

# The Weird, Wonderful World of Parke Meek



Parke Meek....

## “if it’s not fun, don’t do it”

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From Parke Meek’s perspective, “It’s a weird world.”

Anyone who has ever strolled past Jadis, Meek’s quirky Main Street shop, undoubtedly agrees. After years of serving a strictly private clientele, Meek is opening the shop to the public. And he opens his life story with a warning: “It’s a difficult life to keep track of.”

His first job, at age 12, was stock boy in a Fort Wayne, Indiana, grocery store. “Lowly Maloley’s, we called it. There was an old lady who worked the cash register and she’d keep a broom leaning there. Every few customers, she’d ring up the broom. If they noticed, she’d just say she thought it was theirs. Most of them didn’t notice. I don’t know how many times she sold that broom.”

He soon advanced from stock boy to “bootlegger. I was washing taxis for

Meek found an outlet for his entrepreneurial talents even in the South Pacific. “We made Japanese flags out of cloth and painted them with Mercurochrome, then sold them to the American pilots when they came in. The problem is, when they got wet, the colors ran.”

He also built a still.

When the war ended, Meek returned to Indiana, where he was hired to build a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. “Nobody else would touch it,” Meek remembers. “It was weird.”

When the owner’s wife became pregnant and wanted to add a bedroom, Meek paid a visit to the architect. “He said ‘I’m sorry, but there are only two solutions: don’t build it or don’t have the child.’” Meek created a divider for the master bedroom, leaving the original design intact.

As the Korean War intensified, Meek’s Marine reserve unit was called up. Ninety-five percent went to Korea. Meek was in the five percent who remained at Camp Pendleton. “I have,” he says, “lived a charmed life.”

The decision to stay in California

for him for 30 years, until he died on me.”

Along the way, Meek was married and divorced twice, first to “a school buddy,” and later to a realtor who “drank too much. One day she stepped off a plane and dropped dead.”

He met Sue Lieberman at the Eames offices and they have been companions ever since. The couple opened Jadis together in 1976, in the former Bank of Italy building. When the neighboring space became available, Lieberman set up her own shop, Paris 1900, and Meek created the intricate woodwork that adorns the storefront.

Jadis has seen several incarnations. It was an antiques store, then a purveyor of replica Deco furniture, until Meek transformed it into a prop company catering to the studios. Jadis merchandise has shown up in a number of “Frankenstein” films, as well as “Batman,” “Waterworld” and most recently, “Van Helsing.”

The always fanciful window display merely hints at the trove of old-fashioned curios, eccentric contraptions and sinister-looking gadgets that dwell inside. The gear wheels, control panels and many other contrivances are all Meek originals, fashioned from parts from the Department of Water and Power salvage yard. But he’s willing to part with them.

“I don’t get attached to objects,” he claims, but will concede “the Zeppelin [in the front window] is the best one. I collect folk art and it’s the best example I’ve ever seen.”

In the shop, Meek has one rule: the customer is always wrong. “People come in and want something that costs \$75. They ask ‘can’t you do any better than that?’ I tell them yeah. Eighty-five.”

In life, Meek has another rule: “If it’s not fun, don’t do it. And I’ve held

Checker Cab Company. A guy here asked if I'd like to make some extra money. The deal was, I'd need to be there after midnight. In Indiana, they don't sell booze after twelve o'clock, in bars or in stores. If you wanted to buy booze, you'd call Checker Cab Company and ask for Maggie. She'd take the order. All they sold was Coke and Kessler's.

"The cab driver would take me to the address and I'd go up and tap on the door, get the money and come back. I'm 14 -- what are they going to do to me? I met some of the weirdest people in the world."

Meek discovered collecting through a school chum, Sammy Levin. "Sammy's dad was a rag man. After school, Sammy had to pick up rags in the alleys, pushing his pushcart. I'd go along with him and pick up things I wanted. It was right when Deco was coming in and Victorian was going out, so people were throwing out some great stuff."

Meek dropped out of school in the ninth grade and at 17 joined the Marines, who dispatched him to Guadalcanal.

"That was the greatest place in the world to be," he says. "It was warm."

was an easy one (Meek calls Indiana "a good place to be away from") and he soon landed a job working for celebrated designers Charles and Ray Eames. "Charles' genius was in getting the best out of people. I worked

to that.

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Beginning this week, Jadis (2701 Main Street) will be open to the public on Sundays from noon to 4 p.m. through Christmas.



..and his world