



*Edward with 'Orbis' drinks cabinet. Walnut, quarter sawn oak, scorched oak and brass detailing.
Below: Edward in workshop in Bosham.
Pictures: Ed Bryan*

Bespoke creations

CHARLOTTE HARDING talks to an award-winning furniture designer and maker in Bosham.



It is not very often that you hear someone say they like 'anything with a challenge'.

But for British furniture designer and cabinet maker Edward Johnson he relishes pushing himself creatively.

"I like designing pieces that are going to push me as a maker," he adds.

Edward's love of art and design started when he was nine years old when he attended Great Ballard school.

"I recently bumped into the man that inspired my creativity, my art teacher Adrian Thomas," recalls Edward.

"Inspired by his enthusiasm and teaching ability I continued to stumble through school spending most of my time either on the rugby pitch or in the design technology department.

"Unfortunately when I went to university I had to choose between the two, and although I chose design there is always a big part of me that misses playing professional rugby, I use this to drive me to succeed as a designer and craftsman.



Ligamentum I – Coffee Table. Walnut and glass.

"I captained Sussex at County level, and got into South East England division whilst at school. Then at Uni I played semi-pro for Reading with the view to progressing to London Irish but I just couldn't afford the time to dedicate to it.

"My last game was for Worthing, around the time I went self-employed, I broke my cheek bone in five places and decided again I couldn't afford the time to train five days a week and now also the risk of being off work if injured."

It was while at university that Edward first picked up a chisel and plane both of which were his grandads.

"Although I remember the plane being useless," he explains.

"I turned some new handles for the chisels and still use them as my main set. Old Sheffield steel is brilliant."

At university he was on exchange in Sweden which he says was 'extremely influential' and pushed him to think outside the box and stretched him and the boundaries of his materials.

Edward designs and makes innovative furniture using wood which is primarily sourced from English Woodlands near Midhurst.

"I like to personally select the timber as it is one of the overriding features of the finished piece," he says.

The starting point for his inspiration is the client's brief - what they like, what fits in their house and what works with their character.

"Outside of this brief it comes from anything and everything from man-made to natural forms," he smiles.

"Ultimately though it's the wood - it can do far more than most of us know and I let this lead my work."

Most of Edward's work is commission based.

Commissions take on average, a month or two to finalise the designs during which time he will book it into the workshop schedule which varies depending on how busy he is.

Typically, he can start within three months from the initial contact.

"The cabinet making time can take anywhere from two weeks to five months, depending on the stature of the project - it takes patience and an indulgence in my craft," he reveals.

"The most interesting and fulfilling commissions are the ones where I can apply my skills and experience to the project and where the brief is not excessively restrictive."

Edward says he understands the apprehension people have when commissioning a piece, admitting he would feel the same.

"It is important that I gain their trust and build a strong relationship," he adds.

"I've been commissioned to make all sorts of projects from a 'hobbit style' archway, confidential superyachts and a Swan Lake inspired dining table."

In 2014 Edward relocated from Brighton to Bosham and has since established one of the leading workshops in UK.

He currently has three full-time members of staff and an apprentice from Chichester college.

"Once young Tom finishes college in June



Murano sideboard. Ash, olive ash, fumed oak and brown oak.



Ripples chest of drawers. Ash, walnut and cedar.

there will be four of us at the bench including myself," he explains.

"We will work together on a maximum of three projects at any one time."

When it comes to his favourite piece Edward says rather than singling out one item he would narrow it down to three of his ranges - Ripples, Free-form and the newly formed Murano.

He describes his work as fluid, clean, tactile and technically challenging but he says it has taken quite a body of work for him to pick up what his style actually is.

"It is not something I purposefully set out to establish," Edward explains.

"The fluid and tactile aesthetic style varies from project to project and will continue to branch in different directions because it is very much founded in the path of exploring new processes and techniques.

"The designs are led by a core desire to challenge and innovate in wood, developed alongside the notion of form and function as equals."

Each of Edward's pieces have his maker's mark on something he says is very important and goes hand in hand with type of work he does.

"And the level of craftsmanship that I aim for," he says.

"I'm proud to put my name on the pieces and mark it as an Edward Johnson original."

To view more of Edward's work visit www.ejbespokefurniture.co.uk