

# The Art of Steampunk

## Modern technology with a Victorian mind-set

By Toni Fitzgerald

Geahk Burchill was interested in steampunk before he knew the word for it. “If you just go back to those things created by H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, some type of technology that we know today existing in a Victorian/Edwardian setting,” says the Oregon-based artist. “My first experience was with *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, the Disney movie, so I guess I got into the concept at a young age.” His experience is not uncommon.

The idea of steampunk, which melds modern technology with the aesthetic of the Victorian era, has been around for decades but has only recently received a name. The word was coined during the late 1980s by author K. W. Jeter, referencing the then-popular cyberpunk futuristic movement. “Steam” refers to both steam technology itself and the era when it was prevalent.

The genre took off from a design standpoint after Jake Von Slatt posted pictures of a brass and wood computer mod and a clockwork Fender “Stratocaster” electric guitar on his website, The Steampunk Workshop, in 2007. “The computer keyboard and mod was immediately copied by Rich Nagy (aka ‘Datamancer’) with Jake’s permission and steampunk was off to roaring start,” says Art Donovan, author of *The Art of Steampunk: Extraordinary Devices and Ingenious Contraptions from the Leading Artists of the Steampunk Movement*.



Steam engines, like this one by Geahk Burchill, are one of the enduring images of steampunk.

Photo courtesy of Geahk Burchill.

Artists of all kinds, from jewelry makers to painters to fashion designers to vehicle designers, have embraced steampunk, and wood plays a key role in many of their undertakings. “Steampunk, because it harkens back to the 19th century, strives to duplicate this aesthetic, so wood is perfect choice to lend an antique romance to the newly created piece,” Art says. Adds Geahk Burchill, “A big part of the [steampunk] aesthetic is having wood parts.”

Kyle Miller, a West Coast artist who has been producing steampunk-inspired pieces for three years, works primarily with black walnut, eastern maple, arbutus, and cherry. He says there are always challenges when



Kyle Miller’s wooden wings capture the technological bent and whimsy of steampunk.

Photo courtesy of Kyle Miller.



Geahk Burchill’s *Dr. Ameil Hadrian* is a steampunk marionette made of wood.

Photo courtesy of Geahk Burchill.