

In 2008, however, when Pamella was feeling a need to take a break from the rigors of being a touring puppeteer, she ran across an ad for a job teaching English to elementary school students in Korea. “I had always wanted to visit Asia,” she says. And so, after some negotiations that permitted her to use puppetry projects to engage the children, she accepted the assignment.

It was in Korea where she was first introduced to, and immediately became infatuated with, hanji, a paper made from the inner bark of the Paper Mulberry, a shrub-like tree that grows throughout Asia.

The paper’s natural color is off-white, but it’s often dyed a variety of different colors. Hanji’s strength yet malleability renders it adaptable to many different forms and functions. It is capable of being stretched, feathered, gathered, and twisted, and can even be sewn. Also, natural materials—such as flower petals, grasses, and leaves—are often incorporated into the hanji. The paper is used to make trays, bowls, furniture, and other items.

When she and a Korean colleague discovered they shared an interest in the art form, they sought out a local hanji teacher who helped them make a ceremonial tea tray. Pamella then continued creating pieces of hanji home décor in her spare time.

She then came across a store in Seoul that carried hundreds of lamps made using hanji. “I absolutely loved being there.” She decided she wanted to make a lamp for her apartment, and soon learned of Young Sang Soon, a hanji teacher specializing in lamps. “She taught me most of the basic lamp techniques

that I continue to use.”

After returning to the States in 2010, Pamella made more hanji items—bowls, trays, boxes, and a few lamps as well. “People simply fell in love with the hanji lamps,” she says. “So I decided to concentrate on them. When I felt ready, I showed them to some local galleries.” They sold quickly, and that encouraged her to explore whether she

could market them on a national scale.

In 2012, she received the Merit Award as a first-time presenter at the Buyers Market of American Craft, the nation’s largest wholesale trade show. Part of the prize was a one-hour consultation with a marketing professional to help guide her in the national launch of her lamps.

“It was very heartening to have her tell me that she could see my puppetry background in my

lamp designs. She said it was as if ‘they wanted to talk.’ I loved that comment.” By the time she left the show, 25 galleries had booked enough work to last her an entire year.

Her creative process varies from piece to piece, but always as progression of the artistic road she’s traveled.

“I know that as the tilt of the puppet’s head speaks clearly the emotional content of that moment, so too the arc of two flowers leaning together toward the imagined sun brings feelings and images we’ve

tucked away from tender moments of our past.”

To see more of Pamella’s creations, visit hanjihome.com, or stop by her studio in Upper CURVE Studios & Garden, 9B Riverside Drive in the River Arts District. Her lamps can also be seen at Grovewood Gallery in Asheville, and in many other galleries across the country. She welcomes requests for custom designs.

