

Women Studio Furniture Makers: A Longitudinal Study

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I would like to thank the nine amazing studio furniture makers who volunteered their time in 2005 and again in 2020 to participate in this study. They generously shared their experiences with me and I am in awe of their creativity, skill, and accomplishments.

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Dedication

This thesis project is dedicated to my husband, Robert, and my daughter, LiLi, for all of their help and support.

Abstract

This research is a longitudinal study involving nine experienced women studio furniture makers interviewed in 2005 and again in 2020. The study explores the progress of their careers over the course of 15 years. Are they still making and selling furniture? If not, do they still think of themselves as furniture makers? This study addresses the rewards and sacrifices that these nine female furniture makers have made, not only in the past 15 years, but throughout the duration of their careers in the field. Also of interest in this research is whether more women are making furniture in the present day than in 2005, and whether they are entering the field with realistic expectations.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

This research is a longitudinal study involving nine women studio furniture makers interviewed in 2005 and again in 2020. These women were all chosen in 2005 because of their membership in The Furniture Society, and /or their exhibitions and reputations.

The study explores the progress of their careers over the course of 15 years. Are they still making and selling furniture? If not, do they still think of themselves as furniture makers? This study addresses the rewards and sacrifices that these nine female furniture makers have made, not only in the past 15 years, but throughout the duration of their careers in the field. Also of interest in this research is whether more women are making furniture in the present day than in 2005. If not, what can be done going forward to encourage more women in this field?

This research includes interviews with seven women who are “first generation” women furniture makers and three women who are “second generation” women furniture makers. From a demographic perspective, we can define “first generation” women furniture makers as Baby Boomers and the “second generation” women furniture makers as members of the Gen-X. Boomers were born between 1946 and 1965 and GenXer’s were born between 1966 and 1980. Those born after 1980 are often referred to as Generation Y or the Millennials (Howe & Straus, 2000). This research focuses on Baby Boomers and Gen-X. Future research could include younger students entering the field which would provide more information.

Demographic numbers do not account for how many women studio furniture makers there currently are or what they are doing, or what opportunities and obstacles they have encountered over time. This research question also discusses the realistic expectations for women makers of studio furniture: is it a viable way to make a living, and if not, what can be done to increase their chances of success?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Studio Furniture

“Wouldn’t it be great if, after introducing yourself as a studio furniture maker, you didn’t need to launch into a detailed explanation of what that meant?” (Gladwell, 2003, p.1).

Although each individual studio furniture maker may have their own personal definition of the term “studio furniture,” there are common themes throughout what has been written on the subject. According to the editors of *Furniture Studio – The Heart of Functional Arts*, studio furniture is succinctly defined as furniture that not only serves a function but also adds meaning to the interior scene (Kelsey & Mastelli, 1999).

The editors go into detail with this explanation of the studio furniture maker. The term “studio” evokes this type of long-term exploratory learning, but it also suggests a high degree of visual literacy and a vigorous conceptual approach to design and construction. They found that often the men and women who choose to be studio furniture makers had some education in art or design and draw inspiration from a vast stock of images and ideas – traditional furniture or new industrial design, fine arts or popular culture, the familiarity of wood and joinery or the excitement of new materials

and techniques. Constant throughout the design and fabrication process is an intellectual rigor in which a maker fully invests him- or herself to realize an idea.

Edward S. Cooke Jr., who is considered the premier chronicler of the rise of women furniture makers, believes that the word “studio” also helps locate where this practice of furniture making takes place. Studio furniture makers use a variety of machinery and hand tools and often use assistants or specialists, but they tend to work in smaller spaces to maximize the effective work of the individual, and their level of production remains relatively low, occupying the middle and upper layers of the furniture market. The term “studio furniture” thus highlights the independent professionalism of the furniture makers and their custom production, which is characteristic of other aspects of today’s decentralized (yet networked) social and economic culture (Cooke, 2009).

Peter Korn, who founded one of the top woodworking schools in the country, defines studio furniture makers from the perspective of the teacher by saying that what all makers of studio furniture have in common “is that at our best, we are exploring the basic questions with which all art is concerned. What is it to be human and how should we live our lives? This level of engagement is what makes our work worthwhile” (Korn, 2002, p. 7).

From the economic side, Amy Forsyth, the first editor of *Furniture Matters*, adds “Professional studio furniture makers have chosen one of the most difficult means of making a living. We compete with industry and struggle against a lack of public understanding and appreciation of design and construction techniques. We build things that no one really needs, and we make things for the pleasure of making” (Forsyth, 2003,

p. 1). Many makers are supported by their teaching careers, working part time for a salary or by their spouses. There have been a number of articles in *Furniture Matters* about trying to make a living as a studio furniture maker. It is a concern shared equally by women and men in the field.

There are several common themes expressed by those who have written about the meaning of studio furniture. One theme is that studio furniture is custom and made in small numbers as opposed to being a mass-produced product. Another theme is that studio furniture has something personal expressed in terms of the makers' feelings at the moment about techniques to be employed, materials to be used, how the furniture will be used in a particular environment all of this being in sharp contrast to thousands of pieces of furniture coming off the assembly line.

For the purpose of this research, studio furniture is defined as custom furniture inspired with the maker/creator's personal expression toward meaning, material, and technique. Studio furniture is the personal expression of choices made by the maker in technique, material, and *raison d'être* or reason for being of the furniture created.

Studio Furniture as Art

Is studio furniture "fine art" or simply one of the "decorative arts?" The artistry of many studio makers places their work in the collection of museums, private collectors, and galleries. Other pieces are commissioned and used as actual furniture, and not just displayed.

Loy Martin, in his introduction to the book *Tradition in Contemporary Furniture* summarizes, "In short, I think that, more often than not, studio furniture finds ways to

communicate something about the actual work its makers do to create it” (Martin, 2001, p. 9).

The notion of what is and what is not art is a question that philosophers have been debating for thousands of years. Great minds over the centuries have delved into the definition of art and the value of the artist to society. In the newsletter *Furniture Matters* Christopher McNulty quips, “I would argue that since humankind has yet to agree on adequate definitions of art, history, or truth, there is no reason to expect that a definition of our furniture should be any less elusive. The impetus for such labels is understandable inasmuch as the field wishes to distinguish itself from the fields of industrial design and large-scale production furniture and, depending on your perspective, the fields of art and/or craft” (McNulty, 1999, p.8).

Gord Peteran, writing in *Furniture Matters*, compares studio furniture to fine art. “While exploring new materials, form, color combination, and textural arrangements, successful work needs to be sympathetic to our humanness, our sexuality, our anger, weaknesses, aspirations, fears, and egos. These are the constants in our existence that art has traditionally been concerned with, and as furniture begins to cross boundaries into the realm of sculpture, it must address these too” (Peteran, 1997, p. 6).

