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FEATURES

Hone decor to a rustic simplicity

Woodsy wares a big city hit



Faircloth's wife makes the rustic birdhouses, which are painted with latex paint and sanded to resemble worn wood.



Hickory wood is used to make much of the rustic furniture. The wood is harvested nearby and dried in a kiln behind Faircloth's shop.



Keith Boyer/Post-Herald

'We make about any type of rustic furniture,' says Faircloth. Items that they make can range from a child's rocking chair to end tables, some of which are on display in two rooms at the front of this century-old cabin. Behind the two rooms used for display is a large workshop.

By Janet Jimmerson
Post-Herald Reporter

Their rustic furnishings have appeared on the glossy pages of catalogs and magazines across the country.

Demand for their handiwork stretches from here to Japan.

But to the 100 or so folks in Rising Fawn, Ga., Phil Faircloth and Joe Croker are nothing special.

"They're not really sure we're not drug dealers," Faircloth says laughing.

Says his partner Croker, "They seem to think any day now we're going to come up and say, 'Well, it just fell under boys. We didn't make it.'"

But the signs of success are there, once you look past the backwoods charm and rustic simplicity.

Parked in front of the century-old cabin where they display their wares is a shiny red Volvo. Faircloth recently remodeled his house, and inside the general store-looking shop where he works is a ringing phone and a wall covered with newspaper and magazine clippings.

A gentle giant of a man in loose-fitting overalls and a bushy blond beard, Faircloth could probably pass for an itinerant craftsman, maybe even a drug-dealing cracker. But he seems more at home on the front porch of his shop keeping a watchful eye on daughter Brittany, 7.

He used to rebuild grand pianos in Orlando, Fla., but grew tired of the big city. After moving to Rising Fawn, he tried refinishing furniture and selling antiques out of a small shop in Mentone. He started making willow furniture when an unusual chair caught his eye.

Croker, his half-brother, moved to Rising Fawn for similar reasons. He and Faircloth used to visit relatives in the area during summers when they were growing up, and he was ready to leave Florida. He started out with carpentry work and later switched to furniture making when Faircloth caught the bug.

In 1985 the two men started harvesting green willow in the Appalachian hills around Rising Fawn and bending it into loveseats and chairs. They packed the furniture in pickups and peddled it in neighboring cities. A three-piece set back then probably cost about \$100.

Today, you might pay that for a small chair. If you buy from a dealer or department store, it could cost you two or three times that.

The Faircloth and Croker catalog lists several collections with a variety of shades and styles. The "Big Sky Collection" offers a popular western flavor with several pieces of prairie-style furniture hewn from cedar. The "Blue Ridge Collection" is more Appalachian in design with cane-back chairs and sturdy, hickory-topped tables.

The "Elk River" and "Hamptons" collections have the romantic look of willow woven into intricate, curving patterns.

Customers can choose from the list of styles and accessories shown or custom-order a design of their own. The choices range from plant stands and baskets to chaise longues, canopy-style beds, coffee tables, bookcases and benches.

All of the wood is harvested from the Appalachian hills surrounding Rising Fawn. The harder woods such as hickory are cut during the winter months when the sap is low, then dried in the kiln behind Faircloth's shop. Willow must be cut year-round and used while still green to create the arching designs used in beds and chair backs.

Many of the designs are inspired by the wood itself. A forked branch will be incorporated into the design instead of scrapped, which helps distinguish one piece from another. Other styles are inspired by authentic rustic furniture dating back to the early 1900s.

Like many of those pieces, Croker and Faircloth say their furniture will last indefinitely if kept dry.

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Phil Faircloth, left, and Joe Croker have been making rustic furniture for about eight years. The two started out making love seats and chairs and now make more than 100 different types of furniture.