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# BIG SKY

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## Formed in fire

ARTIST GLENN GILMORE  
BREATHES LIFE INTO STEEL

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# FORMED IN FIRE

Artist Glenn Gilmore breathes life into steel



Metal artist and blacksmith Glenn Gilmore cools a glowing-hot steel acorn, a design element he often incorporates in his fireplace screens.

*Certainly blacksmithing is a fascinating subject; logical yet mysterious; elementary in its importance to the development of civilization, yet highly sophisticated in the practice. To most, the blacksmith is epitomized by sheer brute strength but such an epitome misses the mark widely. Brains, imagination, the power of visualization are far more important than brawn to the smith. The secret of success in the trade is really intellect, and this must have been true of its beginning.*

— THE ART OF BLACKSMITHING, ALEX W. BEALER

BY WAYNE ADAIR

ANYONE WHO SHAKES HANDS WITH Glenn Gilmore knows he doesn't earn his living typing at a computer keyboard or shuffling columns of figures on a spreadsheet by clicking a mouse.

The power in his thick-fingered hands has been developed over decades of hammering, twisting and otherwise manipulating glowing-hot steel to produce metal artwork that defies logic; it seems delicate as an oak leaf and, at the same time, solid



as the tree that bears them.

As the photos accompanying this article show, Glenn thrives as an artist of vision and complexity who creates utilitarian objects like tables and fireplace doors but infuses them with life and movement from lifeless, motionless steel.

But his career, his first step on his path to creativity, had lowly beginnings — literally.

A native of Michigan, Glenn started out as a shoer of horses who studied his craft at the Wolverine Farrier School.

“I took the 12-week course to learn the basics,” he said. “We’d make our own shoes, had tools to punch the nail holes. For the first few years, I used a coal-fired forge but then bought a propane forge.”

Glenn described that simple, basic phase of his career as satisfying and he enjoyed his association with other farriers in Michigan, and his humble beginnings as a horseshoer definitely laid the groundwork for his current career.

“To get that shoe on the horse, you’ve got to bend the metal and shape it — and through that process you start to see what you can do when the metal is hot,” he said. “So when I quit shoeing horses, I felt a little guilty about it because I had known all these other horseshoers and we were all in it together. It was just part of the process to learn what I needed to learn to move on to the next stage and it wasn’t the idea that I was quitting — I was just moving on.”



This fireplace screen, and the close-up photo below, show the meticulous, exacting details of the unique designs that originate in Gilmore’s shop.



He said he has learned in his career that professional progression is a series of learning increments — of stepping-stones moving past today’s work into tomorrow’s promise.

“I had a friend who also went to the farrier school who was interested in decorative forge metal work so he kept trying to drag me down that road,” Glenn said, “so I started looking into that. In 1978, I went to New York to a big conference and saw all kinds of forge metal work, realized what could be done and I got pretty excited by that.”

Inspired by the level of creativity he saw at that conference in New York, Glenn began thinking beyond his work with horses, exploring the more creative aspects of forging metal. At that career-changing conference, he met a man from Colorado, Francis Whitaker, who had studied in Germany when he was a teenager back in the 1920s.

“He had been teaching blacksmithing his whole life so in 1979, I signed up for one of his classes with him in North Carolina, and I continued to study with him for a number of years,” Glenn said.

His quest for a more creative career bore fruit in 1980 when he was awarded his first commission to design and forge a large, free-standing fireplace screen for clients in Michigan. He had been making smaller art objects that he sold at art fairs, but that first commission marked a significant advance in his professional aspirations.

In 1981, thanks to a grant from the Michigan Creative Arts Council, he began to study pattern development in Damascus steel, an ancient process that combines steels of differing hardnesses, layered and hammered together over

and over at high heat to form a single alloy of legendary toughness and edge-holding ability. The famed Japanese Samurai sword represented the pinnacle of this process.

“(With the aid of the grant funds) I studied Damascus pattern steelmaking on my own and then did some research with Darrell Meier (one of America’s foremost experts),” Glenn said.

He explained he wasn’t much into knife-making, that often accompanies creation of this steel, but was focused on the decorative patterns one could create with an expressive medium like Damascus steel.