While describing studio furniture, many writers compare it to art or sculpture. To fit furniture makers into the field of art it becomes necessary to establish some basis for what constitutes art. Theories tend to be broadly divided into two camps:

1. Theories that attribute quality to innate ingredients in art, and

2. Theories that suggest that quality in art are due to a relationship between artist, artwork, and context.

In other words, the first camp argues that the art quality is innate, for example, Michael Angelo's "David" was appreciated as a masterpiece at the time it was commissioned and will still be thought as a masterpiece or art of the highest quality a thousand years in the future. The second camp argues that quality of art must be seen in the context of the relationships or experiences of the artist and the art audience. George Dickie, professor of philosophy, University of Illinois-Chicago, states that the institutional theory of art typifies the second category (Dickie, 1997). In short, this theory requires four elements:

1. Artist: An agent that created artwork, according to an art theory, for an art audience.

2. Artwork: A work created by the artist, according to an art theory, for an art audience.

3. Art theory: A set of rules that constituted artwork, made by the artist, and judged by an art audience (aware of the particular art theory involved).

4. Art audience: An educated group of people (knowing the particular art theory involved) appreciating the artwork, made by the artist using art theory.

Of the two theories of what constitutes art; the first being that art is innate, and the second that art must be examined in context, the second theory, Dickie's "institutional" theory of art is more rigorous. Using the institutional theory studio furniture is art. The studio furniture maker is an individual making artwork according to an art theory,

understood by an appreciative although often small audience and is personally and spiritually involved with the artwork (Dickie, 1997).

History of Studio Furniture Movement

During the 1940s and 1950s, the growth of the number of families able to buy houses ensured the extensive market for mass-produced factory furniture. The modern style was characterized by simple clean design with three basic types: American Industrial, imported Scandinavian, and custom designed works. The early studio furniture makers began during this period and were identified by a number of qualities, from their background training in liberal arts and architecture to their “reverence to wood.” Those first studio furniture makers defined themselves as woodworkers and designed around the aesthetics of the material. According to Jennifer Standley at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, this reverence was “demonstrated through the natural look of their furniture” and is representative of most of the studio furniture being produced during those years (Standley, 2003).

As with many other types of art the studio design movement changed during the experimental sixties when designers broke with earlier traditions and began exploring new forms, techniques, and materials. This shift was a reflection of the then popular Pop Art. The spirit of the '60s was reflected in the fanciful shapes and bright colors.

One writer of the period, Rose Slivka, helped nurture this evolving studio furniture movement. She became editor of *Craft Horizons* in 1959 and began to shift the editorial direction. Starting during 1961, she supported the design of more freewheeling work that challenged past traditions, and suggested new possibilities.

The 1970s are the beginning of what is referred to as the second-generation of studio furniture designers. As one of the results of the women's movement, women became professional furniture makers. As men were beginning this second-generation, women were just beginning their first generation. Many of them began in the 1960s working with their husbands or families. The shift to college training for woodworkers after World War II opened up the possibilities for women to pursue furniture making careers, but it was the feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s that encouraged a larger number of women to enter the school programs. This use of organized education for women was given a large boost by the "Title IX" legislation. Title IX is a federal civil rights law passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. This law protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance (United States Department of Justice, 2015). Title IX mandated equal opportunity for women in what were up to then men-only "shop" classes. In addition, during this period the studio furniture movement grew based on both the growing number of furniture makers and the growing visibility especially in galleries and museums.

The studio furniture movement grew considerably in 1970s California. One of the biggest supports for the furniture makers was the Baulines Craftsman's Guild, which emerged directly from the counter-culture. In 1972, the Guild brought together practitioners of any craft including woodworking, pottery, glass, bronze, and sculpture among others. During the latter part of the decade, the Guild members began to change again as the younger craftsmen wanted to actively market their work. This change of

philosophy led to another increase of the reach of this growing craft (Kelly & Mastelli, 1999).

During the 1980s, an effort was made to change from the abstraction of Modernism and restore contextual meaning to artistic expression. Studio furniture makers had outgrown the medium and were beginning to look at the aesthetic value. The commercial turning point for the studio furniture industry took place in 1983 when Wendell Castle successfully marketed his work and sold a desk and chairs for \$75,000, which far exceeded any previous price for studio furniture. Finally, with this success and the increasing visibility of the work, interest in studio furniture greatly expanded. The number of galleries accepting studio furniture grew and new markets emerged. By the late 1980s, the second-generation furniture makers established a firm middle ground between antique reproductions and the first-generation reverence for natural wood and the radical new art furniture. They now had a niche that was recognized by both the user and gallery that displayed their art, built on and continuing the work of previous generations.

History of Studio Furniture Making in the United States

An overview of the history of furniture makers in the US reveals that there is no documented evidence of women makers until 1920. Furniture in the United States of America began in Colonial America with the rise of furniture makers or joiners as they were then called. Through much of the early history of American furniture, the objective of was to emulate the furniture styles that were popular in England and Europe at the time. Unlike England, however, which had one national center for furniture, the colonies,

and later the United States, had regional centers developed where designs evolved into unique local styles. While there were many prominent male US furniture makers (listed following below), there is no mention of women furniture makers in the US until the last half of the 20th Century.

Students of American furniture makers know the names of important makers such as Job and Christopher Townsend and John Goddard who founded the Townsend-Goddard cabinet making family in Newport, Rhode Island. After spending some time at sea, John Goddard married Job Townsend's daughter and the two joiners began their activities in the Queen Anne period. John Goddard's sons, Stephen (1764-1804) and Thomas (1765-1858), went on to create notable furniture in the style of the Classical Period, but it appears that none of the daughters entered the family business.

America's first great furniture designer/maker was Duncan Phyfe (1768-1854). Born in Scotland, Phyfe's Fulton Street cabinet shop in New York City became the most fashionable of the time. Phyfe created his own interpretation of the popular styles of the time. His style became one of the most widely imitated in the United States (Comstock, 1980). Another famous furniture maker was John Henry Belter who was one the leading furniture makers of the Rococo Style during the early Victorian period in America. In 1856, he patented a laminating process which is described in Joseph Down's article in *Antiques*, September 1948, "Belter used thin layers of rosewood glued together, with the grain of each layer at right angles to the next. These layers of wood were glued and pressed together and steamed to take the required curves in a special matrix to give parts their shapes" (Comstock, 1980, p. 285).

Interestingly, 130 years later, the furniture maker Wendell Castle made laminated furniture a collector's item. Many museums have his pieces on display, for instance the Minneapolis Institute of Art has one of his chairs. Edward S. Cooke Jr., gives a good account of the transition from the mid-19th through the mid-20th Centuries. He argues that the stylistic revivals of the mid-19th Century and increased production due to mechanization diminished style as the most important element. Instead, taste and workmanship rose as important criteria. English tastemakers such as Charles Locke Eastlake, and architects such as E.W. Godwin began to call for better-designed furniture. Godwin developed the term Art Furniture in the late 1860s to distinguish well-designed, custom-produced work from tawdry factory work that poorly copied previous styles. In America, Art Furniture ran the stylistic gamut from the Japanese-inspired work of the Herter Brothers, to the Modern Gothic of Kimbel and Cabus to the colonial revival work of the Potthast Brothers. Attention to tasteful design and quality workmanship linked the various expressions.

