

Orchestrating symphonies in wood



Studio Woodworkers of Australia director and chairperson, Phoebe Everill, is one of the few women today successfully carving out a living from making and designing fine furniture. The opening of her own furniture-making school near Drummond, in central Victoria, is the culmination of a lifelong passion, driven by her desire to teach others of timber's inherent beauty and how to make it sing.

Phoebe Everill grew up with tools in her hands. While her four older sisters and twin brother were off rushing around the family home in Malvern, Phoebe could generally be found shadowing her beloved father around his much-frequented workshop.

"My dad had a fine art printing firm in Melbourne while we were growing up but when he was in his 40s he sold it and went off to TAFE to follow a lifelong dream of learning furniture making and joinery," Phoebe says.

"When I was a growing up, I was always dad's devotee at the

end of his work bench, passing him tools and watching what he was doing. Both he and my grandfather before him totally loved working with wood, and it was a love they passed on to me. But I'm not sure growing up I ever envisaged a career in wood."

A graduate of Lauriston Girls School, Phoebe travelled widely after leaving school, and then worked in various sales and marketing jobs. In her 30s, and now with two young girls of her own, she started making items from wood from a small workshop at home, as well as working part-time in retail hardware."

While my girls were little, I began making traditional furniture; things like tables, bookcases. But I had no idea about design or technique really. I would often walk into galleries and marvel at the exquisitely made and designed wood pieces I would see. But for me that came later."

In 2000, Phoebe broke new ground, and became one of the very few female carpenters in Victoria. She concentrated on renovating old houses, where the wood skills imparted by her Dad, were put to good use.

"When my girls were in secondary education,



I set up my own business working full-time first as a carpenter/joiner, and then as a builder, doing custom fit-outs on older houses that required individual, specialised work," says Phoebe.

"I did that for more than 10 years and while I loved the work, being a female chippie meant I was breaking a whole lot of new ground all the time. The work was lucrative but it was also stressful, and physically demanding, and although I did still manage to do some furniture making in my workshop at home, there was little time for anything really creative in my life back then."

With her partner, Phoebe bought, renovated and sold a number of houses, before the couple settled on a picturesque 70 acres spread outside Drummond. Much of the fine furniture Phoebe designs and makes today, originates from local blackwood trees, fallen on their property. She cites the Shakers' work, famous for their clean, smooth lines, and the Japanese as design influences.

In 2009, an approaching personal

milestone encouraged Phoebe to finally follow her dream.

"As my 50th birthday drew closer, I knew that it was now or never really," says Phoebe.

"With my family's blessing, I travelled interstate to Mittagong in NSW to undertake a 12-week course at the acclaimed Sturt School for Wood. That turned into two and a half years of training during which time I completed my Certificate IV in woodwork and design, was taught by some of Australia's most acclaimed makers, David Uphill-Brown and Leon Sadubin, and was awarded Sturt's Artist in Residence for 2011."

In April this year, Phoebe became the

first fully accredited female member of the Studio Woodworkers of Australia. The SWA is comprised of some of Australia's most internationally acclaimed, and emerging woodworkers who share common beliefs in original design, sustainably sourced wood and the integrity of excellent work.

In July, Phoebe opened her furniture-making school at Drummond. She teaches absolute beginners through to advanced students in small, intimate classes, and on occasions continues to teach, at her former alumna mater, Sturt School of Wood. She hopes one day to teach internationally.

"I believe it is the maker's responsibility to respect the tree by using its timbers wisely, and investing time and creativity into the creation of tomorrow's antiques," says Phoebe.

"I am a third generation woodworker, and I use my grandfather's and father's tools regularly. I am incredibly fortunate to have had my father as my first teacher, and life mentor, and although he passed away recently, he is always at my bench. He imparted a great love of wood to me, and through making as well as teaching, I hope to share that passion with others." (See Phoebe's advert opposite page)