In June of 1983, Glenn moved from Michigan to Tennessee, taking a slight career detour as a glass blower at Silver Dollar City, a theme park near Gatlinburg, Tenn., adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Then in 1985, Glenn went to Germany for four months and studied at the International Teaching Center for Metal Design.

“That was quite an experience,” he said. “We worked and studied five days a week, and on the weekends, I’d generally walk to the train station and travel to one of several nearby towns to visit the local museum. They were open on Saturday and Sunday so I did a lot of historical research on the weekends. It was quite an experience to immerse yourself in a whole different culture and a whole different language which I didn’t speak, but there’s an amazing history there.”

At this stage of his research, Glenn said he wasn’t focusing strictly on decorative metal work. He’d inspect

whatever the museums had on display, including tools and weapons.

“In the town of Liege on the Belgian-German border, there was another museum, the museum of arms. Liege was well known for making Damascus gun barrels, an industry that pretty much ended around World War I with improving firearms technology, specifically smokeless powder, but I went to that museum because I had studied Damascus pattern steel-making. At one point, I thought about making Damascus gun barrels so I was going to the Liege museum to look into that and see how they did it. They had excellent exhibits in that history.”

After his four-month adventure in Germany, Glenn said he realized the business potential of making Damascus gun barrels looked bleak so he moved to North Carolina in 1985 and was a resident blacksmith at a folk-crafts school there.

“I took care of the teaching facility and taught some classes. I was in a couple of places in North Carolina, over near Asheville and at Brasstown until I moved to Montana in 2000.”

Glenn said that he had always wanted to live in the Rocky Mountain West, and considered Colorado and Wyoming before deciding on Montana.

He’s been in his current shop in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley of extreme Western Montana for almost seven years. His work area is a do-it-yourselfer’s dream on steroids, featuring multiple forges, propane and coal-fired versions, two giant power hammers weighing tons each and both

Everyday objects like a table or stairway railing become works of art under the creative hammer of Glenn Gilmore.







Steel and other metals are Glenn Gilmore's media of expression.

almost a century old, and a massive steel fabrication table machined virtually dead-flat to ensure precise layouts of his work. And that's not counting scores of hammers, tongs and forging dies, many of which he made himself.

Although he uses his modern propane forges for most of his metal work, the ancient technology of the coal forge does not sit unused.

"The coal forge is useful in some instances of forge-welding, specifically when (joining) two small pieces of steel. In the propane forge, the metal gets too hot and you get too much scale on it."

The propane-fired equipment does have its uses for forge welding, he said, particularly making Damascus steel.

He showed an example of forge welding, a poker from a fireplace set with individual layers of steel overlapping, creating a pleasing pinecone effect.

While his shop is designed and used for hard, hot and heavy work, it manages to be neat and organized — forges close to anvil or power hammer so glowing steel loses minimal heat before being subjected to shaping blows, hand tools hanging from wall hooks, easy to find and reach. What sets it apart from scores of similar metal-working shops in Montana is the delicately wrought examples of his creative talent scattered about in various stages of completion: intricate and beautiful fireplace doors, decorative lighting fixtures, leaves, limbs, pinecones and acorns all crafted from steel.

"What I try to do is artwork," he said. "I have a commission right now down in California, and when I met

with the people a few weeks ago, that's what the gentleman said — he wanted artwork."

Glenn has traveled across much of the country, working with homeowners to create special and unique designs. He has completed commissions in Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey and Colorado, in addition to the California job he mentioned.

And the talented metal artist has worked in the Big Sky area, beginning in 2002.

"The first project I had was about a two-year job in the Yellowstone Club. I had 122 feet of railing to do and fireplace doors. That was a pretty involved project," he said. "That property was almost finished and it got sold. And the new owners decided to change some things and add some things so they called me back for another six months. That one house I was involved with for three or four years."

He has also worked on exclusive projects at Moonlight Basin and Spanish Peaks.