In the late 19th Century and 20th Centuries, Gustav Stickley, Charles Limbert, William Price, and other arts and crafts enthusiasts elevated the importance of craftsmanship over decoration. Good, honest structural furniture was considered to possess the greatest moral integrity that would facilitate the simple life pursued by many middle- and upper-class Americans. It was also the first movement in the United States to involve women with the education and practice of many of the design components. Furniture historians studying work from the last quarter of the 19th Century and first two decades of the 20th tend to categorize the work less by style and more by form. This

parallels much of the studio furniture movement of the last quarter of the 20th Century. Marvin Schwartz, curator of decorative arts at the Brooklyn Museum, describes the emergence of the Studio Furniture Movement. “Since 1945 another new movement in furniture design has developed. ‘Studio’ furniture, so named because it is handmade in artists’ studios, revives the traditional emphasis on handsome wooden surfaces and fine craftsmanship. Working in highly individualistic styles, artists have created forms that range from the traditional and practical to the inventive and, sometimes, amusingly fanciful” (Bishop & Knopf, 1982, p. 33).

History of Women Studio Furniture Makers in the United States

Women have been involved in designing furniture since the beginning of the 20th Century. In the book *American Furniture: 1620 to the Present*, the authors list only one female furniture maker among the dozen or so men mentioned (Bidwell Bates & Fairbanks, 1987). Several notable scholars have recently challenged this male-centric view of contemporary furniture making, but it is a more recent (1987 to the present) phenomenon.

The Arts and Craft movement in America was one of the entry points for women to become involved with furniture making. The movement began to break down barriers between fine and decorative art and to emphasize both the craftsmanship of construction and the expression of surface decoration. Professional women such as teachers and artists became active in Arts and Crafts organizations, while working and middle-class girls enrolled in manual training schools and design colleges.

In 1916, William Varnun, a professor of manual arts at the University of Wisconsin, wrote *Industrial Arts Design: A Textbook of Practical Methods for Students, Teachers, and Craftsmen* (Varnun, 1916). In this book, he wrote of three different types of design: structural design, contour enrichment, and surface enrichment. Women of the period tended to participate in the last category. While some high-school girls studied cabinetmaking techniques to produce Craftsman-style furniture according to provided plans, most women's involvement in furniture making at the time was restricted to painting and carving. There are several reasons for this. One was that women may have a predilection for floral ornament and surface texture, and another was the fact that women's lower wages made intensive decorative work affordable.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the rise of the new profession of industrial design signaled a new conception of design as more of a scientific planning exercise. Most architects and industrial designers who developed concepts for furniture were men. They created the designs but left the actual building of the furniture to others. A few women such as Ray Eames and Florence Knoll also designed furniture in the interwar and postwar years. Ray Eames was perhaps one of the most hands-on of the women designers of this period, but as a partner with her husband Charles, she was seldom acknowledged as an individual furniture maker.

Two of the first modern women studio furniture makers were Molly Gregory and Joyce Anderson. Molly Gregory was born in 1914 and graduated from Bennington College in 1936. She taught sculpture at the Cambridge School in Weston, Massachusetts. In 1941, she became an apprentice woodworking teacher working with

Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Gregory joined the faculty there and developed “furniture that was constructivist and utilitarian but still based on good craftsmanship and traditional joinery” (Kirkham, 2002, p. 20).

After Black Mountain College, Gregory became a manager at Woodstock Enterprises in Vermont, but left in 1954 to set up a small shop to make furniture for personal clients. Gregory continued to make beautifully crafted, original pieces of furniture until the late 1970s, pursuing her dream as an independent furniture maker where she could do every job herself. Sharing this passion for customer furniture making was Joyce Anderson (born 1923), who set up a custom furniture making studio in 1948 along with her husband Edgar. Anderson was fully involved in all the processes of furniture making, including design, construction and finishing. Anderson continued making furniture into the 1980s, furniture with simple designs, beautiful uses of woods, and no surface decoration.

Although there were several other women furniture makers in the 1940s and 1950s, the field itself didn't become as professionalized as it is now until the 1970s, which opened more opportunities for women. One of the most important developments was the significant increase of furniture making/design programs in higher education. Joining Rochester Institute of Technology's School for American Craftsmen was the Rhode Island School of Design and the Philadelphia College of Art. Many more schools added programs in the 1980s, which increased the number of academic furniture makers and allowed more personal expression in furniture forms. Also, the number of self-taught makers increased dramatically during this time, partly due to the counter-culture

influences of the 1960s and 1970s (the Whole Earth Catalog, communes, the rise of do-it-yourself) and also because the number of books and publications about woodworking and furniture making also proliferated.

The new availability of academic training attracted growing numbers of women who saw the educational system as a way to break into the male field. Several programs, such as that at California State University at Northridge in the 1970s, became well known for encouraging women. As the field of studio furniture expanded and matured in the 1980s, women found new opportunities for artistic expression, and have influenced the entire field (*Woodwork: A Magazine for all Woodworkers*, 2001). Five of the women that participated in the following interviews are members of this first group of studio furniture makers. Unlike many of today's women woodworkers, they were not able to take industrial arts classes in high school.

Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 prohibited discrimination based on sex by universities and other schools receiving federal funds (United States Department of Justice, 2015). In 1975, the government issued detailed regulations outlawing such discrimination in admissions, athletics, course offerings, hiring, and other school activities. As a result of these regulations, home economics, shop, and other classes became coeducational.

In the February/March 1983 issue of *American Craft Magazine* there was an article titled "Women Are Woodworking" (American Craft Council, 1983). It focused on the furniture designed and crafted by seven female woodworkers whose work was featured at the Gallery at Workbench in New York City in December 1982. This show,

and the subsequent write up in *American Craft Magazine*, was one of the first shows to feature women furniture makers exclusively. In the now defunct *Woodwork Magazine*, Edward S. Cooke Jr. wrote an excellent article about the rise of women furniture makers (Cooke, 2001). In it he featured several of the most well-known female furniture makers including Judy Kensley McKie, Kristina Madsen, Rosanne Somerson, Wendy Maruyama, and Gail Fredell. These five women are still some of the most well-known women studio furniture makers 20 years later.

In 2018, thirty-seven years after the 1983 *American Craft Magazine* article, Anne Carlisle wrote an article for *American Craft Inquiry* titled “This Is My Work: The Rise of Women in Woodworking” (Carlisle, 1983). She featured some of the same furniture makers as Cooke did in his earlier article, including three that were mentioned in the 1983 article in *American Craft Inquiry*, published by the American Craft Council. Based on these three articles, and the research presented in this paper, there has not been much of an increase in women studio furniture makers. There are a number of reasons for this conclusion.

First, it’s a financially demanding business which requires space, tools, marketing and time. Several of the interviewees mentioned that getting shop insurance was expensive, along with the cost of materials, rising rents, and increasing shipping costs. Job stability and health insurance are more available when not self-employed or working in a small studio. Second, the audience is limited. Studio furniture making has a smaller audience than most other art forms. Many of the artists spend hundreds of hours building their furniture and there are fewer patrons that want to spend thousands of dollars on a

genre that is not always understood.

