

Kathleen Besaw
Oswego, New York

I chose Victoria MacKenzie Childs as the traditional craft artist that I would wish to have dinner with. Victoria and Richard MacKenzie Childs have a long history in New York State not far from where I live so I have had the opportunity to visit the MacKenzie Childs facility in Aurora, New York as well as their home/business in Kings Ferry. I find their rags to riches, to rags to riches history interesting from both an entrepreneurial and an artistic perspective. Victoria and Richard earned their Master's degrees in Fine Arts at Alfred University in upstate New York. They went on to purchase a rundown farmhouse in Aurora, New York and Richard taught ceramics at Wells College. As the story has been told they had no money to buy new furniture, and a large rundown house badly in need of repair and decoration. Thus the MacKenzie Childs style of whimsical, colorful, eclectic artwork manifested itself in their home as they painted and adorned rooms and salvaged furniture. This was not the beginning of the business that became a multi-million dollar enterprise. In 1983, in an effort to earn money to send their daughter to ballet school the couple decided to make and sell teacups and MacKenzie-Childs, Ltd. was born.

There is so much that I would want to talk with Victoria about over dinner. It is fascinating to me that her beginnings are much the same as many ordinary people who are selling their creations at craft shows and creating in their basements and home studios. I would like to gain a sense of what qualities she has that led her to such great success. I would like to know what her "creative process" is. I find her work to be quite eclectic, with some of it rather traditional and some very much "out there". After she and her husband experienced the bankruptcy and loss of MacKenzie-Childs, Ltd, there is a decidedly different look to the work they produce under Victoria and Richard Emprise. I would be interested to hear how and why this came about. Having visited the farmhouse at the Mackenzie Childs facility in Aurora I have seen the rooms with every surface --- walls, ceilings, floors, and furnishings, painted and adorned. I like this whimsical style but cannot conceive how anyone can plan and produce such a monumental work. It would be interesting to hear how this was done and how long it took. Recently I have developed a hobby of turning trash into treasure, upcycling, or re-purposing -- whatever people choose to call it. I see Victoria MacKenzie Childs as one of the original upcyclers -- perhaps born of necessity-- not as a hobby and a challenge to make something out of nothing, but it would be interesting to discuss her views on this with her.