



## SUPERSIZE ME

DALLAS, TEXAS-BASED **DOC WRIGHT** CREATES MASSIVE, LIVE EDGE PIECES OF FURNITURE THAN SHOW OFF THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE WOOD. *F&C* MEETS HIM

Doc Wright started woodworking on December 6, 2016, and quit his job in the oil industry three months later. He has never looked back. 'This woke up something inside me that I never knew I had,' he tells *F&C*.

Doc specialises in massive live edge pieces sold to high-end residential, corporate and hospitality clients, and his business, The Wright Edge, is based in Dallas, Texas. He had no background in woodworking, going to college in Detroit on a wrestling scholarship but returning home to Texas after he was injured and lost the scholarship. 'I liked subjects where it wasn't about my opinion, so I naturally drifted towards the sciences where it was all about data, and got a degree in geology and chemistry,' he says. He left college and started working in corporate America in 2008, but struggled with the stress and politics in that world. Doc started his furniture business in February 2017 – four years to the day before *F&C* caught up with him during one of the worst freezes Texas has seen, when temperatures dropped to -17°C, water pipes were frozen and intermittent electricity blackouts had brought work in his workshop to a halt.

He initially got into woodworking to relieve stress, and because a friend asked him to build him a bench. 'Work was too much to handle sometimes,' he says. 'I wanted to have a hobby outside of going to the gym, and when my friend asked me to do this it gave me something to do in the garage.' Just a few months later, Doc was asked to bid on a large job – 'and to my disbelief I got it,' he says. He decided that if he wanted to take a chance, leave behind the security of his well-paid job and benefits, now was the time – he was young, unmarried and facing an unexpected opportunity. He took the plunge and The Wright Edge was born.

Doc is 100% self-taught, and found that because of the sheer scale of the projects he is working on, even YouTube didn't offer much in the way of instructional videos, and nor did he find any books on the subject. 'I learned by making mistakes,' he says. 'I grew up very hands on doing construction, so I always understood that whatever you are trying to do there is a tool out there for it. When I wanted to try different things in woodworking I needed to get a router, and then I needed chisels, and it progressed very quickly from there.'

When he took on his first project, an 8ft long red oak bench for

a friend, he had never used a sander or tried to finish anything. 'It was your most basic, garage-type build,' he recalls. 'That went well and he asked me to make him a coffee table. Then I made a second coffee table that I threw into the burn pile, nobody has ever seen it.' He worked on a few smaller projects before a couple in Dallas asked him to build them an 8ft long dining table. He posted it on social media and a week later was approached by an interior designer who first asked him for a 14 x 5ft table, then asked him to bid for a contract to make five of them. 'I went from zero to 150 pretty much overnight,' he says.

Before bidding for the project Doc had checked with Andy Hodd, who operates a sawmill and had provided him with wood for his previous projects, if he could supply the wood and do the milling. Now Doc has a workshop based on Andy's property, and Andy helps him out with the milling and heavy lifting. 'It's been just me and him for the last four years until October, when I brought on my first full office employee who handles business development,' says Doc. 'Andy's a big old redneck and I'm short and thick so we are good at lifting heavy stuff.'

For pieces that are too big for them to lift, and so that he can work on his own, Doc imported a giant piece of machinery from Australia called a Wood Wizz. 'It has a crane arm attachment so I can flip over a 25ft slab by myself, no problem,' he says.

### LET THE WOOD DO THE TALKING

He was attracted to live edge pieces straight away. 'I liked the size and the natural beauty of it,' he says. 'I think a lot of woodwork is overdone to the point where it doesn't look natural, where it takes away from the wood. I want to highlight the wood and let the wood do the talking for me. I started seeing diverse species and how every tree is different, and I loved it so much.' But he doesn't have a favourite wood to work with. 'Honestly, I like working with woods that yield me the highest quality possible build with the highest margin of profit,' he says. He imports his wood mainly from Costa Rica, but also from Panama and Thailand. 'I import for a reason,' Doc explains. 'Domestic woods here in the US are extremely expensive, especially when you are building the size of stuff we build. I can get bigger, prettier stuff that is of higher quality for a fraction of the price abroad. We seem to just keep going bigger and bigger, and it is hard to find domestic pieces of wood 10-12ft in length.'



Apart from the Wood Wizz Doc uses almost exclusively hand tools. 'We don't need a lot of typical woodworking machinery like jointers, massive bandsaws or belt sanders. Our stuff is too big and it would cost too much money and take up too much space to actually use. Right now we are making a 39ft double waterfall edge table. There are three pieces of wood and it is huge. That whole table is going to be made with the Wood Wizz, a tracksaw, a domino jointer and a router, and that's it.' He uses mainly Festool tools and says he has almost everything by that brand – including some things that aren't available in the US, which he has had to buy from abroad. Finishes depend on the wood and on the client. He particularly likes a tung oil and wax finishing product from Vietnam-based Lucero, especially for residential builds. 'It takes more maintenance but if it gets damaged it can be fixed on site – you can do it,' he says.

