

PLAYTHINGS FROM THE PAST

Christine LeFever is a modern woman who's fascinated with the past. The Oregon City, Ore., dollmaker and antiques dealer loves all things old-fashioned, from clothes to homes to lifestyles. It's no wonder, since her mother was an Early Americana enthusiast (a trait she passed along to LeFever); that passion for eras past has inspired LeFever's life's work.

"I love the decorative arts of the 18th and 19th centuries," says LeFever. "I've taken vast numbers of workshops and was a 'Jaqueline of all trades, master of none,' but I realized that every time I went into an antiques shop, I gravitated toward the dolls. And I also realized that doll-making required me to do a little bit of everything: embroidery, painting and making accessories."

LeFever's dolls, which she makes by pouring liquid maché into molds and then painting their features and dressing them in hand-sewn, period-authentic clothing, are a mix of reproductions of antique dolls and designs from her own imagination. Hattie A. (right) is LeFever's version of a pre-Greiner doll "Ludwig Greiner, who made dolls in the 1850s, was the first patented dollmaker in America," she says. "The original pre-Greiners had glass eyes, so I painted Hattie's

eyes to look like glass." Her Queen Anne-era doll, named Tess, even caught Hollywood's attention: She was featured in the Warner Bros. movie "Felicity," based on the *American Girl* books.

LeFever, 58, names all of her doll collections (think old-fashioned names like Emma and Rose). "They've become like my little children," she says with a laugh. "I'll have all of these dolls with painted faces waiting to be clothed, but they're not 'alive' until they're finished and named. That's the best part when I can step back and say, 'Welcome to the world!'"

LeFever, who lives with her writer-husband in an 1888 Italianite home that's listed on the National Historic Register, brings her dolls to life in an inspiring setting. Her studio, an upstairs bedroom with 10-foot-tall ceilings, opens onto a wrap-around balcony that overlooks her Victorian "fairy" garden.

"I like to say that we live in an historic house in the most historic city in Oregon: Oregon City," she says. LeFever's dolls range from \$95 to \$500; Hattie A. costs \$265.

Call dollmaker Christine LeFever at 971-322-5182.

You can see more of her dolls on her website, christinelefever.com, and in the display cases at Stars & Splendid Antiques Mall (7030 S.E. Milwaukie Ave.; 503-235-5990) in Portland.

