

# Onward & Upward

**B**usiness is looking up—literally—for Tour de Faux, a faux-finishing company in Missoula, Mont., whose specialties include transforming ordinary ceilings into works of art. The creative force behind Tour de Faux is Cookie Hanson, who excels at creating exceptional finishes for any surface—walls, floors, countertops and furniture. However, in many instances, the crowning glory of her projects are her dazzling ceiling effects that draw the eye upward and the jaw downward in wonderment.

Among the stellar ceiling effects that Cookie has created are: a tray ceiling featuring seven layers of metallic waxes in custom colors; a depiction of Michelangelo's Creation of Man on a barrel-truss ceiling; the creation of a ceiling medallion featuring a Modello™ stencil done with metallic plasters and waxes; and a ceiling featuring hand-dyed paper made to look like leather.

Cookie has been a professional decorative artist for the past eight years. She does the decorative painting, while her husband and partner, Greg Hanson, handles all the paperwork and other business aspects of Tour de Faux. Greg is also handy whenever there is a need to measure a project or tape off a wall or ceiling. The Hansons are able to work effectively on this and two other businesses that they own together—mainly because they are able to keep their professional and personal lives sepa-



**Above: Cookie Hanson shows a Michelangelo "Creation of Man" design, which was created for a barrel-truss ceiling, 30 feet off the ground. At right: Greg and Cookie Hanson. (All photos provided by Tour de Faux)**



entrepreneurship threefold. Once again, they opened a window cleaning business. But a few years later, they opened a carpet cleaning business and also established Tour de Faux.

Cookie and Greg work in all three businesses, which can be quite a juggling act.

Some days, the couple is occupied with cleaning windows or carpets. However, Cookie's true passion lies with Tour de Faux. "We hope that it will grow large enough that we can close the other two businesses," she says.

They are on their way to accomplishing this. The business has grown greatly through word-of-mouth referrals. However, Greg has

helped move the business to the next level through promotional, marketing and advertising efforts. In addition to preparing promotional materials and having a nice visual portfolio online at [www.tourdefaux.com](http://www.tourdefaux.com), the Hansons advertise the business with local TV and radio ads. This has helped increase Cookie's visibility with potential clients. "People have seen me on TV," Cookie reports. "So, now when they see me in person or

## Tour de Faux Excels With Ceilings & Other Surface Effects

rate. As Cookie explains, "At work, we're both owners and bosses. At home, we're husband and wife."

The Hansons have lived in Montana for the past 12 years. Prior to that, they lived in Huntington Beach, Calif. While living in California, they were the owners of their own window cleaning business. They sold the business and moved to Montana with the notion that they would retire. Instead, they wound up increasing their



**This seven-layer wax tray ceiling, created by Cookie, was featured on HGTV.**

see my truck, they know who I am.”

Running three businesses all at once does provide good synergy. For instance, a window cleaning or carpet cleaning job can quite easily lead to a decorative painting commission. And once a painting job is complete, a customer may decide to freshen up the dingy carpet or the dusty windows with a cleaning job that adds to the overall feeling of freshness and newness in the room.

Cookie is grateful for the experience she has gained in co-owning the two cleaning businesses. In fact, Cookie reports that she has actually learned skills that translate well to the faux-finishing business. As an example, all of the expertise she has

gained with a window-cleaning squeegee has turned out to be similar to the skills needed for troweling Venetian plasters and concretes. “Troweling is second nature after using a squeegee,” Cookie says.

The window cleaning business also has helped Cookie get accustomed to working on ladders, which helped prepare her for the heights she must reach in order to do her ceiling work. She not only has used ladders and scaffolding, but also learned how to use a Genie Scissors Lift.

It was perhaps inevitable that Cookie’s inclination to entrepreneurship would eventually lead her to the decorative painting arts. She has always been interested in art, even though she



**Cookie Hanson with her Fauxcademy Institute award.**

got her degree in fire science and spent several years as a firefighter and paramedic. After she moved to Montana, she talked to Greg about her decorative painting ambitions. To help her get started, he gave her a class at Decorating Master Institute in Fort Myers, Fla., as an anniversary present. She took the six-day “boot camp,” which gave her a basic knowledge of faux techniques and faux-finishing business operations.

