

Boot maker D.W. Frommer creates custom-made boots from his Redmond workshop that are sought after throughout the world.

The Boot Maker's WORKSHOP

Photo by Timothy Park Photography

“If you’re going to be in this business, you have to think of it as a continuing journey. It’s a learning process that will continue the rest of your life.”

by Kathy Oxborrow, for *The Bulletin*
Special Projects Department

Did you know that cowboy boots originated from the boots worn by the Duke of Wellington when he defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo? This is the kind of information one learns when they chat with D.W. Frommer, Redmond’s world-renowned custom boot maker extraordinaire.

Frommer greeted me at the door of his shop that sits behind his Redmond home. He was attired in tooled, brown leather suspenders and cuffs with pants tucked into his high-top black and white boots. Smiling through his gray handlebar mustache, he introduced me to his wife, Randee, who works alongside him, and their rescued Greyhound dog, Rosie.

Examples of Frommer’s custom-made boots are on display in the Cowboy Hall of Fame and the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum,

though Frommer says he didn’t always aspire to become one of the top custom boot makers in the United States.

“My dad was a metallurgical engineer, and he wanted me to go into business,” he said.

Frommer’s early years were spent in a small Missouri town that he likened to “Mayberry,” the idyllic fictional community depicted in the 1950s TV show starring Andy Griffith. His first exposure to working with leather came when his parents gave him a wallet lacing kit when he was around 10 years old.

“That planted a seed that took a long time to germinate,” he said.

After military service in Vietnam, he eventually made his way west to the Willamette Valley, where found a job in a shoe repair shop.

“Horses weren’t my first calling, but I did wear shoes and boots on a regular basis,” Frommer said.

So when a Billings, Montana friend, who worked for a custom

boot maker, phoned needing a shoulder to cry on because his wife had left him, Frommer immediately offered his shoulder.

He hitchhiked to Billings and ended up apprenticing with Mike Ives, the custom boot maker. Ives told Frommer, “The only thing I can do for you is sit you down and take you through a pair of boots and, every time you make a mistake, hit you upside the head with my baseball bat.”

Ives never used his baseball bat on Frommer, but he did teach him the basic skills that set him on his way to his current status at the top of the custom boot making world. Frommer has learned from many since then.

“If you’re going to be in this business, you have to think of it as a continuing journey,” he said. “It’s a learning process that will continue the rest of your life.”

Returning to the Willamette Valley, Frommer set up his own shop



D.W. and Randee Frommer / Photos by Lyle Cox.

“He will take an order for something he doesn’t know how to do, and he’ll work until he perfects it.”

in Brownsville. A reporter was covering a parade in town when he spotted Frommer’s store and decided to interview him.

“A week after the article appeared in the Albany paper, I was all of a sudden a year behind in orders,” he said. “And by the time a month was over, I was two years behind, and I have never been less than two years behind since then.”

Sixty percent of Frommer’s customers are men. They are people who can afford from \$1,500 to \$5,000 for a pair of boots. They include lawyers, doctors, ranchers, stockbrokers, wine-makers and even working cowboys.

They come from all over the world—Japan, Venezuela, England,

Switzerland and Saudi Arabia—to commission Frommer to make their boots as well as to study the boot-making craft.

“It’s a 19th century trade in the 21st century,” said Frommer. “If a boot were to be priced according to the degree of skill and quality of leather, boots would probably run up to \$8,000 and \$9,000.”

Frommer’s customer with the most unique profession is a Brussels, Belgium architect who restores castles. The architect plans to return next year to spend three weeks studying boot making with the master craftsman.

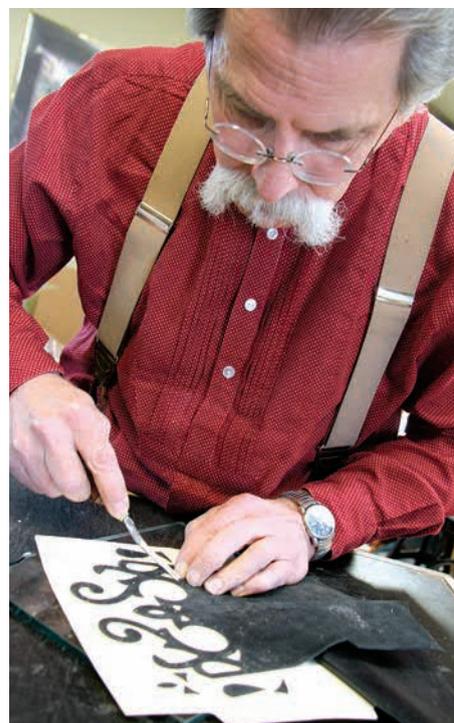
During their time with Frommer, students read his three self-published books and make a pair of boots.

“I pour my 35 years of wisdom, techniques and knowledge into their skulls,” he said. “Sometimes it just leaks out of their ears as I pour it in.”

Frommer figures that if 20 percent of his students actually go into shoe or boot making for any length of time, he’s probably “on the top of the heap as far as teachers are concerned.”

When asked what makes him such an excellent boot maker, Frommer was silent for the first time during the interview. His wife, Randee, broke the silence.

“He is always learning new techniques,” she said. “He will take an order for something he doesn’t know how to do, and he’ll work until he perfects it. He has a very keen eye, and he’s very particular about what he does.”



REDMOND CHAMBER SPOTLIGHT:

Cent-Wise Sporting Goods & Hardware

Cent-Wise Sporting Goods & Hardware, located at 498 S 6th St. in Redmond, was established in Redmond in 1948 as a drug store. It was a focal point of downtown with a popular soda fountain where people would gather and visit. Over the years, Cent-Wise expanded its operations to include sporting goods and hardware. Founder Vernon Patrick was so influential in his support of local schools and activities for children that Redmond named a school after him, Vern Patrick Elementary School.

The Cent-Wise Sporting Goods store focuses on providing everything needed for the hunting and fishing opportunities that abound in Central Oregon, including gun and bow supplies and services as well as rod and pool maintenance and repair. Cent-Wise is also a full service Oregon Fish and Game center providing hunting and fishing licenses, controlled hunt applications, game tags, bird stamps, etc. Contact them at (541) 548-4422.



Goody’s Soda Fountain & Candy

To satisfy you or a family member’s sweet tooth this holiday season, be sure to stop by Goody’s, located at 515 6th St. in Redmond. Goody’s, founded in Sunriver in 1984, will celebrate its 25th birthday this year. There are now five Goody’s locations, including their most recent shop in Redmond.

“With the plans for the reroute, the revitalization of downtown and the strong sense of family and community, Redmond seemed like the perfect place to expand,” said owner Jvon Danforth. “The atmosphere (of the Historic Redmond Hotel) is very appropriate for our old fashioned soda fountain.”

Goody’s still uses the same award-winning chocolate and ice cream recipes it began with in 1984. You will enjoy the 2008 holiday menu which includes Old Fashioned Fudge, a Rocky Road Wreath, Peanut Brittle, Christmas Pretzels and Peppermint Bark. Their chocolates are handmade and hand-dipped right here in Central Oregon.

For more information, call (541) 385-7085 or go online to www.goodyschocolates.com.



Photos by Timothy Park Photography