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Shop Specializes In Antique Equipment

By Lydia Noyes, Contributing Editor

Justin Click of Hobart, Ind., founded and runs JC Tractor Restoration and Repair. The five-employee business focuses on tractors from 1910 to 1980, along with antique trucks and old semis.

Although Click didn't grow up on a farm, he's had a passion for repairing machinery since childhood.

"I've always enjoyed old mechanical stuff in general," says Click. "As a kid, I'd pull apart old lawnmowers, fix them up, and sell them from my parents' front lawn."

This hobby eventually progressed to like-new engines and transmissions on small, new-model tractors. He developed a love for antique tractors and, as a teen, purchased his first Rumely tractor. That purchase started a collection that has since grown to more than a dozen pieces.

As an adult, Click worked full-time while also doing side work from home. He founded JC Tractor Restoration and Repair 20 years ago and eventually grew it to the point that he could devote himself full-time to the business.

Today, Click prefers to work on Rumelys and other steel-welded pieces made before 1925.

"I like that it's a challenge to work on stuff without manuals and parts," he says. "Lots of problem-solving."

The company receives a higher per-

centage of Rumely machines than any other brand, but other popular brands include Aultman & Taylor, Avery, Flour City and International. Jobs range from full restorations to less time-consuming engine tune-ups.

"I get stuff sent to me from all over the country," Click says.

He often handles shipping logistics himself, even returning items in person to show customers how it works.

Estimates are challenging until a machine's been opened up, so the business bills on a time-and-materials basis.

"We're talking about obsolete parts that have been stuck for a hundred years or longer," Click says. "It's impossible to predict how long that repair will take."

The parts can be nearly impossible to find, so he makes what he can in his shop and contracts with foundries to produce the rest from diagrams or pictures of the parts that need replacing.

"Every job is unique," he says. "Sometimes we're working on stuff that there's only two of in the whole world. It's a real challenge waiting on parts; our lead time can be years. But it's always satisfying to experience the success of getting something running again."

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Mill Creek Antiques doesn't use paint; it uses stove paste, and all nickel is buffed and polished to achieve an antique finish.

They Restore Heirloom Stoves

Mill Creek Antiques of Paxico, Kan., specializes in restoring antique woodstoves to beautiful, functional condition.

"Steve Hund started a minor stove restoration business for friends and family in the early 1970s," says company representative David Berringer. "The business grew from there."

Potential customers are asked to email photos of the stove, both inside and out, along with a description of what they want done. Mill Creek Antiques then reviews the photos to provide broad quotes.

The stoves are almost always delivered either personally by customers or shipped through one of the company's two private shippers.

"Regular shipping companies don't know how to deal with antiques," Berringer says.

Once the stove arrives at the shop, each piece is inspected individually before the company commits to specific numbers for the restoration work.

"When customers leave us with a stove, they know exactly how much it's going to cost."

Pricing varies, but a standard, everyday stove typically costs between \$2,000 and \$2,800. A cookstove might cost closer to \$4,000, often because it's used less frequently, which can lead to stuck or broken parts. These costs are mostly due to labor, not parts, and the pricing for restored stoves

is between 2/3 and 3/4 of the cost of a new stove from the Mill Creek showroom floor.

"Most people are fine with that," Berringer says. "They're invested in keeping a family heirloom in working order."

The restoration process includes brushing off rust and welding broken pieces back together. Each piece is repaired individually before reassembly.

Mill Creek Antiques doesn't use paint; it uses stove paste, and all nickel is buffed and polished to achieve an antique finish.

"The pricing of nickel has increased 300%," says Berringer. "So, restoring the original metal is the more attractive option for most."

If customers prefer new nickel, the pieces are sent to Wisconsin for restoration.

Turnaround time can vary, but for most stoves it's about three months. Complicated wood-burning cookstoves can take an average of four months. Still, customers find the wait well worth it.

"We're proud that 95% of the stoves we fix are put to use," Berringer says. "It's a real joy, creating stoves that exceed our customers' expectations."

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South Dakota Made French-Style Yoghurt

Scheetz Mercantile of Mount Vernon, S.D., makes and sells small-batch, French-style yoghurt. This family-run micro-dairy offers the first commercially produced cup-set French-style yoghurt in the state.

"My interest in making yoghurt really grew out of our family's dairy farm and wanting to create more value from the milk produced by our own cows," says Kelly Scheetz, founder and owner of Scheetz Mercantile. "My husband and I are raising our family on his fourth-generation dairy farm, and we've seen how unpredictable milk prices can be. We wanted to find a way to connect directly with consumers while creating something meaningful and high-quality from the milk we work so hard to produce every day."

The breakthrough came when Laura Klock, co-owner of FarmLife Creamery, proposed an equipment-sharing partnership.

"They had equipment available, but not the current capacity to utilize it," says Scheetz. "Laura really nudged me to leap. Once I started learning the process, I completely fell in love with it."

French-style yoghurt's rich texture, cream-top finish, and simple, wholesome ingredients drew Scheetz in.

"French yoghurt is traditionally cultured slowly in the container it's sold in, which creates a naturally thick, silky texture without relying on heavy stabilizers or fillers," she says. "The milk itself is our biggest selling point. Our yoghurt is made with whole milk from our own dairy cows, so it has a richness and flavor that people immediately notice."

The milk isn't homogenized, which allows cream to rise to the top of the cup, creating a silky creamline layer above a soft, custard-like body. It's best eaten scooped, not stirred, to preserve the texture. Finishing touches include organic Madagascar vanilla from a local South Dakota business and pure Vermont maple syrup from Barred Woods Maple, a locally owned business nestled at the foot of the Cold Hollow Mountains in Northern Vermont.

"Our customers love that the yoghurt feels old-fashioned and authentic," Scheetz says. "It's a slower, more intentional way of making yoghurt, and I think people can taste the difference. There's also something special about knowing exactly where your food comes from and how it was made."

The yoghurt-making business brings Scheetz a lot of joy.

"I love when customers say ours reminds them of yoghurt from years ago or that it's

the best yoghurt they've ever tasted. Producing food on a small scale creates a real connection."

The homemade yoghurt also gives the dairy a natural way to show the care that goes into producing milk.

"Our customers understand there's a real family behind the product."

Still, she's quick to note that small-batch production comes with challenges.

"Everything takes time and attention to detail," Scheetz says. "There are long days, strict food-safety standards, balancing production schedules, sourcing ingredients, packaging, marketing, and still managing family and farm life."

Looking ahead, Scheetz plans to continue growing the Mercantile sustainably while preserving the operation's roots.

"I'd love to expand our yoghurt offerings, introduce new flavors and cultured dairy products, and continue building strong relationships with local customers and retailers."

Most importantly, she's looking to make the business a place where people feel connected to agriculture—a place to learn about dairy farming, support local food systems, and teach children the value of hard work, creativity and community.

"People crave authenticity more than



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ever," Scheetz says. "Every jar of yoghurt we make represents generations of dairy farming, a lot of hard work, and a deep love for what we do. At the end of the day, our goal is simple: to make wholesome, delicious food that brings people together and honors the traditions of family farming."

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