

J. Wilde's Wild Designs

San Angelo's favorite daughter brings her designs to far-reaching fans, while keeping the hometown crowd happy—and proud.

Joyce Wilde's face changes constantly, flitting from one expression to the next, a study in movable emotion. The designer's palette of expression echoes her own lively creations—enchanting furniture, accents, interiors, and clothes far removed from a "still life" version of art.

At J. Wilde (pronounced "Will-dee"), the retail and wholesale designer line of this San Angelo artist, the mundane becomes the extraordinary. Headquartered at 20 East Con-

cho Street, J. Wilde has won devotees far beyond its heart-of-Texas origins, with showrooms in New York and Dallas and prominence in several high-end catalogs.

On this day, Joyce and loyal local

Joyce's bright collection of furniture and accents is only one of several color possibilities at J. Wilde's. "When everybody else was stripping furniture, I'd put more coats of paint on it," says Joyce.





says Diana. "In some design areas, you must always have a touch of color. Our premise is you must always have a touch of J. Wilde."

"The whimsy that's in your soul that you didn't know you had? She just sort of pulls it out, and she's so sweet about it," Diana adds. "She's not intimidated by life and by using her imagination. Something that others see as odd and ugly, Joyce takes a hold of and twists and turns it and puts some fabric on it, and it's happy. There are no rules."

Slightly embarrassed by all the fuss, Joyce shakes her head at the compliments. "Our customers inspire me," she says softly, her demeanor earnest. Then that ever-changing face lights up as she thinks of the perfect way to sum up the appeal of J. Wilde: "If we have boundaries, they are so far apart you can't see one from the other." Nancy Dornan-Hickson

GET WILDE

You can visit J. Wilde's at 20 East Concho Street, San Angelo, or phone (915) 655-0878. The retail operation is open 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday.

Customers love Joyce's funky clothing line, with items retailing around \$500 to \$600. "We don't do a lot of summer clothing because there is not enough to work with—we can't layer it," says Joyce. "That's what we do best—put lots of colors and fabrics together. That's what makes our stuff different from other lines of clothing."



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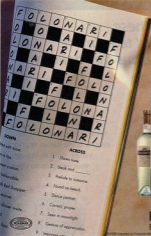
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Walzer, a retired cotton farmer, now handles wholesale and shipping. Daughter Missey Dacy works as bookkeeper and manager. And daughters Jenny and Katy help in the store and at market as needed.

The designer, 51, credits her artistic vision to the divine. "God didn't confuse me with a lot of talent," she says in her soft drawl. "I can't draw," she says, smiling. "I don't even know how to operate a glue gun." But a wellspring of ideas seems to come to her as naturally as breathing.

"My theory is that people tend to separate necessity and beauty," she says. "I think that something necessary can be beautiful, and that the beautiful can be useful." As an example, she points to a huge mirror, hung at an unusual angle to accommodate a thermostat. And tapestry even upholsters the office's filing cabinets.

"Color is easy for me," she continues as she walks past different areas showcasing her wide range of collections: the brights, the darks, the jewel tones, the muted, the powdered pastels, the browns and blacks, and the ivories. "Anything can be done in any color combination. I think we take the seriousness out of material things by taking a piece of oak furniture and washing it in pastel pink, for example. We do it with passion. When you look at it, you don't just see it, you feel it."

She concedes the J. Wilde line is "pricy," but explains that each item is handmade by U.S. contract workers, as opposed to cheap factory labor in another country. A popular Santa chair retails for about \$900; jackets are \$500 to \$600. But her items are so strong, she adds, you don't need a lot.

As she winds her way through the store, friend and customer Diana Ryan drops by, eager to share her views on Joyce's success. "Ever since she has breathed, Joyce has been giving a gift to West Texas, and now the world."

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customers are moving part of the store's merchandise to a new location across the street. "Everybody has ideas," she says about her design theory as she walks through the rabbit warren of rooms. "The only difference is that we finish our ideas. We go a step further."

Well, maybe. But some way-out-of-the-box thinking is called for to believe we all have *this* much imagination. Take, for instance, the ordinary mattress and boxsprings covered with leopard print and plopped upon an electric-blue iron bed. Voila! An exciting oversize sofa that doubles as a spare bed. The fun, funky pink pastel furniture, dripping rich fabrics and beads, formerly led life as a serious, staid antique. A tiny tricycle becomes a whimsical chandelier. Large swathes of colorful brocades combine to make a Texas-size state flag wall hanging. A plain-lane jacket outfitted with multiple fabrics, fringe, buttons, and beads transforms into a fanciful vision of romance.

It would be natural to assume that creations as bold as these originate from a cocky creator. But Joyce is as self-effacing as her designs are daring. "We," not "me," crops up constantly in her conversation, as tribute to the 30 or so contract employees who bring her ideas to life. Joyce also frequently compliments local customers who believed in her in the early days 16 years ago, long before larger markets came calling. She's also quick to credit the success of J. Wilde to her supportive family. Husband



ABOVE: "Someone can sit in this chair," Joyce says about her popular Santa chair, which retails for about \$800. Although the chair looks like art, careful placement of its adornments makes it usable.

TOP: Various fabrics and fringes like the ones used in this Christmas tree chair and the cross play a part in many of Joyce's creations. "Choosing the fabrics is a full-time job," the designer says.