



# DeForest woman turns passion for art into creative 'earthbowl' design business

BY JAKE KURTZ  
*Hometown News LP*

**F**or the last 19 years, Carmen Zajicek worked as a full-time vocational therapist, but she had studied art in college and had dreams of putting that training to good use.

Zajicek remembers one night specifically about two years ago when she couldn't sleep. She was suddenly hit with a jolt of inspiration.

"I just thought, darn it, I really would like to use my art degree," recalled Zajicek, who with her husband, Mark Anderson, owner DeForest-based 4 Elements Designs.

The next morning, Zajicek asked Anderson to round up a few materials for her and "the rest is history." Since that day, Zajicek has been working away to provide the world with what the couple have dubbed "earthbowls."

The artistic and functional vessels, which Zajicek said are a "nature meets industrial" combination, are produced at the couple's DeForest studio. They range greatly in size, shape and materials used with one common ingredient – cement.

"They are very unique because none of them are the same," Zajicek said of the bowls, which are individually signed and numbered. "It's not something that anyone has seen before or can go out and buy more of. I can guarantee you that you will not find this anywhere else."

Other items that Zajicek enjoys incorporating into her creations are grapevines, heat and chemical treated copper, rare earth stones and crys-

All handcrafted with no two exactly alike, 4 Elements Designs' 'earthbowls' are where "nature meets industrial." The result is causing quite a stir in the art world.





tals, reeds and bark. She has even begun using trilobites, fossils, colored glass and tile.

“Anything that I believe would be interesting and different I try to use,” Zajicek said. “I love experimenting with new things and I love the organic and natural elements working them together with something industrial like cement.”

The first batch of earthbowls Zajicek made nearly sold out at a Sun Prairie fair. Similar results were then seen at a few other shows the couple participated in.

“From then on, we wanted to see what else can be done with them,” Zajicek said, who left her therapist position in February to produce her art full-time.

Today, she and Anderson attend exhibitions and fairs at states throughout the upper Midwest. Thousands of earthbowls have been made to date and they continue to be a hot seller and have the couple looking at expanding their coverage area.

“No, I really didn’t,” Zajicek said when asked if she ever dreamed that her earthbowls would become so popular. “I thought I would try it once, make five or six, and that would be it.”

In fact, Zajicek and Anderson made it through a three-tiered judging process and were invited to have an exhibit at the prestigious Des Moines (Iowa) Arts Festival in late June.

“We got in and it was very exciting,” she said of the multi-day Iowa gathering. “We feel like we can compete and do well at these shows.”

The cost of an individual earthbowl ranges from \$25 to \$500 in price depending on size and materials used. Anderson said he and his wife are often complimented on the variety of bowls and prices they offer at shows, acknowledging that not everyone is an art collector with deep pockets.

“They really are affordable to everyone,” Anderson said. “We do have a lot of styles and things that fit every budget.”

At one fair near Chicago, Zajicek said two women entered into a small bidding war of sorts for a specific bowl. A prominent

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*Mark Anderson, co-owner DeForest-based 4 Elements Designs*

interior design group in the Windy City also has had conversations with the couple about making earthbowls available through their business.

But, getting your hands on an earthbowl is not the simplest task in the world. Zajicek and Anderson agree the easiest way is to visit one

of the many shows and exhibitions the couple attend throughout the year. They also are open to being contacted to set up a studio appointment.

As for selling earthbowls online, many of them are not ideally shaped and suited for shipping, but Zajicek said she and Anderson continue to research and evaluate ways to get them out to the public.

“You just can’t ship some of them,” Zajicek added. “It’s not really possible.”

Using a variety of techniques, such as slab pottery and knowledge of throwing pots on a wheel, Zajicek also incorporates carving, sculpture and metal working skills into each bowl. Anderson produces the molds that are employed to give each bowl its shape after Zajicek provides a design.

Start to finish, Zajicek invests upwards of 20 hours of meticulous work and detail into each bowl. “The copper alone takes several hours to get right,” she said.

Each earthbowl also takes two to three weeks to properly air dry since Zajicek does not use a kiln. But once they’re ready, there are plenty of uses at an individual’s disposal, as long as the bowls are kept indoors and out of the elements.

“They can be used as decorative containers, wine racks, flower pots or as just a piece of art,” Zajicek said. “As long as you put some type of liner in it, because they are porous, you can put almost anything in them.”

4 Elements Designs can be found online at [www.4elementsdesigns.com](http://www.4elementsdesigns.com) and can be reached by phone at (608) 445-4347 or by email at [contact@4elementsdesigns.com](mailto:contact@4elementsdesigns.com).



*DeForest resident Carmen Zajicek (top left) is pictured working on the creation of a new earthbowl in her studio recently. Each earthbowl takes hours to finish with each piece unique. The popularity and versatility of the earthbowls has helped Zajicek, and her husband and co-owner, Mark Anderson, gain entry into prestigious art shows, such as the triple-juried Des Moines (Iowa) Arts Festival. The couple also does shows in several Wisconsin communities and major cities including Chicago.*

*Zajicek said she prides herself on creating earthbowls in several different price ranges to make them affordable to everyone. Costs can range from \$25 to \$500.*

*All photos by Jake Kurtz, DeForest Times-Tribune*