

See Mad Potter for Container Gardens

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By Paul Weideman

Once Jamie Douglass had the idea of doing colorful, seasonal container gardens for people, she had to come up with a name for her business. It came to her when she caught herself looking at potted plants around Santa Fe and mumbling, “I should do that, I should do that pot, I should do that one.” Obviously she was The Mad Potter.

Douglass is coming into her third summer with the business that she loves. It’s been a long time coming. She spent 15 years in investment work, including as a registered sales assistant with Morgan Stanley and then working in a money-management firm, before she decided to study horticulture.

After two years of night classes at Triton College, Chicago, she got her degree in ornamental horticulture. Then she applied to the Chicago Botanic Gardens internship program. “For three months I worked in all their different gardens. My favorite was the Green Chicago program, where I’d go work on vacant lots in the inner city and turn them into veggie gardens. I always said I worked with the wealthiest people in my investment days, but the richest were in the inner city. “Then I was hired full-time. I had Cook County inmates pushing wheelbarrows of manure and helping me do raised beds. I had 45 gardens and I had a truck and I loved it. I’d knock on doors to help revive old gardens that had gone by the wayside. It was a scary area, but the people were amazing.”

She also did horticulture therapy sites, creating raised planting beds with wheelchair access, and sensory gardens for people with sight and hearing challenges. In a recent interview at Douglass’ home of Coronado Road, she mentioned Cathrine Snead, who has The Garden Project in San Francisco to provide job training and support to former offenders. Snead began with a horticulture training program for inmates of the San Francisco County Jail. “I thought I could do it here but I went to the prison and there was no interest,” Douglass said.

After Chicago, she was in Denver for 14 years working with a friend in the Grounds for Learning program, using school grounds as outdoor classrooms. Then for a time she dealt imported goods from Peru and Ecuador. “It was all fair trade, buying beautiful weavings, clothing, and bags directly from the artists. I was selling here and there, at farmers

markets, doing shows back in Chicago. It was the adventure of finding things in the villages. If I could just travel and do the buying I'd love it, but I was losing money and it was physically difficult."

Her Santa Fe business in container gardens has grown by word-of-mouth referrals. She has done demonstrations recently for the Santa Fe Garden Club and the Taos Garden Club. She is talking to the staff at Girls Inc. about doing horticulture programs with the girls, some of whom could go on after graduating to work summers with Douglass.

Most of the Mad Potter pots are priced from \$60 to \$300. Her clients begin by buying nifty pots at Jackalope, Moss Outdoor, garage sales, wherever they find vessels they like. Once planted, most of the flowers only need watering. They look great on patios and portales, outside the living room or bedroom. "This is primarily unique annuals that work here," Douglass said. "I do seasonal pots, and I think I have a good eye for color coordinating."

A few of her favorites are Cuphea, the Agastaches, Gaura, and Oleander. "This will be an Oleander summer. I love the height being airy. I'm tired of all the green spikes everybody does in the middle of the pots."

Once in awhile, a customer wants more than a pot or two. For a couple in Tesuque, she did 15 pots, plus an antique wagon full of flowers. "I also do Winter pots just before Thanksgiving with fresh-cut greens and pine cones and other fun stuff. This year I have some white birch branches from Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The greens stay green all the way to March."

Douglass began doing summertime installations at the end of May. Autumn designs will be installed starting Sept. 8. Containers will be prepared for winter starting Nov. 1, with winter designs to be installed by Thanksgiving into early December.

See www.MadPotter.net for more information.