



Rebirth of an Age-Old Craft

The Timeless Beauty of Wrought Iron



By Suzanne Wright

Not all architectural ironwork is created equally.

Wrought iron has been used in building from the earliest days of civilization. In Roman times, wrought iron door furniture was commonplace. As the name suggests, wrought iron means that the metal has been worked—or wrought—into shape while utilizing almost pure iron, with the lowest level of carbon of any type of iron. This purity makes it highly resistant to rusting, yet the material is highly ductile, tough and durable. Because it is so pliable it can be successfully worked into intricate curved designs and forms. Flowing lines, hammer marks and other irregularities typical of hand tooling characterize wrought iron. It can often be distinguished from cast iron by

slight variations between repeated elements such as scrolls, where each outline is slightly different from the next.

Defining the lower-end product cast iron begins when molten iron is poured into a mold rather than forged. Cast iron is strong in compression rather than tension. It can also be brittle, for it lacks the pliability of wrought iron. The molds or patterns for cast iron elements can be used repeatedly, so it is less costly and less durable than handmade wrought iron—typically half the price and significantly less durable.

Local Wrought Iron Works.

Former teacher and sales professional Jenny Sandlin never expected to be one of the few females in a traditionally male dominated

field. Born in the Dominican Republic, Sandlin has lived in Dallas for over 20 years. There's a lot of her Caribbean heritage evident in her company's products. Sandlin, you see, is the founder, sole owner and president of three-year old Elegante Iron, a Dallas-based manufacturer of wrought ironwork.

The fast-growing company has twelve employees and has placed their custom-made doors, balconies, wine cellar gates, ornamental inserts and other wrought iron elements in Collin County's most elite home communities such as Stonebriar Park, Starwood, Kings Gate and Shoal Creek, not to mention residences from New York to California.

When she started her company, Sandlin already had a reputation in the industry for



producing high-end ironwork for demanding customers. At the company she worked with prior to starting her own (now a competitor), says Sandlin, she sold 85 percent of everything. "It's been one step after another up the ladder," she says of her prime perch today.

Meticulous Craftsmanship.

Wrought iron has a timeless appeal and offers unmatched security since it is stronger than wood or nearly any other material: there's no peeling or warping or cracking and it's blast-proof. Plus, there's virtually no maintenance. But in addition to its functionality and strength, iron is also beautiful—and, contrary to belief—it can span a range of home styles

from traditional to modern.

"Our product is definitely designed and marketed for high-end homes," says Sandlin. "An iron entrance makes an impressive entrance to a home and will bring years of beauty and enjoyment to homeowners as well as increasing the value of their home."

"Our artisans are masters," she continues. "They are superbly well trained in an age-old craft. They draw design influences from old European classic styles and they also create our own designs for an incredible look that our customers love."

Is wrought iron really appropriate for any house?

Sandlin answers emphatically: "Yes! We have customized wrought iron elements

for every type of home out there, including French country, Mediterranean, Old World and contemporary. Our designers work at the beginning planning stages with architects and designers to select a beautiful design that will complement the architecture of a specific home."

Elegante Iron has won numerous accolades in a very short period of time. The company provided 21 doors for Starwood's Parade of Homes, one of which won the coveted "People's Choice" award. Sandlin's also worked with a number of upscale, respected builders in the metro area, winning raves for her firm's one-of-a-kind products and excellent customer service.

"Jenny Sandlin understands that for her builders to be successful, she must provide a high quality product, deliver it on schedule, and be affordable," says Bob Bobbitt, president of Bob Bobbitt Company, Inc. "Elegante Iron is one of our most reliable suppliers."

A Hot Commodity.

Ironwork has really taken off, Sandlin says, noting that "every home in the \$700,000 range and up expects a hand-crafted iron front entry." More and more people are also putting iron elements into their homes during remodeling.

Elegante Iron is working on a 15,000-square-foot home with 11 doors in the plan, including a regal 12-foot tall door. "They wanted a sleek look, but also the safety and low maintenance of iron," says Sandlin. They know it lasts longer and gives you piece of mind."



Sandlin says the company is seeing a lot of business come through their Web site. "We've outgrown our offices here and, although we haven't opened any showrooms in other cities yet, we do plan to expand," she says. A testament to Elegante Iron's success is that many custom builders are using their doors in every million-dollar home they build in any given community.

"We could not be more satisfied with Elegante Iron," says homeowner Dan Schmitt. "Their combination of new world function and old world artistry is second to none. Jenny Sandlin's design team was able to create a front door that was a perfect complement to the overall aesthetics of our home. It is truly a work of art!"

Those are high marks indeed for this teacher-turned-entrepreneur, who is forging her way into this timeless craft while skillfully leaving the Elegante Iron mark on our community for many years to come. ■



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For more information on Elegante Iron, call 214-342-8987 or log onto www.Elegantelron.com



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