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PHOTOS COURTESY OF NICKI HUGGINS



Retro Eco-Chic

Restoring unique pieces of Americana helps Nicki Huggins relive her Gulf Coast childhood.

Boat rides, barbecues, front porches, and sunburns filled Nicki Huggins' childhood summers along the Gulf Coast. Growing up in Gulf Breeze, Florida, Huggins was always outdoors with family and friends. These memories "got me interested in outdoor furniture that captured that nostalgic feeling of happy times and togetherness," Nicki says.

Nicki, a television producer by trade, is now known as one of the foremost collectors of American outdoor furniture. "I love outdoor design," she says. "Actually, I am known for decorating my outdoor rooms before giving the inside a thought." And her interest in outdoor furniture and its history became very instrumental in the decor of her new home.

Nicki lives with her family in a converted airplane hangar near Los Angeles. The house is over 9,000 square feet with as much living space outside as it has inside. Looking for a way to

warm up this stark modern home, Huggins began a quest for antique outdoor furniture. It was then that she rediscovered the memories of her childhood on the Gulf Coast and the first piece of American-designed outdoor furniture: the glider.

It's been more than ten years since Huggins started collecting and refinishing pieces for her own home which soon led to a business. The first restored glider she called the Gulf Breeze glider because it reminded her of summer nights when she was growing up. "I would ride my bike to the beach and wait for the breeze to come off the Gulf when the sun set," Nicki recalls. "The steady wind was calming to me, just like rocking back and forth in a glider."

When Nicki first started restoring these pieces, there wasn't much eco-consciousness. "I had taken furniture design at SCI-ARC, Los Angeles' cutting edge architecture school," she says, "and I was very aware from the outset of both the fabrication costs and the low environmental

story by

GEORGIA PALAMOYTIS

Nicki Huggins (top) relaxes after spending her days restoring classic American outdoor furniture like the white porch glider (above) and the Gulf Breeze glider (opposite).

For more information:
www.retropatio.com

"I AM KNOWN FOR DECORATING MY OUTDOOR ROOMS BEFORE GIVING THE INSIDE A THOUGHT," SAYS NICKI HUGGINS.



impact of reuse. It just made sense from every angle."

With her company Retropatio, Nicki purchases pieces from an extensive network of antique dealers. The furniture is then stripped, the hardware is replaced with stainless steel, and new straps are put on. Finally, it is powdercoated in one of over 400 colors for maximum durability.

Today, Nicki is producing a boutique collection of her own outdoor furniture designs in sustainably harvested teak. The mini-collection includes a porch swing, bench, and a Balinese-inspired hanging bed.

Not only has Nicki helped Americans rediscover a piece of their own furniture history while rekindling memories of lemonade and fireflies, she's reminded us that newer is not necessarily better. And that just might be the most chic part of eco, after all. ●

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