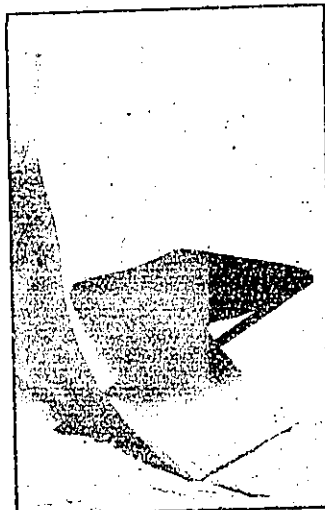


COVER STORY

Proud craftsman: Bruce Campbell and his small crew turn out everything from dining room furniture to mantelpieces. Campbell would even like to create a whole line of furniture.



STAFF PHOTO BY DAN DEAN



Sculptured furniture: The elegant curve of the bent wood chair at right and the elaborate detailing on the table above show Bruce Campbell's love for sculpture that he brings to every piece of furniture he designs.

DESIGNER DRAWS ON 'INFINITE CREATIVITY'

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Birmingham furniture designer Bruce Campbell believes there is an infinite supply of creativity.

From his workshop in Clawson, Campbell has been turning out striking, unusual furniture that seems to support his philosophy that once you're done with one idea, another good idea will surely come along.

"I had a mentor, J. Oliver Black, a wealthy industrial designer," Campbell said. "He started a retreat center in the woods in the Pigeon River Forest, a spiritual retreat."

"He taught me to conceive of something and to see it in three dimensional reality. It's all mind stuff. That's where I get my kicks. That's where the payoff is here. Very few people see that. People just don't see the results of what they do."

Campbell, 42, has been working in and thinking about creation for most of his life. Born in Jamaica to Scottish parents, his family moved to Canada when he was 13. He studied industrial design at the Ontario College of Art.

Campbell married a woman from Bloomfield Hills, studied at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit and set up his first shop in Birmingham in 1988.

The Clawson location, 932 14 Mile Road, is the company's third.

"I love the concept of product development," Campbell said. "That's what sets us apart from the run-of-the-mill cabinet shops. We emphasize product development."

Campbell has been moving his small five person company toward product development, developing a line of furniture in addition to the individual pieces the shop now turns out for architects, interior designers and individual customers.

"We are serious furniture makers, functional furniture, functional elegance. We are into furniture, not art," Campbell said.

Doug MacInnes is the general manager and technical coordinator of the shop, who with his craftsmen turn out Campbell's designs. Campbell also continues to work in the production process. He is firm about promoting the talents of his employees.

"Every individual is in the portfolio building process," Campbell said. "I buy them a portfolio and send them out. When they leave, they have a portfolio. They can go out and get other great places. I

emphasize you don't work for me, you work for yourself."

Campbell's furniture shows a wide range of modern influences and also a love for material.

"At an early age, I had a wood connection," he said. "One of my uncles was a high level craftsman in Toronto and I worked with him over the summers. I also have a strong relationship with nature. I do a lot of backpacking and am planning a trip to Washington's Olympic Forest with my son this summer."

Campbell's pure line comes from his love of Japanese design and the Arts and Crafts and Frank Lloyd Wright influences of the early 20th Century.

"I enjoy the purist approach you find in Shaker and Japanese aesthetic, which is very similar though worlds apart. Japanese and Shaker aesthetic emerges out of stoicism, pure form emerges."

Campbell said he adds to this his own sense of Western decoration which creates a tension in the work.

"It's an evocative process. What do we evoke in humana. We're at such a primitive level in the arts. To shock, cause a reaction, but what are we evoking," Campbell said.

In addition to evoking his own aesthetic tastes,



Simple design: This table, which uses a variety of materials to achieve its effect, is typical of Campbell's aesthetic taste for simple design, borrowing from Japanese and American Shaker influences.

Campbell works closely with his clients to give them what they want.

"They'll say, for instance, they want a dining room table. We talk, I show them examples of different wood, we get to talking about who these people are, not me imposing what I want to see," Campbell said. "I come up with sketches. We'll get together again. Ultimately what we've done is shape their inner vision and brought to reality their vision."

This collaborative approach worked well for Steven and Roddie Harris of Bloomfield Hills. When they moved into the new Cranbrook Chase condominiums they noticed a table that Campbell had designed for the model and sought Campbell to make a dining set, buffet and living room wall unit.

"We sat down with him and he asked what our lifestyle was like," said Roddie Harris. "We said we wanted something different, unique, durable. Something that would last and reflect the two of us together."

Harris said the experience of working with Campbell was "wonderful." She designed the dining chairs and he fine tuned them and he brought original ideas for materials.

"He combined metals with woods, something he hadn't done before. He used granite and metal on the buffet. But the wood is cherry, so it's a contemporary look with a traditional feel," Harris said.

About 60 percent of Campbell's work is done for architects and designers. He has worked with Deloitte Touche, Perlmutter-Prywalt, Brian Kilian and Co., Cranbrook Chase Model Homes and Des Rosier among others.

Campbell has an ambitious set of goals. He would like to develop his own line of furniture to offer through public showrooms and he would also like to work with a major manufacturer to develop a mass produced line.

On the cover:

Roddie Harris enjoys the original and daring designs of Bruce Campbell's dining room set, for which she helped in the design of the chairs. Harris especially likes Campbell's creative use of materials. Cover photo by Jerry Zolynsky.