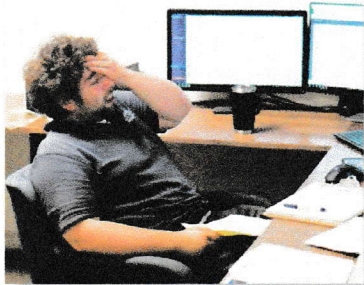




# Chronicles

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GREG PILOTTI FURNITURE MAKERS IS LOCATED IN CHESTER COUNTY, PA



Greg Pilotti—"one of those days"

**"I am a stubborn bastard," says Greg Pilotti, with a laugh. "Whenever somebody tells me I can't do something, it's just like rocket fuel...and I find a way to do it."**

That's a key reason why Pilotti, just 28, is now running a successful custom furniture and cabinetry business, with six employees and a growing roster of clients. The company, Greg Pilotti Furniture Makers, is located in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He's a member of SAPFM's Delaware Valley Chapter.

Pilotti calls furniture making "his life passion." But his first love was AutoCAD, which he discovered in the ninth grade. He enjoyed "the critical thinking, having a problem come up on the screen, and having to come up with a solution."

**"I owe an absolute ton of credit to my guys. These guys are brilliant."**

That led him to study architecture at college. But partway through his studies, his father died. He went home to run the family business, a corner convenience store. "I had no idea how to run it, no idea what I was doing. I just kind of jumped in and made it work."

After three years, he was "fed up" and certain that "I was going to do something [else] in the future." He had been teaching himself woodworking on the side. One day, he read an article by Steve Latta. Latta teaches at the Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The school was just 30 minutes away, but Pilotti had never heard of it. He says, "It just goes to show how little the trades were even paid attention to, respected, marketed, or anything here."

Within two weeks, Greg had sold the business and applied to the school. He also started his company, not willing to wait until graduation to hang out his shingle.

He says, "Everybody thought I was crazy." But he figured, "What's the worst that can happen? I fail. The best that can happen? I have a business that I enjoy for the rest of my life, and I employ people that I like to be with. So far, it's been the best."

Earlier this year, Pilotti was named as a winner of the Wood Industry "40 under 40" award, which recognizes rising talent. A real honor, but it came with an unpleasant surprise. He says at the industry trade show and awards ceremony, he found a "toxic" attitude. There are people who just write us off because we're young. There's a stigma from the older generation that there's no craftsmen coming up in the younger generation."

Pilotti disagrees. "There is still craft happening. While it may not be reproduction furniture...We still pay the same level of attention to detail, and the same principles, and the same super high-quality craftsmanship, and we put it toward something which may be more modern."

Pilotti says, "I owe an absolute ton of credit to my guys. These guys are brilliant." Most are in their 20s. Most are graduates of Thaddeus Stevens. While the school teaches period furniture making, it's also set up as a modern production shop, so he doesn't have to re-train people.

Greg's lead cabinetmaker John Kruis, a 2017 graduate of Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology (a student of cabinetmaking) won a national student veneer award for this chest—his senior project.



Cory, a 2015 graduate of Thaddeus Stevens' cabinetmaking program and my first hire, has transitioned from my shop manager to project manager with the company.



# Chronicles (continued-2)

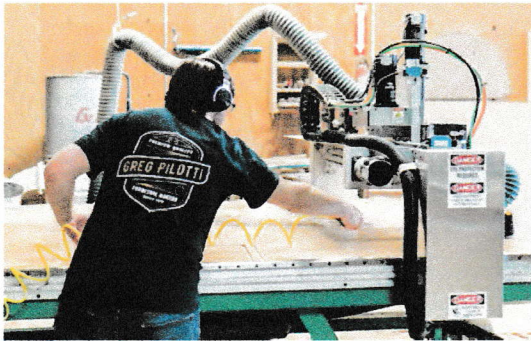
## GREG PILOTTI FURNITURE MAKERS IS LOCATED IN CHESTER COUNTY, PA

The company embraces technology. On the shop floor, for example, they have a CNC machine. “We can’t really use it to build hand-crafted furniture. But when it comes down to making

that everybody loves... and it allows us to build other furniture.”

They don’t do a lot of period furniture. “We all really like it. We all really respect it. We all really know how to

You might be surprised to learn that a guy who calls making furniture a passion is no longer making it. Pilotti now basically handles sales. He says, “When I was trying to be a furniture maker



Matt operating the CNC machine. Matt is a 2017 graduate of Thaddeus Stevens’ CAD and drafting program. He is my design engineer.



The guys stained the 27’ table by hand with General Finishes black gel stain. The gel stain was the best choice for this job as it darkened the walnut just right, without it looking grey.



A rare day that I need to help in the shop floor, or should I say when they allow me out there.

a kitchen, we can cut out 20 pieces of plywood in an afternoon with the dados, rabbets, and shelf pinholes. I don’t want my cabinetmakers to do that stuff.” He says it “hasn’t taken jobs, it has added jobs.”

In the office, “the technology that has really elevated it is 3D modeling. We’re able to show the client exactly what the furniture is going to look like. And... our programs automatically give us the components for the CNC machine to cut.”

Social media is important. To improve the quality of his Instagram account, Pilotti has hired a professional photographer to visit the shop once a week. He says the account has “paid for itself tenfold” because when designers, architects, and clients come in, they already know what his company can do.

Pilotti says 93% of the company’s revenue comes from furniture, just 7% from cabinetry. He says it’s important to be open to different projects. For example, one of the company’s specialties is custom conference tables. By saying “yes” to the first request for one, he now has a product that’s “taken off,

build it. It’s just the market is dead.”

Sometimes they’ll take an old design, and “dial down” some of the details, “so it doesn’t necessarily come out looking like a period 1750 desk, but it has a lot of the same features.



Our way that we’re trying to continue the legacy of the craftsmen before us is by still using, whenever we can, that traditional joinery.”

and run the business, I almost failed. It’s my job to make sure that these guys have somewhere to work every day.” He hopes to start building again, “as the business grows and we build our team (and) I can shave a little time off.”

The way the business is growing, he figures they’re going to need more space in the next few years. Right now they have about 7000 square feet. But long term, “The most important thing is there is going to be a point where we say this is how big we are, and this is how much work we can take on, and this is it. I don’t want to be a factory... because you lose everything that you worked for. It’s going to be interesting—how do we manage growth while still being in a small business?”

Pilotti says furniture making is “a hard business. I love what I do, but there are plenty of days when I just want to go, ‘No, I don’t want anything to do with this anymore.’” But then he adds, “A lot of our days are awesome.”

<https://www.gpfurnituremakers.com/>

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE GREG PILOTTI