

## WILLIAM AND RENEE MORRIS

*Who they are and what they create are inseparable.*

*By Marilyn Fish*

Throughout history, but especially during the Arts and Crafts era, craftsmen inspired by nature have created useful and beautiful objects. In their suburban studio 35 miles from San Francisco, William and Renee Morris (no relation to the historic figure) carry on this tradition. Taking direction from natural materials, they give the gift of the well-made object through the medium of hand-crafted lamps.

William Morris was born, raised, and held his first job in San Francisco. "Pier 64. That's where I started my work life. I was a job shop machinist in a plant that made one-of-a-kind fabrications for the aerospace and defense industries. I was never bored. It was very exacting, precision work."

In time William moved to the suburbs and began working with wood. "It was the challenge of it. The wood. The smell, the feel, the visual appeal." Tired of commuting, he became a self-employed cabinetmaker working out of his home studio. After six years he made the transition to lamp making. This was in the 1990s.

In 1979, William had married Renee, an Oakland girl who grew up in Piedmont, California. In a little more than a decade, they were the parents of five. Meanwhile, Renee learned the craft of shade-making from William's first business partner,

From the beginning, his woodworking effort was no idle pastime. "Never have had the luxury of just making things. I always had to sell what I made."

Both William and Renee embrace the Arts and Crafts aesthetic. Renee says, "I'm definitely influenced by the old lamps. I love the lines and materials used back then. But ours are our interpretations, not replicas."

Other than the samples shown on their website and sold at craft



shows, William Morris Studio lamps are made to order, giving customers the opportunity to choose woods, mica color, and decorative elements.

The Morrises collaborate to develop an integrated design. William then selects a piece of kiln-dried hardwood, letting its knots and imperfections suggest the final form of the lamp base. Renee buys mica (a thin layer of a natural mineral known for its translucence and color variations) in 18" x 36" sheets. "It's easy to work with," she says. "After preparing it (her method is proprietary) you can cut it with regular scissors." She accents shades with hand-cut designs and dried leaves from the studio's yard, placing them spontaneously to keep the designs fresh.

Of a potential second generation in the business, Renee says, "Our children used to participate, but two are getting married soon, two leave for college in the fall – and the 14-year-old isn't interested just now. At this point, William and I are the only ones working on the lamps – we do everything from hand-selecting the wood and leaves to packing up the finished product."

Asked about his goals, William veered from the professional to the personal—which, in his life, are closely integrated. "My quest is to become more loving and peaceful. It's the work of a lifetime." He considers himself as good as retired. "No commute. No boss. Few irritants. Time to read, write, love, play, create. I'm a lucky, lucky man." Lucky, indeed. Husband and wife agree that they're fortunate to do creative work that adds beauty to people's daily lives.

