

Jennifer Poe (left) and Karen Giffel elevate the appeal of standard furnishings with their unique faux and decorative finishes.



Melissa Otrembit

Start to Finish

Waking up walls and sprucing up interior surfaces is the artistic calling of Karen Giffel and Jennifer Poe, partners who combine their talents to create unique decorative finishes for walls, cabinets, furniture and more. With seemingly simple tools and ingredients, the duo does everything from making a new furnishing look aged to enlivening an heirloom or brightening a boring wall. Their unique techniques have helped hundreds of south Louisiana homeowners hold onto treasured pieces while welcoming a fresh new look. *House and Home* talked to Giffel and Poe about their creative backgrounds and their clever new methods for transforming surfaces from ordinary to outstanding.

Describe your business and the services you offer.

Our business is decorative and faux finishes—we thrive on the curious or unexpected. The services that we offer are decorative finishes for walls, ceilings, woodwork, cabinetry and furniture. We also alter finishes on light fixtures and lamps, and we have now started a new division of our business called “Rich Plates,” where we offer standard finishes for electrical receptacle and switch plates. We can do custom finishes on these plates as well. We also offer paint

consultation for a nominal charge when contracting us for a project.

Tell us about your backgrounds.

While we both have a background in art, our paths were a bit different before we joined forces. Jennifer grew up in the art industry and studied under Allison Stewart in New Orleans, and she has a family legacy deeply rooted in the art profession. Karen also has a family legacy in the arts but in addition is degreed in interior design with a minor in architecture; she holds the professional status

of ASID and is licensed as a registered interior designer.

How did you get your start in this profession, and how has your company evolved over the years?

We both have always had an appreciation for color, art history, architecture and the creation of finishes and how they meld in an interior. The decorative finishes themselves have changed and evolved over the years. We have noticed that the public tends to hold onto the past and desires to possess the “aged

finishes” with a purchase here and there, so we are able to capitalize on that timeless appeal by re-creating an aged finish rather than having time create the finish. Our company has evolved, too, considering that when we first began we needed to discover each other’s individual talents, and as our business has grown we can now interpret each other’s thought processes; in other words, “we share a brain!”

What are your official titles?

We are both decorative artists. Jennifer’s degree is in psychology and, as mentioned, Karen’s degree is in interior design. We have both taken several classes for product knowledge as well as art, but we find that our time is truly best spent creating new finishes in our art studio. We both derive a lot of satisfaction and enjoyment from creating in our element and adding these pieces to our portfolio to present to both existing and potential new clients. We do find that both of our degrees come in handy at times!

What is a typical day like for you?

Multitasking comes to mind! After running in “mom” mode in the mornings, we don our aprons while still attempting to look chic on our projects. Our typical day might find us viewing new projects, spending countless hours on sample production, putting together bids and implementing a project before going back to “mom” mode for duties as carpooler, chef, wife, secretary and homework assistant!

Why do you believe you’re good at what you do? Are there any particular qualities that make you especially well-suited for work in this field?

We consider color knowledge our forte or niche, and we see our reward at the end of a project with the client’s expression of delight. Our outgoing personalities endear us to our clientele, and we cherish the many lasting friendships that we have been so fortunate and blessed to accumulate.

What are some of the most popular services that you offer?

We are currently rejuvenating furniture items and sets and inviting the public to view our rendition of “Swedish



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Clockwise from below: This dining table and chairs, in the home of Mary and Bret Pinson, was transformed using a “Swedish antique” painted and aged finish; Giffel and Poe also created the custom cornices and wall finish. Giffel and Poe brought out the beauty of Tammy and Kirk Napoli’s master bath by applying old-world finishes to cabinetry and walls. Dark-stained furniture pieces like this curvaceous chest get a new lease on life with a white opaque glaze topped by umber glazes.



antiques.” We are transforming furniture with finishes that do not become dated; in fact, they become heirlooms. We also transform cabinetry into aged and timeless pieces of architecture, many times replicating furniture finishes.

Your finishes and glazes can be applied to many different surfaces, from walls to furniture to cabinetry. Describe the process of creating these finishes and how it differs for each type of surface.

The interior and environment do dictate which products may be used and which finishes will best complement the architecture of the space. The surface and end use may dictate the type of tool used to apply the products. As far as creating these finishes, we may spend hours researching a non-traditional tool or application.

You create finishes in a variety of different styles and looks. What’s particularly hot right now among your customers?

Although the aged finishes continue to be the most requested, we have had many requests for a more “retro” or sleek-style finish. There are many of these to offer, some of which are metallics or use glass inserts.

How does living in south Louisiana affect the finishes you create? Are there specific styles that are more popular here than in other areas of the country?

People here are so “house proud.” Instead of clients copying their friends, we have seen a surge in requests for unique looks such as layered finishes and warm colors.

When customers first contact you, do they tend to explore your portfolios and available finishes carefully, or do they generally have an idea of what they want from the start?

About half know what they want and have collected magazine tear sheets and other inspiration pieces; these people have a strong concept or direction from the start. The others ask us to educate them about the options and techniques that are available, allowing us to guide them to a certain color palette and type of finish. Fortunately, the trust factor and our experience come heavily into play.

What are some of your personal favorite finishes to apply or create and why?

The first finish that we love is the sleekness of Venetian plaster with a wax finish. There are virtually no stop or start lines; it almost creates itself during the application process.

In addition, Venetian plaster can lend itself to either a historic finish like you might find in a European castle or a clean, retro finish, depending on how many layers of plaster are applied and the final finish coat. We also love layers of paint that are chipped away with glazes on furniture, giving it dimension. The furniture piece may have simply been stained wood but is completely transformed by this process. We also love to apply metallics that seem invisible to the eye but come to life when a dull light source hits them. Each project that we do we want to replicate in our own homes, but there is never enough furniture, walls or time to do so!

If you could change any one misconception that customers tend to have, what would it be?

The biggest misconception is that faux finishes are caught in a time warp, like sponge painting from the 1980s! We like to think of our finishes as "decorative art" rather than just "faux"—examples of some of our replications are layered plasters and glazes, incorporating several dimensions in one area, aged gold patinas and even ostrich and crocodile skins.

What one thing do you think your customers should know about your company that they probably don't realize?

We pride ourselves on the uniqueness of our finishes, and we are among only a handful of decorative artists in the Baton Rouge area. Also, we participate in many community functions and donate our services to raise money for beneficial community projects.

What sets you apart from competitors?

We absolutely love what we do, and our extensive background in design and color continues to guide and direct us in our projects. 🏡

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