

# A PERSONAL TOUCH

ST. LOUIS ARTIST JOANNE KLUBA CREATES ONE-OF-A-KIND, PERSONALIZED JOURNALS, BOOKS, AND BOXES ■ By Jim Winnerman



**From left:** Joanne Kluba has designed several journals inspired by Lewis and Clark. Each one includes folds of paper sewn directly into a leather cover. Joanne customizes everything about each item, even down to the patterns used in the stitching.

**B**EING ONE OF few custom book and box makers in Missouri, Joanne Kluba, of St. Louis, is surprised that her unique profession has become such a successful enterprise. "As an artist, I have always recorded my personal experiences in handmade journals and collected important mementos in handmade boxes. But I did not expect so many people would appreciate having a one-of-a-kind container to keep or give as a gift.

"The critical parts of my job are to first listen carefully to what the client wants and likes and then to design something that meets the special need the book or box is to fulfill," she says.

Recently a client in Detroit had Joanne make a journal for a friend who loves the outdoors. "I designed a replica of the soft leather journals Lewis and Clark used," Joanne says. When she found out the client liked chestnuts, Joanne added a real nut as a button, so a leather strap could slip around it and hold the book closed.

Joanne tries to incorporate something special into each piece to make her art even more meaningful. Other personal touches may include a small watercolor she paints on a page, a monogram created for a cover of a wedding album, or a quote added in calligraphy for a journal of personal poetry.

The same kind of careful attention to detail goes into every aspect of one of Joanne's books. Paper is selected depending on the writing implement the user favors, and a special emboss may be added to a page, or the edge of each page may be cut with different decorative

scissors. Pages are often held together with ribbon or the binding is artfully sewn together with thread.

Joanne's technical knowledge allows her to construct a book that will open easily, lay nicely for writing, or accommodate photos if necessary. "How a book works and feels is important," she emphasizes. "It should touch you in an emotional way so that you realize every part was carefully thought about."

Joanne is equally passionate about the handcrafted boxes she builds. "A box that is a work of art designed to hold personal mementos is a very thoughtful gift," she says. "I construct each one knowing it will contain something that hopefully will be passed on and added to from generation to generation."

Among the many different types of boxes made are containers to hold mementos commemorating a birth or other special event, client presentation boxes to add excitement to a business presentation, and boxes to hold artwork.

"Most clients are introduced to my work at an art show or visit my web site after hearing about me from a friend," she says. "After spending twenty years as a corporate graphic artist, now I am enjoying making something for people who appreciate what I do on a personal level. It is very meaningful for them and just as satisfying for me."

Joanne's business is called *Paper Birds*, and she sells her products online and at specialty stores. Visit [www.paperbirds.com](http://www.paperbirds.com), or call 314-752-2551.