

FORM + FUNCTION



After completing a significant wood repair (see following page), Tara Novak painted "Aspens in the Snow," which hangs next to the repaired beam.

Tara Novak Is All About the Details

by LAURA LIEFF • photos courtesy TARA NOVAK

IT'S A NEW YEAR WHICH, FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE, MEANS A FRESH START. WHETHER IT'S COMMITTING TO A revamped exercise program, getting a new haircut, deciding to change eating habits, altering your clothing style or counting days on the mountain, the new year can signify big changes. In terms of home décor, a new year can serve as a catalyst for elevating your living space to the level you've always wanted. That's where longtime local artist Tara Novak, and her 25 years in the faux/decorative painting business, comes in.

“Most people who hire me live in high-end homes (usually second homeowners) and appreciate art and attention to detail,” Novak says. “I work with general contractors, architects, interior designers, and property managers who bring me on because the owner is looking for top-tier upgrades to their houses.”

Through her business, Custom Creations & Restorations, Inc., Novak melds form and function by transforming something utilitarian and giving it style, mood and character. Her expertise covers a wide range of indoor and outdoor home décor which encompasses various surfaces, panels, and outlets people are looking to highlight, repair or make disappear.

“My clients want to avoid spending a lot of money on fancy granite or wood only to have their guests’ eyes go to ugly outlet covers,” Novak explains. “One of the many things I do is change the focus by turning the seemingly ordinary into a conversation piece by making those outlets blend and look like art.” And by art, she means creating distinctive wall and ceiling finishes, unique murals and elegant cabinetry refinishes, as well as camouflaging utility boxes and outlet covers, fixing stone and concrete, adding metal patina finishes, enhancing metal, antique restoration, wood repair, and furniture moisturizing care, just to name a few.

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On this project in Red Sky Ranch, a large, vertical barnwood beam had twisted after installation, creating a 3" gap. "My job was to fill the gap, sculpt in the texture to match the natural existing beam texture, then paint the patched zone to blend with the existing distressed finish of the beam," explains Novak.



Combining Restoration + Fine Art

What sets Novak apart is that her expertise goes beyond “fixing” and into fine art which can be seen in the murals she paints, the texture she adds and the mediums she uses including metallic plasters, stencils, mica, gold leaf, and glitter, among many others. “I specialize in handcrafted custom finishes that bring the inside and outside of a home to life,” she explains.

One of the most common jobs for Novak is woodwork repair and restoration, as many of her projects start with new construction or remodels. She explains that when a house is under construction for several months, or even years in some cases, wear and tear happens regardless of how careful tradespeople try to be. As a result, Novak is hired to handle scratch repairs, mis-cuts and mis-drills, and filling old and new gaps. “I use high-quality epoxy fillers and different types of paint mediums depending on what is

appropriate,” she adds. “I have honed my detailing techniques over many years, with the goal of making damage disappear.”

For wall and ceiling finishes, Novak consults with the client regarding their design style and asks for examples of inspiration for their space. “I love customizing based on people’s personalities and themes, choosing from endless design ideas that use plasters, glazes, foils and stencils. I also have numerous samples and tools for creating anyone’s dream décor,” she notes. Material selection is another important aspect of Novak’s job as each project has its own characteristics and needs. Therefore, her first step is always identifying the substrate (the underlying layer or material that supports a primary layer or construction element) and whether it needs repair, filling, and/or priming before she can begin the layers of the proposed design.

Because each surface tends toward a different regimen of paint products, Novak must accurately choose from her arsenal of design kits which include acrylic, lacquer based, exterior latex, furniture moisturizing and waxing, resin epoxy and gold leaf, among many others. “In my early



Camouflaged with paint, electrical outlets don't stand out, but rather blend seamlessly into the walls.

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years of restoration work, I apprenticed locally with The Wood Doctor and learned the basics of wood repair and furniture moisturizing. After that I did a stint for another company in Long Island, New York that specialized in high-end furniture,” she explains. Since then, she has taken numerous workshops and certifications to learn how to use a variety of product lines and tools. Novak adds, “With the trust of many wonderful clients, I have been given the freedom to create and embellish dozens of houses throughout the Valley, each project having its own unique flair.”

