

Linda Fifield: Mountain Magic

Growing up in the southeastern hills of Kentucky, Linda Fifield learned the art of handwork from her maternal grandmother. Crocheting, quilting, and embroidery were part of everyday life, and as a child in this creative environment Linda developed a natural confidence in her own abilities.

Over the years she tried many fiber techniques. In 1975 after a visit to the Native American section of the Field Museum in Chicago she began to bead. Linda had been inspired by the beauty of tightly twined and coiled baskets, "each minuscule stitch was as perfectly formed as a bead."

The solitude of her mountain life challenged her to experiment with the beads and with techniques that would satisfy the goals she held within. Glass bottles were the first forms used, then came clay vessels made by potter friends, but she was always worried about their fragility. Linda's husband Jack suggested the purchase of a wood lathe. On Christmas day, 1994, he taught her how to turn a hollow form vessel.

Working with cedar, maple, apple, and other hardwoods gathered from her own property, Linda turns the bases for her beaded vessels. Ideally she turns two to three at a time to have a variety to choose from when it comes time to bead. The scale of each can run from two to 12 inches tall, and the beading of these can take from two days to two months. Linda spends five to six days a week at her craft. She doesn't begin a new piece until the one that she is working on is completed.

Nature is Fifield's muse, and the vessels are a way of expressing gratitude and praise for the beauty that surrounds her. The "Earth and Fire" and "Heaven and Earth" series capture the essence of those feelings. One is drawn to the fire of autumn leaves and the coolness of the forest floor in Linda's art. The surface textures (ruffles, spiraling fringe, and the addition of gemstone beads) articulate the dense, subtle qualities

of an Appalachian woodland, inviting the viewer to participate in the spirit of the place where Linda Fifield lives.

—Carol Wilcox Wells

Carol Wilcox Wells is the author of Creative Bead Weaving (Lark Books, 1996) and the owner of Love To Bead, Inc., in Asheville, North Carolina.



Earth and Fire XXV. Netting stitch; Czech glass seed beads, maple; 5 by 3 by 3 inches. Photo: Jack Fifield.