



TEMPORARY

BY MARK LOVE • PHOTOS BY JULIZZA GOMEZ HOLUB

When I was 26 I rented a little gray house in a very old neighborhood in Austin Texas. Before I even signed the lease I decided that the overgrown patch of ground that separated the garage from the quiet street would become my new vegetable garden. Not because this neglected tangle of dead weeds looked particularly inviting for this purpose, but rather because I'd just spent the last three years of my life jealously gazing at a neighbor's garden through my second story grad school housing window, craving any open patch of earth to plant my own.

No matter that my garden-to-be was knee deep in brambles and trash, I would happily make it work.

So the last trip on moving day included a stop at the hardware store to buy a shovel—something every man should have unless, like me, he'd lived in downtown seminary housing until about 20 minutes ago.

This would be my very first actual garden and I was happy. Looking back, I'm not even sure I had unloaded the last few boxes from the truck before my spade and I were hard at work redeeming the wretched lot.

New to this sort of thing, I didn't really

know what to expect, or else I'd say that what happened about ten minutes into the job was unexpected. After a few successful tills my luck suddenly changed, and I hit something hard and mean. An awful "ping" that played my shovel like a tuning fork. It was only about three inches down, whatever it was. I guessed a rock, so I moved over a few inches and stabbed again...Ping! Move again...Ping! Over more...Ping! Ok way over there...Ping! Whatever it was, it was big.

There was a gritty sound as I angled the handle almost flat to scrape off the

soil, expecting to be disheartened by a garden-disabling slab of bone-gray limestone (which is all too common in central Texas). But what crumbled up through the soil wasn't gray, but red. Dark red.

A few more shovelings and a garden hose finally revealed what I was standing on: a carefully laid mosaic brick walkway. Perfectly flat, tightly assembled, imaginatively envisioned, and now blanketed by decades of neglect. I uncovered its breadth and length, about four feet by fifteen, and dutifully washed it clean. Stunning. Functional but more than, this four foot wide via was a dance of square and triangulated bricks, arranged in sunny, randomly placed arrays. Happy, beautiful, whimsical. I looked up and down the empty street for someone to show, but nobody appeared. I was alone with my discovery.

Looking back down I suddenly felt sad for the maker of this sidewalk (perhaps it was the first resident of this house when it was built back in the 1920s), who by my calculations was now enjoying a similar but much deeper fate than his mosaic. I was sad not for his passing but at the realization that the world, of which I was a part, had allowed this beautiful piece to become quietly buried under the conscienceless refuse of time. I was a young artist myself, a woodworker's apprentice, and I wanted to believe that when a person puts his heart and sweat into something solid and extraordinary it will be loved, or at the very least seen, forever. I had removed

the vicar's collar for a reason; I craved a legacy beyond the fickle spiritual peaks and valleys of my parishioners.

Nobody in my 150-year-old congregation could remember a single pastor who worked there before 1970. They were just names in a book now (and no one even knew where that book was). There is a Psalm, "As for man, his days are like grass,

"I've never made a piece that I didn't think would last forever."

he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." While the young minister in me blindly accepted this as wisdom, my awakening artist took it as a challenge. Make something so extraordinary that the world will never let it go, that time will never bury it, that future generations will never forget it. Make your mark, and make it last.

I've been making furniture professionally for seventeen years, and I've never made a piece I didn't think would last forever. As I work in my studio I am precise, careful, I create very strong joints, and thus I fully believe my work to be immortal. I believe my

designs to be both pleasing and interesting, and I think future generations will always find a place for them in their homes. So I can no more easily wrap my head around the failure, destruction, or marginalization of one of my pieces than I can fathom my own death and non-existence. What's more, I fear that if I ever did grasp these things, it might be at the expense of my will to get up every morning and do what I've told myself is important. I believe, because I have to, that my art will last forever.

And yet it will not. Rare is the piece of wood furniture over, say, 200 years old that is still around and still usable. Wood shifts, warps, contracts, expands, and rots. Joints quietly loosen and fail and wobble. Styles change and young couples look for polite ways to rid themselves of that ugly dresser grandma loved so much. My work will not last. There will come a day when nobody remembers me or the things I've made.

As I ponder this, I imagine my mason friend sitting in a pew the Sunday after finishing his sidewalk. He would have been a churchgoer. As the pastor reads the Psalm my friend smiles in gentle defiance, believing his new brick edifice to be a rare exception to the skeptical wisdom of impermanence. Three blocks away at just that moment, outside his empty house, the wind loosens a waxy leaf from the live oak that spreads above his pristine path. It twirls and juts in the breeze and finally rests heavily on one of the bricks.

EDITOR: TIM JOHNSON; PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIZZA GOMEZ HOLUB

