

Taking it slow

Bruce Hodgson, founder of Artichoke, explains why slow woodworking is the secret to furniture that lasts for generations

What can we learn from antique furniture about the benefits of the slow furniture-making process?

There is something astonishing in the fact that well made furniture can still be in daily use 300 years after it was created. Antiques demonstrate why it is important to care for precious resources that take hundreds of years to grow.

Do you consider yourself to be making the antiques of the future?

We do not necessarily set out to do this, but it is a consequence of Artichoke's passionate approach to making furniture. We take time to interrogate the opportunities of a brief, exploring how we can deliver the client's dreams without compromising the architectural heritage of the house. We are lucky enough to have clients who understand the time required to create beautifully made furniture that is sympathetic to a historic interior.

As well as longevity, what are the functional benefits of slow furniture-making?

Standardised designs and manufacturing methods have been developed to boost profit margins. In contrast, traditional joinery is more complex and time consuming. Fast fur-



Slow woodworking ensures longevity

niture has dominated the market for decades: it's encouraging that a new generation is choosing antique pieces made from high-quality materials as a sustainable alternative.

And the aesthetic benefits?

Mass production and speed mean there has been a dumbing down of architectural joinery over the years. Our mouldings, however, are designed and made to suit the period of the house—sometimes requiring complex profiles and shapes to reflect a style that is appropriate. Similarly, the traditional hand finishes that we favour create depth and character, so that new elements complement furniture that has been there for decades, sometimes centuries. In houses that are newly built, our expertise in hand finishing means that our joinery brings atmosphere and charm—an aesthetic benefit often missing from modern spray finishes.

Why is so much modern manufacturing all about speed?

Speed is often confused with efficiency, which, in turn, is about reducing cost. In fact, the opposite is true. Building a house is a great example of this; if a new house has been given time to dry out and to settle, it will not only have more stability, it also won't impact on joinery that is fitted at the next stage. When water evaporates out of the substructure, the distortion creates stresses in the timber, and twisting and structural defects that are difficult to remedy once the movement has taken place. Allowing a building to dry completely might add time and cost in the short term, but it is essential to the integrity of a building and its contents.

Does this principle also apply to making furniture and how?

Yes, it's exactly the same; like slow building, slow woodworking is vital to the integrity of a piece. But the process starts a long time before wood arrives in our workshops. Thoughtful timber selection and appropriate storage is key. When a tree is forced to dry too quickly, the timber is shocked and you get inconsistency, splits and shrinkage that are quite unlike the natural knots and



Great architectural joinery requires time-consuming techniques and finishes

strains created in the grain when it dries naturally. However, it ties up cash and requires storage space. Yet, like the construction of a house, the time and cost benefits further down the line are huge.

How does slow woodworking compare with mass manufacture?

Speed dominates mass manufacture from the outset; when selecting wood, there are no opportunities to identify defects. In addition, short lengths of wood are often laminated together. Choosing the right wood from the same area of forest adds predictability to the process and reduces the risk of remedial action and means that we can get it right first time for clients.

How does modern technology complement slow furniture-making?

We are not luddites and have invested in technology that allows us to provide the best of both worlds—old school quality and new world efficiencies—creating furniture that will be admired for generations. 🐿

For more information, please telephone 01934 745270 or visit www.artichoke.co.uk