

# Contemporary Handmade Furniture

By Nancy Millard | Photos by Kyle Evens

**T**im Miller launched his handmade furniture with a stroke of luck. *Dwell* magazine (September 2015) showed and identified his two Liftoff chairs in a “Pricewise” feature about the Ferguson Souder family, who built their backyard retreat of mostly reclaimed materials. So, how does a recent Taylor University graduate make it to a national magazine?

Nestled among the rolling hills of southeast Missouri is Chaumette Vineyards and Winery. Home to the winery is the historic town of Ste. Genevieve, a 75 minute drive of breath-taking scenery south of St. Louis. Settled by French-Canadian colonists in 1735, it was the earliest European settlement west of the Mississippi River. Although Spain (through a treaty) assumed control for more than 40 years, the →



region retained its French culture, architecture and language.

“In my sophomore year, I studied for a semester in Italy. My design professor there, Tim Ferguson Souder, influenced me a lot,” says Tim. “Ferguson Souder, who teaches in a Boston area college, later contacted me to make him a pair of chairs out of reclaimed wood. I found some old wood farm fence that had been treated and was sustainable. The chairs are comfortable, you can push back a little and the undulated back supports you. They’re good for star gazing, the Ferguson Souders say.” In the Dwell photo the family relaxes in their backyard retreat; Tim’s chairs are in the foreground beside an oil drum fire pit.

Back home in Indiana, Tim Miller has set up his furniture design and construction operation in a workshop which his dad, Keith Miller, had built in the woods behind their family home, as he anticipated retirement. Over the years, “Keith has made a cradle for grandbabies, bedroom furniture and a lot of our other furniture,” says Elaine, Tim’s mother.

Determined to stay in Muncie, Tim and his father have a business-like arrangement; Tim does his design and woodworking on a regular week-days schedule in the workshop. Since graduation and his marriage to Abby, Tim has been busy filling custom orders and commissions.

One of his first commissions was for a narrow wood table for Pat O’Dell, a friend of the family. “He came to my house to see what I wanted and where the table would stand in the dining room in front of a window. He brought some mahogany wood samples and matched the wood to my antique table. He recommended a smoked glass top so you can see the geometric design of the legs through the top. It’s quite modern, but it goes well with my antiques. I love my table. He’s so creative and imaginative,” says Pat.

“Geometry is at the heart of all of my pieces. There’s a purity to geometric forms,” says Tim. “For me, there’s a perfection you can reach with geometric form. I spend a lot of time on details. I’m drawn to producing pieces no one has seen before, designs that never existed.”

As an art major at Taylor, Tim credits his sculpture professor, Josh Welker, influencing his sense of design. “I had an internship for 2-1/2 months in Atlanta with Benjie Osborne, the furniture maker-designer, who is about as good as you can get.” Tim also explored design at Miami Basel, the world famous art expo and Design Miami, the side exhibits throughout the city. “I got a lot of inspiration from the street art.” →

Two coffee tables he exhibited at Gordy's Fine Art and Frames gallery during August in Muncie reflect his fascination with geometric forms. A round glass top reveals a pair of curved wood bases, sliced off a circle. "Two of the four curved pieces form the legs. They can be flipped so that two concave and two convex form a base," he says. "The identical wood strips consist of bent lamination, seven strips of wood bent over a form with a vacuum press for 24 hours." →



Even more complex, what he calls his wave table has a base with aluminum rods fastened to triangular light maple wood supports. “I was looking at a painting and it popped into my head as to what would it look like to put rods from the wood supports. I met with math and engineering professors to get guidance putting it together, as to what materials would work. A lot of hours were spent on it before touching the materials.”

Tim says during the design process, “I’ll sketch what idea I’ve come up with and work on finalizing it on the computer to get dimensions. I am working for the optimum illusion. I prefer pieces you have to be walking around to see from every angle, so the viewer isn’t bored.”

Tim has come out with a catalog, which shows pieces he has made. “With custom furniture, we provide you with the opportunity to transform a space, making it uniquely yours. Our contemporary design aesthetic, focused on minimalism and symmetry, is united with our commitment to expert craftsmanship.” •

