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*“I love anything that brings a smile to my face. If it’s quirky, I like it. If it’s handmade, I like it.” —Marcy Carsey*

Below:  
*Mechanical Automotive  
Turn Signals, ca. 1918,  
vintage warning signs,  
metal, glass, 6 x 4½ in.*

Bottom:  
An inside look at some  
of the folk and outsider art  
on display at Just Folk.

# Producing Just Folk

STORY BY  
Leslie Andrea Westbrook





“We were a couple of TV gals who knew nothing about retail,” admits Marcy Carsey, the co-owner of Just Folk, a gallery in Summerland, CA, that features traditional American folk and outsider art. Carsey and her business partner, Susan Baerwald, had both found 30 years of success as Hollywood producers—Baerwald produced television miniseries and movies of the week as a network executive, while Carsey had her own production company with business partner Tom Werner, producing such hit television series as *The Cosby Show*, *Roseanne*, *Cybil* and *Grace Under Fire*—when they decided it was time to focus on another love: the handmade.

The two first discovered their mutual passion after meeting at a yoga class held at Carsey’s Brentwood, CA, home. They quickly became friends, and their many conversations while hiking in the Santa Monica Mountains revealed they had much more in common.

Carsey had always been attracted to 19th-century American furniture along with what she refers to as “fun stuff,” such as games, toys, whirligigs, tricycles and velocipedes. She began collecting these objects as soon as she had both the time and money. “I love anything that brings a smile to my face,” she laughs. “If it’s quirky, I like it. If it’s handmade, I like it.”

Meanwhile Baerwald collected outsider



Top left:  
*Five Blue Measures*, 20th century, wood, dia. from largest to smallest: 14, 12, 10, 8, 6 in.

Top right:  
**Paul Hart**  
*The Revolution of Evolution*, wood, old wheels, fan, 19 x 24 x 10 in.

Left:  
**Bill Traylor**  
*Woman with Handbag and Umbrella*, ca. 1932, paint and graphite on cardboard, 16 x 8 in.



art and quilts. Her interest in American craft was sparked long ago when her parents bought a summer home that once belonged to a branch of the Guggenheim family. The home was filled with Early American antiques—spinning wheels and cobblers' benches. "Those things spurred my love for that period of American creativity and ingenuity," she recalls.

Three years ago Baerwald and Carsey decided that after many decades of collecting it was time to share their fervor for craft with others. Since both had always planned to retire with their families to coastal Santa Barbara, about 100 miles north of Los Angeles, the area was a natural choice for a gallery; and Summerland, five miles south of the city and filled with antiques shops, was a perfect fit. They commissioned the architect Brian Cernal to create a barnlike,





Opposite left:  
*Watch Out for Lambs  
with Lions Paws*, ca.  
1976, enamel, wood,  
11 x 13 x 3 in.

Opposite right:  
**Leroy Archuleta**  
*Rooster*, 1994, carved  
wood, paint, 26 x 9  
x 24 in.

Opposite bottom left:  
*African American Quilt*,  
ca. 1930, cotton,  
78 x 59 in.

Opposite bottom right:  
In 2007 the gallery won  
an architecture award.

Left:  
*Boneshaker Bicycle*, ca.  
1987, wood, 45 x 74  
x 17 in.

Bottom:  
*Shiner/Boxer*, 2008,  
wood, rulers, tape mea-  
sures, fabric, boxing  
gloves, 47 x 14 x 13 in.

metal-roofed, two-story building—which subsequently won the 2007 Santa Barbara Best New Commercial Project Award—reflecting the tone of the work featured inside. The gallery found instant appeal among the locals. A wide, welcoming brick entrance invites porch sitting, and summer parties are a popular draw in the tight-knit seaside community.

Just Folk has quickly established itself as a go-to source for collectors and dealers alike. Baerwald and Carsey scour auctions and other sources for items to add to their shop, as well as their ever-changing personal collections. These many treasures range from the lighthearted, such as papier-mâché watermelon slices, game boards and tramp art, to the more high-end, including drawings by Bill Traylor (for whom they mounted a major show from Oct. 9 through Dec. 10 and produced a catalog entitled *Unfiltered*), wood carvings by Leroy Archuleta and textile paintings by Chris Roberts Antieau. Their lifelong appreciation for folk art is now fueled by the ability to keep things circulating and adopted by new folk and outsider art aficionados. However, it is never easy for Baerwald and Carsey to part with the objects they have fallen in love with—both confess to occasionally asking for “visiting rights” when something is sold.

Baerwald and her husband, Paul, divide

their time between their folk-art-filled Los Angeles home and a cozy cottage adjacent to the gallery. In a heartbreaking turn of events, Carsey, who also had homes in both areas, lost her nearby Montecito house and the many objects she had spent years collecting in the Tea Fire in 2008—a disaster that consumed over 200 homes. Looking ahead, she is designing and building a new, green house, built of stone, in the original location. Just Folk is also a source of solace as it allows her to remain surrounded by the things she loves on a daily basis.

While Carsey and Baerwald may be the brains behind the gallery, it’s the energy of the artists, both known and anonymous, that steals the show. But the women are used to that: it’s the producer’s role and they’re very happy to fill it in a new way. “We get to do what we want now,” says Baerwald, referring to her hectic years climbing the Hollywood executive ladder. Today the only reason she and Carsey are climbing ladders is to access unique items among the upper reaches of the two-story high shelving.

*Based in Santa Barbara, Leslie Andrea Westbrook has written for Antiques West, San Francisco Chronicle and Conde Nast Traveler, among other publications.*

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[justfolk.com](http://justfolk.com)

