



Striking a new note with cuckoo clocks

By Rebecca Johnston

ney that began with a love of German handcrafts passed down from grandfather has now transported Hickory Flat resident Jodie Davis into the new career designing and producing cuckoo clocks.

Davis began designing the distinctive clocks for her business, the American Cuckoo Clock Co., and having them made in Germany, but the process was slowed down by the wait to get them from the Black Forest. Turn the clock forward, and she is now taking the next step on her journey by having the clocks manufactured in the United States. "These are traditional cuckoo clocks, regulated by gravity, by weights. The heart of a cuckoo is the movement, made by a spring in Schonach, Germany. The weights regulate the movement, the movement is connected to the bellows by wires, and the weights drive the cuckoo and most of the motion," Davis said. "My American cuckoo clocks are constructed from cherry, locally sourced, which is much like the lindenwood used in the Black Forest."

Before delving into the world of designing cuckoo clocks, Davis was a top host in the crafting world shepherding a quilt line network for quilters, QNNTV.com, which was birthed in the early days of online TV. Her journey brought her to demonstrating products on QNNTV, guest co-hosting the most-seen crafts show on PBS, and producing and hosting long-running monthly series including "Quilt Out Loud!" an e-wall lifestyle quilting show she created with Mark Lipinski and "It," her biography reads. She also authored 35 books, including her e-aller, "Rubber Duckie" which sold 230,000 copies, before embarking

on her next chapter to design and manufacture cuckoo clocks. Davis now lives in a lovely mid-century butterfly roof home in a still rural area of southeast Cherokee County where she has two horses in a barn she designed to mirror the architecture of her home.

Davis loves to design her clocks with a fresh new look, making them appealing to today's collector while still offering the traditional appeal.

"The problem with cuckoo clocks is that while enchanting, how many people want dark wooden clocks with beer drinkers and wood choppers in their homes? One of my first customers summed it up well. When she ordered my clock she and her husband were heading off on their dream trip to Germany, the pinnacle of which was to be to bring home the ultimate souvenir, a cuckoo clock. The problem, as I hear over and over, is that German cuckoo clocks don't reflect our passions and interests and don't fit in our homes," Davis says. "As a quilter she was thrilled to discover my Quilt Shop Cuckoo Clock which fit her to a tee. When she and her husband arrived at the Triberg cuckoo clock shop for the big event



he sent her off to find her clock. A bit later she circled back to him and said she looked and looked and didn't find anything until she found... a cuckoo clock with a quilter on it. His eyes lit up and he said, 'Show me.' She replied, 'When we get home,' "Davis explains.

While her designs are a fresh take on the traditional cuckoo clock, Davis's works of art are constructed in the established way. "The clockworks I use are the exact parts used in Germany. What's amazing

it the industry is that all the parts are still made right there, even the
as," she says. "My clocks would pass the Black Forest Clock Association
fication were they constructed in the Black Forest. I'm a stickler for

her latest designs include the Hickory Flat Cuckoo Clock, inspired by
ondack furniture and tramp art, made from birch bark, beech leaves,
twigs gathered from her farm and surrounds.

I hand sculpted the owl, 3D scanned him, and printed him in wood,
hand-paint him. He sits upon a platform with a sliding lid (created in
on 360 and 3D printed) which makes him slide in and out of his
way at the hour and half hour accompanied by owl 'hoot' bellows
orted directly from the manufacturer in the Black Forest. Blacksmith-
e weights complete the clock," she says of the unique design.

Other designs include the Log Cabin Quilt Cuckoo Clock designed to
like a traditional quilt design draped over a bed. The Log Cabin Quilt
oo Clock taps into simplicity, with extra large hands and sleek hand-
d weights, Davis points out.

The Birdwatcher Cuckoo Clock features a layered laser cut and hand-
ed forest that is the perfect spot for the birdwatcher. "When the cuckoo
from his birdhouse she (or he - two versions) raises her or his
culars to get a better look, a Towhee pecks on the forest floor, and the
hining down on our scene winks," she said.

