



MASTER OF THE SHOP

Woodworking has been a way of life for Eric Saperstein, 33, for more than 20 years. He says when most kids were out running around, he was in his father's workshop. Too small at age 10 to run a table saw, he instead used the band saw and sander while standing on a stool.

Today, Saperstein runs Artisans of the Valley in Pennington (www.artisansofthevalley.com), the shop that his father, Stanley, founded and continues to work in. They specialize in hand-carved, custom woodworking, including reproduction period furniture, original designs and antique restoration and conservation. He is the next link in a long line of master woodcarvers. His father served a seven-year apprenticeship with the last master craftsman of the well-known Grinnell family of woodworkers that dates back to 1614.

Saperstein chose to learn the trade on the job over a longer period of time. "You have to hit the ground and make a living," he says. He also earned a degree from Rider University and works full-time in the computer industry as well.

Two-thirds of his business is restoration and conservation of antiques and collectibles, because, he explains, baby boomers are downsizing and passing on their furniture. The rest is commissioned work – his favorite – a delicate balance of form and function. Projects range from hand carved walking sticks and a Gandolf doorknocker for a Hobbit house to an intricately carved safari chest and Gothic dining room table.

He looks forward to the time when a signed Saperstein original is worth more than the actual trade value. "When you're doing a trade, you're doing an hourly rate. When you're doing art work, you're selling the piece for whatever the market will demand."

While he enjoys the artistic outlet of woodcarving, Saperstein also has a strong practical streak and gets tremendous satisfaction from building quality pieces that people can use. "His furniture will last 400 or 500 years," says his father. "I'm not exaggerating, that's how well he builds it."

Printed October 2007
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North Jersey Media Group

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