Third, women's furniture/art is frequently valued below that of men. Even now, women are seriously underrepresented in museums and galleries as shown below:

According to the website <https://nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts> from the National Museum of Women in the Arts:

- Just 11% of all acquisitions and 14% of exhibitions at 26 prominent US museums over the past decade were of work by female artists
- A 2015 special issue of *ARTnews* on “Women in the Art World” featured a report by curator Maura Reilly revealing a huge gender disparity in solo exhibitions, with few major institutions even reaching 30%).
- Relatedly, *The Art Newspaper* reported that of 590 major exhibitions by nearly 70 institutions in the US from 2007–2013, only 27% were devoted to women artists
- In a study of 820,000 exhibitions across the public and commercial sectors in 2018, only one third were by women artists
- On average, only 30% of artists represented by commercial galleries in the US are women.
- Only 13.7% of living artists represented by galleries in Europe and North America are women.

Fourth, although Title IX increased the opportunities for young women to study industrial arts in high schools, most of the woodshops have disappeared. This was due to a new emphasis on college readiness instead of focusing on trades. The slack has been picked up by colleges, private schools, and sometimes, community education. However,

this reaches a much smaller audience. Fifth, there is still gender discrimination. Most of the interviewees experienced it, as noted. However, they didn't let that stop them from persevering their furniture making careers. Sixth, there is a question of life balance. Furniture making is a time-consuming business, and quite a few women decide not to have a family to pursue their art.

One of the challenges to determining the numbers is the lack of hard data regarding the increase of women in furniture making, or even woodworking in general. According to my literature review, there is little evidence that there has been much of an increase at all. In April 2020, I interviewed Rob Johnstone, publisher of *Woodworkers Journal*. According to him, the percentage of women print subscribers has stayed consistently in the five to seven percent range since they started tracking it in the middle 2000s (R. Johnstone, personal communication, April 2020). Another woodworking magazine called *Fine Woodworking* has a slightly lower percentage of women subscribers. This is disconcerting because they focus on fine furniture more than their competition.

In April 2020, I interviewed Peter Korn, the Executive Director of the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship, regarding the ratio of male to female students over the past 15 years. He said it's about the same, around 20%, although he does notice he's getting younger students over the years (P. Korn, personal communication, April 2020). The CFC offers workshops that are either three months in length or nine months. Though there is much continued interest in the craft of furniture making, most of his students, male and female, do not expect to make a career of furniture making.

The Furniture Society's Role in Modern Studio Furniture Making

The Furniture Society is a nonprofit, educational organization founded in 1996. The Society sponsors a variety of programs that contribute to the education and enrichment of members and the public. Their official mission is “to advance the art of furniture making by inspiring creativity, promoting excellence, and fostering an understanding of this art and its place in society” (The Furniture Society, 2020). Built on a tradition of volunteerism, the Furniture Society works to realize its mission through educational programs, publications, exhibitions, recognition of excellence in the field, and annual conferences.

With members from across the United States and Canada, as well as numerous other countries around the world, the Furniture Society represents a broad cross-section of furniture makers, museum and gallery professionals, journalists, and others involved with the field of furniture in many different ways. Germinating from an idea first discussed in 1995, the founder Sarah McCollum presented the concept for an organization that was to become the Furniture Society at the annual American Craft Council show in Baltimore in March, 1996. With strong interest and significant grassroots financial support, a steering committee was formed in April 1996, charged with the tasks of formalizing the Society's bylaws and applying for 501c3 nonprofit status. Plans were also established for the first Furniture Society conference, to be held in the summer of 1997.

May of 1997 saw the publication of the first Society newsletter, *Furniture Matters*. June 1997 also saw the convocation of the first annual Furniture Society

conference, Furniture '97, held at Purchase College in Purchase, New York. With 350 people in attendance, this conference set the standard and served as a template for all succeeding conferences. Opening in conjunction with the conference was the first exhibition sponsored by the Furniture Society, Survey of North American Contemporary Furniture, curated by Paul Sasso and shown at the Neuberger Museum of Art on the Purchase campus.

The second annual Furniture Society conference convened in San Francisco at the California College of Arts and Crafts (now the CCA) and the Oakland Museum in late June 1998 titled "Furniture '98: East Meets West." Speakers included Aaron Betsky from the San Francisco Museum of Art and Ken Trapp of the Smithsonian Institutions' Renwick Gallery. One year later, the Furniture Society mounted its third annual conference, "Furniture '99 The Circle Unbroken: Continuity and Innovation in Studio Furniture," at the Appalachian Center for Craft in Smithville, Tennessee.

By 2015, membership had grown dramatically. Scholarships and grants (albeit relatively small) were being offered, another book had been published, and the annual Award of Distinction had become a beacon for the field in honoring the "best of the best." The Society continues to hold conferences every year.

About Modern Studio Furniture Makers

There is no definitive census that will tell us how many studio furniture makers there are currently working in the US. Studio furniture makers can therefore be considered a subset of woodworkers. There had been quite a lot of research completed regarding woodworkers with one very large, thorough study done by the NFO World

Group (one of the world's leading providers of research-based marketing information) 1995 standing out as the benchmark in the field. This study was updated again in 1998, which is the last large study done on about woodworking in America that I could find (NFO World Group, 1995, 1998). The information below is from this report, although it is now 22 years old.

American woodworkers, which includes hobbyists, numbered 20.5 million individuals in 1998, or roughly 11% of the total US population. Of that number, professional woodworkers numbered 2.1 million individuals in 1998, or about 10% of all woodworkers. Woodworking has historically been a male-dominated activity, though it has become increasingly popular with women, who now account for roughly 21% of non-professionals, up from 16% in 1995.

To extrapolate from these numbers, we can estimate that of the 2000 total US population of 281 million there are roughly 30.9 million woodworkers with 3 million professionals. For the purposes of this study, I will use these estimates, which will equal approximately 727,000 American women woodworkers/hobbyists. This is a large enough population for educational and business communities to pay attention.

Woodworkers have been involved with the activity for a long time – 15 years for the average non-professional and 19 years for the average professional. Professionals are especially prolific, completing an average of 21 projects a year, but non-professionals also keep themselves busy, completing nearly eight projects a year. The percentage of professional woodworkers who are women rose from 6% in 1995 to 7% in 1998. Professional woodworkers include furniture makers in small shops, large shops and

factories, cabinetmakers in all three categories, as well as carvers, tuners and marquetry experts.

If gender is not taken into account, however, the demographic profile of woodworking professionals very much mirrors that of typical adults in the US, as follows:

- The vast majority of professional woodworkers, far more so than US adults overall, are married (76% vs. 57%).
- Professional woodworkers, like their non-professional counterparts, continue to be more highly educated than the average American, with well over half having completed at least some college (57%, versus 48% for the total US).
- Professional woodworkers are well represented throughout the US but tend to be concentrated in the south (35%), which closely reflects general U.S. population trends.
- While professional woodworkers are well represented across all market sizes, they are increasingly likely to be found in the largest areas with populations of 2 million or more (42%, up from 33% previously).
- A more significant observation is that professional woodworkers also *enjoy* what they do, even as much as non-professionals who are pursuing it mainly as a hobby. More than four out of five professionals increasingly practice the craft because they derive personal satisfaction as the most important reason for doing so.

