

# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES

## Ten Mile Creek Forge Pottery & Lighting

By Country Lines - September 2012



You could say that George Potvin has metalsmithing in his blood. The U.P. farm owned by his great-grandfather had a blacksmith shop, and George says, "I used to snoop around the old buildings when I was a kid—my dad had really good stories to tell about everything there." Intrigued by the old blacksmithing tools, George began to teach himself metalworking by trial-and-error, and at age 16 created his first knife from an old file. "The first thing that you could call any kind of a knife," he laughs.

Today, George runs his own metal forge shop, and with his wife Maureen, operates the Ten Mile Creek Forge, Pottery & Lighting Gift Shop, near Escanaba. As the name implies, there's a little something for nearly every wanderer who seeks out this secluded business—a brimming gift shop, watching metal being forged into art and tools, and maybe some fascinating stories about local history, the intricacies of metallurgy, and Irish folklore.

Maureen's Irish and Celtic-themed country store displays George's hand-forged metal items and high quality works from over 30 artists, including jade and dolomite lamps, regional wood carvings, multi-media works, raku pottery and jewelry. The shop smells of the handmade soaps and candles, and brims with vividly colored glass art and collectibles.

On the other side of the driveway, George's rustic workshop smells of wood smoke and old metal; the coal-fired forge hisses and flames, and rows of wood and steel tools await their tasks. When he talks about "working the steel" used to form custom knives, fireplace tools, door knockers and other items, he speaks of the metal as if it's alive: it is "quenched," "stressed," "hardened," and "resting," and then "tested" and "shaped." Each material has individual properties that enhance whatever project he is imagining: from fine jewelry to one of his unique knives with an ornate handle.

Each knife is handcrafted—from metal selection and blade design to many choices for handle materials: bleached deer bone (with hand-carved scrimshaw), moose antler, spalted beech, and exotic woods from Africa. The custom sheaths are handmade from vegetable-tanned leather.

George especially enjoys the challenge of joining old steel—especially a meaningful item owned by a customer—with something new, such as a piece of antler from a trophy hunt. Such as the custom hinges and old-fashioned door latches he's making for Tom Stitt's summer cabin. Stitt, who is a member of Great Lakes Energy and Alger Delta electric co-ops and nominated the Potvins for this story, adds, "George can make just about anything in metal."

"It's an art," Maureen says about her husband's unique knives. "When you have someone punching out a [pre-formed] blade, it's not the same. These are shaped and formed individually." More than 40 years of blacksmithing experience shapes George's personality-filled creations.