

LIFE OUTSIDE THE LAB

Pushing Porcelain to New Possibilities

SHERRIE ENG / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

As a former jewelry maker and sculptor, Chuck Little, CDT, constantly found himself asking what else he could do with the dental materials he works with every day—how far could he push it?

Little, owner of Little Dental Lab in Durango, Colorado—a crown and bridge lab that he and his wife, Terri, have been running for 21 years—decided to create tiny fairy figurines out of the porcelain powder and alloys he has in his lab. “The original idea for creating these porcelain fairies came from the constant reference to the tooth fairy when I tried to explain the responsibilities of a dental technician,” he says. “Our work is very important to patients and I take it very seriously. The fairies are a fun complement to that work.”

Little’s first fairy was a reproduction of his own logo. While he initially made the fairies small enough to fit on top of a quarter, he decided to make them larger—approximately

two- to three-inches tall—so he could concentrate on adding greater detail. Using the lost wax technique, each one-of-a-kind piece is constructed from thin-gauge wax wire and then cast out of high noble porcelain alloy. The body and wings are opaqued and stacked with standard porcelain that he modifies to achieve the color he desires and then fired in his porcelain oven.

It takes Little close to 20 hours of hands-on work to complete one fairy, not including conception or design. “The wings are the hardest part and can take up to 10 hours alone to create. Casting the wings is very intricate and it’s tricky to make the fairies fit in the muffle,” he says. He also has

to figure out how to adjust the firing times so he doesn’t over fire them. His meticulousness has paid off, however: to date, Little has never had to throw away a figurine and start over.

What began as a hobby and cathartic exercise has turned into a business: Little is now taking orders for his fairy figurines because of the interest they’ve generated with the help of an article in a local newspaper and word of mouth. The fairies range in price from \$1,800-\$2,500 each and customers get some input about the design, like picking the color of the hair and wings. For more information, call 970-259-3787, e-mail info@littledentallab.com or visit www.littledentallab.com. ■



Chuck Little, CDT, started Little Dental Lab in 1988 and has been a CDT for almost 25 years.



Inspired by his lab’s logo (below), Little created a tooth fairy for his first project.



Little’s newest creation—a dragonfly—accompanies this fairy.

This pregnant fairy is “everyone’s favorite,” says Little.



The body and wings of the fairies are built using specially modified porcelain powders.



Little creates the structure of the fairy with thin-gauge wax wire.



Little can spend up to 20 hours to complete a fairy.

Photos courtesy of Heather Leavitt, www.heatherleavitt.com