

## Doreen Leskowitz



Nestled among well-munched meadows in the rolling hills of Buckland is a little log cabin on a dead end road. Inside, it's a lot bigger than it looks, and downstairs, in a room with sliders that overlook a field bordered by ornamental grasses, fabulous leather bags are being designed and stitched by one of the Coop's more recent members, Doreen Leskowitz. Arriving from Needham only a year ago, Doreen is in love with rural west county. She settled in Needham thirty years ago, before the rise of big box 'burbs: the razing of older, modest housing stock to put up uglier, wasteful McMansions. For ecological and aesthetic reasons, this affront to nature repulsed her; she is much happier tucked away in the hills with her reconstituted family— her two grown children liked the new location so much they, too, came back to roost in the new home. For Doreen, it reminds her very much of her native England countryside. Doreen brings a lifetime of artistic pursuits to bear upon the creation of her leather bags. She has delved into painting, silk screening printing, book binding, stained glass, crochet, macrame, etc etc. Born and raised in England, in college she studied the teaching of English and crafts for elementary

education. The only thing she revealed was impossible for her, as far as crafts go, was pottery. “I



was hopeless at it— a big failure!” she admits.

After receiving her degree (which, by the way, did not entirely transfer to accreditation in the US, so she ended up teaching at preschool) she taught for a few years and then she took advantage of a program to go to Israel and pick fruit on a communal farm which also functioned as a language immersion school.

It was there that she met her husband Rick, who was “their star pupil.” After Israel, the two of them spent an exciting year traveling together through Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal, Turkey, and other countries on what she calls “the hippie trail.” They walked and took common conveyances through beautiful unspoiled areas, having a once in a lifetime experience for next to nothing in terms of dollars. Afterwards, they came to the US where Rick entered medical school.

Some of her belt patterns were inspired by these travels, but she didn’t start serious production of leather items until the 1990’s. Meeting and receiving instruction from an expert leather worker was a pivotal experience for her. She was already designing and stitching pocket books and bags, but her work was unlined. When she ran across the work of Karen Thompson Bullock and saw that it was much better with lining, much more refined: she rang her up immediately, but didn’t get a reply until nine months later. Karen became her teacher, and even more: she hooked Doreen up with suppliers, tools, and introduced her to numerous methods of improving her work. Especially in the lining of the leather bags with leather. Although it means making, basically, two bags instead of one, it raises the product up to a whole other level of finesse.



Doreen has rolls of leather in her studio (see picture) in a wide variety of colors and textures. There are unusual embossed and painted varieties as well, some with flowers and scrolls and some embossed to look like alligator and snake skin. Very fancy stuff! She has known of at least six leather suppliers who have gone out of business since she started, and close-out sales from these have greatly augmented her stash over the years. She uses mostly 2 ounce leather, a grade that is on the light side (heaviest leather would be 8 or 9 ounce) but still requires an industrial machine to stitch.

One of her latest projects is making holiday ornaments. On a table were elephants, birds, angels and a tiny golf bag complete with clubs. She used to make large stuffed animals and puppets, but has cut back on making such expensive pieces. She is still a member of the Cambridge Co-op gallery and The Clever Hand, in the eastern part of the state. She loves being part of SAC, "a lovely artistic community," and like everyone else, is busy getting ready for what we all hope will be a fruitful holiday season!