



## HANDCRAFTING A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

# RB Woodworking

**A**S LIFE CHOICES GO, there are plenty of people whose college degrees have little to do with the career they end up with. But you couldn't get much farther afield from Rick Badgley's East Coast MBA than his underground woodshop at the foot of California's Sierra Nevada Mountains.

As the CEO of RB Woodworking, a handcrafted Arts and Crafts furniture company, Rick oversees a staff of one—Rick (though wife Martha does sew the leather cushions for his beautifully executed Stickley reproductions). It's a far cry from the bears and bulls he once thought would be his life's work. But all in all, he much prefers his bucolic life in the hills, peacefully crafting heirloom-quality furniture in his culvert workshop, to his former life on Wall Street.

### Woodworking DNA

Rick's always had a head for business. "I wanted to be a stock analyst," he says. But after a year on Wall Street,



he realized the rat race of New York City wasn't for him. So in 1970, he made a daring move and got about as far away from New York as he could and still remain in the continental United States. He joined VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and moved to California to build low-income housing and to learn about building in the process.

The about-face wasn't as improbable as one might imagine.

"Woodworking is in my genes," says Rick, whose father and grandfather were builders and carpenters. It was during his stint with VISTA that he discovered his affinity for Arts and Crafts furniture.

"In those days, I had a lot of time on my hands, and I'd drive around looking for junk stores. I bought two chairs, paid \$10 for one and \$25 for the other, and a couch. The chairs turned out to be Stickley, which I'd never heard of, and the couch was Limbert. I didn't know what they were, but I really liked the lines." (Later, when Rick learned about Stickley and tried to find chairs to match his junk store find, he discovered the \$10 chair was a 306½. The "new" chairs cost \$600 each. "I'd been using mine as a step-stool," says Rick.)



LEFT, RICK BADGLEY IN THE CULVERT WORKSHOP HE BUILT WITH SWEAT EQUITY AND A LITTLE HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS (OPPOSITE PAGE). ALSO OPPOSITE, A STICKLEY-STYLE BOW-ARM CHAIR AND PLANT STAND BY RB WOODWORKING.



### Honoring the Ultimate in Furniture Design

After VISTA, Rick worked odd jobs as a carpenter and built homes with fellow VISTA alumni. He even designed two homes, but determined that building was far more satisfying than designing.

Years later, Rick landed a job with a local contractor to create a Stickley basement. He'd already built some arts and crafts pieces for his own house and for friends, using books like *Bungalow Style* as his guide. For the basement project, he bought \$13,000 worth of quarter-sawn white oak to turn it into a Stickley-inspired retreat. He thoroughly enjoyed the process, building a staircase, bar, cabinets and wainscoting. It was then that his business brain kicked in and he realized he could make a living, a real, viable living building Stickley-style furniture.

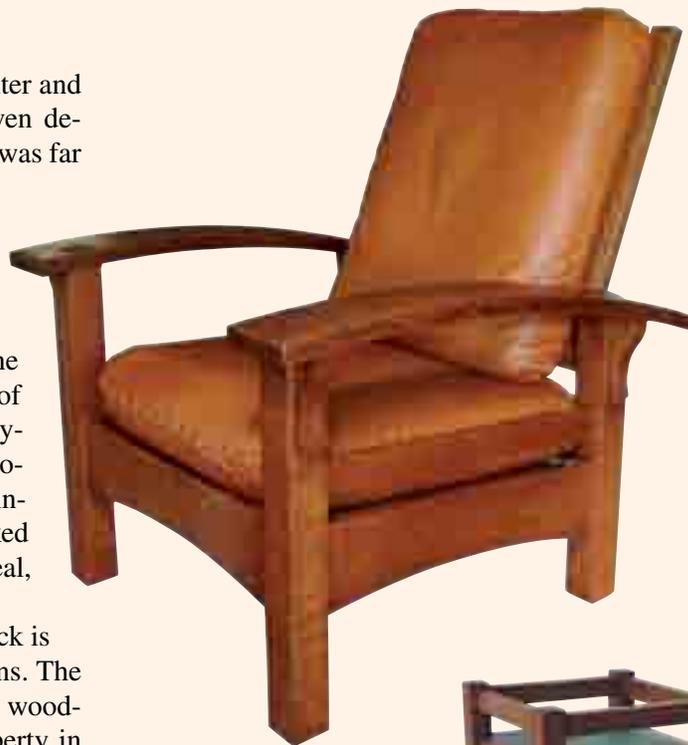
He's been working with wood ever since. Rick is best known for his spot-on Stickley reproductions. The magic happens in Rick's unique underground woodshop, built with the help of friends on his property in Three Rivers in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas. While Rick does custom work to suit each client's needs, he most enjoys living up to the challenge of recreating what he considers the best furniture ever made.

"Gustav Stickley was the ultimate in furniture design. I don't have any real desire to change it to make it my own. I know a lot of people do, but I don't. I'm happy making my reproductions as exact as I can."

The business started local, but Rick now has clients across the country who recognize his skill and knowledge of the Stickley catalog.

"I love to make stuff from the catalog. I have the Gustav Stickley Craftsman Furniture Catalog from 1912. One of my clients in Sacramento has it too. He'd call me and say, 'Go to page 12. Can you make that?' I built several things for him that I normally wouldn't have built, like the Gustav Stickley hall bench."

One of the most satisfying elements of being a one-man shop is developing a relationship with his customers.



"They know I'm the guy who picks the wood, builds it, sands it, and finishes it. My wife and I make the leather pillows. And if it's within a few

hundred miles and I deliver it, I actually get to meet them." So what would Rick's life be like if he hadn't left Wall Street?

"I'd probably be living in Connecticut, divorced two times, hopefully well off, but I wouldn't bet on it."

RB Woodworking  
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