



Photo by Linda Winski



Ali DeJohn & *the* makerie

BY JENNIFER WENNIG

Photography by Teryn Wilkes (about.me/teryn)

The seeds of creative inspiration that have beautifully blossomed into the Makerie (www.themakerie.com), a three-day crafting retreat nestled in the foothills of Boulder, Colorado, were planted during Ali DeJohn's preschool days in San Diego, California.

"I went to an incredibly creative preschool where we were able to explore creativity in a million open-ended ways," says Ali, who founded the retreat. "We painted toast, played with yarn, experimented with paint and baked treats."

For four glorious days starting April 11, 2013, Ali will welcome and encourage crafters of any skill level to delve into their own creative inclinations in an inspiring, nurturing and peaceful environment at the Makerie's third annual retreat.

After participating in the Squam Art Workshops in New Hampshire several years ago, Ali says she often found herself daydreaming about creating a place where people could use their hands and foster their souls.

"I started the Makerie in my hometown to give people the gift of uninterrupted creative time shared with a loving community that is often hard to carve out of our everyday lives," says Ali.

At the 2012 retreat, Ali welcomed more than 100 bright-eyed, crafty spirits (including the first "Makerie Man") from 18 states and three countries. Whether they were looking to hone their crochet skills (Crochetologie), focus a culinary eye (food styling and photography workshop) or design their own stationary by learning the charming old-and-new-school art



of letterpress (letter writing, talk about a lost art!), crafters flourished in the thoughtful and imaginative classes.

Ali says that each year the workshops will be a mix of the familiar and the fresh. “We not only search for approachable, unique, creative offerings, but also seek teachers who are inspiring souls.”

One such soul is Liesl Gibson, founder of *oliver + s*, a Brooklyn-based children’s pattern company. Liesl has taught two classes and has written on her blog, oliverands.com/blog, that she plans to return to the Makerie.

“I was hooked almost immediately. I learned new things. I made new friends. I was inspired. I didn’t want to leave. And I was a teacher!” Liesl cherished the sense of community that enveloped the retreat and blogged that Ali’s “disarming” attention to detail set the perfect tone for the weekend.

While much of the weekend focuses on figuratively feeding the soul, Ali knows her creative campers need to be physically nourished. Taking a yoga class or an adventurous hike in the Flatiron Mountains provides ample opportunity to temper that fantastic (yet happily exhausting) right brain stimulation.

And, what of the food? A delightful bounty of healthy organic meals (locally procured ingredients when possible) are served at lively family-style or picnic-like mealtimes.

After stretching their creative muscles by day, as night falls, crafters gather in the Cozy Creative Lounge to read, chat and indulge in homemade treats. Ali put her baking prowess on display with chunky chocolate cookies (recipe from food styling and photography instructor Aran Goyoago) homemade with light muscovado sugar and Fleur de Sel.



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Event Profile: The Makerie

After cookies and milk, an inviting bed in one of Colorado Chautauqua's cozy cottages awaits. Ali says each abode oozes unique and historic charm.

She believes everyone, even the non-crafter, has "creative flair" and suggests to anyone whose creative self has been hibernating that they make an inspiration board (by hand or on Pinterest). She offers this easy and rustic tip for constructing an inspirational display: Chicken wire!

"I have a big wall of chicken wire above my desk where I constantly pin images and other things with clothespins. It's a super-simple way to capture your ideas in one place, easily changeable and something I look at everyday."

Ali describes her crafting style as simple and approachable, doesn't consider herself an artist and didn't formally study art (she studied psychology at the University of Michigan). But, says she was bitten by the "I-think-I-can-make-that" bug.

A passionate knitter, she's taking up sewing and hopes, with the days turning cooler, to make her first quilt. Her curiosity and penchant for homespun wares has her contemplating trying her hand at making slipcovers, crocheting and woodworking.

Using one's hands, Ali purports, lends itself to being "mindful, present, calm, grounded and happy." This, she says, is a gift.

"I think more than ever, people are craving time and space to slow down, to use their hands to make something original in a time of mass production. (They're) searching for activities that bring together a community of like-minded souls in person – offline."

That is exactly what craft hobbyists and artisans will find at the Makerie. Katherine Skene traveled from Toronto and gained much more than a new skill in her crafting arsenal.

Katherine says, "Every once in a while, something happens to you that can only be described as magic. Yes, yes. It might seem strange to describe a crafty weekend in Boulder as 'magic', but it really, really was. What made the weekend so amazing was how I felt while there and how I still feel. More than ever before, I felt connected to a community of truly brilliant people, to my friends, to my family, to myself."

As Ali preps for next year's retreat, she is reveling in the natural beauty and bounty of fall by keeping those hands busy. "I've been experimenting with canning, which is a perfect fall activity." Last year, she made peach butter and adorned the jars with sticker labels that her 7-year old son decorated. "I loved giving them away as gifts with his sweet, personalized labels."

And so her creativity is coming full circle from those early preschool days, to life with her children (she also has a young daughter) and her latest offspring, the Makerie. "I still have an insatiable appetite for learning how to make things – anything," says Ali. Where better to satisfy those crafty cravings than at a Makerie retreat?

For more information on the Makerie, visit www.themakerie.com.



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—Katherine Skene