For my Backyard Birds Cuckoo Clock the originals are hand carved by
time world champion bird carver Bob Goad. I 3D scanned them and
rint them in wood. Then they are hand painted" she said. "Traditional
come weights simply don't cut it for some of my clocks. California

blacksmith Josh Waters turned my idea of simple svelte wrights for my Log
Cabin Quilt Cuckoo Clock."

While Davis did not start her business with plans to make cuckoo clocks
in America, she says the move was necessary and a learning process.

"I sure didn't set out to make my own clocks. But when I waited two
years and 36 days for the American Barn Cuckoo Clock to finally arrive
from Germany I discovered that the industry simply wasn't going to be able
to produce the six new designs each year I need for my business. I had to
have control over new product or I had no business," Davis said. "The only
solution was to become my own factory.

Once a prototype is made in Germany the production aspect is no
problem so I started out learning everything I needed to know about wood
and woodworking, finishing, painting, and of course clock making in order
to make perfect prototypes to send to Germany to be copied. Shortly, I
decided to make small initial batches to test the market. From there, I
thought, if I'm doing that why not just make them here?"

When she looks back on the journey she remembers those favorite
childhood treasures, German Christmas ornaments passed down from her
grandfather and a set of hand carved angels and farm animals in a lovely
wooden box. Decades later a friend's cuckoo clock cast its spell at first sight,
she says.

"Then I found eBay and Schmeckenbecker cuckoo clocks from the '70s.
Aha! My world. My collection began," Davis exclaims.

Then in 2006 Davis, who was at that time hosting several series for the
online channel for quilters, QNNtv.com, was sent to Europe by Bernina
Sewing Machine Company to shoot an episode.





“Since we were going all that way I thought why not shoot an additional episode? Shooting a show is a fantastic entre behind the scenes, so I arranged to shoot at a cuckoo clock factory,” she said. “When the cameras were about to roll I popped the question to the manager, ‘Since this is a show for quilters could we turn this into a clock for quilters?’ He bit. The hag wielding a rolling pin became a quilter with a rotary cutter and the beer drinkers turned into a kitty jumping up and down on fabric bolts.”

Then she found out some of the realities of the business, along with the successes.

“To realize my dream of having a cuckoo clock I designed I had to import 100 clocks. Fortunately, QNNtv.com had been bought by a bigger fish which owned magazines in the industry. They ran the clock in the shopping section and voila! I didn’t end up with 99 cuckoos in my basement after all,” she laughs.

Then, “fast forward 10 years. QNNtv.com got eaten by ever bigger fish and I needed to find another way to support myself and my horses. Quilters had been bugging me to import more clocks, so I ran a kick starter and sold 77 clocks. A business was born,” she explains.

Davis says that her business is all about smiles nowadays.

“Traveling extensively when I was hosting quilting shows I was asked what I did for a living. When I replied invariably the response would be ‘My grandmother/aunt/mother quilts(s). Oh the memories!’ Turns out the case is the same with cuckoo clocks. Family members brought clocks back from Germany. Many, many people relay fond memories of waiting for the hour and half hour to strike to see and hear the animated carvings. Cuckoo clocks are family heirlooms because they speak to our hearts,” Davis said. The clock doesn’t stop there. Her dream continues with future plans.

“Well, and then there’s my dream of creating my own world. I can’t wait until I have to build my own fairyland to house all the cuckoo clock designs I create. Hum, it could be a factory and a museum...” she muses. “Cuckoo manufacture originated as a way for farmers to make extra income in the winter months. They created clocks start to finish in their farmhouses. I’m doing the same.”

Those wishing to learn more or purchase a clock can visit:

www.TheAmericanCuckooClockCompany.com
Current models range from \$450 to \$1,000.



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