

WHEN DREAMING OF A COOL CAREER, THERE ARE MYRIAD OPTIONS. FROM FASHIONISTAS TO GARDENERS AND FURNITURE MAKERS TO ILLUSTRATORS, THERE ARE THOSE WHO FORGE THEIR OWN PATH, BOTH EARLY ON AND AFTER THEY'VE MOVED ON FROM OTHER ENDEAVORS. THIS YEAR, WE FOUND FIVE PEOPLE WITH ENVY-INDUCING JOBS THAT'LL HAVE YOU ASKING: WHAT DO I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP?

COOL JOBS

PHOTOS BY ROMERO & ROMERO



BY DESIGN

Burt Durand draws crowds in Lafayette and beyond with colorful album art

BY ASHLEY HINSON

ILLUSTRATOR BURT DURAND'S

drawings, logos, cartoons and fliers share the common thread of acute design and playful, kinetic energy.

His designs have become ubiquitous in Acadiana because he never stops working.

"My work ethic is to always be creating, whether it's drawing or music, or writing or even cooking," Durand, 34, said. "It's always good to be doing and making something."

When he isn't freelancing his drawings for Time Out New York, Dollar Shave Club,

Durand's work is sharp but fluid, and he takes inspiration from artists like Jeff Smith and his Bone comic and Calvin and Hobbes author Bill Watterson, both of whom merge their illustrations with well-crafted stories.

or Dirty Coast T-shirts, Durand works full time as head art director of BBR Creative in downtown Lafayette. He's at the helm of idea creation and execution, and that approach spills over into his personal work, designing the logos for the C. Wolf Barber & Shop, Rêve Coffee Roasters, Community Coffee and Burgersmith.

Durand also contributes to the music scene with colorful fliers and album art for local acts like Lost Bayou Ramblers, Sean Bruce, the Rayo Brothers and many of J. Burton's projects, such as FIGHTS and Talker. His work garnered national acclaim when his Cracklin Festival T-shirt for Parish Ink — depicting a monstrous pig that resembles the Kraken, a sea monster, being cooked in a pot that resembles a turbulent ocean with "Release the Cracklin" brandished across it — won the illustrative journal Communication Arts' 2016 Illustration Competition.

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"I try to put humor in, humor or a clever twist," he said. "I kind of think of that as my style. There are so many artists and illustrators, painters, that are better than me. But maybe there's something I can do to differentiate myself, to add a clever twist or clever concepts."

Durand's next project is a mural for Dat Dog's Lafayette location at 201 Jefferson St. Its corner spot on the edge of downtown secures the mural's position to greet Lafayette visitors coming from the Evangeline Thruway. He also wants to eventually do a portrait series of Lafayette creatives.

To keep churning out commission-based and client-focused work, Durand said he stays inspired by looking at award-winning work in the design and advertising fields, and seeing people do what they love within the community.

"There's cool work out there, and everyone keeps all that love and passion around them," he said. "It's kind of hard not to stay inspired."



PISTACHE OWNER ALYCE RAY, 29, knew she didn't want to be behind a desk forever. Acquiring the shop has fostered her obsession with St. Landry Parish and contributed to the growing number of women-owned businesses in historic Grand Coteau.

A native of Opelousas, Ray discovered the shop when she stepped into Pistache's equally southern and feminine sister store, The Kitchen Shop, between leaving office life and beginning a stint as an au pair in Italy. Ray met then-Pistache owner Nancy Brewer, and the two quickly bonded. Ray worked in

SOUTHERN CHARM

Shop owner **Alyce Ray** brings bohemian style to Grand Coteau

BY ASHLEY HINSON

the shops during holidays and special events, and bought the shop last year.

Ray maintained and expanded upon Brewer's vision of modern southern womanhood by keeping her vintage-inspired A-line dresses, white cotton tops with lace detailing and old-fashioned nightgowns, and added jewelry and accessories inspired by nature, Gunne Sax-influenced wedding gowns, bridal combs and vines, and handmade Indian embroidery. Her pieces appeal to bohemian young women who, like Ray, draw inspiration from traveling and collect vintage dresses.

She hangs her cotton and linen items from wrought iron gazebos. Shop cats D'Artagnan and Blanche meander between the boutique to the courtyard and back again.

