

TEXT BY TONY DIMARTINO • STYLING BY DARVA MURRAY • PHOTOGRAPHY BY LANCE DAVIES



LEFT: At home with Curlin Reed Sullivan in Atlanta's Buckhead neighborhood. "Our sunroom doesn't really look like this," she hastens to explain. "When this photo was taken, I was setting up the panels for my booth at the stationery show." Hanging above her is "Twirlin' Curlin," a self-portrait. BELOW: "Kernie in Spring" wears Gerbera and Aster daisies, freesia, and chile peppers.



So, what **EXACTLY** is a **pippingtooth**?

It's the tiny tooth used by baby chicks to break out of their shells. But to this Atlanta artist, it's also the perfect name for a bunch of chicks hatching a business =>



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Curlin creates "botanical character studies" with watercolors, colored pencils, and fresh flowers. "Dried flowers just won't do." She never sits down with a specific image in mind. "I'm always surprised by the final design." BELOW: "Kristin Cattail," named after an energetic friend.



IT'S NOT EASY, GETTING CURLIN REED Sullivan to talk about herself. In fact, it's downright challenging, not because she's shy—far from it!—but because she's so busy trying to give credit to all the friends and relatives who've helped her become the artist and entrepreneur she is today.

"There's my mom, whose photo was the very first thing I put in my workshop; and my paternal grandmother, Curlin Reed, who supported her family during the Depression by working as a writer and artist for the *Saturday Evening Post*; and Pamela Barsky, a fabulous designer and brilliant writer who's been so generous and helpful to me..."

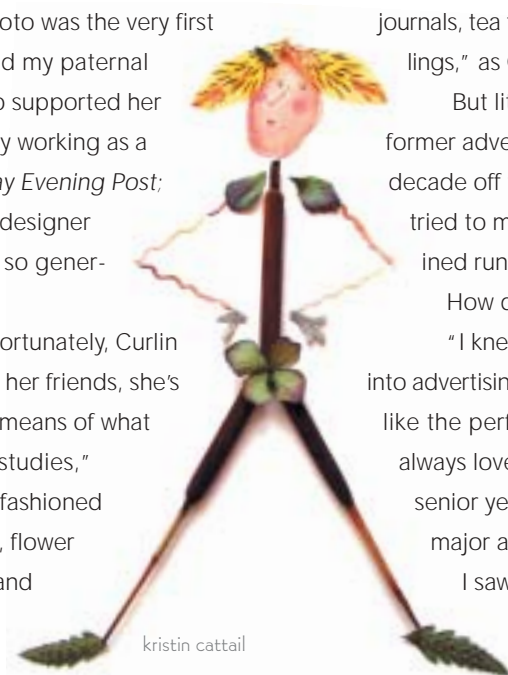
The litany goes on and on. Fortunately, Curlin not only spins vivid tales about her friends, she's immortalized most of them by means of what she calls "botanical character studies," charming personality sketches fashioned from paint and colored pencils, flower petals, berries, chile peppers, and

other natural materials. After arranging these elements on paper, she photographs her creations, tweaking the images on her computer until they're just right.

Then she and her colleagues at Pippingtooth, an Atlanta-based company she started with a bunch of talented friends, turn the results into a quirky, colorful line of greeting cards, framed prints, note pads, purse-sized journals, tea towels, and other "gifty little hatchlings," as Curlin calls them.

But little more than a year ago, Curlin, a former advertising copywriter who'd taken a decade off to raise two sons, had never even tried to make a greeting card, let alone imagined running a business that produces them. How did she get from there to here?

"I knew since my teens that I wanted to go into advertising," says the artist, now 40. "It seemed like the perfect combination of everything I'd always loved: words and pictures." During her senior year in high school, she interned at a major ad agency in Atlanta. "The first time I saw a storyboard, I was hooked."



**"It's a FAMILY THING:**  
My dad sends out catalogs,  
my brothers and a cousin work  
in my booth at gift shows, and  
**LUKE AND THE BOYS**  
cheer me on."



Curlin's Pippingtooth designs include cards and gifts. Some of her favorites are, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, "Chairwoman K. Bray," fashioned from tulips, roses, and spider orchids and named after a friend who's now dean of women at their mutual alma mater; "Mme. Snoot," composed of maple leaf, Nandina berries, sunflowers, and chile peppers,

"named after no one in particular—she just came off the page as snooty!"; "Surprising Myra," who's wearing Hydrangeas and paper whites; "Lena de Mae," a vision in Gerberas and Cordyline leaf, named after Lena Mae Miller, a mother of six who helps Curlin out at home; and "Shopping Lizzie," a retail therapist clad in tulips, Nandina berries, Gerberas, and Veronica. ➔

## ARTIST'S WORKSHOP

BELOW LEFT: It takes Curlin a couple of hours to compose a design. Photographing it adds another hour to the process, "then I fine tune each image with Adobe Photoshop." RIGHT: In the dining room, "all my friends are watching over me, like guardians." BELOW: "Raine's Dance," named after friend and makeup artist Raine Tillman, who powdered Curlin's nose for her HOME COMPANION portrait.



“There’s nothing quite as **MAGICAL** as a fresh pad of paper and a **NEW BOX** of crayons.”

**A**FTER EARNING AN ENGLISH degree at Davidson College in North Carolina, Curlin went straight into advertising, meeting her future husband, Luke, when they worked for different agencies in Richmond, Virginia. They married in 1991.

She spent 10 years in the business and another 10 raising Reed, 9, and Preston, 6. "But by the time my youngest was in kindergarten, I knew it was time to hatch out of my shell." A year ago on a whim, she brought samples of her work to the National Stationery Show in New York City, an annual event where both established and emerging artists display their wares. "That's where I met Pam Barsky, another ad copywriter-turned-artist whose work I'd long admired. She invited me to come up the following January to show my stuff in her booth, and things sort of took off from there."

raine's dance

"Sort of" is Curlin being modest. Following that show, she received orders from 60 stationery and gift stores.

At Pippingtooth, her coworkers include Marjorie Rieder, a fellow room mother from her sons' school, whom Curlin calls "the left brain to my right brain. She got our software up and running and figured out a shipping system."

Husband Luke, a partner and chief creative officer at WestWayne Advertising, is a staunch supporter. "He never looks askance at my farfetched notions." Major fans include her sons, also artists: Reed does a comic strip called *Chicken Al and Hunter Hal*; Preston writes what he calls "haunted books."

Curlin doesn't regret the years she took off to spend with her sons. "I call it my incubation time, because while I was drawing with my children, I was becoming the artist I am now. And we laughed a lot. Laughter inspires me." 🐼

see [getting the goods](#) for more information