

Comment

JEREMY GRIFFITH

“It is difficult to do something in pure craft and succeed — but we’ve been in business for 12 years.”

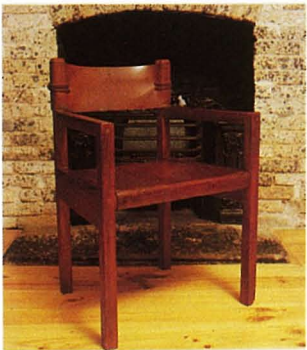
The first thing you notice about any piece of Griffith Tablecraft’s furniture is its simplicity. Chairs are made from uniform thicknesses of wood in long, straight lines. Their tables are special. According to Jeremy Griffith, they are “lovely, big, floating slabs of timber. All our furniture is made for sheer function — no extras, just completely unadulterated wooden furniture.” The wood is waxed and sealed but never stained, allowing the rich, warm colours of the cedars, rosewoods, and other timbers to show through to their best advantage and full beauty.

Jeremy and his brother Gervase (who designs furniture, as well as handling the factory side of the business in Murwillumbah in northern NSW) grew up in the bush of central western NSW, where they both learned to work with timber while building sheep runs, fences and other rural necessities. “There’s still a lot of that famous Australian ingenuity in the bush”, says Jeremy. “Even in jobs like building fences, clever devices are invented through sheer necessity,” he grins.

Jeremy hasn’t always been in the furniture game. After majoring in biology at university, he spent six years chasing elusive/extinct Tasmanian tigers around the wilds of Tasmania. He didn’t find any but did discover the beauty of vast expanses of natural



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timber. One day he saw a huge truck carrying a single log so enormous that it made up the truck’s whole load. Looking at the wood, he thought that a table made from a single section would look great. “What could be better or more natural?” was the pioneering thought.

Griffith Tablecraft started their business making tables from single slabs of wood: they expanded into chair manufacturing under slightly unusual circumstances. “I was showing some tables in Sydney one day,” says Jeremy, “when someone asked me if we also made chairs. ‘Of course’, I said and then had to spend most of that night making a chair from pieces of wood and some strong leather.” The seat of the ultra-simple chair is held in place by twisted rope. “I was thinking about Alexander the Great and his siege machines — the catapults that were powered by twisted rope — and I suddenly thought that rope used in this way must be



very strong, so why not use it in a chair?

“Chairs are about the hardest thing to design because the human body is such a strange shape.” According to Jeremy, all chairs are derived from six basic designs. His favourite is the simple stick chair, the Jimmy Possum, that was “built by a bloke who lived in a hollow log around the



Jeremy Griffith is proud of the beautiful wood, clean design, of their furniture: as in wood and leather chair, slab table, and sideboard.

turn of the century” — a design not only simple but clever. “The original chair was made by a man standing at a woodheap with nothing more than an axe and a brace and bit.” The weight of the person sitting in such a chair makes its legs, arms and back lock together, an idea that has been adopted by Griffith Tablecraft in the chair designs they manufacture.

Their designs don’t make concessions to market trends. The only compromise they’ve made to recent furniture designs is to dovetail the joints in drawers. “The first thing people do when they are looking at a sideboard is open the drawers to see if they are dovetailed. It is just something that they expect to see, so we gave in and started dovetailing,” he says.

Jeremy believes that there are far too many compromises made in manufacturing, not just in the furniture business but across the board. “You used to be able to go into a sports store and buy a good pair of plain wool socks. Now you have to go to a disposal store for them. You can’t buy shirts without fancy buttons and other extras unless they are really plain work shirts.” This seems to sum up the Griffith Tablecraft philosophy: no frills, but plenty of comfort and quality.

Griffith Tablecraft’s showrooms are in Surry Hills and Murwillumbah, NSW. VJ. □