"This shop is very feminine," she said. "It's for everyone, from birth to a 90-year-old woman. They're breathable fabrics that are appropriate for our climate, 100 percent cotton garments that are lightweight and breathable year-round. It spans generations; a granddaughter comes in with mother and grandmother, and each could find something to wear."

Grand Coteau is most known for its boarding school, Academy of the Sacred Heart, and the Jesuit Spirituality Center at St. Charles College. Ray said the idyllic girls school and the college's retreats attract women from the world over in addition to Acadiana residents.

"Grand Coteau has always been a charming and special place to me. Whether going to the academy for any kind of sporting event, or picking up a gift at kitchen shop, I just felt a connection to this place in my soul."

The town is flush with feminine businesses, too: local wedding staple Root Floral operates a few feet away, Petit Rouge antique shop is next door and a new salon and lipstick bar, Dollface, opened down the road. Ray said she wants to eventually collaborate with other locally owned ventures by making Grand Coteau something of a bridal hub.

Ray will celebrate her first year as owner this fall, and she said she spent her first year learning. In the future, she would like to incorporate vintage items, host events in the courtyard, and maybe open a second location that has similar charm and strong ties to tradition.

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I'm D'Artagnan, meow



PICK AND GRIN

New Iberia orchard owner **Eddie Romero** shares the fruits of his labor

BY DENNY CULBERT

EDDIE ROMERO'S ORCHARD just might be one of Acadiana's best kept secrets...sort of.

"I don't advertise, it's all still word of mouth," says Romero.

But during peach season and blackberry season, those in the know arrive in droves to pick their own fruit in his backyard orchard. In the past decade Romero has trained a Cornell student on the art of pruning muscadine vines, entertained bus loads of French tourists with his "clean jokes," and has enthralled horticulturists from all parts of the globe with his personal slice of heaven near New Iberia.

His pick-your-own operation has been in full swing since his retirement from the Department of Energy in 2006.

"This investment back here is my 401k," says Romero of the fruit trees that started as a hobby in 1986.

"I knew what I wanted to do when I retired," he says. "I wanted to have some fruits behind my house that I could pick and give to my friends, but it got so big and I only have so many friends, you know? Then I started selling and I said man, this is the thing!"

At 74, Romero has bounced back from hardships including a multi-million dollar business sunk by the real estate market crash of the 1980s, a battle with prostate cancer and even the occasional citrus thief. He attributes his current health and wellness to his fruit.

Romero shows no signs of slowing down, as he breezes between rows of grape vines full of plump green and purple bunches and a pair of speakers blare his favorite Cajun tunes from a stereo in the barn. He continues to learn something new each day and grow experimental varieties of plants.



If I won that Powerball and had one or two hundred million dollars, the first thing I'd do is try to build a big fence around this place so no one could see the good time I'm having here.

"I drink five ounces of blackberry juice every day, and today I feel great," he says.

He shows no signs of slowing down either, as he breezes between rows of grape vines full of plump green and purple bunches and a pair of speakers blare his favorite Cajun tunes from a stereo in the barn.

Romero continues to learn something new daily and grow experimental varieties of plants. "No one knows it all except for the Good Lord," he says. "He knows what He's doing.

Now if only He would give me those lotto numbers."

"If I won that Powerball and had one or two hundred million dollars, the first thing I'd do is try to build a big fence around this place so no one could see the good time I'm having here," he says. "Then I'd probably just go back to the same thing I've been doing. Get up at 6 a.m., drink my coffee, eat my breakfast and then come out back and play. If I tried to be different, I'd probably die."



SATCHELS OF SUBSTANCE

Lafayette leather goods designer **Alexandra Warren**'s brand of alligator chic

BY LISA LEBLANC-BERRY

FOR DECADES, alligator purses and other such luxury satchels have served as status symbols carried by people with social authority. Prized for their durability, rarity, symmetrical patterning, elegance and texture, they can be pricey. FinancesOnline listed a \$250,000 Cleopatra clutch made of metallic silver alligator hide accented with diamonds by Lana Marks as one of the 10 most expensive handbags in the world.

Since Louisiana has the highest alligator population in the U.S., and it's the nation's largest purveyor, major European fashion houses such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Versace buy most of Louisiana's alligator skins each year. Lafayette's expanding Mark Staton Co. is on equal footing due to their "insider" connections with local farmers and trappers who provide the state's finest exotic skins for their product lines.

