

DESIGN

Ron Yeager:

Mid-Century Modern master

BY STACIA FRIEDMAN



In Ron Yeager's Herman Street studio in Germantown, Mid-Century Modern is alive and well.

For nearly two decades, Yeager has custom designed furniture for homeowners, businesses, architects and design firms with a range that covers just about everything that can be hand-crafted from wood.

"I have been doing historic doors, built-in cabinetry, heirloom furniture, custom carpentry and stairs since 2002," said Yeager who lives in Roxborough.

As trends change over the years, Yeager changes with them.

"To be good at your craft, you have to change with the times," he said. "Right now, Mid-Century Modern is trending."

Yeager said his personal taste run more along the lines of George Nakashima, the father of the American Craft movement.

"I'm completely comfortable making any style," he said. That includes working with clients who have environmental concerns.





OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: Ron Yeager at his Germantown, Philadelphia studio. OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: One of Yeager's pieces of fine craftsmanship. TOP: "I make pieces for myself. If someone wants it, I'll sell it," Ron Yeager said of his furniture. (Photos by Fesica Monroe)

"We can incorporate sustainable and safe materials into any project or create a fully green cabinet installation," Yeager said. "The lumber we select comes from local sawmills and is harvested sustainably or FSC certified. Hardwood plywood is now available with formaldehyde-free glues preventing harmful chemical gasses in your home. We do not use flake or particleboard in any of our cabinetry. We use finishes made from natural ingredients and selected safe non-gassing finishes. Keeping toxic materials out of your home is important."

Growing up in Royersford, Yeager came to Philly to attend Temple University.

"I always wanted to make furniture and did carpentry in my spare time, but in college, I worked in the food service industry in restaurants and catering," he said.

For a while, that became Yeager's career trajectory.

"I was running a big catering operation at the Navy Yard for the Frog Commissary in 2003 when I decided to take a gamble and go full time into woodworking," he said.

Good thing he did. Yeager's craftsmanship can be seen all over the City, including distinctive doors on Delancey Street.

"We design and fabricate both modern and historic doors to your specifications," he said. "Our custom doors start with carefully selected hardwoods oriented for good color and grain matching as well as stability throughout seasonal changes. That also goes for porches,

benches, fences, gates, and decks that need to endure the harshest conditions Mother Nature can deliver.

"Sometimes a single piece of wood inspires a design and the rest of the piece develops around it. Black walnut and white oak are popular now."

Unlike furniture that ends up in yard sales, Yeager's pieces are timeless collectors' items. "My furniture is built using classic techniques and results in an heirloom furniture piece that will be handed down for generations to come."

Philadelphia attorney Mark Gallant hired Yeager after seeing some church doors he had designed.

"I first had Ron make a large mahogany door with a glass panel for my Fairmount home. His craftsmanship and sense of design are superb," said Gallant. "I also had Ron replace my two inner foyer doors in mahogany and he built a white oak, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry and drawers designed by architect Gabrielle Canno who was greatly impressed. It elicits high compliments from everyone who visits. Ron is a true old world craftsman in modern times."

Penny Ordway, founder of Eviamo, a green spa on South Street, has commissioned Yeager for 18 years to design and craft custom cabinets and countertop workspace.

"Ron also designed shelving, bookcases, display cases and saved the day in terms of my

ability to open on schedule," Ordway said. "He completely embraced the concept of using sustainable, green building materials and to this day proves that he has a creative solution for all the quirky problems I present to him. This year he produced a perfectly lovely LED lighted display case. Ron can turn something utilitarian into art!"

Yeager's clients also include former Eagles player Todd Herremans for whom he custom designed banquets at the Ritz Residences. From those banquets, the offensive lineman could take in a spectacular view of Billy Penn atop City Hall.

Some of Yeager's most elegant work is hidden from public view, such as five sets of handsome Gothic doors tucked inside the courtyard at Green Manor condos on 200 block of Johnson St. in Germantown. Or a pair of classic Adirondack chairs Yeager made for his home that fold up for storage.

"I would love to just make hand-crafted furniture but there is a lot of competition now with imported furniture that looks similar and is less expensive," said Yeager.

Fortunately, some clients appreciate Yeager's meticulous handcrafted work. Case in point: an elegant Cherry Tall Table Yeager originally made for his wife which was later commissioned by several clients.

"I make pieces for myself. If someone wants it, I'll sell it," he said.

For more visit yeagerwoodworking.com.