"I've been real fortunate because the people I've worked for have called me to do the work. It's not so much, 'We are looking for a set of fireplace doors and we're asking six guys to give us a bid on them.' (The people who hire me) say they have seen my aspen fireplace doors, or my pinecone fireplace doors, or my animal designs and they want me to create something for them."

It's a satisfying working relationship, he said.

"It's nice because they like what I do, and they want me to do it for them. The people, when they see what I've done for them, they say it's above and beyond their expectations.

“Artist Glenn Gilmore has found a way to make a fireplace a quantifiable work of art. Gilmore’s fire screens — handcrafted of mild and stainless steel, bronze, monel 400, copper and brass — are stunningly individual and breathtakingly beautiful.” — WESTERN ART & ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

I’ve been fortunate to work for some really great people who appreciate the hand craftsmanship, the artistic work and they treat you on a personal level.”

Editor’s note: The home profiled starting on the next page features metal work by Glenn.

Glenn’s innovative style has gained the notice of national media, particularly publications that focus on exclusive home design and architecture.

For example, the magazine *Western Art & Architecture*, wrote in its Winter /Spring 2010 issue, “Artist Glenn Gilmore has found a way to make a fireplace a quantifiable work of art. Gilmore’s fire screens — handcrafted



of mild and stainless steel, bronze, monel 400, copper and brass — are stunningly individual and breathtakingly beautiful. Plus, Gilmore puts his German blacksmith training to work crafting hinges and hinge pins that allow for the flawless functioning and movement of every door. Choosing a favorite is folly, but browsing through Gilmore’s award-winning pieces in the numerous books that include his work is a worthwhile pursuit.”

The mild steel the magazine piece mentioned consti-

tutes the lion’s share of his preferred medium. Mild steel is a simple alloy of iron and carbon and suitable primarily for construction or artistic applications as opposed to, for instance, tool steel or stainless steel used to make knives, saws, drill bits and other cutting tools.

Most of the mild steel he uses is manufactured in northern Utah, and, according to Glenn, is recycled material so that people looking for the LEED qualifications for environmentally friendly buildings can rest assured his designs are compatible with the standards.

LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a green building rating system to provide a series of standards for environmentally sustainable design, construction and operation of buildings, and is becoming increasingly popular as homeowners seek to minimize the impact their building will have on the environment.

“My stuff works for that because it’s made within a 500-mile radius and it’s recycled,” he said. “I’d say that probably 90 percent of the materials I use are recycled.”

So what’s the next stepping-stone for the metal artist?

“The next step is staying healthy enough to keep doing the work,” he said. “I turned 60 this year, so I say to myself, ‘what do I really want to make?’ It took me quite a long time to get all my tools together — I’m pretty much well set there — so now I’m focusing on what objects I want to make. The thing is, I love the work, but I also have to do the marketing and all the other aspects of being a small businessman. I find it all a challenge, but pretty interesting, the business side remains interesting, and in these economic

times, it’s a challenge.”

Has the down economy affected his business?

“Well, the market is tighter, people are watching their pennies more. I will say that I’ve been very fortunate, you know, to be working, to stay busy. I had one project in Big Sky this year, I had three projects here in the (Bitterroot) Valley and the one in California.”

Anyone interested in learning more about the work of Glenn Gilmore can go to his website, [gilmoremetal.com](http://gilmoremetal.com). ◀





# MOUNTAIN REFUGE

BY JOLENE KELLER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS LEE

**Family embraces Montana lifestyle with carefully crafted home**

A sturdy stone fireplace anchors the main living space.

FOR THE SATULLO FAMILY, it's just not the holidays without snow. While spending winters in Fort Lauderdale has its appeal, for husband Sandy, wife Shirley, daughter Tia, 28, and their teenage son Sandy the third, it became



difficult to get into the holiday spirit. Even decorating palm trees wasn't cutting it.

For years before Sandy's son was born they would rent places in Colorado in the winter, but always kept coming back to Big Sky.

"It's just more serene," said Sandy. "We've skied just about everywhere, but this mountain is one of the best. It's a great place to get beginners out there, and then the experts that want to do those elevated experiences are happy too. But most of all, it's great because there are no lift lines. It's wonderful to not have to wait.

