



# Harvest Moon Soapworks

*Bathing Elevated to Fine Art*

by Keith Waller

The ancient art of soap making is alive and well, and making a resurgence here in the sunny green countryside of South Carolina. "Most of what we call 'soap' is actually a block of inexpensive texturized detergent. If you look carefully, the word 'soap' is not on the label at all," says Patrick Showalter. Patrick is a nationally certified hand crafted soap maker and owner of Harvest Moon Soapworks in Florence, SC. Out of curios-

texture, color, fragrances and lather characteristics that come from using natural and time tested ingredients. "I use high quality vegetable oil blends, including palm, shea, olive and other oils," explains Showalter. "Olive oil soap cleans well and is very moisturizing, but it doesn't lather as well and is a little soft. Coconut oil adds lather and palm oil adds firmness and cleaning ability. The wrong combination might be brittle, too soft or drying to the skin,

oils for fragrance and poppy seeds or loofah to exfoliate, and each addition further complicates the mix. Add to this the variables of temperature, humidity and the differences inherent in natural ingredients, and you have quite a challenge for even a skilled artisan. Much trial and error goes into learning to make the perfect soap, into understanding how each natural additive affects the whole. For example, adding comfrey has a smoothing effect, feels good on the skin, and adds color and texture. "Some herbs don't hold their natural color in the soap-making process, and people expect certain colors to represent the fragrance," says Patrick. "Lavender, for example, is very difficult." In the end, a satisfying result includes rich colors, fragrances and wonderful textures in a product designed to be used every day.

"Most fragrances in store-bought soaps are synthetic, but natural is best,"



Patrick Showalter

Much trial and error goes into learning to make the perfect soap, into understanding how each natural additive affects the whole.

ity, I checked that statement, and sure enough, those bars of what I have always called "soap" are named "beauty bar," "cleansing bar" or "moisturizing bar." Like that fake bacon called "country crisps" or the "buttery spread" sold in place of butter, there are creative marketing people behind these items, every one of them laughing hysterically at having fooled us into thinking what we're buying is the genuine article.

Showalter explains that soap making is an art, and each soap artist carefully guards his recipe for the perfect

and getting that perfect blend is where skill comes in."

One particular soap on display caught my eye, with a pattern embedded in it that looks like a sea animal found on the beach. "That's my loofah sponge soap," says Patrick. He molds a specially blended soap around a whole loofah, then slices the finished soap into sections. This creates an organic looking soap with its own cleverly encased internal scrubber.

Mineral clays are often added to soap for color, herbs and essential

says Patrick. While some people might expect to see an aromatherapy guide of the scents and their associated moods, Patrick says that his scents are simply pleasing. Lavender can be relaxing, peppermint invigorating, but magnolia and gardenia are more personal. "These remind me of my mother's garden. You can't discount that aspect, that certain herbs, flowers and scents invoke memories and happiness."

So is this organic or all natural? "The definition of *natural* or *organic* applied to soap is a tricky problem for us,



one that we discuss at the Soap Makers Guild,” explains Patrick. “Basic soap making is a chemical process. Though using all natural ingredients, even organic ones, the basic soap making process is still a chemical reaction and manufacturing process, albeit done by hand in a small kitchen environment. We use lye, a strong chemical that causes the reaction that makes soap. Although the lye is gone from the finished soap, it seems dishonest to call hand-crafted soap a totally natural or organic product.” *Handcrafted* is an honest title for this locally made, custom product, which uses ingredients that are as natural as possible.

Technical definitions aside, Patrick’s sister, Patrice, sees customers crowd into the store, asking for SLS free, paraben free, chemical free and artificial fragrance free soaps. These are, they say, less irritating or less likely to aggravate allergies. Patrick quickly clarifies, “We can’t make any claims that using a natural soap can cure or treat any disease, but people do find relief from irritation using bath salts, natural mud clays, certain herbal soaps, and soaking salts that have relaxing and soothing properties.” Herbalists and aromatherapists can confirm this and offer advice, but Patrick is not working specifically with any local experts.

In high school, Patrick Showalter had a reputation for treating his dates to gifts of custom blended aromatic bath salts, which might have been a bit more effective than flowers, dinner or a movie. Today, his shop is filled with gift

ideas, gift baskets and bath items that allow one to find a present that would be welcomed by anyone dreaming of a long, luxurious, relaxing bath. Besides bath salts, herbal soaps, and a myriad of natural body care products, Harvest Moon sells organic and fair trade herbal and traditional teas. You can have a soothing cup of tea while you soak, or use one of Harvest Moon’s oversized special screen infusers to treat your entire body to a soothing herbal tea bath.

With natural earth friendly sensibilities in mind, Harvest Moon gifts and accessories are all natural or handmade. A multitude of items line the shelves, including wooden soap dishes, boar bristle brushes, sisal and cotton scrubbers, and even eco-friendly, locally-made soy candles. Have a particular fragrance, color or packaging in mind? Harvest Moon can make up gift baskets to include hand crochet soap bags and wash cloths, custom blended soaps and bath crystals, and for special packages, even custom labeling. Patrick says that he ships everything from his shop so that he can recycle all shipping material, and know for certain that nothing leaves his shop or goes down his drain that has a negative impact on Mother Earth.

*For more information on Harvest Moon Soapworks, call Patrick Showalter in Florence at (843) 661-1008, or see his shop at 2012 Second Loop Road. You can also order from his website at HMSoapworks.com. See ad page 17.*

# WOUNDED WARRIOR



## 100% All-Natural Topical Ointment

An astringent ointment that heals, relieves, and soothes skin irritations.



### Key topical uses:

- Abrasions
- Acne
- Blisters
- Burns
- Cuts
- Insect Bites
- Rashes
- Sunburn & more

Wounded Warrior is made with all-natural herbal extracts of the highest quality and is produced by our family for your family.

SINCE 1990

Our Guarantee...

Wounded Warrior works!

If you are not completely satisfied, return the unused portion and we will refund your money.

**"A FIRST AID KIT IN A BOTTLE"**

Call us at: 1-800-232-7713

[www.WoundedWarriorOintment.com](http://www.WoundedWarriorOintment.com)

### AVAILABLE AT THESE FINE STORES:

**Charleston  
Earth Fare**

**Myrtle Beach  
New Life Natural Foods  
(2 Locations)**

**North Myrtle Beach  
New Life Natural Foods**

**Summerville  
Mother Nature**

**Tell them you  
found it in  
Natural  
Awakenings.**