- Professionals are also increasingly likely to note that they practice woodworking because it is an enjoyable hobby (74%, up from 65%), and because it allows them to creatively express themselves (63%, up from 55%) (*Woodworking in America*, 1998).

Although it is difficult to arrive at the exact number of women studio furniture makers, anecdotal information suggested that their numbers are on the rise. A survey of projects featured in *Furniture Studio - The Heart of the Functional Arts*, for instance shows that out of a total of 268 projects 48, or 18%, were attributed to women (Kelsey and Mastelli, 1999). Women, in fact, made up 26% of those listed as members of the Furniture Society, according to the 2004 membership directory. In January the 2020 directory, women are close to 36%. Interviews with several woodworking instructors nationwide indicate that women regularly make up between 20% and 35% of the students, so the number of women students seemed to be increasing. As these women students move from the classroom to the woodworking shop and studio, they will hopefully have an ever-increasing influence on studio furniture.

CHAPTER 3: PROCEDURE

In 1996, I started to research the history of studio furniture making in the US. At that time, most of the literature was about male studio furniture makers, and all the articles and books were written by men. Not much had changed when I first decided to profile women studio furniture makers in 2005. At the beginning, I was just interested in how they learned their craft, since most of them had been unable to take industrial arts classes in high school and were at a disadvantage to their male contemporaries. However,

I discovered each woman had a unique story about how she learned her art. Therefore, I designed a longitudinal study of how women learned the art of studio furniture making, and why or why not they were still involved in furniture making. To accomplish this, I interviewed these same nine women fifteen years later. See Appendices D and E for interview questions from 2005 and 2020.

In January 2005, I placed an email request on the website of the Furniture Society, www.furnituresociety.org, to find 10 to 12 women studio furniture makers to answer the 21 questions in my interview schedule. See Appendix A for an example of an email response from a participant on May 23, 2005. Most of the women who responded were professional furniture makers or artists, and a number of them were also instructors. Almost all of them had been profiled in magazines, newsletters, or journals. The 2020 interview schedule included nine of the original ten interviewees with five new questions. See Appendix B for 2020 recruitment form. I obtained IRB exempt approval for both the 2005 study and the 2020 study. See Appendix C for 2005 consent form.

The women studio furniture makers who volunteered in 2005 were contacted and the interview took place by mail. Fifteen years later the women were again located through their websites and through networking and asked to again be interviewed. Nine of the ten women were located and agreed to the subsequent interview. Three women responded through email and six with interviewed using FreeConference.com.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The following is a summary of the interview data from interviews that took place in 2005. I use the names of these furniture makers by permission of participants.

2005 Interview Data

Jamie Ann Yocono. Jamie Ann was born in 1958 in Ohio and received a bachelor's degree (BGS in furniture design) from Ohio University in 1980. She learned her craft at Ohio University, attending many workshops, demonstrations, lectures, and teaching herself through practice. She also took three years of high school woodshop where she was the only female. Ten years later in her carpentry apprenticeship, she was again the only female.

Jamie Ann didn't have role models in the beginning because she wasn't aware of people making studio furniture. Later, she saw a piece by Wendell Castle and studied Tage Frid's books. She was highly influenced by the work of James Krenov and that was how to "see" the wood. Krenov wrote about grain orientation and patterning, about colors within the wood, and taught her through his books to inspect the wood and use it wisely. After two years as a union carpenter, she opened a very small furniture gallery where she designed and built one-of-a-kind furniture. She also started teaching at the University of Akron.

Several years ago, she became interested in adding color to her work, and she settled on ceramic tiles to accomplish this. After six or seven years of perfecting the technique of inlaying ceramic tile, she wrote an article that was published in *Tile Design and Installation Magazine*. Over the years she has purchased better tools which helped her bottom line by saving time. When asked if her work differs from male contemporaries' she said she didn't feel there was anything specific to differentiate her work from a male counterpart's work. But when it comes to the thought process that goes

into designing a piece, it might be a different story. “Women designers, to me, tend to think of different ramifications to their work. For example, I started adding tile for two reasons – to add color but also to add functionality to my work. Women understand what is easy to clean.” See Appendix F for images of furniture made by Jamie Ann Yocono.

Leah Woods. Leah was born in 1971 in Honolulu. She received her MFA in Woodworking/Furniture Design from the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York, which she attended from September 1996 through May 2000. Role models were Wendell Castle, Wharton Esherick, and others because she felt they helped her push her own creativity. Leah did not encounter very many gender-based obstacles.

A challenge that is repeated in almost all the 2005 interviews is that it is hard to make money as a furniture maker, especially when starting out. Leah had just started teaching at Illinois State University, but previously she moved from studio to studio looking for the best equipment and made very little income. She stated, “I am getting better at focusing on a specific idea to express, how to express it, and how to merge that idea with function. It is this evolving process I am sure that I will never actually solve, at least I hope I don't solve it, because I guess that is a big challenge for me.” See Appendix F for images of furniture made by Leah Woods.

LiLi Jackson. LiLi was born in 1981 in Minneapolis. Her BA was in Global Environmental Politics from College of Santa Fe in 2002. She learned furniture making at the Minneapolis Community Technical College, in woodworking and craft schools, and classes at the local woodworking store. At the time of the interview, LiLi had a fulltime job, so she was not making furniture for sale. She also wrote several articles about

furniture making for *The Woodworker's Journal*. In some of her classes, she made furniture influenced by ancient Ming craftsman because she was drawn towards Asian and Middle Eastern lines and shapes. Her other influences were Wharton Esherick, the Eames, Sam Maloof, and the members of The Furniture Society. See Appendix F for images of furniture made by LiLi Jackson.

Meredith Beavans. Meredith was born in 1975 in Indiana. She learned furniture making through art school and as an apprentice to furniture makers. Meredith was the first woman I interviewed who when asked for her role model mentioned another woman, Rosanne Somerson. Her technique has changed over the years to smaller pieces that are more manageable to physically handle. And asked if her work differed from male contemporaries' she replied, "The content is personal, sometimes feminine. I tend to make 'delicate' pieces using minimal material. I noticed occasionally that men tend to use more materials and build more masculine, heavier pieces." See Appendix F for images of furniture made by Meredith Beavans.

Jen Schwarz. Jen was born in 1959 in Long Island, New York. At the time of this interview, she'd been a furniture maker for 24 years. After receiving her BA degree, she attended the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts for their fulltime program in wood. She started her own business upon graduation and shared spaces with other woodworkers, which continue to expand her repertoire of furniture making.

One of her main role models was Sam Maloof. She really admired his good cohesive design and that wonderful blend of organic and clean definition that epitomizes his work. Jen said she was lucky to be in such a supportive environment. Her main

obstacles were a lack of upper body strength and that woodworking is so slow that it's a difficult way to make a living. Jen marketed her work through galleries, through word-of-mouth for her church furniture, and throughout the Puget Sound area.