Alexandra Warren is one of their sought-after designers handling the challenging, meticulous custom work orders.

If you want to order one of Warren's exquisite custom alligator handbags at Mark Staton Co. the wait is around four months. Her job includes product manufacturing and development, but the Lafayette native's specialization is in handbags. In fact, it's her passion. Warren's bachelor's degree in Fashion Design helped her learn the tricks of the trade at Mark Staton.

"I'm preparing orders to be delivered by Christmas," Warren says. "On my weekends,



I use rich leathers in conjunction with restored alligator skins to create leather goods at a more affordable price point.

or when I can find a spare moment, I work on my own line of exotic leather goods geared at a lower price point called Floodline. I've partnered with Mark Staton to create my own line, which is purely my design aesthetic. I use rich leathers in conjunction with restored alligator skins to create leather goods at a more affordable price point."

Now that Louisiana's alligator hunting season is starting up (late August until the end of September), more and more people will be showing up with their alligator

skins "without a clue about what to do with them," Warren says. She helps conceptualize their ideal luxury items from start to finish.

"I couldn't feel luckier to have discovered this job's existence in my own back yard," Warren says. "I'm constantly learning. Alligator leather is one of the most expensive to work with, and it's such a valuable local resource. When I think of my

future, Mark Staton will always be a part of it. They are like family."

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TREASURE HUNTRESS

Reuse of objets trouvés inspires Breaux Bridge furniture maker **Katherine Gooch**'s artful adaptations

BY LISA LEBLANC-BERRY

ON A SATURDAY MORNING, while sipping dark roast coffee in her back yard, Katherine Gooch was pondering new designs for a screen door.

She suddenly jumped up, grabbed a roll of tin roofing, threw it down in her driveway and began running over it with her pickup truck, again and again.

"My neighbors must think I'm nuts," Gooch says. "They saw me driving five feet forward and five feet backward over and over and over again, just running over this poor piece of tin. But the old door was going to be trashed."

Just before the tin roof throw-down, Gooch had a fleeting epiphany about a discarded old pecky cypress door she was harboring for reuse. It had splintered and broken panels, but would serve as an ideal base for the new



I've always been one to love a treasure hunt. I enjoy the thrill of discovering hidden gems.

screen door commissioned by a Lafayette landscape architect.

She decided to remove the panels and replace them with corrugated tin and screens rimmed with vibrant inlays for added dimension. The finishing touch would be the neck of a splendid old violin for the door handle, something gleaned during her "treasure" hunting forays near the bayou.

Before Gooch started having such cosmic flashes of furniture design genius, she was known for other attributes in Miami, where she resided for 30 years. A former graphic artist, she was held in high regard as a photographer, guitarist, mixed media artist and as an accomplished gourmet chef.

She moved back to Acadiana five years ago, and purchased a charming Cajun cottage in downtown Breaux Bridge. Gooch's contagious sense of humor that attracts admirers in Pont Breaux is a happy side effect of her relentless experimentation in art and in life.

Recently self-taught in the art of carpentry, the Vermilion Parish native is successfully designing furniture and lighting as a sideline. Her regular gig involves the acquisition, repurposing and selling of vintage items at a booth she rents in Bayou Town, a quaint multi-vendor antiques and collectibles market located in downtown Breaux Bridge.

It isn't often that someone describes their job as a "total blast." Gooch's work-related superlatives are at once refreshing. She employs graphic art sensibilities with creative carpentry and a playful spirit to fashion functional art with a twist. Her preferred materials are vintage items and discarded rubbish she finds along country roads bordering the Bayou Teche.

"To me, changing the intended use of something into a new function in a clever way is ultra fun. Like taking an old fishing reel, for example, and turning it into a retractable clothes-line for delicacies. I've made pendant lighting out of chicken feeders, a kitchen knife magnetic strip out of an old train pressure gauge, gate pulls out of antique wrenches, and shelving out of the fold-down lid of an old upright piano. "When someone compliments something I've repaired, shined up or built upon, they evidently appreciate the beauty, and this makes what I do seem worthwhile. It's like a meeting of the minds with total strangers who often become friends, and it's a total blast."

When designing interior architectural elements for her new cottage, Gooch built a four-foot-tall row of giant piano keys from salvaged scalloped wooden boards, adding a dramatic border to her kitchen.