



Photo Credit: Josh Marshall

Sweetening the Deal

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Whether it's in his workshop or in the sugar house, David Lamb keeps his focus on the process. As a world-renown furniture maker, David has made his mark as an artist, crafting his visions into reality. As a farmer, David is tapping into a tradition of sugaring that brings an extra smile to his clients and friends alike. Along with his wife Janet, David balances the lives of an artist and a farmer, and those two professions may not be as different as you think.

The similarities between an artist and a farmer don't always seem so obvious. Upon closer inspection, however, the two professions

have more in common than you might think. It's easier to spot when you find someone like David Lamb, who embodies the spirit of both craftsman and agriculturalist. A past New Hampshire Artist Laureate, for his world-renown furniture making, and current sugarmaker, David's story illustrates how those who make art and those who make food, fiber & fuel, are cut from the same cloth.

David's mother and step-father moved to Shaker Village in Canterbury, NH, in 1972 right down the road from the workshop of European furniture master, Alejandro de la Cruz. David had a penchant for drawing and making things which preceded his journey into furniture making. He knew of a distant family member who made a living making furniture and, even at 14, felt a connection to the history of such an endeavor.



David takes a break from observing and measuring boiling sap to feed the fire in his family's sugar house in Canterbury. A distinct design in the sugar house is the wooden hood that hangs about the evaporator. (Photo Credit: David Lamb)



Maybe more so than the craft, it was the lifestyle that sealed the deal for David. His mentor, de la Cruz, lived in a modest house a stone's throw from his workshop, the very house and workshop where David and his wife Janet reside today. "You look out, it's a beautiful environment, you don't have to commute." David said. "You are in your own castle and being paid to create your ideas."

Sound familiar? Anyone with a background in agriculture understands how their profession and their way of life are inseparable. Neither farmers nor artists are getting rich off of their labor, but they are following a passion and building a life their own way. "Getting paid to create your ideas is a wonderful feeling." David explained. "You don't do it for the money, you do it for the love of it. And if you can make a living at it – holy cow!"

And just like in agriculture, an apprentice needs time to hone their skills. David studied under de la Cruz for three years before moving on to Boston University to study everything from business and art history to mechanical drawing and more. The academic learnings have come in handy for sure, but without the time and patience of a teacher like de la Cruz, there is a lot that would have been left on the table. "It's that hands-on, master-teacher interaction," that David credits for his foundations.

David's furniture comes in many shapes and sizes but is mostly based off traditions and trends of 18th-century Europe. Whatever the monied aristocracy of London and Paris were purchasing for high-end furniture in that time, those styles would be translated across the Atlantic and become something for future furniture makers to replicate. David prides himself in combining those classic inspirations with his own unique voice to create signature pieces that are truly his own.

At the heart of furniture making, David explained, is a focus on the process

and a connection to the material. "This work in the shop is totally reliant on the forest. Lumber is my primary material." Through that connection, David has been drawn to the woods to take part in another process: sugar-making. "It just seems to go hand-in-hand," he noted. "I work in maple, so that's one end of it. The sugar-making part is about being out in the woods, utilizing the tree as a living organism."

On his mother's side, David had a faint familial connection to sugar-making but had never attempted it

himself until 1995. "I'd seen it and smelled it," he recalled. "The visual, too, was so appealing." Now David and Janet, along with their daughter Amy, look forward to spending the early months of each year in the woods and in the sugar house. Janet is fully involved with both businesses, in the shop helping with many aspects of the furniture making and with Lamb's Maple Syrup tapping, boiling, and canning.

"I love the first big run." David said. "You get everything set up and the tubing tight. It's 45 degrees and you can almost hear it begin to run." David admitted that he takes a new video each year of that first run, attempting to capture a moment of joy that he waits for all year. Like a vegetable farmer getting out to harrow their first field or a cow returning to pasture in the spring, there's nothing quite like the feeling of renewal each new season brings.

"I think the goal of craftsmanship is the process," he explained. "Whether it's a well-turned leg or sap that's been boiled really fast that has the best flavor, right density and color, there are a lot of parallels." David's pursuit of sugaring hasn't surpassed his reputation as a furniture maker just yet, but he has found a way to bring both passions together. When he delivers a piece of furniture to a client, he brings along a jug of maple syrup as a 'thank-you' and something to sweeten the deal. It's his way of showing appreciation to those who have recognized his talents and commissioned his work.

As an artist, David has a keen understanding that his livelihood is built upon others acknowledging his talents and purchasing his work. As a farmer, he understands the happiness a locally produced, quality product can bring to a consumer. It's all part of the balance that artists and farmers share, appreciating the solitude of your work as it comes and reveling in the joy of customers, friends, and family and the lifestyle you chose to live.



Above: David Lamb's furniture speaks for itself. With inspirations from 18th-century styles combined with his own vision and voice, pieces like New Hampshire Secretary (above), which currently resides at the Currier Museum of Art and is made primarily from the NH state tree, white birch. (Photo Courtesy: David Lamb)