

DUFEU BEARS:

German Bears With Old-Style Charm

Ardent teddy bear enthusiast Patricia Green introduces the stunning creations of Eva and Günter Dufeu

Years ago in Germany, young Eva Dufeu listened to the stories told by her grandmother. Eva's grandmother had grown up in the early 1900s with many beautiful mohair animals which were given to her by her own parents who owned a pet shop and loved animals. Among her toys were four teddy bears she was very fond of. She enjoyed telling her young granddaughter, Eva, about their adventures. Sadly, none of these teddy bears survived WWI but Eva's grandmother made them come alive by telling Eva stories about them and by recreating them from scraps of material. At the time, Eva did not know how much influence this would have on her life later on. In fact, this early inspiration may have been what brought Eva into the world of teddy bear artistry, where she has been creating bears since 1991. In 2002, Eva was joined by her husband, Günter, and they have been selling their wonderfully classic bears under the name, 'Dufeu Bears'. These bears are modern and very

original, but have an unmistakable well-loved and classic look reminiscent of antique Steiff bears.

In fact, the first bear Eva set out to make (when her children were young) was inspired by memories of the early Steiff bears. "My dream at the time was to make a classical bear like a Steiff from 1910," she says. "So I started to make a similar one completely out of brown felt." Felty, as he was called, was adored by Eva's two daughters. "He was about 35cm tall and he looked very funny," Eva recalls. Sadly, Felty was lost some years later during a holiday trip. While this was a first creation, Eva has made many bears since then on the road to becoming a true bear artist.

"All of what I know about bear making, I have learned myself," Eva reports. "I never visited a class." To make a new bear, Eva first begins by drawing. Then she sculpts the whole bear with Evaplast, a technique she learned from her grandmother. From this sculpted form, she then makes





a pattern. All of the Dufeu Bears are made entirely by Eva and Günter, with no outside help. Both Eva and Günter have background and training in the arts. Eva has studied graphic design, and worked as a professional in airbrush illustration. Günter also studied art. His areas of specialisation included painting and sculpting. The experience in art, shared by the couple has undoubtedly contributed to the superb quality of their creations. Attention to detail and craftsmanship can be seen in their work.

Günter and Eva Dufeu live in Mülheim an der Ruhr, a city in Germany. They have four children – Ben, Serge, Michele and Denise – whose ages range from 15 to 24 years. They also have two lively Jack Russell Terriers. In addition to art, they enjoy classical music and visiting antiques markets.

The Dufeus like working together and enjoy sharing their thoughts about bear making. Günter previously had a job in advertising, but as their bear-making grew, and collectors responded enthusiastically to the bears, he quit his job to become a fulltime bear artist with Eva. According to Eva, working together allows the couple to have creative discussions about their work and this helps them to improve as artists.

The materials used in Dufeu Bears include German Schotte mohair, alpaca, mouth-blown glass eyes from Germany, high quality felt and embroidery cotton, leather, Alcantara™ and Suedine, linen, natural wood wool, kapok and, frequently, vintage materials. All of the materials used are top-of-the-line, which produces the finest of bears. Eva and Günter do not know how many bears they have made as yet. "We did not count," says Eva.

Most of the bears they make are between 35-60cm, although they have made some bears both smaller and larger. Many of their bears are dressed, often using lovely vintage materials. The Dufeus design and make the clothes that their bears wear.

www.teddybearscene.co.uk



Maker Profile



Photos show the many faces of Dufeu Bears



In 1959, when she was born, Eva was given a teddy bear by her parents. "I don't think that my parents knew at that time that my love for teddies would last forever," she says today. She still has this childhood teddy who has been with Eva for her entire life. She has since identified him as a Steiff Original Teddy in caramel colour, 35cm size.

Like many artists, Eva also collects bears: she has a fondness for black ones. Both Eva and Günter naturally like the older, well-loved bears as well. They are particularly fond of Steiffs. Indeed, when I first purchased a Dufeu Bear a couple of years ago, I could not believe how much the bear resembled an early Steiff. The bear not only looked old, but had the feeling of a vintage bear as well. "We admire the old Steiff veterans, and maybe this is mirrored in our work," Günter says.

Seeing the beautiful Dufeu Bears, I cannot help but wonder how Eva and Günter are able to part with their wonderful creations. I asked them if they ever feel they have to keep one of their bears. "Yes," Eva agrees. "sometimes it happens that a bear has to stay in our home."

Currently, Dufeu Bears are available from Eva and Günter's website and they are also sold on Ebay and at bear fairs. The Dufeus plan to attend Teddybär Total in Munster, Germany, and Teddybär Welt in Wiesbaden,

Germany in 2005. They would also like to attend and exhibit at shows in the United Kingdom in the future.

As for their goals as bear artists, the Dufeus say, "It is always a great challenge to bring the soul into a new bear." This idea, I think, is the hallmark of a true bear artist: the feeling that the bear has a distinct personality waiting to be brought to life as well as being a well-made creation. When asked about their bear making philosophy, the Dufeus replied, "Always when we start a new bear, we try to make the best bear in the world. There is never success in this, but we don't stop trying."

Eva also adds, "Every time our bears bring love and happiness to their humans, this is our goal."

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