Regarding whether or not her work shows any distinctions from the males' work, she believes that you can't lump all of the guys together by gender. Some are builders of blocky, macho furniture, and others are exquisitely sensitive and craft delicate things. Jen's work is her own personal aesthetic and she can't generalize by gender. See Appendix F for images of furniture made by Jen Schwarz.

Beth Ann Harrington. Beth Ann was born in 1965 in Michigan. At the time of this interview, she had just finished her bachelor's degree in Studio Art / Art Education from Wheaton College in Illinois. She had finished her first year of graduate school also. She became interested in furniture making after seeing the New American Furniture Show at the MFA in Boston in 1990. BA already was a textile artist. She went to trade school at the North Bennett Street School in Boston to learn woodworking. Her role models were Tom Loesser, Michael Hurwitz and Kristina Madsen.

When asked about sacrifices that she made to pursue a career as a studio furniture maker she mentioned health sacrifices – the kind of power equipment she worked with, some of the toxic chemicals in finishes and glue, and breathing wood dust. Her reply to the question whether her work differed from male contemporaries was “Yes, because it reflects my experiences. But I hope it also differs from the work of female contemporaries. I've been told on occasion that someone can tell a piece of mine was made by a woman. I think that a male could also reflect something similar to whatever

this femininity is that some people think they can see in my work.” See Appendix F for images of furniture made by BA Harrington.

Rosanne Somerson. Rosanne was born in 1954 in Pennsylvania. She has been a furniture maker since 1978 having earned for BFA in Industrial Design from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Role models were Tage Frid, Wharton Esherick, and others. Rosanne said that early on there was little acceptance of women furniture makers and somewhat of a patronizing attitude. However, she didn't let it get to her, and she was very fortunate to get several grants early on and have some successful early exhibits. When I interviewed Rosanne in 2005, she was already so successful that she didn't need to market her work, since clients and galleries came to her. She does exhibit as much as possible to continue visibility. Rosanne works hard on new designs and developing her ideas. Taking risks rather than doing the comfortable and familiar also helps her work. When asked how her work differs from male contemporaries, she said that she believes all of the main players in the field have unique styles. “The women who have made names for themselves have a clear and individual aesthetic. Women in the field were earlier at integrating surface treatments, color, mixed materials, and a range of techniques that could best express their ideas.” See Appendix F for images of furniture made by Rosanne Somerson.

Linda Sue Eastman. Linda Sue was born in 1956 in Wisconsin. She made her first sofa and set of chairs for her own apartment in 1976. After 20 years of engineering, technical theater and carousel menagerie, Linda Sue settled on furniture as her medium in 1996. She has a BFA in technical theater and learned her furniture making craft by

studying books, taking a workshop at North Bennett Street school and looking at other furniture. Earning a diploma degree in mechanical drafting and an AA degree in mechanical design contributed also. Linda Sue is also an expert leather worker and has taken many workshops from the best studios. She has incorporated leather into several of her pieces.

In answer to the question, how did you become interested in studio furniture, Linda Sue has a unique answer, “I have always loved to make things, first in the ‘feminine’ arts of sewing and knitting. I enjoyed this making and the high standards I achieved. Yet there was something missing – a lack of permanence and respect. I wanted my efforts to last for a longer time. Consequently, I searched for making items of permanence and work whose standards would be respected and recognized by all. It took some years of searching but furniture designing/making is where I landed. I make my work to last for generations. After many years of pursuit, I am creating artwork that makes me feel very satisfied.” When asked if her work differs from her male contemporaries she replied, “I can’t distinguish from male and female makers. There are always contradictions to any kind of conclusion I tried to draw. I wonder about those who say they can. Where have they drawn their criteria?” See Appendix F for images of furniture made by Linda Sue Eastman.

Cindy Vargas. Cindy was born in 1960 in Minnesota. She was one of the first women to be able to take woodworking in junior high school, thanks to Title IX which was passed in 1972. Later, Cindy studied at the Minneapolis Technical College and received her BFA from the Oregon College of Arts and Craft which is where she learned

furniture making/woodworking/fiber arts. Like many of the other women that I have interviewed, she also learned from local guilds, networking opportunities, and organizations like The Furniture Society.

Role models included Sam Maloof and designers of Modernism. Several of the obstacles that she experienced included credibility as a woman woodworker, moving cross country several times, and getting business insurance as a sole proprietor. In 2005 Cindy was making her work more functional, less artsy. She was also trying to simplify her designs and reduce some of the detail. These were economic decisions besides aesthetic. Regarding a difference from the work of males, she thought that her work was decidedly female. “Yes, my work is much more feminine. I have used textiles and painted surfaces quite a bit. The overall lines I think are more delicate and sometimes. See Appendix F for images of furniture made by Cindy Vargas.

Jo Stone. Jo had already been a studio furniture maker for fifteen years when I interviewed her. She became interested in studio furniture through an undergraduate arts course and then learned more about furniture making when she studied for her MFA. Role models that directly affected her were Paul Sasso, (undergraduate instructor, Rosanne Somerson (visiting artist at her undergraduate school), Jere Osgood, (from whom she took a summer workshop), and Wendy Maruyama (graduate instructor). The two obstacles she faced in her career as a studio furniture maker were the same as most of the other interviewees – time and money.

When asked if she felt other women have faced obstacles in becoming studio furniture makers she replied, “Everybody has obstacles of some sort. If you don’t have

financial backing to put together a shop and spend time in it, you have to pay the bills another way, and squeeze in time for your art. I taught fulltime at the college level from 1999 until now. When I turned 42, I got married and worked less. I made less work, but the balance that family provides is important. It does hit me, as gender specific that men for the most part do not make this choice. All of my female role models (artists, not just furniture makers) seem to have basically chosen fame or family. Rosanne Somerson is the only one I know who has a family, teaches, and is a significant maker. I now have a home studio, husband, and two-year-old daughter. I've given up the fulltime teaching, and I'm much less stressed. It would be interesting to ask me in three to five years how I feel about this decision.”

The audiences for Jo's work were galleries and trade show attendees. She marketed through trade shows and furniture makers association. In 2005, Jo was the only female member of the New Hampshire Furniture Masters Association (NHFMA). As noted, I was unable to locate Jo either for the 2020 interview or to obtain a photo of her work.

