

California Artist Brings Big Gourds To Life

For the past 20 years, California gourd artist Betty Finch has transformed gourds into lifelike people and animals.

The unusual hobby grew out of Finch's FBI training in forensic facial imaging and her work reconstructing faces out of clay on human skulls.

"I sketch the face on the gourd in pencil first. Once the size and position of the eyes has been determined I drill holes to set plastic doll eyes in." The rest of the face is built out of gourd parts. Clay is used to fill seams. (Clay that works well on gourds can be obtained from the Caning Shop ph 800 544-3373; www.caning.com). "When the face is finished I cover the clay with paint, being careful to blend the colors to match the gourds and hide my work. I want them to look like they grew this way naturally," says Finch.

She uses gourd seeds for the teeth, and some sculptures have a tuft of hair from her horse, her dog or herself.

The rest of the body parts are ordinary gourds. Finch grows everything from 1-in. miniature Nigerian bottle gourds to giant Zucca gourds. Her favorite variety for arms

and legs is a cross between a snake gourd and bottle gourd that she shapes with stockings as they grow. She has a 40-ft. shipping container filled with gourds organized by shape and size to create the parts she needs.

"I use a dowel to connect the arms to the torso on people. The dowel acts like an axle so the arms can move. The legs are usually rigid with an internal structure that you cannot see, which supports the sculpture. Sometimes weight is added to the legs to create the proper balance to allow the sculpture to stand," she adds.

It's challenging to create a 9-ft. tall sculpture that breaks down to fit in a car and is stable, she admits. While gourds will last centuries if kept dry and protected from the elements, they'll break if they fall.

Finch's website includes instructions on how to shape and manipulate gourds as they grow and provides tips for wood burning, embellishing and creating sculptures with gourds.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Betty Finch, 785 Tucker Rd., Ste. G, Tehachapi, Calif. 93561 (ph 707 773-1336; finchgourd@hotmail.com; www.finchgourd.com).



California gourd artist Betty Finch transforms gourds into lifelike people and animals. The body parts are ordinary gourds that she grows herself, shaping some of them with stockings as they grow.



At first drivers behind this livestock trailer think they see a bull standing in an open doorway. But when they realize it's really just a big decal, they pull up close to check it out.

Giant Stick-On Trailer Decal Entertains Highway Travelers

Nobody tailgates too close behind Rathbun Angus' livestock trailer because of the bull standing in an open doorway. Of course, once they realize the bull is really just a big decal, they pull up close to check it out. Jared and Jeff Lembecke, owners of FastSigns franchise, in Kennewick, Wash., helped Rathbun Angus come up with the arresting image.

"We do lots of vinyl wraps for businesses so it was no problem coming up with something eye-catching for their trailer," says Jared Lembecke.

Rathbun provided professional quality pictures of one of their bulls standing in the doorway of the trailer. The Lembeckes reviewed photos and the dimensions of the actual door to pick one that would look most realistic.

"We wanted one that matched actual shadows and things," says Lembecke. "Lighting can be kind of tricky. We had to match the proportions of the trailer and the door when deciding how big to enlarge the image."

Lembecke advises anyone interested in doing something similar to talk it over with a graphics professional like himself or his father. Identify the area to be covered, and get the highest quality image possible.

"It really turned out amazing," says

Lembecke. "We did it 5 or 6 years ago, and we still hear comments about it."

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Harold Heil drills a small hole near the bottom of colored glass bottles and then inserts a string of white bulbs. It creates a glowing light that adds interest to any room.

How To Capture Lightning In A Bottle

Harold Heil, Zearing, Iowa, says he found a way to capture "lightning" in a bottle to make eye-catching colorful decorations around his home.

He drills a 3/8-in. hole with a diamond bit near the bottom of a variety of colored glass bottles, and then inserts a short string of white

bulbs. It creates a glowing light that he says adds interest to any room. He ties a ribbon or other decoration around the neck of each bottle.

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