

Homespun Design

A New Horizon for Handcrafted Furniture

By Sherrie Wilkolaski

In a world of mass production, replicas and standardized products, it can be difficult to find something unique. Homespun Design seeks to counter-act this trend with its handcrafted, American made furniture. Founder, Joe Noonan, combines classic techniques of the past with modern technology of today, to bring distinctive home décor to the masses, with the

expectation that it will last for generations. He has partnered with select crafters across the country to ensure the highest quality of work and greatest preservation of the environment. These “makers,” as they are called, source their wood from sustainable logged forests, to help eliminate waste. Since the makers’ work is of such high quality, there is a great chance these pieces

will not wind up in a landfill. Homespun is affiliated with the Sustainable Furnishings Council, which strives to raise awareness of sustainability issues and inspire eco-friendly decisions in the wood-working industry. We spoke with Joe Noonan about his unique operation to learn more about his success.

He started Homespun Design with the idea of bringing together the smaller, undiscovered craftsman to buyers looking for custom pieces. “Most online furniture retailers cater to the mass market, which makes sense since it’s the biggest,” says Joe. “But I had seen the beautiful furniture that smaller, highly skilled American makers were creating, and I felt like that market was

Joe Noonan, CEO
Homespun Design



underrepresented online. It's a niche we were thrilled to fill." And so they do. Joe's seventeen wood-makers provide a variety of products for the bedroom, dining or living room, with wood choices such as maple, walnut, cherry or oak. If you're looking for more custom, they provide customization options on everything from finish, type of, and scale of the furniture to suit the needs of your

own space.

Joe attributes his company's uniqueness to its focus: "high end, bench-crafted furniture." Homespun Design is not limited to one style of furniture. Styles range from mid-century, cottage, industrial, reclaimed to traditional. Because they create pieces that are geared towards the individual, there's not

any one piece that's more popular than the rest. "We're actually not seeing a significant concentration on any one or two pieces. Our mid-century furniture, such as the Asher Collection by Spectra Wood, is doing well for us, but so are classic pieces from Vermont Furniture Designs and Cherry Pond Fine Furniture."

The claim to be American made is important to Homespun Design. "First, we believe in the quality of the products and also, there is a great story to tell here. We're not wrapping ourselves in the American flag, but supporting American manufacturing jobs is a great secondary benefit of partnering with highly skilled, domestic furniture makers. Another benefit that we feel strongly about is the environmental impact of our offering versus others and that has many components. First, our products are mainly solid wood and built to last for generations, whereas lowered priced RTA (ready-to-assemble) furniture is bound for the landfill within three to five years in most cases. Second, many of our makers aim to source lumber and most components locally, so the carbon footprint is dramatically smaller, because you're not shipping containers of lumber overseas and then shipping containers of furniture back this way. Third, as I've mentioned, our makers source lumber from sustainably harvested forests, and many of our makers are members of the Sustainable Furnishings Council (as is Homespun Design), which promotes sustainable practices within the furniture industry. Some overseas manufacturers are less concerned with sustainability, and that's reflected in the rampant deforestation we're seeing in Southeast Asia and Latin America."

Running an online luxury furniture retail store isn't easy. Joe was an executive at Wayfair, and he has the experience that is leading Homespun down the path towards success. He was head of international affairs, doing business with Europe, Australia and Canada. Homespun differs from other online furniture hubs, in their customer service and delivery methods. Homespun focuses on the individual through one site, as opposed to other retailers with multiple. Currently, they only ship their pieces in the continental United States, as shipping costs would be impractical for customers, but Joe hopes to change this within the next year or so. "Unlike marketplace models that leave

customer service and logistics up to individual sellers, we don't work on a fixed portion of the retail price. Along with ensuring we're able to invest in premium custom service and delivery, one of the key considerations in pricing for us is where our makers' brick and mortar partners price the products. We want to offer fair value to the customer while not undercutting the stores, many of which are single shop operations that have partnered with our makers for many years. We want to earn our customers' business because we have an unparalleled selection of high quality, beautiful furniture, not because they found it in a store and can get it cheaper from us."

Talent of the makers is critical to the success of Homespun Design. They follow detailed principles when choosing whom to hire, "The first criteria is that they're making beautiful, unique furniture here in America. We're also looking for makers who have a compelling story – why they're making furniture, how long they've been at it, and why they've decided to maintain production here as opposed to shifting offshore. Lastly, we're looking for makers who share our appreciation for the environment. That can mean a lot of things – where they source their lumber, both in terms of proximity to their workshop as well as whether it's sustainably harvested. Many of our makers reinforce that commitment by using eco-friendly finishing materials, powering their factories with alternative energy sources, such as solar, and even by donating their sawdust to local farms."

