

Hickory, cedar and willow magically become decorative chairs, tables and beds

Just a short trip down a country highway as you leave Alabama on the way to Rising Fawn, Ga., takes you to the front door of the 140-year-old log cabin workshop and showroom of Appalachian Rustic Furniture and Phil Faircloth.

Faircloth appears relaxed and unhurried as he supervises the construction of the increasingly popular furniture pieces. Using natural materials — hickory, cedar and willow, Faircloth and his brother, Joe Croker, fashion chairs, tables, beds and other decorative items.

Their work has been featured in several home magazines including Southern Accents, House and Garden, Countryside and Country Living. As their popularity grows, they are also being recognized in regional publications like the North Georgia Journal.

Faircloth moved to Rising Fawn, the town where his mother grew up, from Florida in 1980. He found the old cabin and restored it, adding a workshop onto the back.

From the workshop, Faircloth and his staff work to fill orders from all across the country.

"Most of our furniture is sold to people furnishing second homes. It definitely appeals to a certain crowd and many of the people buying houses in Mentone and around here like it," Faircloth says.

Hickory is favorite

Hickory is his favorite wood to use. It is one of the hardest in the United States but is also pliable and can be shaped to form sturdy pieces.

The hickory hoop settee is one of the most popular designs he turns out.

Cedar is used for some of the furniture, especially beds. It is polished to a smooth surface with a soft blond color.

The wood is gathered during the winter. They hand peel the bark from the wood with pocket knives.

"Some people ask why we don't use a draw knife, it would be quicker. But, hand peeling does not remove the character of the wood," Faircloth says.

Croker, Faircloth's half-brother, works in another location fashioning his willow designs. Willow can be bent, shaped, and twisted into a variety of forms. His furniture looks like it is still growing wild in the woods.

Rustic revival

Rustic furniture design first became popular in the late 19th century when the Industrial Revolution prompted families to build retreats in remote areas to escape the mechanized cities.

Mentone and Lookout Mountain were among the areas discovered at this time and "roughing it" was the fad. The trend faded some at the time of



Fred Worden works on caining a hickory chair for Appalachian Furniture.

Times Staff Photos



This is the log cabin shop where you'll find many of the furniture items made by Appalachian Furniture.



Ryan Faircloth uses a band saw to cut out table lamp parts.



This is one of the designs used on a chair made at Appalachian Furniture.

the Great Depression and World War II but came back into vogue around 1976 when the country celebrated the Bicentennial.

There was a revival of interest in American crafts in this time. Weaving, pottery and rustic furniture came to the forefront as many new craftsmen took up the art form.

Local guides, woodsmen and jacks-of-all-trades supplied the basic furniture pieces for those turns of the century cabins, all made of local materials.

Birdhouses popular

Other popular items in the Faircloth collection are the rustic birdhouses that are really miniatures of stores, houses and churches in the area.

Faircloth's personal favorite is the Rising Fawn Grocery birdhouse.

"I just wanted to put everything I liked into one birdhouse and that's how it came about," he said.

The Grocery Store design has become his number one seller.

One of his most unusual orders was from a Japanese company wanting the birdhouses.

"They had seen one of our catalogs in California and ordered a whole bunch. Then later they called me and wanted to know why the roofs were rusty, they'd never seen that before," he said.

The birdhouses are constructed entirely from "found materials." They are like a recycled project made from scraps.

Kathy Faircloth, Phil's wife paints the advertising slogans on the birdhouses. His whole family has become involved in the business and he is assisted at the workshop by his 16-year-old son, Ryan.

Looking for ideas

Many of Faircloth's designs are taken from old furniture he picks up at auctions and flea markets.

"I get excited over some of the things I see, like an old hickory chair or the bench I used as a pattern for one we are making now," said Faircloth.

With the showroom open six days a week and on Sundays by appointment, Faircloth rarely takes a day off. A steady flow of customers drop by during the day and out of town orders keep the workshop humming all the time.

"When I have any free time, I'm creating new things," he commented.

"This is what I want to do for the rest of my life," Faircloth says. "If I was a millionaire, I'd still come here and do the same thing."

This article was written by Gadsden Times Correspondent Emily Smith.



Kathy Faircloth paints a sign on the side of the one of the more popular items — a birdhouse.