

Rustic designs

Fairecloth's Appalachian Rustic Furnishings is headquartered in Rising Fawn, but furniture and accessories made there are sold around the country and abroad.

"Our stuff has been in almost every major magazine and is often sold in the retailer's name," Fairecloth said.

Neiman Marcus features Fairecloth's furniture in its latest home catalog, and the Bob Timberlake line of home furnishings includes items from Fairecloth.

More than 100 pieces of furniture are made by Fairecloth and his brother, Joe Croker. The bulk of the output is sold wholesale through a broker, Garden Source Furnishings of Atlanta, but Fairecloth sells on the retail level, too.

"We reproduce older designs and put our little twist on it," Fairecloth said.

Hickory furniture is the backbone of the business, although Fairecloth also works with cedar. And the designs seem to fit in with whatever type of rustic furniture is trendy at the time. "It began as folk art, then Southwestern, and now it's

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Phil Fairecloth crafts furniture in Rising Fawn, Ga.

Craftsmen

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Western stuff," he said.

The brothers' work is not identical.

"All my furniture is jointed, and his is all nailed," Fairecloth said. "We do it all by hand, although we have power tools and all. Most of the tools we use we have to invent and improvise."

Croker has a shop a few miles from Fairecloth and works primarily with bent willow.

Fairecloth cuts wood for his creations within a 5-mile radius of the shop in the winter when the sap is down. "This year we cut about 15,000 sticks," Fairecloth said. "The year before we cut 5,000. That shows the growth." Fairecloth's shop is full of wood in

various stages of production, and one room is the domain of the Fred Warden family, the operation's resident chair caners.

"We average 30 chairs a week, and we do a lot of accessories," Fairecloth said. "We are not a big business by a long shot, but we are about maxed out now. There is only so much you can do by hand. The more volume you do, the more the quality goes down."

Fiddling around

Smith, a retiree, is also devoted to quality work, and, he, like Fairecloth, has had to invent tools to produce his fiddles and guitars.

"By trade I came up through tooling in the aircraft industry, and it was not hard to make my own tools," said Smith, a resident of Fyffe. He does the work strictly as a hobby and has sold only one instrument, a five-string guitar.

Smith makes his fiddles with European spruce tops and maple sides and backs, and he crafts guitars with mahogany backs and maple sides and tops. He orders some pieces partially machined, but he does the bulk of the work by hand. He learned some tricks of fiddle-making from Lonnie Barksdale of Sylvania, Ala., but devised his own method of putting a fiddle together.

"There are about 32 steps in making a fiddle the way I make them," Smith said. "It takes a week, and my wife says I work 10 to 12 hours a day. You have to take one step at a time."

Making a guitar is a bit easier because the instrument's curvature is smaller.

The first fiddle Smith made didn't suit him, but the second one was much more successful.

"You can't imagine the

satisfaction I had to make this' when I pull across the fiddle, and right tone. I made exactly what I wanted, and it was beautiful."

"I think, to some degree, I have mastered the art of fiddles."

Smith's friends and family must agree. One of Smith's fiddles is on display in the Alabama library.

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