



Remain Flexible and Don't Procrastinate

Robert Gasperetti Furniture Makers has been in business for 41 years. Found on Mount Tabor just inside the Green Mountain National Forest, Bob makes custom, handcrafted furniture using mainly Vermont hardwoods. Bob makes a wide variety of furniture for every setting from beds and nightstands to dining room tables and chairs to desks for an office and more. He also makes smaller accessory items such as tissue box covers, cutting boards, and waste baskets. Most of his work is done in the Shaker and Arts & Crafts styles although some of his work is inspired by Modern studio furniture craftsmen. Bob began making furniture in the late 1960s. He moved to Vermont and began working as a woodworking teacher at Burr & Burton Academy in Manchester, VT. Bob made furniture to supplement his teaching salary, and after seeing a desire and market for his work Bob decided to leave teaching and start his own woodwork business. Bob sells his work through his website, customers visiting his showroom, and in a craft gallery in Manchester Center called Epoch. Epoch includes work from 13 other artisans some of which include stitchwork, metalwork, and jewelry.

The Coronavirus pandemic has greatly slowed down Bob's business as he said the business is "dog paddling" right now. Bob's two employees left for non-COVID related reasons in March so currently he is running the business on his own, which is not a big change for him. Bob said his website is too old and that hindered more work from coming in during the initial months of the pandemic. While he may be "hunkered down" at the moment he is actively prepping his business for when markets turn upward again. He has applied for grants to aid his business and has received one that will update his website through Restart VT. He is also doing some maintenance projects on his workshop and planning for the future. For the work Bob is doing now, he has not experienced many supply chain issues, although he said shipping and deliveries have been slower and has had issues.

Through the pandemic experiences so far Bob has learned to not procrastinate. Updating the website was something he had been wanting to do for a while, but never set out to do it. The pandemic forced him to do it, but it would have helped his business to already have an updated website. He has learned to remain flexible. He talked about preparing his business for any situation saying "Don't believe something can't happen" and "Don't let your guard down." The

pandemic has also had him thinking about his future. Now in his mid-60s Bob has started to think about slowing down eventually and he is interested in hiring and training new woodworkers to continue to craft.

One of the unique aspects of Bob's business is his large inventory of interesting wood. Beneath his workshop is a basement full of all sorts of woods of mainly Vermont hardwoods. Bob has woods that lumber distributors do not regularly carry and is not afraid to use woods that may be rejected or seem unusable. The custom aspect of his business is also unique. Much of Bob's work is based on ideas that customers have. He gave the example of a customer seeing a table in the showroom and liking the design, but wanting it in a different color or type of wood. Bob is more than willing to customize his work to the customer's desire. Another strength of the business is the finishing process that Bob practices is specific and really makes his work stand out.

Bob joined the VWWC around 20 years ago (back when it was referred to as the Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association) and served on the board for a long time. He is also a member of the Guild of Vermont Furniture Makers. Bob said he joined for the networking that the VWWC offers through events like its shop visits, and also because of the unity it brings to Vermont woodworkers. He said that there are "strength in numbers." The more businesses that are in the council, the more clout they have in affairs that concern them. He feels the VWWC works "for the good of the industry." Bob is always willing to help other VWWC members. He has a great deal of experience in his work in the VWWC and GVFM, and as a former teacher he is willing to teach what he knows. As he said, "Once a teacher always a teacher." With this teacher's mindset he hopes to help his fellow woodworkers and the industry in general.