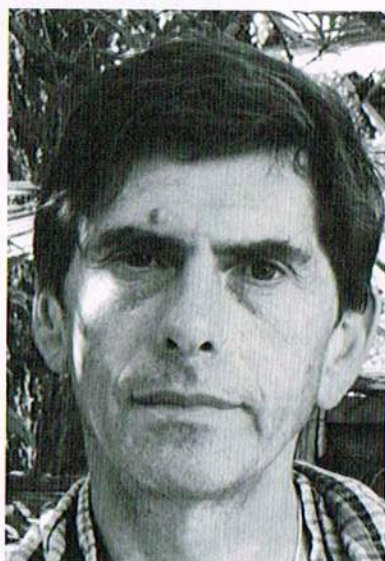


20 minutes with... Derek Elliott



Derek Elliott answers our questions in 20 minutes

Derek Elliott established his company 1979. Based in the Cotswolds his team of craftsmen offers a one-stop-shop for clients in need of a totally bespoke service. Architectural joinery rubs shoulders with some of the finest examples of hand-crafted furniture we've come across.

F&C: What are you working on at the moment?

Derek Elliott: A couple of libraries, which are a favourite of mine. We are also making furniture for the famous church at Fairford.

F&C: Why did you become a furniture maker?

DE: By accident. I started working in wood to keep the wolves from the door. It became obvious that design and making was the thing which kept me dreaming well into the night.

F&C: What inspires you?

DE: It used to be just shape. But it felt like an apprenticeship. Now I use my own internal responses. Design is a way of clarifying this process. I recently taught some sessions using this method to students at Rycotewood. The results were inspiring.

F&C: If your furniture were music, what kind of music would it be?

DE: I recently held an exhibition where five pieces were set to music. This was done by my daughter Faith, who is an amazing musician. The results can be heard on my website.

F&C: Who do you admire in the craft at the moment?

DE: If I were to choose anyone, it would still be John Makepiece. He sets a high standard of beautifully imagined objects.

F&C: Who has been your greatest mentor/ role model?

DE: The greatest early inspiration was James Krenov. What I do, bears no resemblance to his work. But he communicated woodworking, as something almost sensual. So different from dry technicalities.

F&C: What comes first, design or technique?

DE: Design. Technique is only a consideration of cost. I really don't mind how a piece happens, as long as it does. But design is heavily influenced by the material.

F&C: Is all your work made to commission or do you produce speculative pieces?

DE: Both. Commissions are where the paid work is. Speculative pieces are largely for a maker to show his art and attract the former.

Stripe Chest in European walnut, ripple sycamore and dyed veneer



Soldier's Cabinet is made from English walnut

F&C: Are we too obsessed with outdated modes of work?

DE: Yes. And unless we have a private income, pure handwork is economically untenable. What is really important is the care and attention to detail that goes into making a piece. But knowing handwork is important.

F&C: How or where do you like to exhibit your work?

DE: I like solo exhibitions since they show a whole body of work. I did one about a year and a half ago at the North Wall in Oxford. But they're a lot of effort. I exhibit with my home guild, the Guild of Gloucestershire Craftsmen, and it's lovely to see the furniture surrounded by other types of craft. I do the usual pure furniture exhibitions and there is something special in being in the context of my fellow makers, who are an amazingly supportive bunch. The one type of exhibition I would love to do, is a major venue in London. The furniture world has been trying to do this for years, but have yet to come up with a successful formula.

F&C: Are there any elements of your work that you out-source to others?

DE: Yes. Mainly woodturning and carving.

F&C: How comfortable are you working to someone else's design?

DE: I'm not bothered by who puts their name on something. It's the object that counts. It rarely happens, but when it does it can be nice to have the mental break.

F&C: What's your creative process like?

DE: Like any creative process, the more you do it the more fluid it becomes.

F&C: Do you consider yourself an artist or a craftsman?

DE: I largely work these days as a designer rather than a craftsman. It depends on the brief. Sometimes the designs are more craft orientated sometimes more artistic.

F&C: Do you think that fine furniture making is in danger of disappearing?

DE: No. There's a far greater pool of highly motivated designer/makers than when I first started.

F&C: What advice would you give to young makers just starting out?

DE: Well, if your heart's in it, persist.

F&C: What's the practical process you take when moving through a project? i.e do you use CAD, maquettes, drawings etc...

DE: I use a computer as a drawing board and maquettes when the budget allows.

F&C: What irritates you about the industry?

DE: It's self-consciousness. Although it is an exaggeration, there's a need to be valued along with great artists. History will no doubt have its own comment on the movement. *F&C*

Puck is made from European oak and wenge



Flow Cabinet is made from ripple sycamore and ebony

Contact details

For more information contact
Derek Elliott
Sherborne Gardens, Sherborne
Cheltenham, Glos GL54 3DW
Tel 01451 844448
Email derek@outofthewood.co.uk
Web www.outofthewood.co.uk

Exhibitions

Celebration of Craftsmanship.
Cheltenham 20th-29th August 2011
Painswick Summer Show.
Guild of Gloucestershire
Craftsmen 31st July-30th August 2011