Specialized Creations

From a barnwood beam repair in Red Sky Ranch to a landscape mural in a window well outside of a lower level bunk room in Arrowhead, Novak has seen, repaired, camouflaged and created it all. The combination of her meticulous restoration techniques and fine art-inspired touch is another aspect that sets her apart. She can also handle any kind of style — antique, modern, classic, etc. — that appears in high-end resort homes across the Vail Valley.

“For larger decorative or faux painted wall finishes, the client usually has an idea of what they are looking for but may not know how to produce it,” Novak explains. “I consult with the homeowner and interior designer, review the design concept and space, take measurements, create samples of design ideas and potential products/mediums, configure the cost estimate, take a deposit to acquire materials and secure time, work with the general contractor for any special setup and safety constructs and then start on the approved design project.”

For the barnwood beam, she conferred with the builder regarding how the fix could be approached. With the help of the carpenter adding a dutchman piece as backing, Novak was able to apply layers of a stiff



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plaster-like stone filler, build up the product, and then sculpt it to replicate the texture and deep cuts that were part of the original distressing of the beam. “I used this filler because it is lightweight, nontoxic, has a bit of texture to it and has excellent structural integrity with the ability to mold, shape, cut and sand,” she explains. “After several sessions of building up and sculpting the patch, I began the painting process. Deciding which paint products to use entailed evaluating the sheen, size of the area and, of course, the material being painted.” Architect Bill Nutkins, of

NDG Architecture notes, “The column between the dining room and entry is the most amazing work I’ve ever seen.”

For the window-well mural, Novak did some research and referenced her own photographs of local views. “I initially showed the client concept sketches and worked out details regarding the season, time of day and animals they wanted featured,” she says. Keeping in mind that the mural would be seen from a bunk room, she used a vibrant, color-blocked style to draw attention. She adds, “The aspen and evergreen trees in the foreground meet up with the real trees on the property;

the client was super excited for the final design and very appreciative of my diligence.”

Transforming the Mundane into Art

In addition to envisioning and crafting artistic ways to turn the mundane into conversation pieces, or making something that sticks out meld into the beauty that’s already there, Novak creates fine art that uses similar techniques of texture and a wide array of mediums. Therefore, seeing her with a blowtorch in her hand is just as typical as seeing her with a paintbrush.



For this mural visible from a bunk room, Tara Novak used a vibrant, color blocked style to draw attention. The aspen and evergreen trees in the foreground of the mural meet up with the real trees on the property.

“These large-scale restoration endeavors require a lot of thought, planning and time,” she explains. “My work encompasses detailed and technical components while still ensuring that the artistry comes through. Clients call because they want to freshen up their home, add some artistic elements and sometimes incorporate a little bling!” When the client has these components in mind, Novak points out that a big part of the conversation is figuring out how to integrate them into a design. “Metallic elements can be a bit overwhelming, so I am careful to design appropriately to the client’s overall preferences,” she notes. That being said, there are instances when people want to go all out. Novak adds, “Over the years I have installed 24-karat gold leaf on an inset dining room ceiling. I have also done full walls of three-dimensional stenciling designs embellished

with silver glitter and repaired a few large ornate gold leaf frames.” When she’s not beautifying a variety of home aesthetics, Novak is busy working on her own fine art, running ArtSpace workshop + gallery in Eagle, spearheading the EagleArts Board, and spending time outside with her family and friends. A former professional snowboarder and lifetime lover of the outdoors, she moved to Eagle County in 1994 after earning her degree in Packaging Design (with a minor in Graphic & Industrial Design) from Rochester Institute of Technology in 1993. While in school, she also pursued pottery, glass, and photography. Over the last few years, she has been recognized multiple times as Best Visual Artist in the annual Best of Vail Valley competition. [www](#)

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