

This Room's a Mesh!

It's not likely to be found in any of this summer's catalogues, but the gear bed from The Rusted Lava Art Shop could lead to sweet dreams.

Chase Allen, owner of The Rusted Lava and designer of the bed, has been sleeping under gear teeth for a few years.

The concept of an industrial bedroom set came out of a trip to a local transmission shop. Allen visited the store to find scrap parts for his art and became enthralled with the idea of using gears in his decorating scheme.

"They're completely symmetrical," he says, "I salvaged my old bed, cut off the ugly headboard and drilled holes in the posts for the gears."

Though the creation has been functional for Allen, it is up for sale at a price of \$775. Located in a Gullah house on Daufuskie Island, SC, the rest of the bedroom looks industrial with a headboard and shelves that are constructed out of a highly brushed steel.

For that romantic touch, Allen is also selling a candleholder made from old transmission gears. He found them at the same junkyard, painted them a bright yellow and welded metal into the center to hold a candle.

The rest of the artwork at this shop is equally unconventional. Allen learned most of his craft from an auto mechanic, who taught him the basics of welding. His artistic process involves finding scrap or sheet steel and seeing what ideas flow from there. He uses a torch to cut the steel, then bends and shapes it by hand before signing and dating each piece with the torch. At the foundation of each sculpture is rust, which Allen attains by spraying salt water over the surface, letting it rust naturally, then coating and painting the exterior.

All of this takes place in Allen's studio, which is a tent in the backyard of his house. Once the idea starts growing in his mind, it takes about a week to complete each masterpiece.

Gears are among the decorative touches that Allen is most comfortable with. Partially, that's because they're so abundant, as his mechanic frequently discards the ones that don't function. In the past, he found a pile of old gears and assembled them into the shape of a pig, which sold as a lawn ornament for \$85.

"A friend suggested making a coffee table out of some gears. I might use them as the legs or as the tabletop and sell it for \$500-600," he says.

Allen is open to any other creative uses for gears, whether as lawn or interior decorations. His work is mostly displayed on the porch of his house, but he also keeps pieces in numerous galleries and stores in the Carolinas. The 27-year-old artist started The Rusted Lava in 2001, buying all of his original supplies on a credit card until the folk art dollars started rolling in.

Daufuskie Island is only accessible by boat, so a portion of his business comes from customized work. If you have some extra gears and a one-of-a-kind innovation for them, he'd welcome the discussion.

"No request is too strange," he laughs.

