

# Meet Your Makers

**GARLAN GUDGER**  
SOUTHERN ACCENTS  
ARCHITECTURAL ANTIQUES

WORDS TIFFANY BELL

**PHOTOS**

LEFT: LISA JONES  
CENTER: TIFFANY BELL  
RIGHT: MICHELLEMARIEPHOTOGRAPHY.COM



Like many of you, we fell in love with Garlan Gudger's Train Shed transformation using all repurposed pieces at Southern Makers last month. So much so, we took a trip to his Cullman warehouse, grabbed an old-school cola and stayed for hours hunting through endless rooms of salvaged finds. It's well worth the (surprisingly short) trip for yourself - until then, take a peek inside with the force behind it all.

**MADE: Tell us a little about the Southern Accents story?**

**GG:** Southern Accents has been family owned and operated for 44 years by the Gudger family in Cullman, Ala. It started with a simple idea that the craftsmanship of antique building supplies - carved fireplace mantels, bronze/crystal chandeliers, embossed doorknobs, intricately trim doors, stained and leaded glass - was just not being produced in the same quality as they were in the previous years. Dr. Garlan Gudger, Sr. decided to start one of the first architectural salvage stores in Southeast out of a garage. Garlan, Jr. says their annual vacation while growing up consisted of a leaving with a van filled with family and ended with a u-haul trailer full of antiques. That's just what we did every year and I just thought it was normal going on vacation and exploring every antique store and junkyard that you came across.

**MADE: I'm picturing a young Garlan Gudger, Jr. ditching the Legos at an early age to get your hands dirty. What was the young Garlan Gudger, Jr. like?**

**GG:** It was common to get dirty digging through old wooden nail kegs of doorknobs and tool chests filled with amazing items. Every child needs a place to start a clubhouse and build a fort and roller skate - it just happened to be that my play area was my father's salvage store filled with goodies that allowed my imagination to run wild. My earliest memory as a child was wearing a pair of adjustable plastic Superman roller skates around with a cape, while dad swept up the shop. Now my two boys, Tripp and Pierce, think it's normal to throw and catch the baseball next to the 50 claw-foot bathtubs in our alley behind the store. I guess like father like son!

**MADE: Have you thought about moving your warehouse out of Cullman or opening locations in other markets?**

**GG:** Cullman will always be home base - but we are being approached from different investors in different markets that enjoy seeing the work that

we do so we will see...

**MADE: It's no secret you love what you do. What do you love most about restoring, creating & repurposing?**

**GG:** Our mission statement at Southern Accents is to rescue, restore, and protect pieces of architecture with historical significance. That's what we DO, but I believe the question is WHY I do it.

I think it may be best answered by a movie scene that I remember in Shawshank Redemption. The scene is where the mean jailor needs some tax work done because the IRS is after him and he will have to pay a lot of money and Andy, the main character, being a CPA before being jailed, told the jailor that he would prepare the jailor's taxes for a bucket of cold beer for his work crew during a hot summer day. The surprise and enjoyment of the work crew when the jailor told the work crew to take a break for a few minutes and enjoy some cold suds in the hot summer sun. They didn't expect it and come to find out, Andy didn't even drink! He did it because he could, and by his finished work, it allowed other people satisfaction that wasn't expected.

I love watching other people unexpectedly enjoy what I am passionate about. Sharing my passion excites me and I am blessed I have family, friends, and YOU to share it with! That's why I do what I do.

**MADE: Any advice on spotting historic pieces and making them work in modern spaces?**

**GG:** Historic architectural pieces will work just about anywhere - I suggest placing at least one piece per room to give each area a focal point surrounded by the modern setting. By using the salvage item thoughtfully in your design, the texture, color, and character of the piece alone should stand as a work of rescued art.

**MADE: I'm sure you love all of your pieces, like children, equally. But if you HAD to choose, what is your favorite piece or project so far?**

**GG:** Project - Southern Makers last month in Montgomery because of my friends that were gathered from around the state: Natalie Chanin, Butch Anthony, Billy Reid, Sarah Trapp, Cliff Holt with Little Savannah, Audwin McGehee and Sandy Stevens from Florence - just to name a few. I love to be inspired by other creative people and after the work is done, go out with them and have a good time.

