

Business Spotlight Back Burner Designs

Starting a business requires sacrifice, commitment, hard work, risk and passion. I suppose it can be done without passion but that is where a lot of the joy comes from so it is really more of a necessity than it is a luxury.

Matt Lebel, owner of Back Burner Designs, has passion. Matt is also making the sacrifices, putting in the long hours and taking the risk to be a successful business owner. However, it was the passion that really came through as he led me around his shop on Main Street in Somersworth and shared how he went from working in retail to creating furniture out of reclaimed and “upcycled” wood.

Matt has never taken a wood working class. A graduate of Somersworth High School he did study mechanical engineering, something he credits for having helped him with his new venture, but everything else has been self taught and born out of necessity. “Furniture is really expensive, even low quality furniture was out of my price range when I moved into my first apartment,” stated Lebel. Not wanting to live in an empty apartment he decided to make his very first piece of furniture, a kitchen table. He was given wood pallets from his employer, Kittery Trading Post, and set to work turning those pallets into a functioning piece of furniture.

It wasn’t a showpiece but it did the job and inspired Matt to try creating another piece, and another one and piece by piece he improved his skills. An apartment doesn’t lend itself to woodworking so Matt worked on his projects in his parent’s garage whenever he could carve out some free time. Wire spools became clocks, discarded pallets became coffee tables and Matt honed his skills a bit more with each piece.

Matt continued working at the Kittery Trading Post all the while crafting furniture with wood sourced from barns, pallets and wire spools. As his passion grew so did his reputation. People saw the value in the custom made rustic furniture created using sustainable practices and encouraged him to start his own business. In April of 2014 Back Burner Designs was born. It was part time but had a website, an Etsy store and a Facebook page and quickly attracted customers. In 2015 Lebel committed himself fulltime to the business and hasn’t looked back.

“I have always enjoyed designing and making things,” stated Lebel. “Right now I do it all including the website and logo but I hope to soon be in the position to outsource some of the jobs,” he added. One of Matt’s first splurges will be a bookkeeper as he admitted his present system consists of a box filled with receipts waiting to be filed. “I can do it I just hate it.” Other future plans include bringing on staff and eventually having a showroom.

A lot of people would look at a wood pallet or a wire spool and see junk or firewood. Matt Lebel studies the grain and the texture and sees beauty and possibility. If you visit his workshop he will share with you not just what type of wood you are looking at but also the story behind where it came from and what it might become. That’s the passion.

Back Burner Designs can be found online at www.backburnerdesigns.com.