That was her first classroom experience, but by no means her last. She also took the Faux Effects International Inc. curriculum. She has taken classes at Vignini Studios and The Faux Finish Institute by Kelly S. King. In addition, she has learned stenciling and the creative use of Modellos™ via classes taught by Melanie Royals. She also returned to the Decorating Masters Institute for an advanced class in murals with Andrea Tober.

“The classes helped me gain confidence,” Cookie says. “Now, I’m able to design my own finishes. I enjoy the challenge of designing.”

In designing her finishes, Cookie takes her inspiration from nature and the world around her. “I take photos when I travel,” she reports. “I also ab-



**Cookie Hanson used hand-dyed paper to create this breathtaking ceiling.**



**Above: This embedded oak-leaf wall finish was featured on an HGTV program. Right: This copper foil ceiling was created for a master bedroom. It, too, was featured on HGTV.**

sorb information from the world around. I look at bedding and artwork. I take ideas from what people have in their homes.”

In addition to her ceiling finishes, Cookie also has become proficient in concrete work, using her expertise to create beautiful floors and countertops. For wall effects, she uses a lightweight vertical concrete that has proven versatile and easy to work with. “It’s only 1/32nd of an inch thick, so it’s not at all heavy,” Cookie explains. “It can be used over a lot

of different surfaces, including wood, and it’s less expensive than other types of concrete.”

Cookie’s ceiling effects and concrete work are just two examples of unique finishes that Tour de Faux’s clients cannot get anywhere else. She also makes her own hand-dyed paper, which she has used on both walls and ceilings. She has become quite adept at the use of Modellos™, using them creatively on floors and ceilings



**This concrete floor with embedded medallion was an award winner for Cookie Hanson at the most recent Fauxcademy of Decorative Finishing Awards.**

and truly making them dazzle with the use of mica powders. Adding to her unique areas of expertise, Cookie is the only decorative artist in the state of Montana to be certified in the use of SkimStone®. “I go out of my way to find things that no one else does,” Cookie reports.

Having learned so much from decorative painting classes herself, Cookie is planning to reciprocate by teaching classes to other professionals. She already has taught classes to homeowners in her own studio for



several years. In addition, Cookie has been requested to teach her hand-dyed paper technique at a prestigious faux-finishing school.

Living in western Montana, Cookie has had calls for various finishes that have a rustic look. Among the artistic finishes she has created in keeping with that “rustic look” are architectural studded leather and the imbedded look of a grizzly bear’s paw. However, she also does a lot of Italian and Renaissance finishes, since those types of looks have a universal appeal. Her eventual hope is to paint abroad in Europe.



**Cookie Hanson is used to working on scaffolding and scissor lifts. At right, she puts a layer of primer on a building for which she created hand-troweled concrete walls. Shown above is the final result.**



Cookie received validation of her decorative painting skills at the Fauxcademy of Decorative Finishing Awards, held this past summer in Las Vegas. She won a first-place award for a concrete floor with a medallion. She also received nominations for her work in six other categories.

In addition, Cookie has done award-winning work for the Missoula Parade of Homes. "I've done six Parade of Homes (in conjunction with a local interior designer), and we've won every year," Cookie reports.

Cookie's work also has been seen on the HGTV Show, "What Do You

Get For Your Money?" Among the work displayed in the show were two copper foil ceilings and a wall finish featuring an embedded leaf pattern.

For the future, Cookie and Greg's hope is that Tour de Faux will continue to grow and prosper. "The business has been building steadily," Cookie says. "Any business takes about six or seven years to establish itself, and that's where we are right now. We've taken the work ethic we established with our other two businesses and applied it here."

Given that work ethic, coupled with Cookie's ability to create beautiful ceiling effects and other decorative finishes, Tour de Faux should be able to continue its growth. For the Hansons, there really is no ceiling to what they can accomplish. In the case of Tour de Faux, the sky's the limit. [TFF](#)

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