

Behind the name

Charles Mak invited a group of accomplished woodworkers to share why and how they name their finished pieces



In fine woodworking, details are important. For some craftspeople, fine details include finding an alluring or meaningful name for their finished work – and a rose by any other name would not smell as sweet. Naming one's work is an incredibly personal thing, as this article will go on to show. Learning how a certain piece got its name not only gives us an insight into the mind of the craftsman, but also makes us feel an affinity with the piece. So, largely through personal connections, I collected naming practices from a group of woodworkers and had the intriguing responses from 14 of them analysed – see sidebars. Naming a well-crafted piece can be an arduous task – but perhaps less so if you draw on some of the insights this group of accomplished woodworkers has shared with us.

ABOVE: Norm Sartorius' 'Partial Eclipse' reflects the dramatic contrast between heartwood and sapwood in the piece

Why woodworkers name their work

Each survey participant was asked to describe their reasons for naming their work and to rank the importance on a scale of 1 to 4 from the following criteria:

- To give an artistic description 7
- Promote the sale of the work 5
- Submit work for exhibition/contest 3
- To create an identification record 6
- Provide a connection with the piece 12

The results showed that most of them considered connecting with the finished piece an important, or the most important, reason to name their work, followed by providing an artistic description and having a record of their work. Naming for the purposes of sales or exhibition/publishing was the least frequently given reason.

Naming can take place before, during or after the creation of a piece. American furniture maker Dean Pulver sometimes

"starts with a title to direct the development of the piece". American spoon sculptor Norm Sartorius, on the other hand, never names a piece before it is created: "I patiently wait for the name to come to me." Betty Scarpino, Editor of *American Woodturner*, adopts yet another approach: "The title of a piece comes to me when I'm working on it. It's very much about my connection with the making."



PHOTOGRAPH BY DEAN PULVER
The creation of this piece – 'Evolution' by Dean Pulver – was guided by its title

► How woodworkers find a name



PHOTOGRAPH BY GRAHAM IKIN

Graham Ikin named this chest of drawers 'Alexis' after Alexis Carrington in Dallas who was famed for her shoulder pads



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROB BROWN

Rob Brown named this piece 'Chrysanthemum Coffee Table' because its shape resembles that of a chrysanthemum flower

Appearance	9
Inspiration	7
Client/family/friend	5
Others	5

Appearance/design

According to the survey results, the most common approach is to name a piece after its design or physical appearance, its theme or its character. British furniture designer-maker Graham Ikin wrote: "Usually it is the physical shape of the piece or an element of it that suggests a name," an example of which is his chest of drawers titled 'Alexis'.

Canadian woodworker and editor Rob Brown "usually includes the material or main design feature in the title" as was the case for his 'Chrysanthemum Coffee Table', while award-winning American furniture maker Seth Rolland likes to search

for an image or a word "that fits and sounds nice." His 'Gazelle Hall Table', for example, features legs that mirror that animal's characteristically slender neck and annulate horns.

American automata artist Dug North believes "the title is a means for setting the context of the scene," and thus named his magical levitation sculpture 'Machini the Marvel'. Lastly, Canadian furniture designer-maker Michael Holton, who lives in my city – Calgary – gave the title 'Tilted' to his bench, referring to its tilted leg.

Inspiration

Design inspiration can be naming inspiration, too. Timothy Hawkins, an award-winning British designer-artist – interviewed in *F&C* 198 – named a wine cabinet 'Wye Bridge',

Naming methods

I posed an open-ended question regarding naming methods: How do you usually develop the name or title for your work? I have broadly interpreted and grouped the responses into four categories



PHOTOGRAPH BY BETTY SCARPINO

Betty Scarpino named this piece 'Night Wind' to capture the night-time feeling of the memories it evoked while she worked on it; memories of "clouds rushing past a bright moon, treetops lit by moonlight and the romance of the wind" she once experienced at Emma Lake in Canada



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVEN KENARD

Some of Steven Kenard's creations, like this 'Lost Orchard' piece, are inspired by photographs he takes



PHOTOGRAPH BY JESPER LINDH

The cycling skeletons of José Guadalupe Posada's print inspired Matt Smith to name his three-dimensional response 'Boneshakers'. Watch the mechanical performance of this automaton at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uug1_QrxRQ

Timothy Hawkins designed this piece – 'Oak Portal' – "in contemplation of mankind's progress through life"



PHOTOGRAPH BY TIMOTHY HAWKINS

photograph. "This beautiful orchard that I loved to photograph was cut down and the naming 'Lost ...' reflects my feeling of loss...", he explained.

Suggestions from client/family/friend

Using a title related to, named after, or suggested by a client, a family member or a friend proved popular to one-third of the respondents, including Wanda Sowry, another British automata maker who uses "a direct description linking to a friend." When Seth Rolland finished an elegant chair his sister-in-law provided the name – 'Trimerous Chair'. My daughter is also a reliable source of suggestions and names for one-of-a-kind pieces that I build.

Other naming methods

Two respondents, including



PHOTOGRAPH BY SETH ROLLAND

Seth Rolland's 'Trimerous Chair' was neatly named, thanks to a suggestion he received from his sister-in-law

Canadian sculpture and furniture maker Chris Wong, quoted 'word association' or 'play on words' as a naming technique. Wood or grain characteristics can also offer naming ideas, as they did for Norm Sartorius's 'Partial Eclipse' – the main image used on page 39 – which reflects the dramatic contrast between heartwood and sapwood in the piece.

Timothy Hawkins shared another naming idea of his: "I entitle the piece to lead the observer into the story and the way in which I've interpreted it to create a functional item." His 'Oak Portal' wardrobe was named in this way. Lastly, the unusual practice of naming a piece after a place came from American woodworker Scott Friedman – featured in *F&C* 189 as 'the Colorado Craftsman'. His 'San Juan Dining Table' was created after a trip to Puerto Rico. Few woodworkers can find an excuse to travel as often as he does! *F&C*



Scott Friedman's 'San Juan Dining Table' was "inspired by the interplay between the organic and geometric qualities of the castillos and fortress walls of Old San Juan"

PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT FRIEDMAN