

Broomley Furniture

One of the great rewards of working on the first edition of a magazine is that it spurs interest from persons until then unknown to you. On this particular occasion a small business popped out of the woodwork and created an immediate impression.

The impact was made because the quality of the work that was being described seemed so good but the people behind the operation also sounded really pleasant - the classic tale of hard working folk with a young family, small business and a leap off the tread mill of industry - in this case the oil industry, to the thin end of the wedge of small business - here carpentry par excellence.

A meeting proved utterly irresistible. And so it was on a sun-drenched September evening we met at The Wellington, Riding Mill.

Martin Scarth proved to be an extremely pleasant and engaging man who spoke with passion and pride about his life and work which today can best be described as a bespoke furniture maker. Although both father and grandfather were skilled woodworkers and despite a good friend making something of a name in the craft in London, the chosen path of career via an apprenticeship at C A Parsons of Tyneside was to the oil industry. This career allowed a two week on two weeks off rota and during this time, having settled in Stocksfield, the seeds of the furniture company were sown. Finally, after the renovation of several houses the purchase of West Broomley Farm, together with many outbuildings ideal for workshops was made.

Like so many people in the oil industry with prolonged breaks, regular returns allowed for the renovation of the buildings and the development of the workshop - it took time but little by little it progressed until the time came when the family - Martin and his wife Vivien and two sons Adam and Liam - were up and running. During the years of developing the barns a real confidence in his ability developed, nurtured by several friends - and particularly professional craftsmen his philosophy became - "I can do this" - the rest, as they say, is history. Martin speaks with zest about his business but also offers some revealing thoughts about purchasing "The great

advantage is there is no middle man but people tend to be wary of having things made - lets go to X&Y and find something, but often in terms of value and character not to mention the life of the furniture - specially made items are a safe bet and can give immense satisfaction."

There are a number of tips that Martin offers - the major one: "Go for free standing furniture - items should be with you for life so we make sure it can readily move home with you."

Playing Devil's advocate I suggest that one is bound to pay more for such service and craftsmanship, but as Martin concedes "You see I can't readily compare it because no one else makes it". A politician's answer to a loaded question but within it is revealed not just the man's good nature but also the credibility of his business - work that is lasting and truly original. So what would his favourite commission be? "Kitchens are big for me, but a small office or library or a real winner - beds. People like beds, well we do spend 40% of our lives asleep!"

Aside from his passion for his furniture and family, Martin has the curiously contrasting loves for renovating motor bikes and hill walking. "Where would you recommend a good walk outside Northumberland?" I quizzed.

"The Lakes - a favourite is from Mardale Head at the end of Haweswater up to the top of High Street via Rough Crag - this place is so secluded that it's one of the only locations where eagles nest and can be seen." And all within an hour and a half of Newcastle. Speaking of which, he recommends Gershwin's for Jazz and Blues and the Free Trade for its stunning views and good beers - more passion from a talented and extremely pleasant fellow.

If you have a penchant for individuality or hand-crafted furniture (and it doesn't have to cost a fortune), give the man a call - if nothing else it may well restore any doubts in human nature - and the furniture's marvellous as well!

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