

american craft

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How
Geoffrey
Keating
Made
A Career
Of His
Craft



Special Report:
Craft Goes to Auction
26,190 Sequins
and One Great Ape
Sneak Peek:
San Francisco Show

AMONG FRIENDS

Over two decades, Ken and Julie Girardini have built a serene retreat that showcases fellow artists' work and their own.



KEN AND JULIE GIRARDINI'S driveway lies at the bottom of a hollow, just off a dirt road in rural Maryland. They share the lane with three other homes, but when Julie gives directions, she says something like this: "You'll know which one belongs to the artists. It's the one with all the windows, and the studio beside it that's bigger than the house."

The couple bought the split-level home about 35 miles northwest of Baltimore in 1995, knowing that it would be years—and many renovations—before it became the serene retreat it is today: a world away, yet only yards away, from the combined metalworking shop, office, and photography studio where they create the mixed-media art of Girardini Design.

We asked them about the renovations and how they filled their home with their own functional work, as well as the art of friends from the craft circuit.

ABOVE: Ken and Julie Girardini tend to their Japanese rock garden.

RIGHT: *History Tomb*, a painting by Ken, hangs in the living room. A sculpture by Charles Savoie sits in front of the window.

What were you looking for when you bought this place?

Ken: We wanted some property where we could do our work, but we needed an outbuilding, so this house wasn't on our list. But what we found was just awful—crappy old farmhouses. We drove by this place on the way to somewhere else and just fell in love.

Julie: It had the big windows, it backed to trees, and architecturally, it was beautiful.

Ken: But no outbuilding. We just decided we'd figure that out. And we went for it. [The studio, a 2,500-square-foot outbuilding, was built three years later.]



STORY BY

Rebecca J. Ritzel

PHOTOGRAPHY BY

Robert Severi

- ① The couple lays out wave forms for a sculptural commission.
- ② Playful stainless-steel fruit picks the couple used to make.
- ③ The back of a steel and copper dining chair from a set the Girardinis made specially for their dining room.
- ④ The light fixture in the couple's dining room, made by David Sleightholm.
- ⑤ A scalloped frame the couple fashioned for a koi pond near their front door.

So was working on the house a gradual thing?

Ken: We did it as we had time and money. We started with the kitchen, because that's where we spend most of our time. We built a temporary kitchen to work in, which is now our prep kitchen. That was a whole year, and it was a labor of love.

And whose idea was the round bathroom?

Ken: We have a friend who is a yacht interior designer. He helped us build the round wall, and the round door that closes with the magnet. I did the metal skin. When we took out all the walls, we uncovered the copper piping, and we had

to leave that exposed, so you can see it.

Julie: Because we are metal people. We love that.

The cabinet finishes are beautiful. Do you rotate the art on display above them?

Julie: We rotate things to keep it fresh. Almost everything

we have, we know who made it; that's a Win Byers platter above the sink. So we can look around our house and see our friends' work and enjoy it.

[Among the Girardinis' other treasured pieces are works by Charles Savoie, David Paul Bacharach, and Grace-ann Warn.]

① The couple's wall-mounted Glass Rock console table, topped with turned vessels by Christian Burchard.

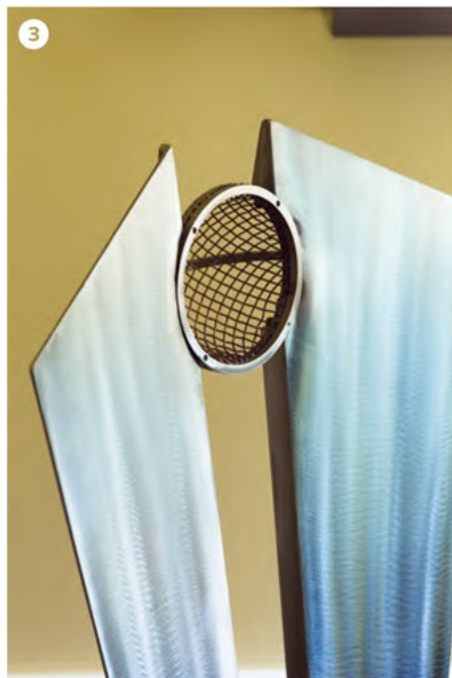
② Detail of a bar stool pedestal in the kitchen.

③ The couple's Spotz wall clock above their Svlt chairs.

④ Kitchen cabinets with stainless-steel pulls.

⑤ Kitchen drawers finished with stainless-steel pulls.

⑥ A copper and steel handrail, a style that is repeated throughout the couple's home.





But the wall clock is yours. And the dot for 5 o'clock, is that margarita green?

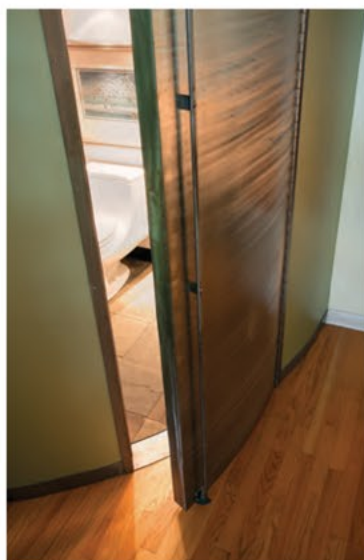
Julie: Exactly. We try to have a pretty regular work schedule. We try to be in the studio by 8, and we are back over here by 5 or 6. The vase on the table is by Hideaki Miyamura, and the dining table and the metal chairs are by us.

Was there a moment when you decided “We need a new table,” and then it was a big production to create it?

Julie: Oh, yes. For a long time, we lived without dining room chairs at all. My father-in-law thought we didn't have money to buy them, and we were like, “That's not the point. We want exactly what we want, and it's got to be perfect.”



FROM TOP: Ceramic bottles by Geoff Buddie and Chris Rom. Julie stands next to a glass and bronze sculpture by Charles Savoie (left), with two of her sculptures hanging on the wall behind her. The steel door to the quarter-round bathroom, a collaboration by Jamie Jensen and the couple.



ABOVE: Steel bar stools made by the couple surround a granite island in their kitchen where friends like to congregate when the Girardinis entertain.

That's how you got your sink countertop – the one in the middle of your master bathroom.

Julie: It has natural fossils in it – some winged creatures. It was on a pallet with a whole bunch of other rocks, and we wanted that one. It was a crazy idea – installing a freestanding sink with a handthrown basin on a rock-slab counter in the middle of room – but we knew what we wanted, and we knew we could make it.



Then we had to find a plumber. Ken: The pipe comes through the stone. The guy who drilled it said it was the hardest rock he'd ever drilled.

You do fireplace installations. How did you create yours?

Ken: This was just a standard brick fireplace. We clad it in steel, and Julie did the concrete sculptures on the endcap. I made the holder for the fireplace tool,

which is by Bobbe and David McClure. Now it looks like a Klingon battle sword. That's an early work, from around 1992.

You have several early works in your living space, like the metal torchère by the fireplace. Why do you keep them out?

Julie: I look back at something, and I look at how much skill and refinement we have now. Now everything is much tighter.

Ken: We'd like to think that we've gotten better. You do see progress.

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“Yours, Mine, and Ours: A Girardini Retrospective,” featuring sculpture, paintings, and furniture, is on view through August at Zenith Gallery in Washington, DC. Rebecca J. Ritzel is a freelance journalist in Washington, DC.

Ken sits by the fireplace, which he finished with a steel façade and mantel. Two of his portraits, painted on aluminum, hang on the back wall.