Homespun Design standards are high. They are choosy on the makers they work with. "Our plan is to maintain a fairly curated offering, with a high bar for the makers we work with. That said, we do have plans to expand from the current set of about a dozen makers to 20-25 by the end of 2014." With this addition to his crew, Joe intends to increase their product line to include upholstered pieces and decorative accents for the home in 2015.

Here is a look at three of Homespun Design's makers and some of their work and personalities:

**Company: Goebel & Company
Maker: Martin Goebel**

Martin Goebel, founder of Goebel & Company, operates out of St. Louis,



Martin Goebel,
Goebel & Company

Missouri. He graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design with a MFA in Furniture Design. He has owned his company since 2011, and features beautiful, yet practical pieces. He says his design style is inspired by the relatability of his products. "We look to create elegance through simplicity not dictated by trends. We accentuate basic forms by obsessing over proportion and functionality. Merging the flexibility of digital design, modern manufacturing and traditional handcraft, we create products that are second to none in quality of user experience." His favorite designers include Bob Ross and Finn Juhl. When describing his experience at Homespun, he says it's a model of how online retail can bring out the best in American products for the world to see and enjoy.

Thoughts on Homespun Design
Homespun offers a forum of well-curated craft-based businesses in a transparent and beautiful manner. They are a model for how



e-commerce can bring the best of American products to the world.

Movie character that best represents Martin

James Bond (of course), Connery, not Brosnan.

What book is he reading now?

A Short History of Nearly Everything by Bill Bryson

Favorite song?

Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots by The Flaming Lips

**Company: Shiner International
Maker: Joe Manus**

Based in Atlanta, Georgia, Shiner International is managed by maker, Joe Manus. He is called a "purveyor of unique, unorthodox sustainable design." He focuses on recycling steel, hardwood and cardboard into unique home pieces. Though self-taught, his works won the Rising Star Design Award in 2012. When we asked where he received his design inspiration, he replied, "This gets a two part answer. The first part is a more obvious model. I get momentum from shapes I see in the woods, the cities and my tangible human experiences. I see promise in many non-categorically, unpromising things. The second part, and really the more surprising part, is I get much inspiration from all that I don't see. I see voids in things and I mentally fill those voids. What is left often becomes my work."

Experience working with Homespun Design

Homespun has been solely judged and

partnered based on one single thing, my first impression of its founder, Joe Noonan. He is charismatic, knowledgeable and instantly comfortable and trusted. The rest that follows Joe's lead is what I've grown to know as Homespun, the comet tail that follows him around, respectfully. Joe Noonan, with his knowledge and charisma, is Manus' favorite part of the Homespun experience.

Who are Joe's favorite designers?

I just can't answer this in singularity. My great friends, Georg Baehler of CFC/Noir and Nathan Leslie of NLD are two solid people who leave a legacy every day.

Movie character that best represents Joe

I guess I am a mix between Owen Wilson and Michael Landon. At least, I hope I am.

The book on his bedside table

TESLA by Nigel Cawthorne

Favorite song?

Unequivocally...Out There (Dinosaur Jr.) Where you been?

**Company: Eastvold Furniture
Maker: Matt Eastvold**

Eastvold Furniture was founded by Matt Eastvold in 2010 out of Dennison, Minnesota. Having a background in a metal fabrication shop, wood and metal are his primary resources. All of his wood, with the exception of bamboo, comes from within 500 miles of Dennison. He defines Homespun as professional and hard-working. Matt has a



Joe Manus, Shiner International

RIGHT Mood Bed, Shiner International



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Matt Eastvold,
Eastvold Furniture



Alden Sideboard,
Eastvold Furniture



Eastvold Furniture
Prod Detail

distinctive style as well, saying, "I really like to freshen up old designs, using new technology such as CNC (computer navigated cutter) and laser cutting. Laser cut steel and powder coating complements solid wood really well and creates a clean high quality product and look." David Salmela from Duluth,

Minnesota is his favorite designer.

Experience working with Homespun Design

Joe and the rest of his staff have been very professional and hard working. I really appreciate their eye and how they have curated the site.

What movie character is most like his own personality?

I'm stumped on this one! I have no idea.

What book is he reading?

The Goldfinch

Favorite song, musician, or album

Song: Halloween by Mastodon
Musician: Dave Grohl
Album: White Crosses by Against Me!

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