

HOME SPOTLIGHT June 19, 2010

By Carrol Krause

Herald-Times Homes

Not many people know what a waterjet machine is used for. Those who do know might not realize that it can be used for art as well as for esoteric technical applications. Shooting a highly focused stream of water containing abrasive material, a waterjet takes only a matter of minutes to cut through thin aluminum and steel, plastic, glass, leather, felt, stone, solid surfaces and more.

Lucia Bennett enjoys her job at Titan Waterjet on Bloomington's west side so much that she gladly continues her work after-hours to create garden art for her bungalow. She uses leftover pieces of scrap metal, polycarbonate, wood and stone to create modernistic sculptures, medallions, garden planters, even furniture.

Lucia is a skilled artist who comes from a family of highly creative individuals.

"I graduated from IU with a fine arts degree in 1992," she said. "I've been involved in art all my life. My fine art background is painting, photography and printmaking. I was originally hired to do the marketing for Titan Waterjet. I designed the logo, designed their first web site, and their first trade show exhibit. Then the manager before me took a job located in Canada."

Lucia took over the job, delighted to have an opportunity to delve further into waterjet applications.

"I'm a one-woman show, from discussing jobs with clients to drawing the artwork and operating the machine," she explained. "Titan Waterjet is one division of a larger custom design and fabricating company called Hoffman Design Works. The bulk of what we do is military and industrial. We also built a lot of the workable exhibits at Wonderlab. We like to do fun things. If we can draw it, we can probably build it."

Bins around the floor of the huge workshop contain custom parts designed and cut to clients' specifications; near one wall a tall installation left over from a trade show



