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fairy-tale fashion

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gliding along

Retropatio owner Nicki Huggins restores old porch furniture and fond memories.

BY DAWSON COOPER
PHOTO COURTESY OF RETROPATIO

NICKI HUGGINS RECALLS ONE OF HER FAVORITE memories as a child, a memory that takes her back to her grandmother's porch in Alexander City, Alabama. She remembers sitting on a Gulf Breeze glider where she played Old Maid and read stories with her grandmother. While the days with her grandmother on the Gulf Breeze glider have passed, Huggins continues to re-create and sustain the past for herself and others who share her sense of nostalgia.

Huggins, originally from Pensacola, Florida, grew up in nearby Gulf Breeze. She went to Los Angeles at age 23 and has been there ever since. That is, until she, along with her husband and children, rediscovered the beauty and charm of the Gulf of Mexico's sugar-white beaches and emerald waters. Huggins says that her family had always wanted a beach home and "once they saw the Gulf that was it—that was the only place for them." Today, Huggins calls Watersound at Seagrave Beach, Florida, home for about four-and-a-half months of the year.

Nicki Huggins pursues her preservation of the past through her passion for redesigning outdoor steel and aluminum furniture. Her company, Retropatio, with studios in California and newly opened in Panama City Beach, Florida, finds and refurbishes pieces of outdoor furniture for direct

customers and designers. Some of her pieces date back 80 years. Huggins attributes the success of her vintage outdoor furniture to people's memories of the past. There are many family memories, Huggins adds, that are connected to furniture like the glider, thus drawing customers to her products. Her colorful gliders, chairs, and chaise lounges seem to take owners back in time, where porch sitting was a daily part of life. Huggins believes that this aspect of life, especially in the South, has contributed to the increasing interest in her vintage furniture. Wherever there is a strong porch culture, Huggins says, the more people tend to be attracted to outdoor furniture like Retropatio's classic gliders.

Huggins says there is a strong market of women consumers who, having gained access to shopping on Retropatio via the Internet, are interested in mixing up the styles in their outdoor areas by means of vintage furniture. Red, Huggins' top-selling furniture color, supports the concept that people are feeling freer in outdoor decorating. Huggins believes that there are less preconceived notions of design when it comes to the outdoors. Her own advice is to mix it up, bringing in older pieces to complement modern furniture.

Most of the pieces of furniture Huggins works with are products of the J.R. Bunting Company and Howell Manufacturing. The glider, in fact, was the first piece of American outdoor furniture designed, causing it to be a point of pride when it comes to our American past. The outdoor furniture, originally painted in red, green, brown, black, and yellow, is available through Retropatio in a plethora of hues. Huggins uses powder-coating technology to repaint the furniture.

So think back to your own grandmother's porch, as Nicki Huggins did. Chances are there was a glider on the porch where you spent many a happy day. Let your mind wander back to the past, nostalgia slowly rocking you back and forth in the time of the glider itself. Let the stories told, games played, and laughter shared grace your mind again. Perhaps you will discover stories from your past that you can share with your friends and family, stories like Nicki Huggins', stories that inspire for the present and future as they recount the past. ☺

Retropatio
Nicki Huggins
www.retropatio.com