But they were still renting even when they came to Big Sky to stay.

"I began to think it would be nice to have a place of our own," said Sandy. "We really liked the Moonlight area and as the ski resort opened it became a natural place to build a home."

They began the search for the perfect lot, and decided to build their new mountain home facing the Spanish Peaks after falling in love with the view.

As a family of skiers, it was also a requirement to have ski-in, ski-out access to both resorts. They found what they were looking for — the lot they chose is in a prime location for skiing. From their house, they can choose either Moonlight or Big Sky Resort when hitting the slopes for the day. For Sandy and his family it was the ideal situation.

They purchased the lot in the winter of 2005, and after about a year of planning, construction started in 2006 and the home was completed in the summer of 2008.

While the family historically came to visit Big Sky in the winter, their new home beckoned them to visit during all seasons. Sandy's son, 15, is an avid golfer so he and his



father take advantage of the Reserve at Moonlight Basin.

But with such a beautiful home and location, the Satullos couldn't just keep the place for themselves. The five-bedroom home is certainly built for entertaining. Every spring Sandy's son, a snowboarder, invites his friends

to come out to Montana from Fort Lauderdale for a snowboard vacation. Daughter Tia, a skier, brings out a group of friends to hit the slopes. Sandy has a group of friends that come out in the summer for a weeklong motorcycle trip. They've been doing the trip for 11 years, and now use the mountain home as their starting point before heading out to places like Canada, New Mexico and everywhere in between.

They've also discovered the joy of late season skiing in southwest Montana.

"We never did much spring skiing, but now we come out in April," said Sandy. "I don't know why we never did it before! That's the huge



A kitchen island provides a central workspace.





Cowhide couches line the window wall in the living room. Below, the master bathroom is spacious, with two sinks and a separate shower.

comes out to hunt deer and elk in the fall — a tradition that started with his father many years ago. This hunting season will be the 45th out of the last 46 years he has come to Montana to hunt. He only took one year off when his daughter Tia was born. Now, Sandy’s son has his hunting license so the hunting and holiday tradition is sure to continue for years to come.

“The holidays are number one here without a doubt,” said Sandy. “Especially after spending time in south Florida. You just can’t get into it like you can here. The highlight of the winter is to come here. We spend a lot of time decorating.”

Sandy said one of the most enjoyable parts of building their home was decorating it. Set in such a magnificent mountain backdrop, the interior needed to be just as magnificently mountainous as well.

To achieve that mountainous western ambiance Sandy and Shirley visited trade shows in Colorado, Idaho and Wyoming and made it a point to work with local builders and designers as well.

Some of those local touches include intricate metal screens on the fireplaces throughout the home. In the upstairs living room the screen has an aspen branch and leaf theme, and the screen downstairs in the expansive family room has a woodland theme. Metal artist and blacksmith Glenn Gilmore from Hamilton, Mont., designed them especially for the Satullo home.

Another local touch is the various giant logs that adorn the home. The one above the fireplace was actually found by

advantage of owning. If the conditions are good we can get out here and take advantage of them if we have an extra block of time.”

Last year Sandy said he got in 50 days of skiing and spent six weeks of the summer in his mountain escape. He







A bunkhouse room can accommodate large groups of visitors.

one of the builders while he was taking a hike through the woods. He mentioned it to Sandy and the log became the mantle above the living room hearth.

Sandy said one of the best experiences about designing his home was working with local companies and artists. He chose Mark Smith of Trademark Construction out of Bozeman to oversee the construction.

“I can’t say enough about working with them,” said Sandy. “We’d come up with the basic idea of what we wanted and they would take it to the next level. I’ve built homes in other places, but it’s a totally different atmosphere working out here. These people really enjoyed working outside the box — these are things you just don’t see elsewhere.”

Some of the things in the Satullo home you might not see elsewhere include a wraparound porch that connects to the kitchen and living room that’s complete with a virtually year-round outdoor dining space. There’s an infrared heating system put in place above the area so it can be used on all except the coldest of days. There’s also a deck downstairs that connects to the family room and two of the guest bedrooms. There’s a fire pit and hot tub down there so the outdoors can be reached and enjoyed with ease and comfort. There’s nothing quite like

The dining area is just off the kitchen.

stepping outside of the house and dipping into the hot tub under the stars.

