



Mark Love

A former minister discovers a new calling.

By Chris Cander

WHEN MARK LOVE delivered sermons in his Austin, Texas church, he hoped to inspire his parishioners to change their lives. But gradually, Mark realized that he needed something more tangible than the job of transforming souls. So after five years of ministering, he stepped down from the pulpit and turned to another passion: woodworking.

In the peaceful quiet of his shop in the Texas Hill Country, Mark has discovered that the same qualities that made him a caring minister—presistence, patience and an eye for grace—make him well suited to woodworking. Just as he saw promise in his parishioners, Mark now sees the potential for beauty in each piece of raw wood.

From the Word to the Woodwork

Mark's journey to becoming a furnituremaker began right after he fin-

ished seminary in 1994. Uncertain of his chosen career, he began an apprenticeship with furnituremaker Michael Colca of Driftwood, Texas. "The first thing I learned from Michael was that I had so much to learn," Mark says. Despite a lifetime of interest—beginning when he was a child in his grandfather's workshop—Mark had no experience with the precision and science that went into furniture making. For example, he didn't understand the properties of wood, or how environmental factors affect design. "The first thing I ever built was a rocking chair for my niece. It was beautiful in Texas, but in Ohio, where my niece lived, the increased humidity caused the wood to swell and pop—the chair became a splintery hazard." Mark made another, more successful rocker later, after four years of working with Michael. "My sister keeps them side by side,

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This elegant mahogany watchmaker's desk stands tall, to provide both comfort and close viewing during the watchmaker's delicate work.

Reminiscent of classic Greene and Greene design elements and proportions, Mark's Westmoreland table embraces the Arts and Crafts ethic.



and I still cringe whenever I see the first one."

Trusting his Instincts

While honing his woodworking skills, Mark realized that the process of refining rough lumber was similar to his earlier aim of helping parishioners discover their spirituality. And he considers the art of combining form, proportion and detail to create a piece of furniture to be just as mysterious an undertaking. "I design by instinct," he says. "There are no rules in my head about how it should be done. I ask clients to send me photos of furniture or architecture they like, so I can understand their sense of aesthetic. I consider the parameters they've given me in terms of function or size, but the rest is just intuition."

Although Mark refers to the influences of celebrated architects and designers—notably Charles and Henry Greene, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh—he doesn't consciously apply their design principles. Instead, Mark absorbs what he thinks are the most appealing aspects of each master's design language into his own unique style. "I love the verticality and use of organic forms by Mackintosh, and the strong, wide-open horizontality of Wright. I think my own pieces reflect some of that," he says. "I want my designs

to be strong, simple and quiet. On a subconscious level, I want them to inspire a sense of dependability and comfort. But mostly, I want people to see the wood first. I hope to convey that something as familiar and ordinary as wood is also unique and majestic. It's a reflection of my spiritual journey. I want to honor what is profound and mysterious about the wood itself."

The Spirit in the Tree

"When you hold a piece of wood, it can feel as though you're touching the earth itself," Mark says. "Wood



Echoing Frank Lloyd Wright designs, this bed's expansive horizontal lines and low, stepped silhouette give it a calm, relaxing presence.



The slatted lower shelf on this cherry and walnut sideboard is intended to hold shoes. Mark designed this piece for a client who was personally influenced by Japanese architecture and traditions.

contains warmth, energy that once shone as light from a generous sun, captured by broad, thirsty leaves and transferred into the dense fibers of branches, trunk and roots. This energy waits, imperceptibly, for calamity or decay to release and return it to the heavens whence it came. In this way, perhaps, a tree is like us. Our bodies are vessels for some mysterious bit of life, holding a tiny portion of energy from

the universe, storing it briefly, then releasing it again when our time on earth is complete. Perhaps this is why we feel such a strong connection to wood. Could it be that some part of us recognizes an unbreakable kinship with the tree?"

Answering his Call

Mark builds about ten custom pieces each year, working thoughtfully to accommodate the unique

wishes of each client. Although his pieces reflect his aesthetic, Mark's designs are constantly evolving. "I'm intrigued by many design traditions," he muses. "There will always be things I haven't tried, and new things to learn."

Mark says he doesn't miss the ministry. "In designing and crafting pieces of furniture that I know others will enjoy," he says, "I've found my true calling."

To read more of Mark's thoughts on the spiritual nature of wood, visit www.americanwoodworker.com/MarkLove.

To see more of Mark's work, visit www.marklovefurniture.com.

Chris Cander is a freelance writer and novelist. Prior to writing full-time, she was a marketing and communications professional in the high-technology industry. Currently, she is a contributing editor to Oxygen, Clean Eating, and Maximum Fitness magazines.



In grand Arts and Crafts tradition, the legs on this white oak dining table are constructed of four mitered quarter-sawn pieces, so they match the quartersawn top from every vantage point.

Reinterpreting Classic Arts & Crafts Elements

*In the elder days of Art,
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part;
For the gods see everywhere.*
~Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

MARK HAS A DEEP AFFECTION for the honesty and integrity celebrated by the Arts and Crafts movement, which valued individual craftsmanship and sound construction over pieces that were cheaply made and mass produced. A defining principle was to reveal rather than hide the structural elements of the design. "It's full-disclosure furniture making," Mark says. "Exposing the joinery not only shows how the piece was put together, but it becomes a striking part of the design."

In the Westmoreland table, shown here (**Photo 1**) and on page 24, the four leaves store in plain sight. Their exposed ends add thickness to the center of the cantilevered top, so it perfectly balances the mass of the base.

Exposed drawer runners add visual interest to the watchmaker's desk shown here (**Photo 2**) and on page 25. "They're also an example of form following function," Mark says. "Normally the runners would be tucked inside, hidden behind the drawer fronts. Exposing them helps to identify the numerous drawers that define this piece."

Mark's pieces often contain elegant hidden surprises, such as the hand-made extension rails and through wedged tenon used to attach the center leg of the oak dining table shown here (**Photo 3**) and on page 26. "Most craftsmen would use screws, because it's not part of the exterior presentation of the table," Mark says. "But not only is the tenon stronger in the long run, it's a little reward for the person who reconfigures the table for the dinner party."

