



Dressing table in English walnut.

Recent Work

Early last year I was approached by the owners of one of my first pieces with a request for a dressing table. A dressing table is a wonderful commission for any furniture maker, and I had been hoping for the chance to make one. We agreed it should be made from English walnut and my client envisaged lots of different inlays including mother of pearl, a tryptich mirror and storage for jewellery. At my suggestion (what was I thinking!?) she opted for a secret compartment as well.

Good English walnut is always a struggle to find, but this time I struck gold. A few months earlier I'd bought some wonderful yew boards for a rocking chair (see my last newsletter) from a man

in Dorset and had noticed a stack of walnut too. He still had most of it and I drove over there one early Spring morning and returned with a haul of treasure.

I enjoy this kind of work: shaping the octagonal flared and tapered legs with their domed and faceted tops; fitting drawers so that they open and close with a faint pneumatic puff; piecing together the jewellery compartments in fine sycamore and cutting and laying their calfskin linings. It is careful high risk work, but it can't be done by machine so hand tools are a necessity, not an indulgence: the craftsman in his element.

Continued on next page

Recent Work continued



Burr walnut, cluster maple, pear, ripple sycamore, ebony and mother of pearl on the top; calf-lined jewellery compartments in the drawer.

Even so, some of the work had to be sub-contracted. The elaborate nautilus shell inlays were cut by a specialist in Sussex and, like many furniture makers, I don't do lathe work, so the ebony drawer-pulls were beautifully turned to my design by Tobias Kaye. Tobias is, so far as I know, the world's only maker of therapeutic Sounding Bowls, which you can see and hear on his [website](#). Splendidly alternative, as you'd expect from someone working near Totnes, the Clapham Junction of ley lines.

The walnut turned out every bit as good as I'd hoped: it is perhaps the star of the show, but I am proud of some parts that can't - or can barely - be seen. Shaping the curve on the mirror's quarter inch rim was an absorbing exercise in lay-out and geometry; the secret compartment, released by an ebony button, returns home with a satisfying click of its hidden yew wood spring.

You can see some more photos of the dressing table in the [Gallery](#) on my web site.



Rosemoor Exhibition: July 2011

The dressing table was completed just in time for a pre-delivery showing at the long planned Devon Furniture Makers exhibition at RHS Rosemoor. Meticulously curated by some of my colleagues in the group, the exhibition, with 35 pieces from 12 makers, was a visual feast in a fabulous setting. If you missed it, we are likely to exhibit there again in 2013.

Current Project In Praise of Machines

I'm currently coming to the end of a very large project - to be the subject of my next newsletter - which entailed four weeks spent simply cutting out and planing a huge pile of elm and oak before the making proper could begin. (The photo on the right shows some of the hundreds of components stacked on the shelves built to store them.)

At least I have a circular saw and planer. At the time I was dipping into a book by the late Alan Peters in which he recalls being apprenticed at the Barnsley workshop in Hampshire in the early 1950s before electricity was installed there in 1955. Vast boards of oak, chestnut and walnut, invariably distorted after years of air drying, were cut to size with handsaws before being hand planed perfectly flat. What can now be achieved in a few minutes would have taken a day of intense physical labour. It renews my admiration for the energy and determination of our predecessors in this craft.



Contact Details

Nick Thwaites
Nick Thwaites Furniture
George Park
Awliscombe
Honiton
Devon EX14 3PJ

Phone 01404 548 467
Mobile 07900041174

www.nickthwaitesfurniture.co.uk
nick@nickthwaitesfurniture.co.uk

The Contemporary Craft Festival 15-17 JUNE 2012

As usual, I plan to exhibit along with the Devon Furniture Makers at [The Contemporary Craft Festival](#) at Bovey Tracey, 15 - 17 June. The show makes a great day out and it would be good to see you there, but please call me in advance to check which days I will be on the stand.



Rough sawn boards of English walnut destined for the dressing table.

Sideboard in black walnut and sycamore, made for the dining room of a contemporary house in Singapore.