



'I don't fit in any genre. I actually fit in all of them to some degree. That doesn't really matter to me because I feel my work is a form of expression. I am hoping that people can get over the fact that it is either not furniture or it is not sculpture: it is somewhere in the middle.' — Terry Bostwick



Terry Bostwick produces thematic sculpture and architectural-based pieces, as well as works on commission, such as the dining room table (above). The chair backs alone (right) took five weeks to design.



'Blurring the Lines'

Terry Bostwick creates unique pieces of furniture that rework expectations, causing people to smile even as they sit on it.

by Brad Walseth

Early in his career, Terry Bostwick was part of an experiment at Cal State San Francisco, in which he was one of six art students combined with six industrial design students in a class led by highly respected teacher Arthur Espenet Carpenter. This successful experience, along with viewing of an early Wendell Castle show, was instrumental in making Bostwick into the genre-blurring artist/craftsman he is today.

Bostwick moved from the Bay Area to Oregon in 1977, working for a decade producing high-end cabinetry. But even as he succeeded in the high-end cabinet field, Bostwick's interest in painting, drawing and sculpture and early love of furnituremaking was calling. In the end, his artistic drive won out.

"I've always had my hand in the creative side, but by the mid-nineties I consciously chose to take it on seriously and professionally," he explains. "It was a business choice to create a unique niche, separate from what most people choose to do. As a consequence, my attempt was to transcend the competitive low pricing of others doing nice work and enjoy myself as well."

Bostwick has built an extensive portfolio of work. "It has been a very serious investment in hours and the money it costs," he says, "but I knew that in order to build a reputation, you have to have a portfolio. And to have a knowledgeable customer understand you, there has to be some relevance to the work."

Some of Bostwick's first work to achieve national prominence was inspired by the turn-of-the-20th-Century French Art Nouveau movement.

"In design school, I had fallen in love with the history of furniture and to me, that became what it's all about," he says. "I really didn't understand what was going on in the 18th century or ancient Egypt. All of a sudden, everything made sense to me: that all of us are just following this progression and feeding off of each other."

Bostwick's Art Nouveau-influenced "Nuvo" line led to a provocative "animal"-inspired series, featuring lumps and bumps, protruding bones and skin overlays. This has, in turn, led to extensive explorations of the human form and its relationship to historical furniture design and his current "Slab" series, which utilizes simple geometric forms.

In his 2,400-square-foot shop, Bostwick combines architecturally-based structure with the flow and movement of an artist. He does his own veneering and touts Certainly Wood as a great resource. He also espouses strong opinions about joinery.

"You won't find dovetails in my work," he explains. "Good craftsmanship doesn't need to be noticed; it just needs to be there. I find the aesthetic built around joinery to be 'Old School.'"

Bostwick's speculative pieces have also led to commissions, such as a recent dining table and chairs for a residence in Pacific Heights, CA. In this case, Bostwick, who sketches all of his own drawings by hand, went high-tech and enlisted a friend who is a 3-D CNC programmer to collaborate on the project.

"The chairs are fully dimensional," he says. "We spent five months developing the chair back. The substrate form bends in all directions. I could have sculpted the shape myself, but to sculpt it perfectly and bookmatch veneer 14 chairs is just about impossible without CNC."

In a blog entry on his Web site, www.terrybostwickstudio.com, Bostwick defines the different types of furniture makers as: woodworkers, furniture designers, artisans and furniture artists, and admits that he blurs the lines.

"I don't fit in any genre," he says. "I actually fit in all of them to some degree. That doesn't matter to me because I feel like my work is a form of self expression. I am hoping that people can get over the fact that it is either not furniture or it is not sculpture: it is somewhere in the middle." ❀



Bostwick's current line is his "Slab" series, which utilizes simple geometric forms.



Bostwick first gained national recognition for his "Art Nuvo"-style furniture.

To see more of Bostwick's work, along with that of other custom woodworkers, visit www.iswonline.com.