

# Basement full of artifacts is their base of operations

By DIANE ABRAMS

Whether it's an Ecuadorian pot or a Brazilian basket you are after, two West Bloomfield Township women can fill the bill.

Operating by appointment or private showing, Bobbie Beser and Linda Golden offer cultural pieces from all over the world. They call their home business Artifacts.

The women have continuous shipments of goods coming in. They also acquire pieces from buying trips of their own.

"We don't deal in volume and we try to keep things that are different," said Beser. "We'd rather have fewer pieces, but keep them interesting. In this kind of business, it's sometimes impossible to re-order things."

Each of Artifacts' originators has a basement full of relics and unusual art forms. At present, the concentration is on pottery and baskets. But the turnover is fast, they said, and new items are always arriving.

MUCH OF their pottery is made by American Indians from New Mexico. Beser went on a buying trip last summer to establish contacts with various potters.

"We only carry pieces that are signed. Some of the potters inscribe symbols on their work for identification," she explained.

The different tribes all have varying styles, but none of the pottery is made on a wheel.

Most of the pieces are made by a coil method. Strips of clay are wound into a particular shape and then the entire piece is smoothed out.

"The Indians do their firing in homemade kilns in their backyard," said Beser. "There is a lot of breakage because it's hard to control the temperature."

It's hard to imagine the amount of work that goes into a single piece of pottery just by looking at the finished pieces that are available through Artifacts she said. The pottery goes through many stages before it's ready to be distributed.

THE DELICATE designs common to the Pueblo Indians are works of art in themselves. They are frequently geometric. The pottery is also thinner than most other pottery.

There are numerous variations between the pottery of different tribes. The pieces from the Santa Clara pueblo are generally thicker than those of Acoma.

"The Santa Clara pottery has to be thicker because the Indians frequently carve designs in the pieces," said Beser. "Most of the work from this area is done in black or red clay and has a shiny surface."

Artifacts also imports pottery from the Ilesia Indians. One potter they deal with has work displayed in the Smithsonian Institution.

Although most of their pottery comes from New Mexico, Artifacts also carries pieces from Peru.

"Peruvian pottery is more delicate than most," said Beser. "But it is similar to the other varieties in that it is made of the same basic earth tones. The nice thing about all the pieces is that they are compatible with any kind of interior design."

A lot of the pottery is made in the form of planters. Beser presently has a large selection of planters from Ecuador stored in her family room.

FACES OR ANIMALS are carved on the front of the Ecuadorian planters. Each one has its own personality and style.

"No two pieces are alike, but they all have a pre-Columbian flare," said Beser. "The terracotta clay figures are fired in two tones, both shiny and dull."

"Part of their charm is the exaggerated features in the design."

The average price of the planters is \$8-\$14, based on the size.

Baskets are also popular items now. Artifacts carries all sizes and shapes. Beser is able to differentiate the baskets of various countries by the material from which they're woven.

"There are two types of baskets that come from Morocco. The ones made from reed are a tightly woven, fine material and the others are made from palm and are a thicker variety," said Beser.

"Countries use whatever resources are available to them," she added.

"For instance, most of the southern countries make baskets out of yucca."

One of the more unusual baskets currently

available at Artifacts is from Ireland. It is called a twig basket because it is made exclusively of small twigs that are woven together. No artificial material holds the pieces in place.

SOME OF THE older baskets come from the Philippines. They look almost lacquered, with a

deep brown color with a red cast.

Not only are all of the baskets decorative pieces, but many are also functional. Some of the extra large baskets from Morocco and Indonesia are used as food carriers.

"Even though I don't carry food in it, I have a carrier that sits on the floor in front of the fireplace in my house," said Beser. "They are made mostly of multicolored geometric designs. The colors are also mostly earth tones and they come from several different countries."

Some of the baskets have other materials. For example, a dragon box is a small basket that has leather superimposed on

the top.

"We try to represent baskets from all over the world," said Beser. "Most of the pieces will fit in any house."

If questions come up about the way certain pieces match particular furnishings or decors, the

women at Artifacts are prepared. Golden is an interior designer and has been integrating the cultural pieces in many of the homes she decorates.

Beser is planning more buying trips for this year in order to maintain a cross section of all types

of primitive accessories. Beser and Golden are talking about turning Artifacts into a store, but are holding out for the right location.

Meanwhile, they work by appointment. For more information call 855-2997 or 855-9518.



Ecuador sends Artifacts a wide variety of these terra cotta figures. They are fired in dull or shiny tones. These primitive art forms have a pre-Columbian flare. (Staff photos by Stephen Cantrell)

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