



# Fresh & funky Philly soul

Living in Philadelphia, bear artist Francisco Carreno's bears are inspired by the city's historic old charm mixed with a modern, urban twist

*By Lauren Nielsen*

free time, I devote it to my bears."

This free time is spent in his basement studio that he designed especially for his work. "I do both my bears and real estate in my studio," he said. "It is quiet and away from the distractions of the city." The studio is filled with materials, especially fabrics, and organised by type, colour, etc. for easy access. "I love to work with Mohair," he shared, "but I also love silk. Interestingly enough, both are protein fibres."

With a background in textiles and fashion design, Francisco's bears are dressed in sophisticated and intricate attire. They possess a human-like quality, full of personality. "I'm most proud of the time and detail I apply to my work to make it believable, full of personality and have a warm soul," he stated.

With such time and detail put into his bears, it is no wonder that the design stage is Francisco's favourite part of working on the bears. "In my case, it happens from beginning to end of making a bear so I'm very fortunate," he added. His bears range from a Steampunk male scientist, to a Victorian-era boy, to a cow doing the Can-Can.

Francisco describes his process of mak-

ing bears as "very organic." He is often first inspired by a texture or colour.

"I then go through all my mohair and other materials in my studio and play for hours until I feel something can be put together with what I have,"

**ABOVE LEFT:** Penelope, the pirate navigator bear, was one of Francisco's favourite bears to create.

**LEFT:** A Victorian boy bear holding his own teddy bear.

**BELOW:** A female Steampunk scientist bear.



**H**istoric old charm mixed with a modern urban twist." This is how Francisco Carreno of Nino's Bears describes Philadelphia, the main source of inspiration for his very human-like artisan bears.

Originally from Venezuela, Francisco Carreno now lives in Philadelphia and works as a full-time realtor and part-time teddy bear artist. He has been making teddy bears for nearly 13 years, and the love of the art continues on despite his busy schedule. It is a constant balancing act. "My biggest challenge has been balancing my personal life with work and bear making. It's not easy. If one devotes too much time to one thing, the other ones get ignored, but I'm getting better at it every day," he said. "My job as a realtor has to come first, but whenever I have any



he said. Francisco then proceeds to make the bear, which can take several days due to his busy schedule. "Once the bear is finished," he continued, "I step back and see if there is anything that it needs, can be changed or should be removed until I feel satisfied with the look."

Lately, Francisco has been working

**ABOVE:** Francisco also creates animals other than bears including pigs and mice, but these two piglets love teddy bears just the same!

**BELOW LEFT:** Angela plays the accordion as her little friend, Dimitri, listens from her bag.

**RIGHT:** Mr. Peepers is only one of Francisco's elaborately designed Steampunk bears.



with cage skirts and feathers. "It's not easy to work in my scale size with these materials or concepts; I have to figure out a way of making things small but also as realistic as I can. There is a huge difference between a feather on the hat of a 5.5 foot lady compared to the one on the hat of a 14" tall bear," he noted.

Francisco attends two bear shows a year, one in Philadelphia and one in London. "I never have enough work finished for the shows or to sell through my website, but it's okay. I like to concentrate on the quality not the quantity," he shared. "I have to be happy with the way the bear looks otherwise he or she does not make it to the show or my website."

With his own bears having so many detailed and one-of-a-kind inspired facets, Francisco recommends other artists to step out of their comfort zones with their work. "Try different materials and looks," he encourages, "be aware of your surroundings and be inspired by them, make a story when designing something. But most importantly, do not be afraid of people not liking your work, this process is here for







**ABOVE:** This is one of Francisco's female Steampunk bears. She has a flair for fashion with her brightly coloured hair, stockings, and elephant toy.

**TOP RIGHT:** The Can-Can Cow is ready to dance the night away with her elaborate dress and feathered hat.

**RIGHT:** One of Francisco's mouse bears, complete with a top hat, glasses, scarf, and satchel.

**FAR RIGHT:** This is a young Victorian bear, brushing her long lovely locks.

you to have fun, enjoy it, do something different."

Looking at Francisco's creations, it is obvious that he constantly strives to adhere to this advice himself. His favourite bear, Penelope, is a perfect example of this. Penelope is a curly-haired pirate navigator bear complete with a hat, coat, and navigating implements. Francisco has given her a specific story to tell and a personality

with which to tell it.

Francisco's outlook for the future is quite simple: "My plan is to stay fresh and creative in all aspects of my life," he stated. "We only live once and we have the responsibility to enjoy what we do everyday. If one does not then one should reevaluate and see what needs to be changed and change it." With this in mind, Francisco continues to create his bears and enjoys every minute of it. **TBT**



#### THEBEARfacts

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