

DEBORAH SMITH

Raised in the picturesque Hudson Valley, Deborah Smith has always had a special connection to the region's idiosyncratic topography and rhythms. And she has endeavored since a very young age to give that topography and those rhythms tangible artistic form. After high school, Smith attended Orange County Community College. For a time, she worked with clay, attempting to draw inspiration literally and physically from the land that surrounded her. She also pursued landscape design through the auspices of the New York Botanical Garden at the Institute of Ecosystem Studies at the Mary Flagler Cary Arboretum in Millbrook, Dutchess County.

She married, became a partner with her spouse in a roof contracting firm and raised two children- all the while still feeling a latent desire to express herself in some meaningful way that would reunite her with the landscape she had loved since childhood. As often happens, it was pure chance that helped her achieve that goal.

After a divorce, she and her children enrolled in a basket-making class as a way of passing time creatively. Smith took to the medium immediately, perhaps sensing in it a host of metaphors: the interconnectedness of nature and life, the steady, almost ritualistic repetition of Earth's patterns (ebb and flow of river tides, intertwining of forest branches and vines, the gathering together of many units into an aesthetic whole).

Smith was initially drawn to the simplicity and economy of Shaker baskets. Perfecting traditional plaiting techniques, she created flower and harvest baskets of exquisite craftsmanship, sometimes working in huge scale (her largest baskets are fashioned after tobacco harvesting ones and measure an impressive 68" long by 38" wide by 8" deep). These garnered Smith great acclaim at prestigious craft shows such as the Philadelphia Museum Of Art Craft Show, The American Craft Exposition in Evanston, IL, and several American Craft Council shows. They also eventually made their way into several magazines, including Hudson Valley, Country Living (on the cover and throughout the featured home) and Old House Interiors.

The artist still enjoys the ordered, methodical beauty of these baskets. But nature is not always so ordered or methodical, a fact that let Smith to experiment with a freer, more sculptural kind of basket weaving. Using a ribbed technique that she taught herself, she attaches "ribs" to irregularly shaped pieces of driftwood that she collects along the banks of the Hudson

Rive and the coast of Maine. Reeds are woven in and out of these ribs, resulting in bulbous, sensual shapes that recall the hollows of trees and the the secret pockets formed by their bases, exposing subterranean gnarls and contortions. The undulation of these forms also bring to mind more palpably the movement of the Hudson River's waters.

With these two bodies of work, Smith has finally merged two levels of her being: the Practical, utilitarian-minded mother of two and a less tangible spirit more closely in synch with the land that surrounds her. Her connection is, finally, complete.