Summary of 2005 Interview Data

Table 1 displays participant characteristics for the women interviewed.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

	current profession	teach	sell work?	ID FM	obstacle(s)	published	how learned	why became SFM	website
Rosanne Somerson	1954 Pres RISD	Y	through exhibit	Y	time & \$ = teaching	Y	BFA Industrial Design RISD, but began in photo	Art School	https:// www.risd.edu/ about/leadership/
Linda Sue Eastman	1956 retired	N	would sell already made pieces if buyer	Y	cost of exhibitions / galleries closed / \$\$	Y	self-taught with a few workshops (Diploma - Mechanical Drafting AA - Mechanical Design BFA Technical Theater)	"art" with "permanence" and "respect"	none
Jamie Ann Yocono	1958 owns a WW School/ woodworker	Y	commissions	Y	\$ / Shipping tools / setting up shop	Y	BGS Furniture Design Ohio U	functional sculpture	https:// www.wooditis.com/
Jenn Schwarz	1959 Human Services Professional	N	word of mouth	Y	\$ / gallery issues / tools	Y	Woodworking-Oregon College of Art and Craft (after a BA in psych)	apprenticed in Wood Shop	http:// www.jeschwarz.co m/furniture.html
Cindy Vargas	1960 Program Rep MN Dept of Health	N	not right now	Y	priced out of shop space/moving tools/health insurance/ marketing	Y	JH woodshop (BA in something else) MCTC BFA Woodworking/Fiber Arts - Oregon College of Art and Craft	expressing creative idea as furniture	https:// www.facebook.com /Three-Elements- Studios-252813061 397481/
BA Harrington	1965 SFM/professor	Y	exhibit	Y	life choices	Y	(BA in art) North Bennet St School MA - Art History - U of W MFA - Wood - U of W	"The New American Furniture" at MFA	http:// www.baharrington. com/
Leah Woods	1971 UNH professor of WW/furniture design	Y	exhibit	Y	\$ & tools/studio space = teaching audience	Y	MFA WW/Furniture design - RIT	SOFA Chicago	https:// leahwoods.com/ home.html
Meredith Beavans	1975 mom and work	N	friends	Y	\$ / access to shop space/tools	N	Herron School of Art and Design	Rosanne Somerson lecture "sculptural conceptual art"	none
LILI Jackson	1981 design	N	exhibit	Y	access to tools/lack of representation	Y	JH woodshop (BA Global Environmental Policy) MCTC/WW classes Center for Furniture Craftmanship Masters ID - Pratt	sustainable, functional art	https:// lilijackson.com/

The biggest similarity among all of the women interviewed is that when asked what sacrifices they have made to be studio furniture makers, they all said money was an issue and source of compromise. They all recognize their market as being upper-middle-class with an appreciation (and the dollars to back it up) of fine craftsmanship. They all also transitioned from other arts to studio furniture, and most had at least some formal training. Informal training usually consisted of people in various social circles (guilds, societies, friends, etc.). Also, everyone acknowledged sexism, although it was not nearly as directly perceived for the younger women as it was for the older women.

It seems that the older generation of women were more typically the youngest or younger siblings of their families and also that all their mothers were housewives. The ones that were born later (after the 1950s) seemed to have had more of an opportunity to learn (school laws changed), but being a woman still made success in the industry (and still does to some extent) difficult.

The younger generation recognizes the women before them for paving their way and acknowledges it being harder to be a woman in this field, but they all say they have not had any specific gender related hurdles. Sexism still exists, and they still have a harder time proving themselves than men. However, getting into and being relatively accepted in the woodworking communities is no problem. For the younger generation, although, like the older, their first thought wasn't to go into studio furniture, but at least they knew the option existed. This generation has been able to be a part of a community right away and find the right educational programs right away. Both groups were often influenced by an already famous furniture maker to go into making (read a book, saw an

exhibition, etc.).

Both groups started in various forms of art and seemed to move towards furniture for certain practical applications. However, they still approach furniture with an artistic perspective, often highly conceptual and design orientated, and always being a reflection and/or extension of who they are. This is why when the question was asked if their work differs from their male contemporaries, they predominantly say that other people say it does, but they do not feel it does. They often acknowledge a feminine quality in their work mostly due to the fact that they, women, built it and often to fit their proportions. There is no defining style or surface decoration that makes it recognizably a man or woman made piece.

2020 Interview Data

Jamie Ann Yocono. Jamie Ann is even more immersed in the world of wood than she was before. She moved to Las Vegas and opened up her own shop and school. She teaches 75% of the time and builds furniture 25% of the time, the opposite of what she did in the 2005 interview. Unlike the other women I've interviewed almost all her work is on commission.

When I asked if there any differences in terms of being female then or now, she replied, "It might be easier now than it was 20 years ago, simply due to the larger number of women who have entered the field. But that's a double-edged sword. Some of the top-rated working content creators have only been working with wood for a minute, and they get a lot of attention and sponsorship. I'll be honest, I hear a lot of women complain that they have a rough time at the lumberyard. But I've never really experienced that. My

work speaks for itself, and when I speak with someone about building a piece for them, they can sense my experience level. My career has been extremely rewarding and successful, and for the first time, I'm actually thinking about retiring from teaching and simply making the pieces of furniture that have been rattling around in my brain all these years."

Leah Woods. Leah now lives in New Hampshire. She is still a woodworker but her work has evolved over the past eight years into sculpture. She has moved towards different kinds of sculpture ranging from chainsaw carved logs to using furniture making techniques to make figurative forms, and teaching herself chip carving. Her work has shifted in terms of content and shape and form and function. One big project that Leah has been working on for the past year and a half is building a new woodworking program and a wood shop at the women's prison in Concord, New Hampshire. So far, she and her committee have received almost \$25,000 in grants, and the prison is totally on board with the idea.

Many of these furniture makers are now teachers, and Leah is also. She is currently teaching woodworking and furniture design at the University of New Hampshire full time. She believes that in terms of woodworking nothing has changed that much over the past 24 years. They are still using hand tools and power tools, and drawing with pencils. Because of her teaching and her involvement with the prison program, she applied to give a talk at the next Furniture Society Conference so they could share their idea of what they think some of the benefits are of woodworking. "I think anybody who is a woodworker knows that it's amazing and awesome and beneficial and so we thought

it could be interesting to share the perspective of what we are doing and see if anybody else was doing something similar.”

LiLi Jackson. LiLi received a Master’s in Industrial Design from Pratt Institute in 2016. While there, she produced a type of movable furniture and is looking to license it. Although LiLi is aware of CNC’s, 3D printing, and laser cutting, she doesn’t necessarily use those in her work. Like many other artists, she’s interested in a diverse range of materials to incorporate including mycelium. Using recycled wood and repurposing plastics are also something that she is looking into. Regarding marketing her work, she believes that Instagram is helpful as is having a big web presence. LiLi pointed out that community education is another form of a maker space, and so are class spaces at technical college is and universities. Because she lives in Brooklyn, and real estate prices are high, it’s hard to find the correct makerspace or woodshop for building furniture. Porcelain is a new medium for LiLi because it’s smaller and will be easier to mass produce. She is looking for representation in galleries at the present time

Meredith Beavans. Meredith is no longer a furniture maker like she used to be. Her access to shops dwindled, and she did not have enough financial support to recreate her space. Add student loan debt, a mortgage, and a new baby to understand why her furniture making faded. She is still combining her love of woodworking and art by renovating old houses. She is now more of a repurposing maker, using reclaimed lumber and materials for her projects which include built-ins for her own house and making projects or refinishing pieces for friends. “I’ve always enjoyed construction of any sort and have been improving my sewing skills. I found piecing in my own natural dyed

fabrics sustains my desire to ‘build.’ I have dreams of creating a line of limited production garments.”

