



JULIE GURR – WILLOW BASKETS

Crafting willow baskets by hand is a heritage art woven into the landscape of Britain in more ways than one, as archaeological finds dating from the Iron Age can attest. For East Sussex-based willow weaver Julie Gurr, proud bearer of two decades' experience from the tutelage of makers in England, Scotland and Ireland, the prosaic functionality of baskets is heightened only by the poetic artistry inherent in both their material and skillful creation.

"I am continually fascinated by the variety of ways natural materials can be turned into three-dimensional baskets," she explains of her medium of choice. Having grown her own willow on Romney Marsh since 2017, she produces work borne of creative experimentation and freedom of autonomy – a marriage much like her customers' very modern appreciation for the craft with a reverence for its traditional form. "These days people are more appreciative of the time and skill involved in making a basket, and are attracted by the use of natural, sustainable materials. My favourite thing to do is creating new designs by trying out the different traditional techniques I have learnt over the years.

Lockdown was great for me as it really gave me time to play with the willow and try out different combinations of techniques. I also love all the colours the different varieties of willow have and enjoy combining them in my work."

Her studio near Rye, close to the coast in Hastings, provides inspiration from the nearby natural environment, and a base from which to work on her further enterprise, Marsh Willow, which she runs with partner James to focus on willow growing and the production of artists' charcoal from offcuts which would otherwise go to waste. Her thoughtfully holistic approach also extends to future design plans, reflecting the context of her coastal setting and beyond: "What I would really like to do is to be able to spend more time creating my own unique designs," she says. "So my plan is to make sure I carve out regular time to do this. I'm also learning how to make coracles, which are small boats with a woven structure covered with a waterproof material. This is just for fun at the moment – but who knows, I might teach courses one day."

willowweaver.com ▶

OPPOSITE PAGE

Julie's mindful approach to both material and craft sees designs take shape at her East Sussex workshop near Rye.

ABOVE RIGHT Each basket is woven with respect to the qualities and colours of the willow, creating a shape and pattern unique in its design.

ABOVE LEFT A selection of Julie Gurr's willow baskets (clockwise from top left): Large Sculptural Log Basket £495; Organic Freeform Basket, £350; Large Hanging Basket, £135.