

JEWELS OF THE SEASON • SANTA FE IN WINTER • HOLIDAY ART SHOWS

santa fean

December 2017/January 2018



the
holiday issue

Clint Mortenson

silver, saddles, style

by Amanda N. Pitman photographs by Gabriella Marks

CLINT MORTENSON KNOWS SILVER. And saddles. And a whole lot of everything in between. Mortenson, a Santa Fean for close to two decades, operates a studio that looks like a treasure box from the good old days, filled with tools large and small. “I was probably about 10 [years old] with a little Tandy® Leather kit making belts and billfolds, and did that for money all throughout high school, and ended up going to saddle-making school.” He continues, “I started [my business] with the saddles—making saddles—about 25 years ago, and then I got into the silverwork, customizing a little bit more.” Custom work, in either leather or silver, is no simple task. Saddles, depending on their level of intricacy, take anywhere from two to six weeks to complete. They are customized to individuals’ riding styles, fit to their bodies with the proper seat size, and of course, made with a saddle tree that fits their horse. Custom belt buckles, with their meticulous sawing, cutting, soldering, and engraving, typically take at least 12 hours.

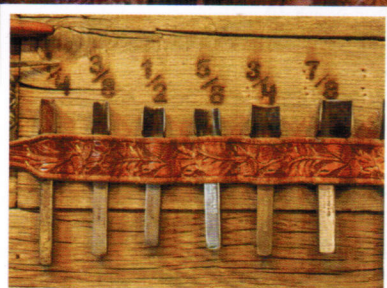
When asked whether he prefers leatherwork or silverwork, Mortenson vacillates. “. . . kinda equal on both; I do less leatherwork now and I’m doing more of the design work and silverwork these days, but I like new, unique projects—it’s been fun working with the movies quite a bit” In fact, several New Mexico-filmed television shows and movies feature Mortenson’s work; Tommy Lee Jones’s saddle from *The Missing* (2003), is just one shining example of his craftsmanship in action. However, he notes that “. . . now the silverwork has grown. We still do custom saddles and leather repair, but the silverwork is a larger portion of our business.” Confirming that this type of Western-style silverwork has worldwide appeal, Mortenson recalls making two particularly memorable custom buckle sets. Prizes for a polo match, they were won by Britain’s Prince Charles and Prince William. **sf**

Mortenson Silver & Saddles, 96 Bonanza Creek Rd, silverandsaddles.com

Below: An art deco-esque vintage style rodeo trophy buckle. Mortenson also makes rodeo queen crowns and other awards for the Rodeo de Santa Fe and various other events, both local and national.



Above: Clint Mortenson is all smiles in his Santa Fe studio. In the foreground is a hand-tooled Charro saddle, similar in style to the one he made for actor Tommy Lee Jones in the 2003 film *The Missing*.



Above: One-hundred-year-old leather-working tools are both useful and decorative.

Left: Mortenson’s work is showstopping—this custom hand-carved, silver mounted holster for a Colt 45 was created for the star of the upcoming series *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018), produced by the Coen brothers.



Below: Mortenson’s horse, Colt, models a custom bridle with a 1950s-style hand-engraved sterling silver Visalia bit.

