ARTS & CRAFTS PROFILE

Peter and Marcie Maynard:
The Cold River Collection

By Lee Jester

In a small village in rural New Hampshire Peter and Marcie Maynard of Cold River Furniture are still making furniture the old fashioned way. Peter had the great good fortune to grow up in rural New England where in the 1970s he apprenticed with Chauncey and John Whitmore, two of the most skilled traditional American craftsmen still working.

The Whitmore brothers were the last members of a family business that started 250 years ago in the lower Connecticut River Valley. They restored antiques and built reproductions for clients all over New England. During his time with the Whitmores, Peter took apart, repaired and restored masterpieces of the craftsmen of the past. From this he learned how they solved woodworking problems that vex woodworkers worldwide even today. By deconstructing the exquisite pieces of the past, he learned what great furniture is and how to make it. His three-year apprenticeship ended with his move to New Hampshire in 1976 and the beginning of his own career.

At first he replicated furniture designs spanning everything from early American to postmodern. His clients in New York City relished his skills, and his business flourished. He gained a reputation for being able to create just about any kind of furniture in nearly any kind of style. He came to be acknowledged on a national scale as a master craftsman, lauded in major publications and highly sought after for his skills. But he never stopped evolving and developing his sense of the aesthetic and came to a point where he wanted to do more than replicate the forms of the 18th and 19th centuries. In Arts and Crafts furniture he found his voice.

BODMER SOFA TABLE.

In 1992 he saw his first Limbert furniture and the art of George Catlin. He was transfixed by Limbert's double-oval table and asymmetrical drop-front bookcase. The Catlin landscapes gave him a view into the past that spoke to him of the heart of America. He took this inspiration and by 1996 had started his Arts and Crafts work.

Today, no longer tied to the rigid conventions of traditional forms, Peter has internalized the aesthetic and moved on to create original Arts and Crafts designs for the 21st century. The Maynards offer a full line of furniture designs in the Arts and Crafts style. Marcie runs the front office and takes care of all the details that any business must deal with. Indispensible, she frees Peter to integrate his personal philosophy and artistry to create designs that express a cohesive view of furniture design.

His work pays homage to Charles Limbert, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, traditional Chinese furniture, Gustav Stickley and other influences. Historically, even in previous centuries, designs from around the world have found their way into New England pieces and become part of the regional vocabulary. Specifically the Chinese influence is the "Kang" table from which American and English designers developed the cabriole leg in about 1830. Maynard has taken the Kang leg and made it part of his vocabulary in Arts and Crafts design.

He also credits George Catlin and Karl Bodmer, 19th century landscape painters, with showing him pre-European America through their paintings. He sees their images not only as works of fine art but as windows into the American consciousness. From them he finds the roots of his design vocabulary and the origins of American design we still see everywhere today.

"I look for meaning in our modern world through transforming the hardwoods of our magnificent North American forests into the finest of handcrafted furniture," he says. "I want to bring a sense of connection to the natural world that resonates in our day-to-day lives."

Peter's furniture represents a seamless transition from the best work of the past into the best work of the present. In his Bodmer and Catlin Trestle Tables we find an original interpretation of the traditional trestle table. Four wide, heavy, carefully proportioned and shaped legs are connected via a vertically aligned keyed stretcher under a thick breadboard top with extreme overhangs. These tables represent a fresh new look in trestle-table design, taking the vocabulary of the past and extrapolating it into new forms for our time.

His Cold River Furniture Collection includes seating options for all the usual needs. The Catlin Settle/Day Bed stands out as a successful evolution from the settles of the past. Here he took the traditional even-arm settle and reinterpreted it with a unique leg arrangement. His settle legs are not square or round, but rectangular and set at 90 degrees from front to back. The leg arrangement gives the piece a sense of being grounded and firmly in place, as if it were carved from a single huge tree trunk. The 90-degree leg detail is unique and makes the piece something special and wonderful.

The "New World Cabinet" is Peter's take on Charles Rennie Mackintosh's writing desk for the 1902 Turin International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art. Here he takes Mackintosh's masterpiece and simplifies it with burl inlays and vestigial feet.

THE MAYNARD MORRIS CHAIR WITH THE ROTATED REAR LEG.

Peter's newest bed creation is the entirely original queen-sized "Champlain Bed." Bifurcated, with two wide panels separated by a simple grill, it also has the by now distinctive vestigial "Maynard feet" seen in the Catlin Settle. Massive and solid, it seems to emerge out of the carpet to provide a relaxed platform for repose.

In its entirety, the Cold River Collection of Peter and Marcie Maynard is a major contribution to the existing body of work we call the Arts and Crafts Movement. They have taken their historic roots and firmly planted them in the future by creating new and exciting furniture to add quality and beauty to our lives.

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