



Iron Man

Dallas' own Potter universe is the hot spot for metal wizardry.

| By Rebecca Sherman | Photography by Nick Prendergast |

At 60 and working in what is generally considered to be a dying art, metal artisan Richard Potter Jr. is still in high demand. He just completed a quartet of art nouveau-inspired entryways for The Residences at The Ritz-Carlton new Regency Row Homes in Uptown that include hand-forged steel and glass doors, aluminum and glass canopies, and brass lanterns. He's also busy restoring dozens of '30s-era bronze, copper and brass lanterns and chandeliers for Woodrow Wilson High School and J.L. Long Middle School, which will be reinstalled this spring.

The lighting fixtures for the schools were originally crafted by his grandfather Henry C. Potter, who founded the family metalwork studio in 1920. Reviving the handwork created by his grandfather and father decades earlier is a situation in which Potter increasingly finds himself. After all, the patriarch of the family was responsible for much of the fine ironwork found throughout the city, including homes designed by celebrated architects Charles Dilbeck and Clifford Hutsell, and the light fixtures at Fair Park, White Rock Lake, downtown Dallas and Highland Park Village. "Seems like I'm always working on something that my grandfather did years ago," says Potter, who began learning the family trade at 11.

Potter Art Metal Studios does all its heavy forging on-site and includes a design workroom and full-time metal sketch artist. The company is one of the few in the country capable of producing a broad range of products, including lighting, stair railings, gates, doors, windows, furniture and gazebos in an array of metals. Many of the company's 20 employees were trained by one Potter or another. The current Potter executive personally oversees every piece that's produced, and workers are highly skilled in hand repoussé, custom brass spinning and hand-forging of wrought iron. Some requests are intricate,

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like gargoyles, dragons, tree limbs or grapevines. For developer Trammell S. Crow, Potter Studios created a nature-inspired, polished steel fireplace surround with hidden compartments that took six months to make. Other projects are so complex that they're in the works for years. A new client who is building a turreted castle on the Red River just hired the company to create hundreds of ironworks, including more than 50 chandeliers, 30 sconces, 30 lanterns, driveway gates, doors, drawer pulls, hinges and a pair of two-story iron trees that will support a room above. At this rate, another generation or two of Potters stands ready to take on restoration work should the massive project eventually need it. It's a good thing, then, that Potter's two sons and daughter already work at the company, and his 22-year-old triplet grandsons are learning the ropes during the summer. "There aren't schools for this kind of craftsmanship any longer. You almost have to grow up in the business to be able to do it," he says. ■

Potter Art Metal Studios, 4827 Memphis St., 214.821.1419, potterartmetal.com



1. Richard Potter Jr. is carrying on the metal-crafting tradition of his grandfather.
2. Historic photo of Potter Art Metal Studios
3. Detail in studio
4. Regency Row Homes