



Photographs by CARLOS CHAVEZ Los Angeles Times

SHOWING THEIR AGE: Jeff Cane, displaying a tile "rug" in his Sylmar home, decorates his handcrafted wares with images gleaned from flea markets and bookshops — all meant to evoke grand European style.

ARTISANS

Selling romance, one square at a time

In cutting-edge L.A., a British expatriate travels back in time to create terra-cotta home accents that capture the spirit of 15th century Europe.

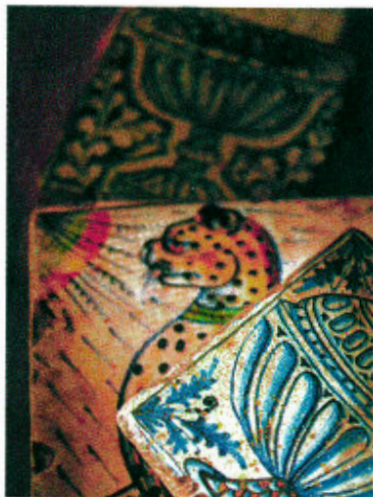
By **TINA DAUNT**
Times Staff Writer

JEFF Cane proudly calls himself a forger. In the extensive area of his Sylmar house, the British expatriate creates replicas of 15th century tiles by mixing modern-day technology with centuries-old techniques. His thick, colorful tiles — used for everything from trivets to wall decorations to floor coverings — look as if they were just unearthed from an old European estate.

"I think tile art is fantastic," said Cane, 58. "But 300-year-old tiles will cost thousands of dollars. So why not create something that looks like it costs an absolute fortune but doesn't? I wanted to make something that a burglar would stuff into his coat liner if he came across it at a Beverly Hills home."

He won't divulge all his techniques. ("It's like the Coke recipe," he said.) But the process involves placing re-creations of ancient images onto inch-thick primitive-looking slabs that he molds. The sides of the tiles are then pounded and chipped to make them look old. "This is decoupage to the highest degree," Cane said. "It's all about faking you into thinking it's real."

There are a number of artisans at work today reproducing tiles that look as if they were produced years ago by Malibu Tile, Batchelder and others. Few, however, have taken the art of tile reproduction back to the Middle Ages. Cane's pieces have been featured in catalogs, including Horchow and Ballard Designs, and gift stores.



FAUX TRICK: Tiles are chipped to appear worn.

Recently, while watching an episode of the MTV reality show "The Osbournes," he spotted one of his pieces — a decoupage plaque of an angel.

Cane started producing the tiles about a decade ago, after pursuing a variety of other creative interests.

During the 1980s, he was a cult figure of sorts in Great Britain, where he recorded Monty Python-type sketches on his home answering machine for hundreds of callers who paid a fee to hear the message each day. "I had a seriously great life, but I had swapped creativity for cash," said Cain.

He came to Los Angeles to visit a friend in 1991 and realized he wanted to start a new life here. So, he packed up his house in London and moved to L.A. a year later.

Once settled in his new home, Cane decided to launch a business making medieval-looking documents on gilded parchment paper. He created sample wedding certificates and displayed them

at several posh hotels, gaining a celebrity clientele. Although he had plenty of orders, he soon realized that the creations took too much time. If he wanted to make a living, he would have to come up with something that could be produced more quickly. "Unless you're the Hockneys of the world, getting extraordinary fees for single pieces of work, you have to mass-produce," Cane said.

He wanted to find a way to use the "bits of paper" — lithographic prints and copperplate etchings — he had collected. One day, while browsing in a tile store on Melrose, he spotted a box filled with 200-year-old French chateau tiles.

"They were old and funky-looking," Cane said. "I thought, 'Wouldn't they be great with an image on them?'" He bought some and started experimenting with various terra cotta mixtures. Next, he covered the tiles with re-creations of images he had collected. After experimenting with various finishes, he finally had the right formula to make his "fakes."

His pieces, which sell for \$50 to \$300 each, feature colorful pictures found at estate sales, on the ceilings and walls of old Italian churches and at flea markets. "I'd go regularly to London to rummage through old bookstores," Cane said. He's produced a series of platters and wood tablets using photographs he took of angel statues in London's old Highgate Cemetery.

"I've always been someone who sets his sights on something, then enjoys the process," he said. "When you set down an avenue of experimentation, you always find other roads leading off. . . . In a town that holds youth as its holy grail, I'm the one going against the grain by trying to make everything look old."

The Eye

Barbara King has the day off.

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Los Angeles Times Magazine

URBAN ART

Romancing the Tome

Before the printing press, literacy was rare, and scribes were just about the only people who could put pen to paper and come up with anything but a doodle. So they took pride in their work, turning a Bible passage or a royal decree into colored, gilded works of art. But now, their works survive mainly in museums and memory.

Skip to Los Angeles. It's five centuries past Gutenberg. Everywhere, pixels seem ready to replace paper. Everywhere but Jeff Cane's studio.

Cane, a transported Brit, is L.A.'s self-proclaimed scribe. Inspired by the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, Cane transforms his clients' letters, poetry and documents into beautiful and authentically old-looking works of opulence. A single illuminated page with ribbons, raised leaf letters and a wax seal, placed by hand on parchment, goes for about \$300.



His company, An Englishman in L.A., has drawn several hundred clients, including Oprah Winfrey, Aaron Spelling, Leeza Gibbons and Mickey Rourke, who sold his Cane-reproduced poetry at auction.

"What I do is something from the past that conjures up gallantry, knights on white horses, chivalry and romance," Cane says. "I am finding Los Angeles—contrary to popular belief—to be a city of very romantic people."

