

The New Bodger

In the depths of Dorset a born-again green woodworker is attempting to change the face of woodland crafts



Guy Mallinson used to be a wood engineer, one of those talented woodworkers trained at Parnham to produce fine furniture. Then, after years of running busy workshops full of craftsmen and dust, and battling to make a living, he saw the light. He realised that it's much more fun cleaving wood while it's still wet and green, using froes, axes, drawknives, gouges and spokeshaves to shape the wood into bowls and chairs, quietly and usually outdoors, ideally in the woods themselves.

Guy moved away from his workshops in London to Dorset and now runs green woodworking courses near Beaminster. He has pole lathes and shaving horses, and shows people how to carve a bowl from a lump of damp ash in two days using gouges and spokeshaves. But he still has clients for whom he makes furniture, and one of them recently asked for a kitchen bar stool. Guy wondered how 'greenly' he could make it, and set about producing prototypes of what has become his Wishbone Stool.

Made entirely from cleaved ash, following the grain, and shaped with the drawknives and little spokeshaves he sells (see p30), the stool balances the precision of fine furniture and the rustic quality normally associated with green woodworking. "That is the difficult part," he says. "I made a lot of legs to find the right balance. Too wobbly and it looks rustic. Too precise and it looks manufactured."

The eponymous wishbone refers to the pair of rungs that are joined with a pin where they touch, at the centre. This creates a much stronger triangulated frame than would be achieved with independent rungs. The wood is finished with soap, and has to be redone from time to time, so the leather seat has to be removeable, hence the straps underneath. The rungs have flats along the top edges, to be more tactile and to encourage people to "be active".

The Wishbone Stool is doing the rounds of shows this year. To find out more visit mallinson.co.uk.



Cleaver Guy Mallinson (above) is changing the face of green woodworking, in part by attempting to produce contemporary furniture using the traditional techniques of the pole lathe and shaving horse. Working under the canopy of a parachute, beside a winding stream, he produces furniture close to nature. He also tries only to use natural materials, including the oak-tanned leather for the seat, which is stuffed with a horse-hair cushion, and is removeable so that the Wishbone Stool can be refinished with soap from time to time

