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Welding is a huge part of forming the metal.

David Perry

Bending and shaping a business >

Executive Summary:

This couple entered the wrought-iron business through the back door, and then started re-working the whole house.

By David Perry

Greg Fagg had a skill for molding metal.

Problem was, he was using it to fix cars that had been in fender-benders. His luck turned when a local developer drafted Greg's skills for a construction job.

"He told me that he was going to make me a wrought-iron specialist," says Greg. Appalachian Ironworks was born, and over the past 10 years, Greg and wife Julin Rice have done projects in three states and as far away as Myrtle Beach.

"We had our largest job in March, which

was a three-story spiral staircase," in a Civil War-era home in Buchanan, says Julin. A prestige job was working for three years on a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired estate in Radford. "We took a crash course on Frank Lloyd Wright," says Greg.



Greg and Julin bend a tube.

David Perry



We took a crash
course on Frank
Lloyd Wright
—Greg Fagg



Greg grinds an end

David Perry

The hardest part of working wrought iron is not the work itself, says Greg. It's "trying to figure out what somebody wants."

"A lot of times we'll take some of the architectural features of the house and go with that," says Greg. "They might have something else like a lamp or a chandelier or an outside porch light" that generates ideas as well.

"What's helped us a lot with that is the ability to design on the computer," adds Julin.

The couple fabricates most of their parts at their home on property where Greg's family had been doing blacksmith work for generations. One of Greg's most important tools is a bar bender, made from a 200-year-old wagon wheel he found and mounted on a frame.

In Brief

- Names:** Greg Fagg and Julin Rice
Age: 46 and 34
Company: Appalachian Ironworks
Location: Roanoke County
Type of business: Wrought iron construction
History: Salemite Greg moved into the iron work business from auto collision repair when a local developer saw his skill with metal. Now, Greg and wife Julin, a western New York transplant by way of Virginia Tech (biochemistry), hand-craft staircases, railings, fences and more.



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Greg Fagg and his homemade, wagon wheel bar bender.


David Perry

Greg and Julin learned much of their craft by trial and error. Their hardest job was "our very first spiral staircase," says Julin. "We wondered what we'd gotten ourselves into."

"The top rail is a helix," she says, referring to the twisting, three-dimensional curve that can be found paired in models of DNA. But "we can whip them out now," she says.

"We got one under our belts, and it took us probably a couple of weeks," says Julin. The trick is "to get it to look smooth like it's all one piece of metal."

"We use solid materials, whereas a lot of our competitors use tubing," says Julin. Greg explains that "anything tubular is going to condensate inside of it," causing rust.

But Julin says the real secret is Greg's attention to detail. "He's a perfectionist. Any little thing out of place drives him nuts." 

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