

Christopher Radko's Christmas tree is a stunner



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Generations know Radko as the maker of one-of-a-kind ornaments. He's back with a new company, selling heirloom ornaments. And meeting fans this week.

COLD SPRING – At the end of a long, winding dirt road and the start of a straight one, the artist Christopher Radko's cozy home is part log, part stone and all Christmas.

Radko is, after all, the man whose name has become synonymous with Christmas ornaments, the creator of thousands of limited edition, brightly painted, hand-blown European glass pieces that are treasured family keepsakes handed down from one generation to the next. (More about that name later.)

In his front hall, a cross-hatched Thomas Nast Santa etching chuckles from a spot near the door. A large painting of Rip Van Winkle dominates another wall. ("He's my patron saint of the Hudson Valley," Radko says.) A hat tree is festooned with a Tyrolean cap and a couple of horse collars, lined in jingle bells.

Steps away, the sunny living room has a vaulted ceiling and exposed trusses. In it stands the season's featured attraction.



Christopher Radko's Christmas tree rules

How to describe Christopher Radko's Christmas tree? The word chockablock springs to mind.

"My thought is: If you can find the tree, you don't have enough ornaments," the ornament maker says with an ever-present laugh. "If you can still see the tree, you're not done yet."

That might be Rule 1, but it's not Radko's only one.

Pick the best tree you can, he suggests, either fresh or artificial.

"The tree always has to be taller than me," he says. "I always used to look up at the tree as a kid. I remember doing homework under the Christmas tree, looking up through the branches and lights."



The 2023 Radko Christmas tree is a full-figured artificial model topping out at more than 9 feet, each branch brimming with his creations.

"I like to mix the lights so I don't just have white lights. I add colored twinkling lights, as well," he says. "When I was a kid back in the '60s and '70s, we had colored lights on the tree and those bring out the vibrancy of the ornaments."



He strings the lights by starting at the trunk and winding up and down each branch, making sure the cords don't show. (Not that you could see them. See Rule No. 1.)

"Then I go to town with the glass ornaments themselves," he says. "These ornaments are like heirloom ornaments. They're reminiscent of the ones I had as a child, that belonged to my grandmother."

Perhaps it's the approaching holiday, perhaps it's an occupational hazard for a man whose trade harkens back in time, but Radko speaks often in a brief conversation about his childhood Christmases.

"That's really what my ornaments are about. They're memory makers. They connect us. People will say: 'Oh, we got this when we were just married or when little Susie was born or when we were traveling to Niagara Falls.' It's a whole story. All the ornaments have those stories."

Radko had family in the Bronx and grew up in Yonkers, where he went to Sacred Heart High School, "back when they had nuns." His mother was a pediatrician, his father a cardiologist.

They were more than a little confused, he says, when their son, with an English degree from Columbia, found a passion in making Christmas ornaments.



Artisans with specialties, and an eyelash lady

The ornaments are hand-blown in Poland, Germany, Italy, and the Czech Republic, he says. They're made by hand by families of artisans who have blown and painted glass ornaments for more than a century, each with their particular style or technique.

They are lined with a thin layer of sterling silver. "That's what makes them all shiny and reflective," Radko says.

"In Germany, it's all about the antique molds that they first created in the 1880s," he says, pointing to delicate examples all over the tree. "This tiny Santa here, that Santa over there, all the birds. Those are created in antique German ceramic molds."

Art/artisancant

"The Italian ornaments are whimsical and are free blown, so no molds," he says. He points to a silvery Tin Man. "They coax the shape out of the glass."

"I even have an eyelash lady," he says, laughing. "All she does is paint the eyelashes on Santa's faces, and the angels. That's her job."

But it might surprise Radko fans — and there are many — that not a single ornament on this can-barely-see-the-tree Christopher Radko tree are Christopher Radko ornaments. These are designs made under his newest brand, Heartfully Yours.

The man behind the asterisk

If you check out [Radko's Heartfully Yours website](http://www.heartfullyyours.com) at www.heartfullyyours.com, you'll notice that every time his name is mentioned, it's not just Christopher Radko, but Christopher Radko*.

The asterisk is a nod to the lawyers of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come, who want everyone to know: **Notice of Non-Affiliation and Disclaimer: Christopher Radko® is a registered trademark of Rauch Industries, Inc. Neither artist Mr. Radko, nor HeARTfully Yours™ are in any way affiliated with, authorized, or endorsed by Rauch Industries, Inc.*

Because in 2005, after nearly 20 years making his name in the ornament business, Radko sold his name and his ornament business. Rauch Industries now owns his trademarked name and the domain www.christopherradko.com.

The sale came with an ironclad non-compete clause, which has since expired.

"I'm so thrilled to be able to have this Act III in my life, where I get to come back and share my new designs under the new brand name called Heartfully Yours," Radko says.



Radko's Act II

What, you might ask, was Radko's Act II? What wasn't?

- He had an organic lavender farm in Poland and made spa products, soaps and lotions.
- He created a festival dedicated to the movie musical "Hello, Dolly!" and worked with Turner Classic Movies for a while.
- He was an event planner.
- He led tourists through Christmas markets in Germany, Bavaria and Austria, and plans a similar trek, to England, next year.

But it's on to Act III and Heartfully Yours, the source of all the ornaments on this year's tree. There are stars and teddy bears and finials. Rocket ships and reflectors and Nativity scenes. And Santas of all shapes and sizes.

"I'll say over 90% of the collection is brand new each year," he says. "Like the fashion industry; you don't show the same outfits every year." And because each ornament takes seven days from start to finish, they are created in small batches and become instantly collectible.

"Enough to make everyone happy, and a little bit of each style," he says. "And they're going to go to great homes in Westchester. I'm so excited about it. I think people will be very intrigued to know that I'm back. A lot of people don't know that I was ever gone."