



# LASTING CRAFT

Gill Harris meets furniture designer Charlie Caffyn to talk about his passion for true craftsmanship and generational pieces



As an eight-year-old, Charlie Caffyn decided he needed somewhere to store his *Beano* magazines and set about making a table with a built-in shelf from an old pallet. And so it was that a lifelong passion for furniture-making was born.

Now 46 and living in Bradford-on-Avon with his wife Emily Middleton, children Albert, six, and Martha, four, and beloved collie Jack, he creates stylish modern pieces from the workshop in his back garden.

Charlie, who was born in Eastbourne and grew up in the small East Sussex village of Buxted, took a circuitous route to Wiltshire, via London, Hong Kong and Bristol. "I've been in Bradford-on-Avon for the last 10 years

and have no intention of leaving," he says. He set up his furniture-making business in 2003, having returned from travelling around Asia with his wife.

"After a one-year art foundation, where I spent my time either in the workshop or doing life drawing, I decided to progress with furniture, and went on to study furniture design and making at Rycotewood College in Oxfordshire, Ravensbourne College in London, and also a placement at a Swedish college called Steneby Skolan," he says.

Charlie describes his design philosophy as "clean, simple furniture that celebrates wood, structure and craftsmanship". He uses four main woods - ash, oak, cherry and walnut - although he will use others on request, and he works closely with Robbins Timber

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in Bristol who supply quality, sustainable hard woods. "The wood must be from a sustainable, well-managed source and the idea is that the furniture I make is generational furniture; pieces that can be handed down the family, rather than disposable, mass-produced furniture," he says.

"I think there is an emerging trend to buy local, support local craftsman, and to buy long-term quality pieces that have been made in the UK. This, I believe, is in reaction to a market flooded with a large array of mass-produced products. We definitely need mass-produced products, but also, we need the locally-crafted products to be offered as

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an alternative.” As well as handcrafted pieces, Charlie’s service is very much about the personal touch.

“If someone is commissioning a new piece there is a lot of communication and sharing of ideas and designs. I will visit their home and walk them through the process,” he says.

“If someone is buying a piece from the range, I make them all by hand to order and contact each customer personally. Everyone is invited into the workshop to see their piece being made, and I can even send pictures showing their piece in construction. People love the fact that only one set of hands has worked on their piece – it’s a really personal customer experience that I want every customer to share.”

**C**harlie draws inspiration for his pieces from architecture – he has a particular fondness for Victorian railway stations – and names each item after local areas.

“You only have to look up at the amazing iron structure of a Victorian railway station platform roof to be amazed. It’s incredible engineering, craft and skill that was left open to be seen, a celebration of structure. It’s these interlocking braced iron structures that influenced both the frame of the Atworth Lamp and the Farleigh Magazine holder.

“My pieces are all named after local villages, towns or areas where we walk as a family and have an affinity for. Quite often I will associate one area with a certain product as I would have been thinking about the design whilst on the walk with Jack, my collie.”



So what’s his favourite creation to date?

“It’s hard to pick a favourite in the range, it’s like trying to pick your favourite child,” he says. “I’m really proud of the Iford Library Step Chair as it’s an exceptionally hard build. I basically have to make two chairs, then hinge them together on two small solid brass hinges, so that they line up perfectly. I have to make minute adjustments to each one to get the chair to hinge over to a step ladder.

“My favourite unique design piece, though, is my Farleigh Magazine rack and I’m really proud of my first light, the Atworth Lamp. The lamp was an especially time-consuming product. The simpler the final design, the more work that is needed to achieve it. I made around 15 to 20 prototypes before I was completely happy. From concept to final piece took just over six months.”

Charlie, who is considering making a floor lamp next, says his ambitions for the future are really quite simple. “I want to slowly build the range into a collection of beautiful, timeless pieces that celebrate wood, great design and craftsmanship and slowly increase the workshop size, without becoming too unwieldy. I will always want to maintain the personal touch and charm.” And there may be a chance to see Charlie in action somewhere near you soon. Having recently completed a 10-day show at London’s *Grand Designs* show and held a Meet the Maker event at Verve Living in Bath, he says: “I love putting my furniture in front of people and being there to chat to about it. I am looking at doing a pop-up somewhere around Wiltshire in the coming months, so keep an eye social posts on Instagram @charliecaffyn.” Charlie is also looking for small, independent shops in which to feature his furniture. **!**



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