—Janet Kinosian

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SEPTEMBER 30, 2002

People



EXCLUSIVE PHOTOS

**Sarah Michelle
Gellar & Freddie
Prinze Jr.'s**

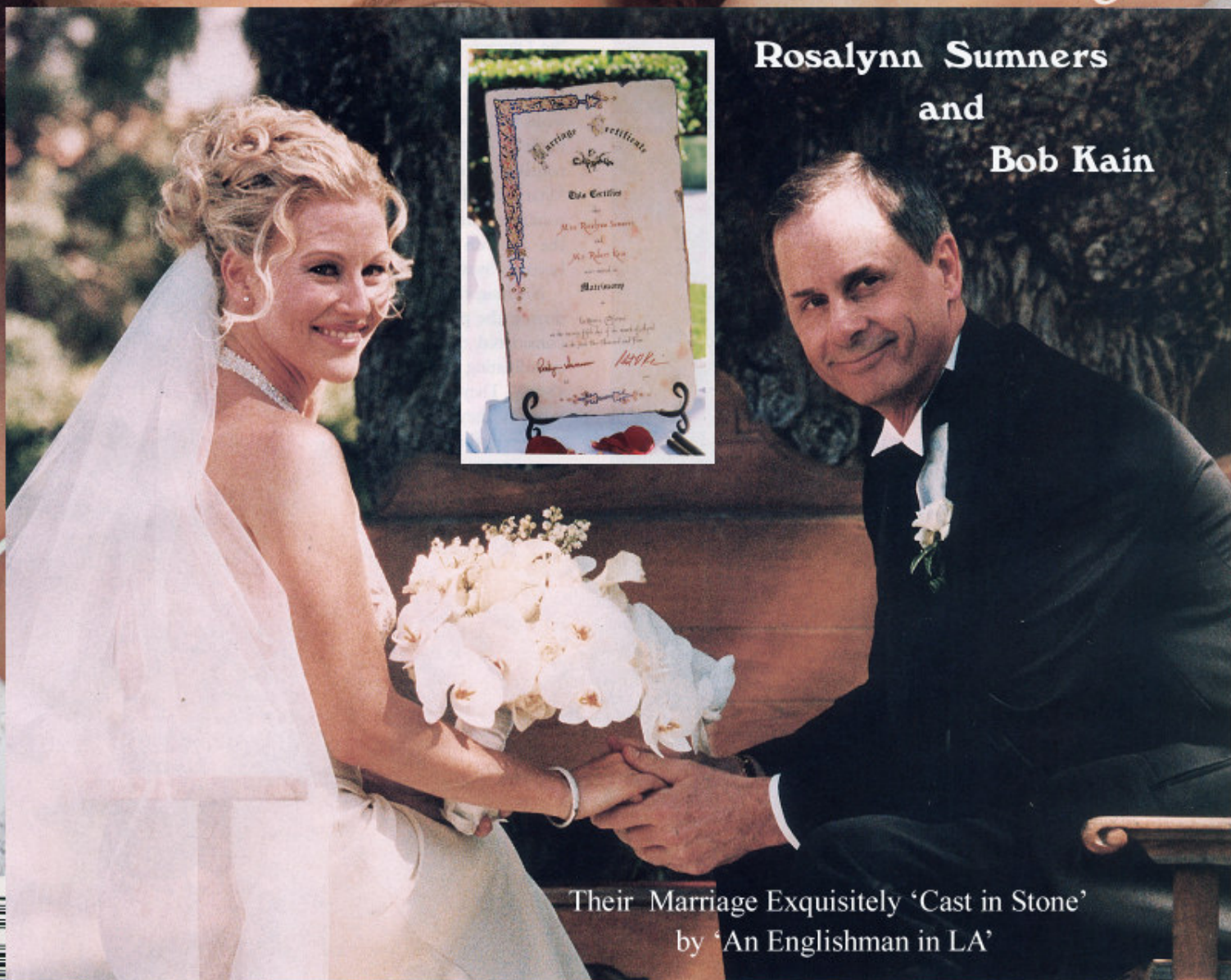
**Dream
Wedding
Album!**



Marriage Certificate for Michelle Gellar & Freddie Prinze Jr.

INSIDE

Weddings

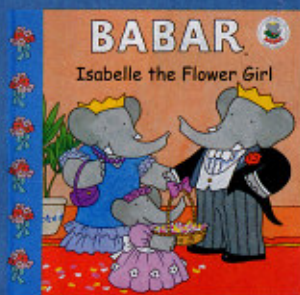


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and
Bob Kain

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Babar Joins the Wedding Party

The just-released *Isabelle the Flower Girl, A Babar Story*, lets you share one of your favorite childhood characters with a soon-to-be flower girl, or any little girl who is fascinated with weddings and brides. Isabelle the Flower Girl finds the famous Babar family preparing for a friend's wedding, with young Isabelle growing nervous about her role as the flower girl. With much encouragement from beloved characters Babar and Celeste, Isabelle's journey down the aisle will put any future flower girl at ease. Available at booksellers nationwide. \$9.95

An Englishman in L.A.

In our never-ending quest for the best one-of-a-kind touches for your wedding, artisan Jeff Cane's amazing medieval-looking marriage certificates nearly took our breath away. Known as "An Englishman in L.A.," Cane mixes modern technology with centuries-old techniques to create replicas of 15th century tiles and gilded parchment documents that are guaranteed to make your guests take a second (and third) look. The British expatriate, and self-proclaimed forger, won't divulge his methods but refers to the process as "decoupage to the highest degree." Cane's fabulous fakes include a marriage document on gilded parchment, a gold-leafed marriage tablet, and our favorite, the straight-from-the-Middle Ages-style "Cast in Stone" marriage certificate on tile. Each original, highly unusual piece of artwork is an exquisite way to commemorate your wedding. Prices available upon request. For further details, call 818.364.1771 or visit anenglishmaninla.com.



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