

Joy of a Journey

by Lori Mirazita

“When we first experienced the works of the Furniture Masters, we knew immediately that they were something unique and special,” assert Dan & Denise Roberts. “Then we began to learn about what goes into each piece...the thought, the planning, the design, what materials are selected and why, how it is constructed...and that every little detail is labored over and every piece of wood is touched a hundred times until it all comes together as an amazing piece of furniture that will continue to delight people long after we’re gone.”

Since that fateful encounter last June, the Roberts have embraced the Furniture Masters and their ethos with gusto. They purchased pieces by Garrett Hack and David Lamb at the 2007 auction and then commissioned David Lamb to create a piece this year. “The excitement we felt after discovering the Furniture Masters was visceral,” recalls Denise. “In the weeks following the house party, we literally found ourselves thinking about the pieces all the time, hearts pounding and excitement brewing. The initial thrill we felt upon seeing these beautiful creations just stayed with us. We wanted more!” Dan quickly concurs, noting that he has lived in New Hampshire his entire life, yet had no idea that the Furniture Masters existed. “This group can’t be a secret anymore,” he says. “These are amazing people who are creating world class furniture. We need to support artists like the Furniture Masters, otherwise we’re going to succumb to a world where everything is a mass-produced commodity that we just discard after it loses its luster.”

What was the spark that kindled the Roberts’ enthusiasm and convinced them that their lives would be enriched by having the Furniture Masters’ creations in their home? It’s not one specific thing, they assert, but rather the “whole package” that comprises any work by the masters. “These pieces are unique, timeless, one-of-a-kind, heirloom quality works,” Denise explains. There’s also the relationship component. “You get to know the masters and you quickly realize that they’re good people, people that you like,” says the couple. “Each time we look at our Furniture Master pieces, we see the master behind them. Each artist puts a great deal of himself into the work and it shows.”

The relationship aspect of the equation becomes particularly compelling when a piece of furniture is patroned. The Roberts’ 2008 commission is a “Lamboovich,” the product of a dynamic collaboration between Furniture Master David Lamb and New Hampshire’s Artist Laureate James Aponovich. The Roberts hadn’t considered the possibility of commissioning a work, but when David Lamb broached the idea, they leapt at the opportunity to join forces with these contemporary masters. For Dan, the allure of working with two fellow New Hampshire natives to conceive and create a distinctly New Hampshire piece (Lamb is incorporating the state’s native irises into the carved portions of the secretary and Aponovich is painting a still life that includes a view of Crawford Notch from Elephant Rock) was irresistible. For Denise, the chance to guide the design of a piece that will be *unique* to their home and

their personal interactions with the artists, was irreplaceable. As it turns out, the relationship between maker and client is a treasured aspect of the creative process for the artists as well.

“Dan & Denise bought my table at the 2007 auction and invited Janet & I to join them for dinner when we delivered the piece,” recalls David Lamb. “The four of us really hit it off and seemed to have a good understanding of each other.” At that time, Lamb continues, he was deeply involved with the ‘Griffith Lambovich,’ his first collaboration with New Hampshire painter James Aponovich. “I decided I should share this project with the Roberts,” he says, “both because of my enthusiasm for the collaboration and because I had a hunch that they might find a similar undertaking an exciting piece to patron.” Lamb’s instincts were correct.

“The Roberts didn’t take long to decide that they wanted to explore this possibility more,” Lamb remembers. In the ensuing weeks, drawings were made, ideas hatched and a very exciting design was developed. Both maker and client are thrilled with the results. “The collaborative process for designing this piece was layered,” observes Lamb. “James and I shared ideas and integrated common themes into my woodworking and his paintings, and Dan & Denise contributed their ideas. It was fun to put all the pieces together.”

Aponovich is similarly enthused about the creative journey this commission has initiated. “Dan & Denise have been very courageous in taking on this project,” he notes. “It’s rewarding to work with two young, enthusiastic collectors, and with David Lamb, a furniture maker that I believe is one of the best in the world.” It’s been a rewarding experience for both artists, Aponovich asserts, with each feeding off of the other’s energy and experiences to create a final product that is unique and stunningly beautiful.

Aponovich’s painting is one in a series of scenes from around the state that he is painting as artist laureate. “We’re each established artists in our own right,” Aponovich observes, “but this commission gives us the opportunity to create something distinctly different, a work that is greater than the sum of its parts and that will hopefully strike an emotional chord with the viewer. David doesn’t just put sticks together,” Aponovich continues. “Wood is *his* canvas—the mahogany grain is his brushstroke, the ebony accents are his line. His work is as painterly as mine in its way. Working on this project, David has released some control over the totality of his piece and given me a role, and together I think we’ve created something unique.”

The end result is a stunning freestanding cabinet with a narrative history that’s distinctly personal. “When you get down to it, it’s really pretty simple,” asserts Denise. “Dan & I would rather have a few, handmade heirlooms with a story to tell than a houseful of mass-produced furniture that will be worthless and worn out in a few years time. Our New Hampshire Furniture Master pieces will undoubtedly stand the test of time,” she concludes. “And if our kids don’t want them, I’m sure a museum will!”