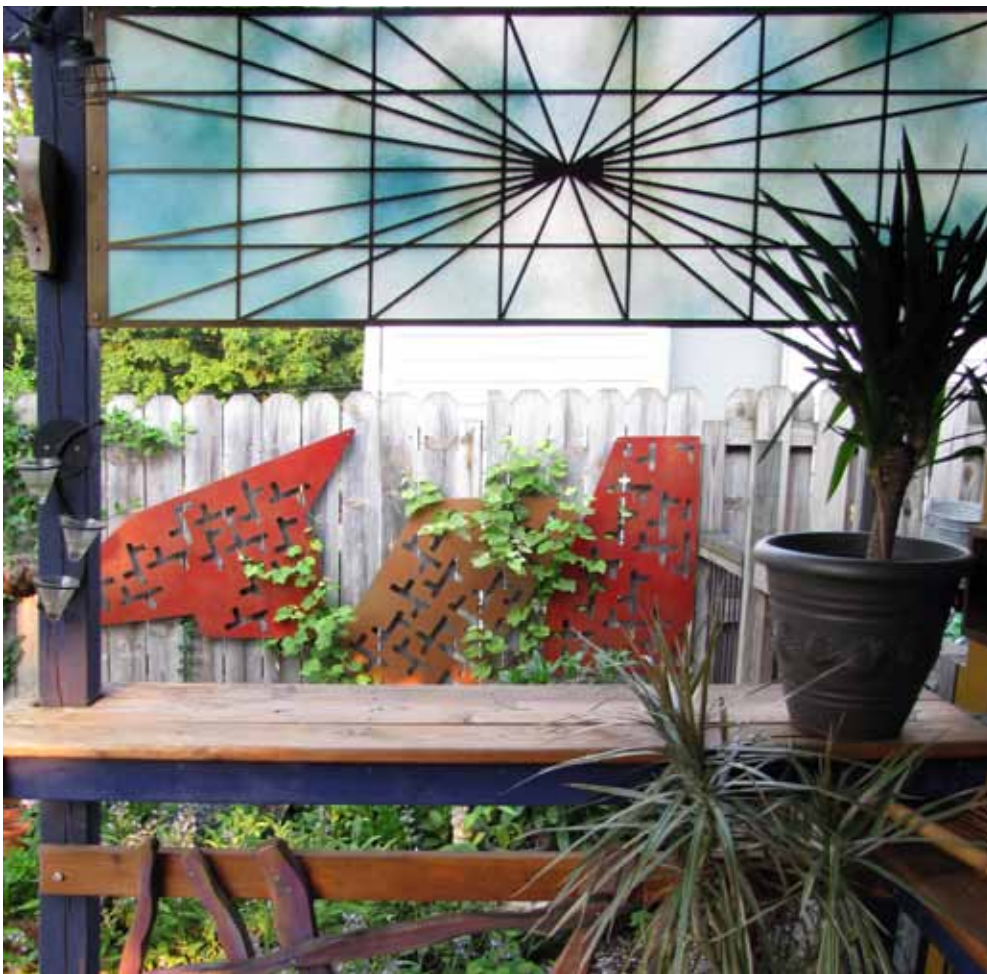
Cutting Edge of Garden Art



looks vaguely like a rocket with fins. Over against one side of the workshop stands the enormous waterjet machine, whose bed is 6 x 20 feet. Lucia uses a forklift to position extremely heavy pieces of metal or stone on the bed of the machine. The waterjet moves forward and backward and side to side, much like a larger version of the apparatus inside an Etch-a-Sketch, following the instructions from a CAD program that controls the design and machine movement. While I watched, Lucia designed a garden decoration with a spiral design and then used the waterjet to cut it from a scrap piece of aluminum. From start to finish: eight minutes flat.

Those who are familiar with Showers Plaza know the Dale Enochs' sculpture, "Bloomington Banquet," which is shaped like a huge limestone table flanked by stone chairs. On that table is a metal meal with metal curlicues of aroma rising above it. On top of those curlicues floats an intricately patterned metal fish. Titan Waterjet cut that fish from Enochs' hand-drawn design, a perfect example of the marriage of technology and art.

At Lucia's Prospect Hill bungalow, waterjet



art is everywhere. It hangs beneath the front gable of the house, all around the front porch, inside of the front fence, between container plantings in which she grows vegetables and herbs, on her garden gate, along the exterior walls of the house, and all around the back deck with its outside cocktail bar.

“I have very tight kerf-widths from the small jet of water.” Lucia said matter-of-factly. “The machine generates very little waste, and it’s considered a ‘green’ technology. Because I can cut so closely, I minimize my scrap and utilize almost everything I have. What I don’t use gets recycled locally.”

Lucia’s latest interest in waterjet



applications is making furniture. She has built several desks and tables from sturdy high-grade polished Baltic birch plywood, using the waterjet to cut joints between matching pieces. The exceptional tolerances mean furniture is built snugly with no wiggling or flexing.

Titan Waterjet is ready and waiting to make your garden dreams (or your furniture needs) a reality.

“We can do sculptures either wall-mounted

or free-standing,” Lucia noted, “railing inlays on decks, medallions, custom garden gates. If someone wanted a giant silhouette of their dog.....” She shrugged and laughed. “The artistic and architectural aspects of this technology are limitless. We can work with homeowners, artists, designers and architects and do pretty much whatever they can dream up.”

She was assembling the interlocking legs of a limestone table as she spoke. The waterjet can cut straight-edged patterns straight through limestone as thick as eight inches. “I cut these two 2” limestone pieces in an hour. If you were cutting with traditional methods, you’d be busy for a long while.”

It’s hard to contemplate creating interlocking stone pieces that fit together snugly like puzzle pieces, but when you actually see the machine at work, the implications for garden sculpture and furniture are endless.

Lucia can create a design from a verbal idea, or a sketch, or concepts from books and magazines. The sky’s the limit when you have a combination of artistic talent and an amazing piece of technology waiting to do your bidding.

“It’s a job, but it’s also my playground,” Lucia summed up. “I have a lot of freedom, but I work very hard for that freedom. It opened the door wide to things I hadn’t ever thought of!”

