



# Creations from UNDER THE LINES

Ron Bladl works on a table leg on the lathe.

MY CO-OP

Text and photos by Al Cornell

**A**s I pulled into Ron and Janet Bladl's home in Yuba, I couldn't visualize the mobile home. Well, even after I was inside and Ron was explaining the process of taking out partitions, moving windows and doors, and building on additions, I still couldn't comprehend how it had been a mobile home. It all looks like a well-planned unit without a trace of the hodgepodge that often results from the process. Ron's woodworking skill showed in the construction and furnishings.

A few years ago, when a crew showed up to trim trees under the REC lines in his backyard, Ron told them to cut the trees down and he would utilize the lumber. A local Amish mill sawed the boards, and Ron added them to his stacks. For him, a tree can become a pile of boards, and his mind begins to fashion that pile into dozens of projects. Then hands and tools are applied to the task of extracting those items from the lumber.

Some of his earliest woodworking was done with his grandfather, whose table saw became Ron's first major power tool. That interest grew during his four years of shop classes at Hillsboro High School, from which he graduated in 1966.

As a teenager, he became a licensed cheesemaker and worked in the family cheese factory in Yuba. He began purchasing woodworking tools as funds allowed. He held

up his hands and said, "I'm glad to have all of my fingers. Some of those early projects were accomplished without the best tools for the job and with some close calls." He went on to describe some cut fingers and stitches but no accidental amputations.

The Bladls' mobile home was set up in 1970 and the makeover began in 1975. In time, part of the basement became a workshop, and eventually, a professional-grade shop was established over the garage. Their hillside property affords a level walk from the house into the shop.

It was a warm January day when I visited Ron, but it was January. He walked out of the shop without even a long-sleeved shirt over his T-shirt. I soon realized his metabolism was expressed in his work projects just as it was in his bare arm comfort.



Inside the house, there were wood articles everywhere. An attractive round table, made of spruce from under the electric lines, held a train engine between a wide-eyed penguin and a happy snowman that had emerged from four kinds of wood. So far, there have been about 100 of those snowmen. The engine was engraved GB & GC RR 2014, which stands for Grandpa Bladl and Grand Children Rail Road and the year it was made. In the interest of passing on the passion for creative crafting, he has made 25 tool boxes for the grandkids and other kids. One-year-old Quinn's was sitting on the table. Nearly all of Ron's projects begin as something for family members and then expand to include other people.

The Wisconsin-shaped cutting board was one of 100 that Ron has made. He had most of them laser engraved with

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Rural Insurance Company's logo, and they went to Middleton where daughter Shelly works for that company. An artistic nightstand in the bedroom supported an elaborate lamp base made from several pieces of wood glued together to create an attractive design when turned out on the lathe. Another one of the round spruce tables is being donated to the Hillsboro Knights of Columbus for their auction.

A portion of the basement, which

had served as a shop, now holds a large open-fronted doll house and a barn. Those items have attracted grandchildren for hours of entertainment. The barn was a model with calf and pony pens, haymow beams, and hundreds of wood shingles.

Ron worked for Foremost for 18 years before his retirement in 2013. He now has an excellent work place furnished with quality tools and more stacks of lumber. Retirement grants the opportunity to join the social group at the local feed mill for an hour in the morning. Then he retreats to his shop to work on projects and to plan new ones.

In spite of the love and devotion to his many projects, he doesn't let it become a force that controls his life. He says, "It's a hobby, and I've made sure it stays a hobby." But nobody has to ask if he's found something to do in retirement. 🏠





Clockwise, starting above: A professional-quality workshop. This stack of lumber includes some from the backyard. Ron has fashioned several tables like this one by using spruce lumber from trees cut under the electric lines in his backyard.

Opposite page, clockwise, starting left: The train engine is a favorite of children and some adults. Starting them young, Ron made this toolbox for his grandson Quinn, who will receive it before his second birthday. The barn is done in great detail.



## THOUGHTS ABOUT FARMERS AND FARM LIFE

**Work defines farm life, yesterday as well as today. On**

**the farms in the heartland, the workday begins at an early hour, before the sun rises during much of the year, and continues into the evening until the livestock are fed and the evening chores are done.**

It is easy to conclude that a rural person's life is one of drudgery. For some it is, but for most, the work is enjoyed nearly all the time, anyway. Some tasks are enjoyed more than others. No one that I knew enjoyed hoeing potatoes or cucumbers hour upon hour under a hot June sun, or forking manure from a calf pen, or walking behind a team of horses pulling a smoothing drag that lifted clouds of dust so thick that you could barely see the horses' heads in front of you.

Other tasks made up for the less desirable ones. Going after the cows on a dewy morning in spring, with birdsong everywhere and the sun edging the horizon, was one of them. Hauling hay into an empty barn, with the sweet smell of drying hay and the satisfaction of seeing the haymows filled to the rafters, was another. Rural people take great pride in their work. It doesn't matter if the task is picking cucumbers, shocking grain, or making a fence. The job is done well, to the best of the person's ability. Here are some characteristics of farmers that I have picked up over the years:

- Farmers, more than anyone else, know the meaning of hope and patience—waiting months for a crop with the hope that it will amount to something.
- Farmers produce food and fiber, not products. Products come from factories. Food and fiber come from the land.
- Farming is like playing five-card poker with four cards.
- Happiness for a farmer is a barn roof that doesn't leak, a pasture fence that isn't broken, and a daylong rain in May.
- Farming is more than making a living; it is about living and the connection of people to the land.

- Few occupations blend art and science as well as farming—adding a little religion also helps.
- For a farmer, next year will always be better.
- Most farmers know they can make a small fortune in farming, if they start with a large fortune.
- No machine, no piece of technology can replace the eye of the farmer in caring for animals, producing crops, or appreciating the land.
- Successful farmers know the beliefs and values that made their parents successful, and they try to follow them.
- Successful farming has more to do with values such as hard work, cooperation with neighbors, frugality, caring for the environment, and common sense than with science and technology.
- Attention to detail makes all the difference, whether it's plowing a field, building a fence, or teaching a calf to drink from a pail.
- Books do not begin to contain what is necessary to become a successful farmer.
- An old horse, an old dog, and an old farmer have much in common: They are slow but wise.



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