

DARIN CALDWELL



“Once I had a house of my own, I built pieces for myself because I could. I didn’t see any reason to buy something I could build, and I haven’t stopped yet.”

To the question, “How long have you been working at your craft?” the answer was “Ten years tinkering, 10 in furniture manufacturing, five in other wood-related jobs; 25 total and still learning.”

Darin Caldwell is a woodworker’s woodworker. A man of few words, his handcrafted furniture speaks for him. He does talk about education, and what he has learned and what he feels he needs to learn. He talks about his experience with wood, and he’s had a variety of insights, especially into furniture making. He also talks about the utility and functionality of wood and how he just recently is beginning to see it more as art. “Functional art,” he says, but art nonetheless.

“I remember as a kid destroying instead of creating,” Darin said of his early days in woodworking. “When I was in high school, I enrolled in wood shop. My first project was a cherry clock, and I remember my grandmother being so impressed and showing it off to everybody.” His mother has that clock today. He made another for his grandmother, and he recalls using sassafras, saying, “it was the only wood I had that was good enough to use at the time.”

After college, Darin took an engineering job in a woodworking factory, “and that is where I learned about furniture construction,” he said. “Once I had a house of my own, I built pieces for myself because I could,” and the rest of the sentence sums up Darin’s perspective on wood as a medium. “I didn’t see any reason to buy something I could build, and I haven’t stopped yet.”

Southern Indiana has a rich history in woodworking, Tell City in particular. “I came here out of college and began working in furniture manufacturing. I learned how to manufacture wood products from some of the most experienced woodworkers in Tell City,” Darin said. “It was after I left the factory that I started making functional art instead of just plain furniture.”

In the last couple years, he says he has started to see his work as art and to realize his potential as a woodworker. “Anything can be made from wood,” he said. “It’s a very versatile medium. I find the most unique pieces and use them so they stand out and catch your eye. Wood is beautiful and every piece is unique. My focus is turning it into functional art, and it’s inspiring to see people’s reaction.”

When asked what makes his work original, he characteristically said, “Nothing. Anybody can do what I do.” And with a slight grin, he said, “but nobody does, so I guess that makes me original.

“I try to make pieces that no one has seen before. I use materials that surprise people. I employ unorthodox techniques such as stringing blocks of wood on a rope to create a chair that conforms to you as you sit in it. I strive to be different,” he said. And he succeeds.