The Wright Edge works 100% on commission, and Doc says he prefers working with residential clients to jumping through the hoops needed to work with major corporates and hospitality clients employing interior designers. He has produced some non-commissioned pieces which he recently put on display in a new showroom in Dallas's Design District, but says: 'We have yet to figure out the magic formula of how to make stuff and sell it – all our clients are the type of people who say: "That is cool, but I want it custom made for me".' There are some clients who will simply tell Doc the size of the piece they want and then give him free rein. 'Andy and I have a million ideas for stuff we want to make – it just comes down to finding the right client who sees what we see,' he explains.

From a relaxing hobby, woodworking has become Doc's whole life. 'I work seven days a week, 24-seven,' he says. 'I handle the business, I do all the woodworking, I'm the one dealing with

clients, doing 3D design work, dealing with designers and I also have to be in the shop making stuff. It's hard to do that.' But when he does take a very rare day off, he will still turn to woodworking for fun. 'Last week I finally took a full day off, and messed around with parts of a couple of guitars I'm going to make for friends. It was pretty fun to work with something that I could move around myself,' he says.

#### SPECIAL DELIVERY

One of the key challenges when making such massive pieces is the delivery and installation, which the small operation delegates to a third-party moving company. 'We can't handle that size,' Doc says. 'The second a piece is done we don't touch it again. If anything happens to that piece from ship to installation, the clients are not liable and nor are we, and that is built into all my budgets.'

A design for the Hard Rock Café in Miami highlighted some of the issues involved. Doc recalls: 'We did a table for their residential suite. They wanted it to be 14ft long with a giant piece of glass on the top. I said, that's easy, but how are you going to get it in there? They came back and asked, can the table come in two pieces? I said, yes, but what about the glass? We had to reduce size of the table by 4 ft to get it in the service elevator. Because of that job I learned how to write my contract. We get paid when we are done, not when the piece is installed, because we can't account for construction delays.'

But his most challenging job ever has been a massive commission for the Delta Hotel in Allen, Texas. 'To this day it is our measure for stress,' he says. The project included a 1,800ft decorative wall art piece, three giant barn doors and a hostess stand that weighed about 2,000lb. 'It was quite an undertaking



for a two-man operation,' says Doc. 'It was just maddening, because from the very first meeting the designers had no idea how to construct this. Luckily for me one of the owners of hotel is an engineer. We went through it with him, but we still can't believe we pulled that job off.' He adds: 'Because of that job we now can foresee issues that even the designers or architects won't see.'

One of his favourite builds has been an 8ft round table he made from a single 19ft slab of monkey pod. 'It is so unique and so different. If you look back on Instagram, you wouldn't believe the number of woodworkers who came out and told me you can't join straight grain and end grain, that is going to come out. I'm a scientist, I'm pretty knowledgeable about structural engineering, and that table now is almost two years old and it still looks just as good as the day we installed it.'

With many corporate clients on his book, Doc has faced serious challenges because of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns, and last year was his worst year of business. In March four corporate clients cancelled big contracts, leaving the company with little business until the third quarter, when things started picking up again, ahead of a 'really decent' fourth quarter. 'We are still navigating how to handle some of this,' says Doc. Presentations are a real challenge, with video conferencing making nothing like the same sort of impact, especially given the nature of his pieces. 'We are trying to evolve and work out how we can do this the best way. It is very interesting and difficult to figure out.' Going forward he would love to work more with residential clients. 'I like to figure out what they want and make it better, with no red tape and restrictions,' he says. 'The corporate side is so rigid you don't get a lot of that creativity.'

#### TIPS FROM THE TOP

Doc's advice to woodworkers who want to try something bigger is to be bold. 'There is a piece of advice I read when I first started out, and it is how I handle social media and critics to this day: the saying is, you will never be criticised by somebody who is doing more than you. So if you are wanting to try your hand at something bigger or you are nervous about it, just do it. You are not going to please everybody, you are going to learn in the process, but you have to be the one to believe in yourself – so just do it.'

Doc says he gets far more questions about the business side of his work than about the actual woodworking, and he has the following tips for people like him, who want to turn a hobby into a full-time occupation. 'My biggest piece of advice is to take time to go on Etsy and Instagram and see what everybody else is making. There are hundreds of thousands of guys all making the same stuff. What can you do and what can you make that is different, that will separate you from the crowd?'

'The next thing is do your absolute best to become a subject matter expert. Whether it is the chemical processes you use or the finishes, become an expert on how to sell your product. You can be the best woodworker in the world, but if you are not likeable and you can't sell your stuff, it doesn't matter. You can't train somebody to be likeable. If you are really serious I would find a mentor. You are going to have to pay them, but if you can find somebody to help with the initial structure of your business, pricing, sourcing materials and so on, you will save yourself years of banging your head against a wall like I did.'

Looking back over what helped him to make the leap from a secure job to a dream business of his own, Doc goes right back to his earliest training – wrestling. 'Sports is what moulded me and my mindset to a tee growing up,' he says. 'Outside my parents teaching me discipline, sports is where I learned true adversity: when things are not going right and you have to go out there and do your thing. It's a battle.' He adds: 'I don't have the ability to do something half-assed – it's either 100% or nothing.'

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