

Guy Martin

Whole Life Cost

A Devon Guild of Craftsmen Touring Exhibition

Making this exhibition presented an opportunity to tell a story. I have tried to lay bare some important working practices and reveal the values that influence my work, through drawing, quotes and texts, the work itself and four collaborative pieces, two of which are very new and still possess an experimental edge.

I need to be authentic... to take risks... to break the mould when necessary.

I need to look forward to new ground in order to continue my journey and growth.

I never cease to be surprised by daring.

I find considerable weight in T S Eliot's poem, *Little Gidding*...

*"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."*

Guy Martin
January 2006



The Devon Guild is an educational charity which supports established and emerging makers who are based in the South West providing professional development, exhibition and marketing opportunities. Our mission is to educate and develop further understanding of contemporary crafts. www.crafts.org.uk



The Resource



“The relationship we have with trees is very complex and goes far beyond our dependence upon them for the air we breathe. Trees tend to be the largest and oldest living things that share the earth we walk upon, and both our social development and creativity have been shaped by our ability to use the wood they continually grow.”

“We may even have endangered something more fundamental to our existence; to work with a natural material inevitably invites the realisation that we too are being shaped by nature.”

Annette Ratuszniak *In Praise of Trees*

¹ Harvesting ash thinnings, which ordinarily have no commercial value. The properties to be found in the ash tree are extraordinary. It can grow like weed in this country.

² The Lewsdon tree

Inspiration & Provenance

Living and working in rural Dorset underpins much of my working practice. The surrounding environs of the Somerset Levels (The Moors), provide the perfect conditions for willow to grow. The Somerset Levels once supported a unique culture and a thriving rural industry, however today willow crafts and vernacular traditions are considerably reduced.

¹ Somerset Levels – The Moors

² Cultivated willow

³ Chair by Clifton Monteith

⁴ Edwardian oil can

⁵ Korean tea bowl – 16th century

These last two ordinary objects, similar in nature – humble, utilitarian, unpretentious, and “in one sense, forgettable”⁽¹⁾, have become for me, a type of icon of provenance. Respectively, 100 and 500 years later, they act as intellectual tools and nourish my approach to designing and making useful objects.

⁽¹⁾ Olding, S. (2006) Guy Martin. In Guy Martin *Whole Life Cost* – Devon Guild Exhibition Catalogue (pp.4)



Furniture

Making furniture, using materials to hand, is very doable. It can be sculpture on a scale that is accessible to all of us.

The values of responsibility, service and truth help to inform my work. The idea of cooperating with a machine or a hand tool, as much as sourcing local renewable materials guide my choices.

The band saw, chain saw, arbortech, smoothing plane and carving gouge all leave their own special mark. Nature and the way trees grow possesses its own rich language. I respect and work with all these gifts.

When fixing wood together traditionally, many wonderful joints have been invented, all very specific to their task. I am far more interested in the ease with which wood can be drilled or grips a screw or nail or takes a through bolt. I prefer to play with these ideas, leaving them undisguised. They are quick and terrific ways of fixing. I am impatient.

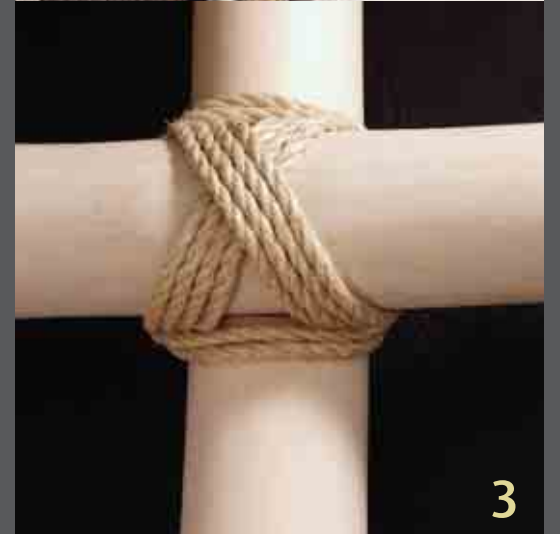
¹ Detail from 'Chop Sticks' band saw and arbortech marks

² Detail from 'Charmouth...' chainsaw texture and bolts

³ Detail of 'Cross' stripped tree sanded and lime waxed

⁴ Detail of 'Tula' backrest

⁵ Detail of 'Soetsu' leg



Buildings & Provenance

*I live and work in rural Dorset.
This sense of place informs my
practice. To make a building is such
fun, it brings out the boy in me.
To make a big structure is physically
demanding, with the need to climb
all over it. It is terribly exciting.*

Some common design criteria include: usage, natural light, insulation, entrance and orientation. These are always high on the priority list.

Renewable natural materials to hand, plus an empathy for each site, somehow connects me spiritually with each project and makes the job doubly rewarding.

¹ Timber frame, supporting integral floor and roof, creating a weatherproof space

² Constructing the straw bale wall infill

³ Two coats of lime render, inside and out

⁴ Finished building prior to painting

⁵ 'Truth window'. Internal wall niche, its rear surface left without render to prove authenticity



Working Together

- Cross-pollination
- Mutual process of discovery
- Open dialogue

Collaboration and cooperation belong together. Charles Eames once said; “Designers need to work willingly within the constraints.” Commitment and willingness are key ingredients to successful partnerships.

I have a hunger to explore new ideas. There is no better way than to work with other people, especially those working in other materials and disciplines.

‘Listening’ to the possibilities seems closer than having an empathy, although the latter may form over time. The condition of discord is a powerful resource in creative partnerships. Recognising the similarities, but being enriched by the differences is the exciting bit.

¹ Yuli Sömme – artist/creative felt maker

² Debby Mason – artist/diver and print maker

³ Jane Price – artist/explorer in paper and other natural media

⁴ Buffy Forgham – artist/inventor currently using recycled tin cans and rubber inner tubes

