

outdoor americana



Nicki Huggins began collecting vintage gliders, spring chairs, and rockers to furnish her California home. Before she knew it, she had started a business and returned to her Gulf Coast roots.



The memory of an old porch glider inspired the decor of Nicki Huggins' home—and helped launch Retropatio, her alluring line of vintage outdoor furniture. Balancing a bicoastal life between residences in Los Angeles and on the Florida Panhandle, the designer guides a business born of necessity and nostalgia.

In 1997, Nicki and fiancé Scott Sternberg trucked an airplane hangar from North Dakota to California to create the core of their modern house. Nicki realized the home would have as many outdoor spaces

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Orange paint and a cut-out flower motif brighten a circa-1930s J.R. Bunting Company bouncer chair.



as enclosed ones, and she wanted to warm it up. “Using antiques to bring in some history seemed obvious, but I dismissed that idea because Scott loves contemporary design,” she recalls. “Then I thought about antique outdoor furniture, even though I wasn’t really sure what that was.” Nicki found her answer when she remembered the outdoor gliders of her childhood.

“Who doesn’t like to sit on a couch that swings?” she asks. “I spent many afternoons doing that as a 7-year-old on my grandmother’s front porch in Ozark, Alabama.”

Finding classic outdoor pieces proved difficult in Los Angeles, a city lacking a rich “porch culture.” With the help of antiques pickers from the Midwest, Nicki furnished her home with steel gliders, spring chairs, and rockers. “The more I learned about their place in American furniture history, the more I collected,” she says.

Nicki primarily searches for furniture manufactured by two now-defunct American companies—the J.R. Bunting Company of Philadelphia



This perforated winter-green beauty is a Howell Manufacturing Company chair originally built in the 1930s.

Powder-coated in candy-apple red and given matching vinyl arm caps, this steel rocker features a fan design.



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and Howell Manufacturing Company of Wheaton, Illinois. Around 1919, they began making steel furniture and decorating it with embossed and cutout designs. The chairs and gliders caught on in the post-war jazz age. “I think the glider could be the most nostalgic piece of furniture ever made,” says Nicki. “All over the country, people have told me the stories of their lives through the gliders sitting on their front porches.”

When Nicki started selling items from her warehouse stash, Retropatio was launched. Every piece is vintage, nothing is reproduced—just restored. “I don’t buy pieces that need extensive repair,” Nicki says, “because you

can’t really rebuild them. It is a testament to the quality of the early

American steel that many have lasted more than 80 years.”

Retropatio offers more than 400 baked-on, powder-coat pigments, and colors can also be custom-blended. Such technology did not exist in the original manufacturing era, when pieces were enamel-painted in bright primary colors.

After a few years in L.A., Nicki noticed she’d shipped most of her goods to Southeastern coastal areas. When she and Scott bought a home in the Florida Panhandle, she set up her operation in Panama City. Now she travels between the two coasts.

It pleases Nicki that her customers feel the way she does about the pieces. “They recognize their history and value and make a place for them in their families,” she says. “This furniture is a part of Americana and, with proper restoration, should last another 80 years.” 🌸

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