



A bit of La De Da' flair!

La De Da' Bears are inspired by the finer things in life, and incorporate the sweet memories of childhood innocence

By Chris Elliott

Brenda Pollock-Smith made her first mohair bear in 1994 for her then three-year-old daughter's collection. Together, the two of them attended all of the local bear shows and shopped in the teddy bear speciality boutiques. Brenda explains, "We were in awe of the artistry of one of a kind bears. It was a wonderful time in my life, sharing our love for teddy bears. It is a marvellous thing to look back now and to see how far this love has taken me today. Or should I say 'consumed' me!"

Over the years, Brenda's life took off in other artistic directions. She began working in floral design, sculpting, photography and digital and mixed media art. She also went back to college to study and obtained a holistic health practitioner degree and licence.

But then, in November 2007, she was again inspired to design bears. She was playing around making patterns, pulled out some old mohair purchased at one of the shows from the 1990s, and put her designs out on the internet. To her amazement, they sold right away. Encouraged by her family, she kept going, and La De Da' Artisan Bears was born. At the time, Brenda was also creating large scale photographic and mixed media art pieces, and so one income supported the other as she built her businesses.

As well as her daughter, Brenda was

also inspired to make bears by her mother, Peggy, who was smitten with the idea of artisan bears and for whom Brenda made one. Peggy and her siblings were children during the Great Depression and did not have many material possessions, and the

bear, reminiscent of childhood, struck an emotional chord. Brenda says, "I knew then that there was a powerful emotional element beyond the fluff of a cute face and squeezable stuffing. The psychological archetype of the teddy bear is ingrained in



ABOVE: 'LaLa Sweethug' - a 4 inch Haute Shabby Tiny Bear

BELOW LEFT: Fannie FrouFrou - a 13 inch Boudoir Ballerina Bear

us all, with its symbolism of comfort and love.”

Brenda lives with her husband, Joseph, who she describes as “the most patient, honourable and sweetest man I have ever known, next to my own father. He is my best friend and cherished love of my life.” She says that one of their favourite pastimes is touring the wine regions in California, where they live and where some of the world’s best wine is raised and produced. Brenda’s daughter, Chelsea, now 19 years old, attends college locally and lives at home. Brenda says Chelsea is her treasured sounding board and design critic. She adds that her honest critiques and encouragement have been very helpful these past three years developing her bears. The household is completed by

three Yorkshire Terriers, Ludwig, Gunnar and Winston. They provide constant “cute inspiration” for the bears through their faces and expressions. They are also Brenda’s loyal assistants and companions every day in the studio.

Brenda’s career history ranges from fashion model to corporate management. She was an agency fashion model and instructor, teaching every aspect of modelling, from makeup application and etiquette to walking a ramp. One of her favourite jobs was proprietor of her own ballet school ‘La Petite Danseuse’, teaching Russian Classical

Ballet to pre- and elementary school children. Brenda worked for a few years in Interior Design, as an assistant to two designers, and says it was a great job, satisfying her love for textiles and design. She adds that she spent most of her adult working years in corporate management and in international business, travelling to Hong Kong and Tokyo for trade fairs in the sportswear business.

Brenda and Joseph are rose fanatics. They have at one time grown around 400 plants in their home garden as a hobby for competitive exhibition. They have won American Rose Society National and District trophies for their roses and for Brenda’s rose arrangements. In fact, they first met through their local rose society, the California Coastal Rose Society, where Brenda is also the web designer. Brenda even has a rose named after her, ‘Lady Bren’.

Brenda is also currently learning to speak French, a pursuit she describes as being “one of my bucket list entries.” For stress relief and good health, Brenda says she “does Pilates, laughs as much as possible, uses aromatherapy and prays often.” She and her husband are also active in U.S. politics, both locally and nationally. Brenda is Native American from both sides of her family - Cherokee and Apache, as well as having some Scottish and English ancestry.

Brenda describes herself as a full time, 24/7, bear maker.

She has a converted spare bedroom which she uses as her studio, describing it as “my slice of heaven where I spend most of my time.”

Brenda describes her bears as “Haute Shabby”, and says that it is her goal to provide an heirloom to pass down through the generations. She adds, “I name my bears in a unique way, which has become another signature element that gets chuckles from people who read them. I like that!”

Asked why she decided to make the sort of bears that she does, Brenda



LEFT: Rosy Goldshine - a 9 inch Victorian Bedtime Girl

ABOVE: Luella FitzPosh - a 8.5 inch Roaring 20's Girly Bear

TOP RIGHT: Angélique WeeDreamer - a 4 inch Haute Shabby Girl Bear

ABOVE RIGHT: Bebe Treschic - a 13 inch Boudoir Ballerina Design

FAR RIGHT: Emma Prancealot - a Lovely 11 inch Equestrian Girl



explains, "I have had some wonderful seasoned mentors, such as Denise Purrington, who have each helped me to define 'my look'. They have been helpful in giving me the thumbs up on looks that are pleasing and unique. I thrive on evolving and will continue to experiment with new patterns. Even if they fail, you will never know until you try."

Brenda hand dyes every bear in custom blended dye. She buys white mohair and dyes it according to her particular inspiration at the time - which "might be a colour and/or combination from a piece of art, from an ad in a magazine, a rose, anything. Colour is my passion and I love the challenge of being able to mix a dye to match the colour I have in mind.



Sometimes it may take two or three dye baths to get just the right colour, which, of course, adds time to making a bear."

Brenda says her favourite part of bear making is sculpting the nose and setting the eyes. On the other hand, the part she least enjoys is cutting out mohair and fray checking.

Brenda estimates that she makes around 100 – 150 bears a year, which she sells on her Website and via Etsy, BearPile and "currently in four lovely shops across the globe."

Does Brenda have a favourite of the bears she has made? "I have had several favourites and almost cry packaging them up, but once I know the new owner is happy....I have my photographs to remember them by."

Asked whether her creations all work first time, or whether she ever rejects a bear, Brenda replies, "Oh my, heads have been thrown, yelled at, tossed into the reject drawer. I sometimes come back to them and might be able to rework them, if

not they are given away to a family member who takes pity on my cruel assessment and rescues them."

In 2010, Brenda began a book using her bears as the characters. It is a continued work in progress, to be released in the future. She has some early bears who inspired the characters and keeps them for the photography.

Does Brenda collect bears herself? Yes, she does. She says that between her daughter and herself, they have "quite a few".

And finally, a last few words from Brenda: "The bears have found homes all over the world, from Scotland to Singapore. I adore my collectors and shop owners, and each one of them has been a blessing to me, allowing me to do what I love most....create. My hope is that the La De Da' Bears serve as a tangible reminder of all the finer things in life, as well as childhood, sweet memories, innocence and celebrating love. Most of all, I hope they make people smile." **TBT**