Flynnns settled down in Tucson, and the artist opened his own studio. Diablo Forge, located in the desert off a dirt road, is Flynn's inspira-

tional oasis. "My commute is through the Saguaro National Monument," remarks the artist, who doesn't seem to mind driving away from the city every day.

At Diablo Forge, sparks fly as Flynn begins hammering out a spent horseshoe. Depending on the size of a piece of steel, he has anywhere from 35 seconds to two minutes to hammer, stretch, twist, bend and stamp the metal before it must be returned to the fire for reheating. He works mainly with so-called mild steel, which comes in various lengths. Also known as machine steel, low-carbon steel, soft steel and blacksmith iron, it is commonly used by blacksmiths.

"There isn't a day that the metal doesn't teach me something," Flynn confesses. Part of the learning process, he continues, comes from experimenting with different ways of forging. Coal forging, which has been practiced by blacksmiths for centuries, is the traditional method of firing up metal. Gas forging, on the other hand, has evolved with technology. It allows for a more controlled heat but fails to spark the inspiration Flynn thrives upon. He utilizes both methods at Diablo Forge, depending on the project.

"Whenever I do a new design or a new idea, I always do it here," he says,



This red table is a collaboration between Flynn and designer Mickey Meulenbeek.

# Tribune

EAST VALLEY • SCOTTSDALE

We Deliver the East Valley & the World



To Subscribe Call 480-TRIBUNE

*Elegant Main Entrances*

*Artistic Door & Stone*  
 Specializing in Custom Door Design, Lighting & Stone

15125 N. Hayden Rd., #125 • Scottsdale, Arizona 85260  
 (In the Scottsdale Design Center) • ph. 480-991-6700



*Gnarly claw feet grasp balls of stone on this hand-forged table.*

pointing to a small coal fire he started with a handful of newspaper. "It's the traditional way. Coal forge always gives me more. It helps to tell me what to do."

Surrounded by tables, gates, lamps, sconces and other pieces he has created, Flynn points out samples of the different decorative techniques he has mastered. These show the endless possibilities in metalwork. "The best way to figure out how to do something is to make six of them," tutors Flynn. Also proof of his talent are the many tools he has forged for himself through the years.

To give his creations a timeless look, Flynn likes to use traditional joinery whenever possible, as opposed to welding and grinding. A table leg, for example, has a tenon on one end that fits into a hole in the adjoining piece. The result is a seamless appearance—clean and done properly, in Flynn's eyes.

A Western theme runs through many of the artist's works: Cowboy hats, wagon wheels, slithering snakes, and barbed wire twists decorate clean-lined lamps and tables. Mickey Meulenbeek of Level 9 Functional Art in Scottsdale is among those Flynn has collaborated with in conceptualizing new pieces. The two met more than 20 years ago through Flynn's older sister, and have worked together off and on during Meulenbeek's interior design career and Flynn's blacksmithing endeavors.

*Finest Selection of  
Designer Fabrics &  
Trims in the South-  
west. Everything for  
Window Treatments,  
Foam Inserts, Huge  
Selection of Tassles,  
Swags and Buttons  
and More!*

**12th Anniversary Sale!**  
**April 18th - May 3rd**  
**15% OFF Storewide**

**FABRIC  
Depot  
& SUPPLY, INC.**

16803 N. Cave Creek Rd.  
Phoenix, AZ 85032  
602.788.7702

# MOVING?

Please let us know your new address  
so you don't miss a single issue.

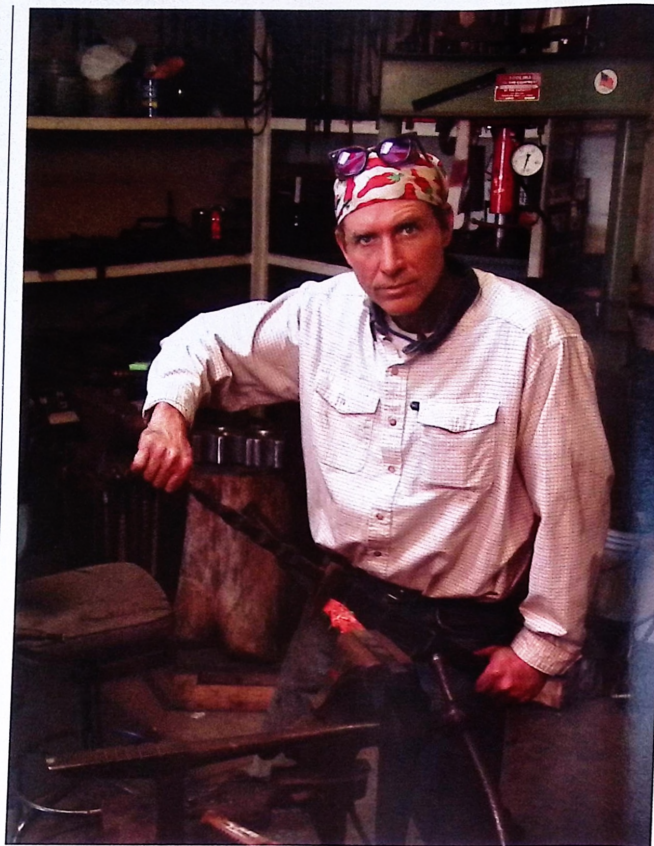
**CALL 1-800-501-6272**

CITIES  WEST  
PUBLISHING, INC.

**PHOENIX  
HOME & GARDEN**



*Always different  
Never ordinary...*



*Flynn at work in his Tucson shop.*

Most recently, the pair designed a small line of furniture. "We really were trying to shoot for smaller pieces . . . which we saw a hole in the market for," says Meulenbeek of their final prototypes and finished items. "The pieces work well with Southwestern decor, or for instance, you can take the snake off of the 'Tammy' table, and it's more eclectic."

At Level 9 Functional Art, Meulenbeek and husband, Martin, add some of the finishing touches to Flynn's designs. Martin is an electrical engineer and wires the lamps and wall sconces; Mickey adds finials and whimsical touches to lampshades for custom looks.

Back outside Diablo Forge, "Tammy" tables are being rusted to lighten the steel's color; later, a clear coat will be applied to stop the rusting process. Jon Molden, Flynn's brother-in-law, left the concrete business about a year and a half

ago to work at Diablo Forge. He is learning the tricks of the trade and appreciates the opportunity to try something new. "David's an excellent teacher," he comments. "I couldn't learn from anybody better. He's a true master."

Now Flynn is considering a merging of materials. Outdoor furniture with stamped concrete inlays and accents may be in the future for Diablo Forge, along with bamboo-style designs scheduled for completion in June.

As for the big picture, this teacher-at-heart dreams of opening a school for troubled and less-fortunate teens that would use blacksmithing to "instill confidence, build self-esteem and reinforce a strong work ethic." With an emphasis on "design, welding, job diversification and job placement," Flynn would strive to help others forge a future.

*See Resource Guide.* 



*Contemporary*

- fine furnishings and rugs
- unique accessories
- tech lighting
- custom lighting systems



**THINGZ**  
EXTRAORDINARY FURNISHINGS  
CUSTOM LIGHTING  
ACCESSORIES

Scottsdale Design Center  
15125 N. Hayden Rd., Ste. 100,  
Scottsdale, AZ 85260

Also visit our showroom in Carefree  
Easy St. (at the sundial) Carefree, AZ 85377

ph 480.368.8111 | fax 480.368.8397  
www.thingz-inc.com