

Former IBM Employee Finds Second Career in Reclaimed Wood



Ed Bryan
PHOTO:
ABBY LUBY

Hudson Valley artisan creates unique pieces

BY ABBY LUBY

Curled wood shavings flutter off the edges of an unfinished wooden bowl rapidly spinning on the lathe. It's mesmerizing to watch the bowl whir around, slowly changing shape by the cutting edge of a gouge held deftly in the hands of artist and woodworker Ed Bryan.

Bryan started his woodworking business, Hudson Valley Woodworking, about four years ago after he retired from IBM. Since then, he pursues his life-long passion and creates one-of-a-kind pieces in his Pawling based workshop.

"I've been a hobbyist woodworker my entire life," he said. "I had been working for IBM for over 30 years and decided it was time to do something different. Now the hobby has become a one-man business."

Bryan, 56, was born and raised in South

Hampton, England, and joined IBM in nearby Winchester working in Information Technology. IBM brought him to the United States in 1996. He and his wife Dana are parents of two adult children, a son and a daughter. They have been living in Pawling for 20 years.

The space where Bryan creates his uniquely beautiful functional art is his home garage. Here, raw chunks of wood are transformed into bowls, pens, pencils, bottle stoppers, ice cream and coffee scoops, vessels and boxes, to name a few. Lining the walls are assorted carving knives, chisels and gouges, drill presses and sanding tools. In one corner are numerous stacks of unfinished bowls all shapes and sizes.

Wood is either reclaimed or salvaged from fallen cherry, maple or ash trees. When cut into a workable piece, the green and moist wood has to dry out before initial shaping.

"I rough-turn the wood and depending on how big the piece is, that takes an hour or so," Bryan said. "Then you have to let it dry out again so the moisture content is stabilized."

Once the bowl is totally dried it's placed back on the lathe. "That's when I true it up," Bryan explained. "You can finish it off by sanding and applying a food-safe finish. From start to finish it probably takes me 6-12 months on a bowl depending on the type of wood."

Smaller items such as pens, cutting boards or ice cream scoops are generally made from left over pieces and takes a couple of hours stretched out over a period of time.

The ability to envision a raw piece of wood as a bowl accentuated with natural tree rings and lacy grains is the mark of a true artisan. Bryan adeptly hones in on spalted wood with its knotty lines and swirls originally

caused by natural tree fungi. When finished, the piece serves up dramatic organic patterns prized by woodworkers.

Inspiration comes from other appealing objects. About 20 years ago Bryan purchased a blown glass jug in England and after years of contemplation, he recreated the jug out of wood—a beautifully elliptical vessel that begs to be held. When he saw a porcelain bowl with scalloped edges he was instantly motivated to tackle the challenging design.

"Trying different forms is the road to improvement. I want to push the boundaries of woodworking and imagine what a certain form would look like," Bryan noted. "You spend a lot of time getting a piece you like in a form that works. Then you have to refine it."

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Since everything Bryan creates are everyday items we use, what guides his creative process is the tactile experience one has when handling his pieces, especially bowls.

“If you pick a bowl up by its rim, your hand cradles the outside, your thumb is on the inside,” he said. “If you’re turning a bowl you ask yourself, ‘how do I want it to feel in my hand?’”

Bryan strives for perfection in his work but instinctively knows a raw piece of wood, like a block of clay waiting to be sculpted, has to be reckoned with.

“Wood is a natural material so there’s really no such thing as perfection. I push myself to learn and improve and try to make different pieces to the best of my ability.”

Artists like Bryan don a different cap when it comes to promoting their business and selling their work. Social media gives Bryan’s work better exposure in the marketplace and he can also reach out to the greater woodworking and crafts community. His detailed website, hudsonvalleywoodworking.com, and Instagram page @hudsonvalleywoodworking are kept up to date. Prices range from \$16-\$15 for a pen, \$20 - \$120 for a bowl depending on size, bottle stoppers are around \$20. Pieces are sold on Etsy at etsy.com/shop/hvwoodworking and at the Aneu Salon and Spa in Pawling. If a customer is interested in a particular item seen on line but prefers a different finish, Bryan encourages them to contact him

directly so he can customize a piece.

“Coming from a big corporation like IBM to running a small business has been eye opening,” Bryan said. “What helps enormously is all the encouragement and advice from the community of woodworkers on social media.”

With the growing success managing his business over the last four years, Bryan said he is pleasantly surprised when other woodworker entrepreneurs ask his advice.

“I’ve had a lot of questions on how to start woodworking and many technical questions,” he said. “I’ve also been sharing life experiences with other woodworkers and artisans.”

Ultimately, what drives the effort to promote and share his work is making something people can both use while appreciating the artistic aesthetic.

“What draws me in is the ability to create a piece of functional art, a piece of true art,” Bryan said. “When I look at a unique, one-off piece I have created I can say ‘I created that, it has my soul and passion in it.’ That to me is special.”



Items Ed Bryan has crafted from reclaimed wood.



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