

Selwedge

DESIGNER EDGE



CLAIRE READ

“They made me smile, made my heart leap a little. I guess you could say I fell in love,” Claire Read says, recalling when she first discovered her passion for making ‘storybox’ sculptures – little whimsical worlds created with repurposed materials. “I take the unwanted, the unloved, the damaged, the decayed and put them together in a way that celebrates the imperfections. They’re formed from vintage treasures; little pieces of the past lives of others, which come together to create a new story,” she says.

Over time, her love for her work has grown and she’s become more adventurous with her designs. And friends and associates have rallied to the cause – antique dealers recommend special pieces to her or they are collected as she does the rounds of textile and antique fairs, shops and flea markets. The result is cupboards full of boxes and a studio packed with vintage materials.

Immersing herself in antiques is an important part of Claire’s creative process. When she holds an item, a storybox idea is sparked. “I see the story unfolding

right before my eyes. Sometimes I pick up an object and a song or piece of poetry pops immediately into my head.” As for the containers themselves, receptacles for her little worlds are generally pre-1930s boxes (tea caddies, jewellery cases, tabernacle boxes) and tins (previously

used for sweets, medical equipment and food, such as Oxo). She also uses drawers, lanterns, glass jars, cages and teacups ... the more imperfect the better. Same goes for the materials used inside, which include embroideries, tablecloths and hankies. (“I have even used Victorian bloomers!”) For accessories, there are paintings, jewellery, furniture trims, mini dolls, millinery flowers, buttons (they make terrific moons), pocket watches, bottle stoppers ... the list goes on. “There are no rules,” says Claire.

For the scenery backdrop, a painting or a panel of fabric is blanket stitched around the edges. Quotes are sculpted from wire or printed onto fabric with a typewriter and then stitched on. Boxes sometimes have handles or feet added (parts of chess pieces or abacus beads), and Claire lines the interior edges with ribbon or fabric. Tiny embellishments add the final touches.

Claire admits to a little inspirational help from the animals at her home in the south west of the UK. “I have 10 acres full of animals. Llamas, sheep, kunekune pigs, geese, ducks – it’s a little world of its own, rather like one of my storyboxes. It’s another thing that inspires my work, as my animals get up to all sorts of antics. Like the times when Mini, my first sheep, used to come into my studio and rummage around in my vintage cotton reels. Quite often, I find myself stepping over sleeping ducks or chickens and rescuing bits of fabric from nibbling sheep mouths!” They clearly appreciate the special charm of Claire Read’s work. Just as we do!

For more information on Claire Read, of Little Burrow Designs, visit www.littleburrowdesigns.co.uk and www.facebook.com/littleburrowdesigns. Or email claireread@littleburrowdesigns.co.uk.

– Janai Velez

