



# Furniture as art

## Matt Clark meets a dales cabinet maker with a singular talent

Sam Anderson doesn't do boundaries: he aims is to nurture ideas and then turn them into something rather astonishing.

Inspired by classical architecture and design, Sam's work has the symmetry of Chippendale and like Yorkshire's most famous furniture maker, he's not afraid to use rich, vibrant hues.

But there the similarity ends. This is cutting-edge, 21st-century design. Take his display cabinet; a magnificent specimen in itself, all English burr elm and rippled sycamore legs.

But it's when you open the lid that it really takes your breath away with exquisite hieroglyphics and Proto-Sinaitic text made from slivers of pulsatingly coloured wood mounted in stunning burrs and illuminated against a green backdrop.



“

For me there is a sense of spirituality in my design, but for clients it might be cars or fishing, or shooting

Sam Anderson Fine Furniture, The Workshops at The Grange, East Wiltton, Leyburn DL8 4SL  
T: 01969 622072  
W: [www.samandersonlinefurniture.co.uk](http://www.samandersonlinefurniture.co.uk)



Then there are tables which features designs from Tutankhamen's sarcophagus or Greek and Islamic detail, but all with a modern take.

"I'm very interested in the prehistory of modern man," says Sam. "For me there is a sense of spirituality in my design, but for clients it might be cars or fishing, or shooting."

Which sums up Sam's furniture. He doesn't just make an item, but something that reflects an emotion or depiction of the client's life, with subtle references to dates and names, places and interests.

Take the piece commissioned by a man who drove the Peking to Paris rally. Sam came up with an English walnut table with colour inlay featuring both the route and landmarks along the way.

"It's furniture as art, trying to bridge the gap between art on the walls and a 3D piece of art, like a sculpture. But furniture is more functional than either."

Other projects have featured mosaics of estate plans and marquetry animals, planes and cars - even a bull-fighter.

"Some people might argue that this is too much for the English market but it's about trying to bring these things together and very much about working hand in hand with each client."

Not bad for someone entirely self-taught. Sam used to be a set and lighting designer, until he got disillusioned with the business.

"My mum said, 'why don't you think about woodwork?', so I appropriated her garage, a few entry-level commissions came in and I learned along the way by experience.

But if you'd said to me 20 years ago, 'you'll be doing this', I would have said, 'great, but I don't know anything about it'."

Sam's background undoubtedly helped creatively. He already knew how furniture fitted into a room space and instinctively understands form.



Now his dining tables cost thousands of pounds, but you can have a piece of Sam Anderson for a fraction of the price. He abhors waste and turns off-cuts into beautiful boxes, picture frames and recipe-book holders.

The same wonderful grain, the same attention to detail as the major pieces, but for a mere £50.

"I've always tried to push the boundaries, because they are there to be pushed. Even a humble wine rack, why not?"

"Why can't you open a few more doors? Any cutting-edge designer tries to push things on, if you don't do that you must be living in a pretty dull world."

That's why he tries to nudge clients. Not all are keen for something a bit different and Sam respects that, but many are and one brought him an inlaid backgammon board, which Sam, using the game's Islamic roots, incorporated into a minaret-like table.

The secret is to push, but also to know when to stop.

To be fair, Sam does have a few boundaries of his own. He won't touch any timber from non-sustainable sources and he is passionate about using English wood; unusual wood like olive ash.

"I'm pretty open-minded, but sometimes I would need to say, 'that's not within the ethos of what I do and what you will get'."

Sam's ethos also includes a sense of fun. His showpiece chest may be of classical proportions and influence, with a mosaic of coloured veneers based on a 15th century map of the world, but there is no pomposity about the man who made it.

"Someone asked me to describe its shape and really it has nothing to do with Roman architecture, I said it's a Dalek. The plinth is Dalek-esque, and then there is the vortex on the side.

"This is a showpiece, it's about what I do and there is a bit of quirk to that."

But never wacky because of Sam's adherence to classical symmetry, which is perfectly illustrated in an olive ash side table with copper and silver fittings that he has just completed.

"It's contained within a traditional boundary but not a rigid one. My furniture has to appeal and pull your eye towards it. That's where using other materials comes to complement top-end veneers.

Distinctive, original and elegant, Sam Anderson's furniture is a result of brushed-aside boundaries. It's brave, but more importantly it works.

This really is furniture as art.

