



BUILDING MUSIC

THIS FORMER RECORD COMPANY EXEC
FOUND NOTES OF NEW PLEASURE IN FINE
FURNITURE MAKING BY BRIAN DUNLEAVY

Red Hook-based furniture maker Jeremy Pickett traces his design philosophy to, of all places, a sushi restaurant in suburban Tokyo.

There, as a record company executive and tour manager for music groups performing in Japan, he observed the reverence with which a particular family running a small establishment managed its food preparation process. The care they took in each step stuck with him.

“Everything they did—from how the fish was set down on the counter, to how it was sliced, to how it was presented to the customer—was handled with thought,” he recalled. “They were using basic materials and the simplest of presentations, but with extraordinary care, and you could immediately taste the results.”

Pickett has been running his own business, Pickett Furniture, in a 12,000-square-foot space since 2008, but his transition from music industry executive to entrepreneurial craftsman was not taken lightly, or without attention to process, just like those Japanese restaurateurs. Although he had flirted with design and architecture in high school and college, taking classes in both disciplines and working summer jobs for a home builder in Indiana (where he was raised), it wasn't until he had purchased his own home in New York in 2000 and started fixing it up that he realized how much he enjoyed working with his hands, and with tools.



“My decision to change careers wasn't just about leaving the music business,” noted Pickett, who has since sold the house and now lives in South Park Slope/Greenwood Heights. (“I can see Red Hook from my window,” he joked.) “I liked the music industry, and music will always be a part of my life, but it was important for me to build a career based on my own talents, as opposed to working with someone else's. In my old life, the musicians I worked with were the

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ones creating. I decided to change that.” Even so, there wasn't a headlong rush into opening a company; first, he spent years apprenticing, initially with a cabinetmaker in Jersey City and then with a furniture maker in Greenpoint. His realm of expertise, over time, came from stints as a bench worker, shop manager, lead woodworker, and designer.

“Just because I liked the work, that didn't mean I had the skills I needed,” he recalled. “To do it right, you have to learn from the best.”

After doing just that, he was ready to strike out on his own. Today, some of Pickett Furniture's work harkens back its owner's history in the music industry; among the company's hallmark creations are a stereo console and, through a partnership with a sound engineering company, cabinetry for other audio equipment. Now, he and his team are working on what he describes as a “Jamaican sound system, made with brushed aluminum and walnut” that will house giant, 140-decibel speakers.

“Those projects are always fun for me,” he said.

Despite the obvious links with the record biz, though, Pickett makes everything from couches and chairs to clocks and even oil diffusers. His designs are clean and simple, yet elegant, all made with the finest hand-selected wood. The company is additionally committed to making its furniture with as low an environmental impact as



possible (Pickett's family tree includes John Muir, naturalist, author, and “Father of the National Parks”), and uses sustainable techniques and vendors who have made the same commitment. Additionally, most Pickett creations employ Japanese-style joinery, which is strong enough to often mitigate the need for nails or screws.

The company's Red Hook space has also evolved into a collaborative creative environment. Up to a dozen other craftsmen at any given time rent studio space from Pickett. He says he and his fellow makers often share ideas and give each other advice and feedback.

“Quality is a big issue for all of us,” he said of this common bond. “For what we do with furniture, we use materials from the best sources. How we handle those materials throughout the process informs a lot of how the furniture is made. Somehow we hope that all the care in the construction comes through.” ■



Pickett Furniture
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