



DOUCETTE & WOLFE—AMAZING, ARTISTIC, MAGICAL

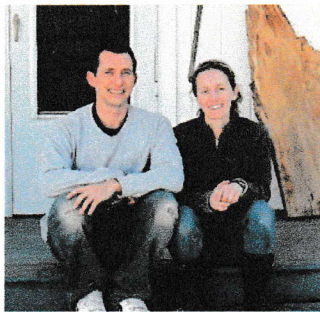
“When you take a day off, and you prefer to be in the shop, what does that tell you?”

“When you take a day off, and you prefer to be in the shop, what does that tell you?” asks SAPFM member Matthew Wolfe.

What it tells you is that he loves what he does for a living.

Wolfe is one-half of Doucette and Wolfe Furniture Makers. He and his partner, Moriah Doucette, live and work in Center Conway, New Hampshire, between the White Mountain National Forest and the Maine border.

The two met at the Vermont Wood-



home making furniture, she was in. That is how the business got started.”

The two work out of a 30'x50' converted garage on their property. As they note on their website: “We now enjoy ‘commuting’ across the driveway to ‘work...’” Actually, Wolfe works alone much of the time, while Doucette is in the shop more in the winter, when the landscaping business is on hold. Sometimes they work on a project together, but more often they work on individual pieces.

“Having a partner is huge. Just to sometimes run ideas by. Every part of it she helps, even if it’s not specifically with a certain piece. We’d like to get to the point where she can do some spec pieces over the winter—that’s the direction we’d like to go,” says Wolfe.

It was, of course, a huge transition for both. Wolfe says it helps that he’s “a little obsessive. It’s basically my life. I really do work pretty much every single day for 12-16 hours a day.”

But hard work alone doesn’t guarantee success. Wolfe is mostly self-taught, so the learning curve involved some trial and error. He is grateful for help and advice from other woodworkers such as Al Breed, Garrett Hack, David Lamb, and Janet Collins. He says “you do a lot of research” on a project. And even when he’s working on one piece,

he’s already thinking about the next one. “Always kind of ten steps ahead of it.”

“Certain people will specialize in certain things, and that works for them,” says Wolfe. “But for creativity



purposes it’s nice to do a lot of different things.” So the company will build anything from William & Mary to contemporary. But, he adds, “Once I do a custom piece, I’m ready to get back and do period stuff. I’m always drawn back to that.”

Much of the work is done with hand tools. “That’s where I get a lot of enjoyment. It’s challenging, more so than doing something on a machine. I’m sure it’s not efficient in terms of the business side of it...but details, joinery, I prefer

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working School in Cambridge, Vermont, back in 2008. Wolfe was a finish carpenter and custom homebuilder who built some furniture on the side. Doucette was a gardener/landscaper who attended the school during the winter.

Wolfe only stayed at the school for about three months. “I’m better just trying things out...so I said I’m just going to go and do it myself...go all in and try to make it work and see what happens.

“Once Moriah and I hit it off, I mentioned I was going into the custom furniture business and it would be great if she wanted to go into it with me. After a few enthusiastic stories about how great it would be to work from



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SAPFM Chronicles

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to do by hand.” However, the recent acquisition of a “big, old” jointer/planer means some of the hard work of surfacing lumber is now done by machine. “So in some of the new videos you don’t see [hand-planing] any more.”

Those videos on the company’s website show the process of creating some of his furniture, from start to finish. Wolfe says part of the original reason for



doing them was to help attract clients. But, he says, “For me, too, it’s rewarding. There’s a lot of time, energy, and focus that goes into a piece, so it’s kind of a way to remind yourself of that.”



Reproduction Side Chairs based on an original chair (front row, right side) attributed to William Savery of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, circa 1750. These chairs are handmade from solid lightly figured maple with a natural hand-twisted cattail rush seat. Traditional hand tools were used in the making of these chairs to match the form and feel of the original.

Watch this video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkHSAEUIGxk>



The videos are also a way of paying it forward for the help Doucette and Wolfe received when they were just starting out. “We get quite a few emails asking questions about a technique or process and don’t always have time to respond,” says Wolfe. He hopes they will “maybe help another woodworker who is starting out or looking to learn more.”

Wolfe produces the videos himself, mounting a camera on a tripod while he works, then editing them on his computer. That raises the question: where does he find time to do all this?

“It’s a battle every day, to be honest. Time management is tough. I honestly do not do much else. It’s my personality, I guess. The amount of work before you even get into the shop is mind-boggling.” One thing, though. No matter how daunting or challenging something might be, Wolfe uses the word *fun* a lot when talking about what he does.

Surprisingly, he seems a little concerned about the future of his chosen profession. “It concerns me a little bit, with CNCs and all this, you hope there’s an appreciation for what woodworkers do. In the woodworking community, it’s easy to see that all these

people are doing this. Wow, it’s great. But then you step outside of that box and a lot of people are surprised that people even do that.”

It seems unlikely that CNC machines will ever replace the handcrafted work done by Doucette and Wolfe. Testimonials from their customers are filled with words such as “amazing, artistic and magical, exceptional and fantastic.”

Whatever the future holds, Wolfe has no doubt about his decision to become a custom furniture maker. “I made the right choice. I don’t know if it would be for everybody, but for me, absolutely, I’m thankful every day. When I feel tired or kind of unmotivated, that’s the thing that keeps me going because I do feel very fortunate that it’s worked out the way it has.” —JB