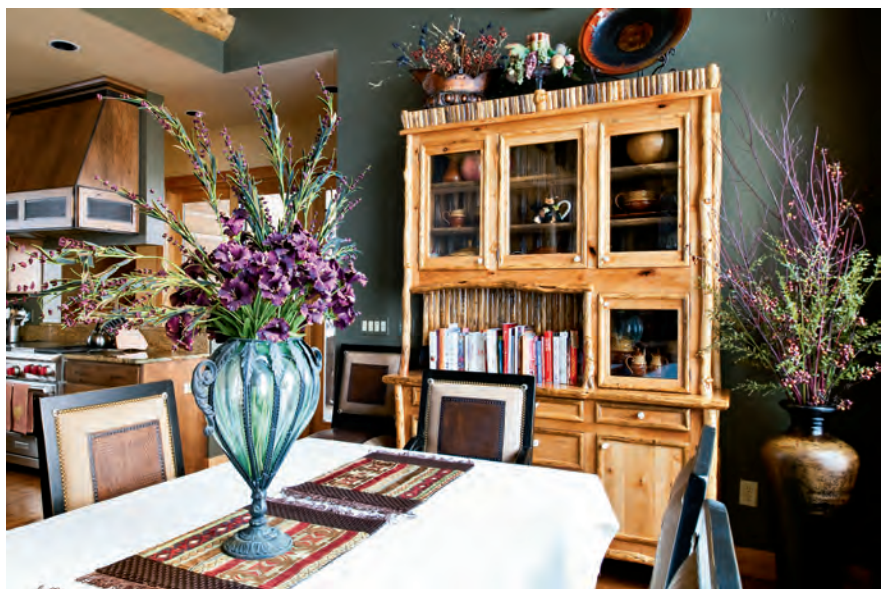
The bathroom near the main entrance of the home is also unique — the base of the sink is made out of a solid pine stump. The stump was sanded and installed upside down, so the sink, made out of copper, is placed in the middle of the twisted roots. Then the smoothed down roots jut out and serve as places to set soap and other toiletries. Just above the sink is the spout that is fashioned to look like a beaver den. Instead of turning the water on with knobs, a light switch is used, and the water flows out of the beaver den like a waterfall. It’s a whimsical western touch that can’t just be picked up at Home Depot.

For the Satullos, taking advantage of the view outside was just as important as interior design. The view of the Spanish Peaks is the centerpiece of the home, so they made sure to utilize as much of that landscape as possible throughout the dwelling. A majority of the rooms face the peaks to the north, so there are plenty of windows to gaze out of.

“I kept adding windows as the plan went on,” said Sandy. “Because that’s why I’m here.”

A prime example of utilizing the expansive mountainous view in the home is the plush seat that runs just below the windows of the living room.

“It’s one of the favorite spots for everyone to relax in the winter,” said Sandy. “They can just lay back, read and look out at the mountains. And since we made it big enough,





several people can stretch out there.”

But alas, it can't all be about relaxation. Business does call for Sandy, who owns Alpine Valley ski area in Ohio and operates a real estate investment company and a group of real estate shops. So even when he's at home in Montana he needs a place to step away and get things accomplished. To do that he incorporated a personal office for himself into the top story of the home and an adjacent workroom complete with a fax machine, scanner and copier for when his guests need to get some work done too.

“Nowadays everyone is so connected it's tough to get away from work,” said Sandy.



“Here we've got a nice quiet place so we can get our work done before the lifts open.”

So despite spending most of the year in Ohio and Florida, the Satullos can rest easy knowing they have a cozy, luxurious



Big, bright windows illuminate the master bedroom. Left, a see-through fireplace connects the master bedroom with the master bath.

mountain home to escape to any time of the year.

“This is home now, we're all thrilled about this place,” said Sandy. “It represents the whole Montana experience for us — with hunting, snowmobiling, skiing and snowboarding as a family. It's great.” ▲

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