If I was told to leave my store and take one Piece with me and not return it would be - my Door Knob Collection. It reminds me of my family.

**MADE: What was it like working with Billy Reid to design his backdrops for NYC Fashion Week? Any collaboration plans for the future?**

**GG:** It was awesome! To really see the vision of where he wants to go and help gather material to fit that vision Billy has is the most fun because I have to see in my head his final look from just his pencil drawings on paper! It really is fun to have people that know what they want and ask for your help to bring it to life! I have been blessed to be able to work with Billy staging his events for NYC Fashion Week in 2010 and 2013. I enjoy incorporating Southern Accents Salvage in most of his retail stores, as well as Billy's own personal home. He has such a dedicated team and talented staff.

As to future collaborations, I was brought in on his NEW Southeastern location this past week and will start preparing material for it, but I believe that it is not up to me to disclose where it will be located - I will leave that to Billy!

**MADE: The Southern Accents sets at Southern Makers, from the entrance all the way to the music stage, transformed the Train Shed like we've never seen and has been the talk of Southern Makers since. What made you want to be a part of the making of Southern Makers?**

**GG:** There has been an artistic renaissance developing in Alabama for the past several years. Creative artisans in the fields of food, fashion, art, architecture, and music, all passionate about their individual industry, have been working independently to promote their wares. Having them all gather in one location for the first time was exciting to me. In recent years, Southern Accents has had the opportunity to incorporate architectural salvage into projects for many of the individual makers. There has never been an event like this designed to bring everyone together. We were thrilled to be able to bring our creative ideas to the table in designing and installing the arena for this momentous event. The chance to join forces and work side-by-side with a collective group of the most talented people from across the state is electrifying. Southern Accents responsibility was to use their architectural salvage to create an atmosphere for the show that inspires not only the makers but attendees as well.

**MADE: What did you think of the places and people you came across in Montgomery?**

**GG:** Everyone was so nice and the downtown is amazing! A lot of my Montgomery friends came out to say hello when I was at Southern Makers -

it was like a huge neighborhood party! The city's growth is evident to me and everyone that flew in to attend the event! Keep it up Montgomery!

**MADE: Where in the world (or should we say "the South") do your vignette ideas come from - like the Dumpster Collage at Southern Makers?**

**GG:** We are always out searching for new and exciting ideas. I thoroughly enjoy repurposing items to be used for something totally different than its original function. So turning a door or a shutter sideways might sound weird, but that is just our way of producing art. That collage wall was something that I have thought about for a long time, but have never had the freedom to produce! So, I really got some unique items gathered together and with a great team (Brad Bell - Bell and Bragg in Auburn and Lucy Farmer of Southern Accents) it just seemed to free-flow together. The teamwork of my staff in Cullman that prepped the items, like sanding and cleaning the materials, was crucial and we met our timeline of finished product before the show began! I am still very proud of how great it turned out!

**MADE: So what's next? You always seem to have a project or big event going on. Point us in the right direction...**

**GG:** For the past 5 months I have had 1, if not 2, large events per month. I am currently focusing on preparing my store and my staff for an expansion of our salvaged / recycled wood department. Dealing with barn-wood, colored bead-board, timbers from textile mills, antique flooring and log cabins is where we are devoted right now. But I am always listening for the next way I can promote the Southern Accents brand.

**MADE: Best advice you were given...**

**GG:** Given to me by Mr. X in Hawaii (at the time the largest homebuilder in the world): "Always do what you have passion for. If you do, you will always enjoy what you wake up for... and the money will follow."

**What:** Southern Accents Warehouse & Showroom

**Open:** Tuesdays-Fridays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Where:** Downtown Cullman (308 Second Ave SE)

**How to Get In Touch:** www.sa1969.com

**Where Else to Spot Garlan's Work:** Sets & stages across the country - from Southern Makers to NYC Fashion Week

**Number of Doorknobs in Garlan's Collection:** 4,586 (but who's counting?)