

Forging a legacy

By Ritchie E. Starnes

The back of his thick hands are peppered with burns. His calloused palms and fingers are stained from metal shavings.

Greet Scott Boatright with a handshake and the stout grip quickly reveals that he's a man accustomed to working with his hands. His long sleeve denim shirt hides arms dotted with scars caused by cascading sparks of fire. Make no mistake about it; the blue-collar Boatright is an artist.

While most think of art as paint on a canvas, a sculpture born from clay, an image frozen by a photograph, or the written word scrawled on linen, Boatright forges molten iron. To simply call Boatright a custom welder would be akin to calling Robert Frost just a writer.

"You can do anything with a piece of steel that you can with clay," said Boatright, recalling the early teachings from an uncle. That uncle had a reputation as being "the best there ever was" in terms of custom ironwork. Curious as to how his uncle twisted steel until it became a thing of beauty, the younger Boatright began his pursuit of iron mastery at the age of 11.



But, his iron lineage started well before his teaching uncle. It began with Boatright's great grandfather at the turn of the 1900s. At the corner of the then dirt Providence and Weddington roads sat his great-grandfather's blacksmithing shop. Traveling by horse and wagon, his great-grandfather trekked the Carolinas from as far away as Charleston, S.C. to Virginia where he laid iron for Southern estates.

Now Scott Boatright travels a Southern territory where he too installs decorative iron works. His specialized metal smithing tends to lean toward the upper crust as well.

"I'm trying to leave a legacy by producing what I believe is a forgotten art," said Boatright in his country boy's slow drawl. Between frequent Marlboro cigarettes and discarded ashes falling to his lap, the easygoing Boatright, 49, talks about forging molten steel like a potter would clay.

"I lay awake in bed at night thinking about how to manipulate steel," Boatright said. "I don't want someone to say 'it would be perfect if...'"

“Some people think about NASCAR, football, or baseball, I think about wrought iron,” he added.

Like most artists, Boatright has been fortunate enough to transfer a passion into a living. His unique ability to forge decorative ironworks has led to a high-end market, what Boatright calls an educated consumer - those who understand the value of quality. Many of the \$1 million homes here in Union County are stamped with his smithing wares. In fact, most of the upscale neighborhood entrances are adorned with his fancy wrought iron gate work, such as Longview, Victoria Lakes, Skycroft, and Stratford on Providence.



“You go up to a home with a \$20,000 front door and grab a \$400 handrail that wobbles,” Boatright describes. “That plants a seed. What else wobbles behind these walls?”

Lisa Giovanniello of Blue Ribbon Realtors said she was so taken aback by Boatright’s work that she assigned him the task of creating an ornamental iron that depicted an equestrian theme. He managed to forge iron into the image of her Arabian horses.

“I was so blown away with his art,” Giovanniello said. “He has great vision and his detail work is amazing. Besides being a great artist he’s also a great person.”

Architects and custom builders routinely rely on Boatright’s skills to help them design what ornamental iron works might best define a structure. Whether it’s the brick, stone, or simply the right atmosphere, Boatright said he could determine what’s best after a gander of the site.

Boatright integrates decorative art forms into the steel. He’s created grapes and leaves for a wine cellar door, fish for a seaside country club, dragons, leaves, or a boot scrape into a wrought iron handrail. One recent property owner requested gardenias.

“I went and bought some gardenias to replicate it into the forge,” Boatright said. “I didn’t want her to think it was roses.

“The difference between a good job and a great job is the detail,” he added.

His work often brings tears of joys from satisfied customers. But, there’s one that’s never totally satisfied - Scott Boatright!

“I’ve done jobs that I was very, very proud of, but I’ve never been totally satisfied,” Boatright said. “That’s how I’m wired. There’s no substitute for perfection.”

That relentless pursuit of perfection as well as a desire to perform the impossible is also a part of his heritage.

“I remember when I was boy and I’d get frustrated, I’d hear my Mama and daddy say ‘can’t never could.’” Any kind of talk that an iron smithing task can’t be done motivates Boatright.

The phrase has served him well en route to making a name for himself in an otherwise underappreciated craft. Most iron workers, like many contractors, befall victim to the call for mass production that accompanies steady income. Boatright said he turned down an opportunity to produce mass handrails for a 200-home subdivision.

“That’s not what we’re about,” Boatright said. “We”re not cookie cutters.”

Despite catering to high-end consumers, the Roughedge native and Parkwood High School graduate doesn’t have a pretentious bone in his body. He’s not above helping a neighbor with a need or sometimes hiring out for a less demanding job.

Instead of some fancy name for his business, he named the small outfit CSC Welding & Fabrication after his three sons. His modest shop sits along McWhorter Road.



Boatright has remained true to his upbringing by mentoring young men who show a willingness to learn a forgotten art. He has bypassed veteran welders with more experience for an upstart. Boatright said many welders lack the flexibility and creativity to do anything other than weld steel together. Boatright prefers to mold younger minds that have yet to learn bad habits.

“It takes a certain type of person to do this work,” Boatright said. “I can’t just hire a welder.”