

Jamie Russell

Rather than call myself “self taught” I prefer to use “ self directed learning”. Thanks to the Craft Council’s ongoing series of formal workshops and the more free form sharing process of the Emma Lake Collaborations I’ve had the opportunity to work with many of the best makers in the world. I’ve been carving wood since I got my first pocket knife when I was nine. In my early twenties I went through the cabinetmaking course at Kelsey and joined the work force as a kitchen builder and general carpenter. I used this part of my life to gather an adequate collection of tools and to develop my work ethic.



In 1985 I went to California to apprentice under two leading designer makers, Stuart Welch and Art Carpenter. Stuart affected my design process and Art affected my designs themselves and my lifestyle. Around this time I first saw Judy McKee’s menagerie of animal form furniture and knew it was what I wanted to do. It took me a decade to fully commit to following my instinct. In 1993 the Saskatchewan Arts Board gave me a grant to explore the use of animal forms in furniture. This became my primary focus for the next decade.

In 2003 I was losing my inspiration for the animal forms and started playing with free formed vessels based loosely on seed pods. I was encouraged on this path by my selection as the Furniture Fellow for the International Turning Exchange in Philadelphia. I came away from this experience with a stronger sense of form and applied it to more vessels and to furniture based on form rather than literal imagery.

Currently I continue to explore vessels and have added some recognizable images to the free forms. I’ve been playing with some totally non functional forms and have had a reawakening of my interest in furniture scale pieces with far less literal figurative imagery. Of course, sometimes I get an image in my mind’s eye of a literal animal in a piece of furniture and have to build it.

I consider myself a Craftsman rather than an artist. The thing that makes my work stand out is my sense of line. I believe this is a natural extension of making a piece well.