Jennifer Schwarz. Jen is still a furniture maker but not professionally. It’s not her primary source of income anymore, and her marketing is only by word of mouth. She found that in Hawaii the gallery commission was higher than in Washington state and that furniture makers were required to use Koa, an expensive wood, and her profit margin went down. Also, she was starting get some arthritis in her hands. When she was asked if there are any differences in terms of being a female now or 15 years ago she said that for her it’s regional. In Hawaii, the male gallery owners were disrespectful, unlike in Washington or Oregon. Jen works for the Department of Health on Big Island. She is very interested in giving back to the community in a more profound way than selling furniture to a few very wealthy people, and now she is doing so.

Beth Ann Harrington. Since our 2005 discussion BA received an MA in Art History/Material Culture from the University of Wisconsin Madison and an MFA/3D Area-Wood from the University of Wisconsin Madison. In 2012, after accepting an assistant professorship at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, BA began teaching advanced and beginning woodworking at in the College of Fine Art, and she offers support to graduate student advisory committees.

BA no longer makes functional furniture like she was trying to do at North Bennett. Her work instead, “is sculptural, but I still considers myself a furniture maker, because conceptually what I do in my art practice is completely wrapped up in the tradition and history of furniture making. So, what’s changed for me is that my work

now, instead of dealing with the function, the idea is still implied because they are based on traditional early American furniture forms. Specifically forms that were built to be used by women like dowry chests. Right now, I'm working with two additional forms – a lady's writing table and a lady's sewing table or work table. I am making my work to exhibit because it's more installation, and it's sculpture, so you can't buy it. Do you use as a piece of furniture, yourself, if you show it the way I've made it as a piece of sculpture?"

Because her undergraduate degree was in textiles, she has added textiles back into her work. BA is doing some embroidery right now, and you can see that in the lineage series. Her campus has discussed building a STEAM workshop (science, technology, engineering, art, math) It won't be woodworking centered but it will be making centered and have all the technology. However, that is on hold currently because of the coronavirus.

Rosanne Somerson. Rosanne has been the president of RISD since 2015. RISD is both a college and museum, so it is a complex institution. Rosanne believes that the complexity of running a higher education institution right now requires the kind of thinking that she learned to her studio practice and the idea of inventing new problems and solving them was very good background for this kind of leadership. She makes at least one new piece a year, and it is generally made for an exhibition. Because RISD has the latest technology, she is able to explore techniques such as digitally printing veneer. In her most recent piece, she printed a water pattern on to maple veneer, and then sandwiched two layers of the maple veneer with an aluminum core, so that it was a bent

form. “I’m beyond the point of having to prove that I can do it, and I am making work that satisfies questions of curiosity about seeing things come to life, so it's very personal work.”

Rosanne commented on how her students are able to launch their own furniture making careers. Many of them have started their own companies and a lot happens through their web sites, but also a lot through design fairs, which are a growing phenomenon. Some of them include the ICFF, Design Miami, and the Milan Furniture Fair in Italy. “It’s a new kind of structure and system. There are new audiences that come to those events and they are very interested in beautifully designed and made objects.” In reply to the question, are there any differences to being female then or now, Rosanne said, “When I was younger, I wanted to be just seen as a furniture maker. But now with an understanding of the fact that women have a lot say that hasn’t always been at the forefront of the conversation.”

Rosanne recently participated in a Philadelphia show at the Center for Arts in Wood. “When I was interviewed by the women that put that show together, at that point they interviewed 30 different women, and they said I was the first one that actually had children. So, it speaks to the kind of time-consuming nature of this work and that it’s very hard to have certain kinds of studio practices. But in terms of my own perspective, fifteen years after we first spoke about this, I think that we’re still in a really difficult place when you look at the art and see the (small) percentage of women who are represented in major collections. And female artists are still way in the minority of representation in the top tier art galleries and museums. So, there is still a lot of work to do and that’s why I feel

it's very important for women to own their own identity and to be advocates for other women to feel empowered to do this kind of work.”

Linda Sue Eastman. Linda Sue no longer makes furniture for galleries or markets her work nationally. During the 2008 recession, the costs of shows remained high but the sales dropped. Galleries that used to represent her work closed. She has only made pieces for a regional furniture exhibition in the past ten years that were all works that she used in her home. If someone is interested, she will sell the piece to them.

Although she is now retired, there was an interesting article about her as recently as 2016.

“For most of Eastman’s studio furniture career she focused on wood and leather, but over the last few months she started working on pieces that incorporate egg shells.

Eastman said she got the inspiration from a French style furniture from the early 1900s, which featured sharkskin. She has also started using some of the animal’s feathers in her pieces. In one of the pieces she will display at the exhibit, the side of the table top has brown leather with vibrant peacock feathers, and the surface has quail eggshells. Eastman says she’s excited about experimenting with new materials in her furniture because she doesn't know yet how it will develop. (Winona Daily News, June 16, 2016)

Cindy Vargas. When asked if she is still a furniture maker, Cindy said that technically she is but just on hiatus. “Although, I still think of myself as a furniture maker and my goal is to be back in business or be back in making furniture at some point.” In 2014, Cindy got a job with the Minnesota Department of Health because she wanted the health insurance. Also, the building that housed her workshop was sold to a developer. With her partner, she had built a very sophisticated workshop with high end tools like

Festool and big machinery such as Felder, which would have made moving very expensive and difficult.

The gender discrimination that Cindy encountered is still fresh in her mind. Though she loved being a pioneer as a woman woodworker, she remembers being laughed at by vendors at a large woodworking show. She was also called diminutive names at the local lumberyard, which she found offensive. However, she is finding that some progress is being made. “Just recently, I was speaking with one of my colleagues at the health department, a young guy, probably in his mid-30s, and I mentioned that I was a furniture maker, and he came to me a couple days later and he said, ‘Gee, I would really love to get your guidance on something. I am making a bench and I need some help.’ In the past I don’t know that that would have happened. I think that I wouldn’t have had the credibility just because I was a woman. And so, I think things like social media has change things for women a lot. The MeToo movement has really gotten awareness to how women and young women aren’t willing to stand up for a lot of the stuff that women of our generation had to put up with.”

Summary of 2020 Interview Data

All of the women interviewed still consider themselves furniture makers, whether they are making furniture fulltime or not. Each of them had spent many years studying, training, and making furniture, and they believe that the craft is part of who they are. Interestingly, none of the women I interviewed said that gender discrimination was a factor in their decision to continue or discontinue their careers as furniture makers; not that it didn’t happen, as evidenced by their interviews, but it didn’t deter them. However,

it is a big factor in that there is little representation of women furniture makers in galleries, museums, and collections. Also, women are still underrepresented in books and articles about studio furniture making. One of the challenges to determining the numbers is the lack of hard data regarding the increase of women in furniture making, or even woodworking in general.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

What's happened from 2005 to 2020?

Ten women furniture makers were interviewed in 2005, and nine were located to be interviewed fifteen years later for this longitudinal study. The objective of the research was to learn if being a woman studio furniture maker is a viable way to make a living and if there are now more women pursuing this career. All the women interviewed still consider themselves studio furniture makers and artists, whether they are making furniture full time or not. It is definitely part of who they are. All these makers have had their furniture featured in books, magazines, websites, and exhibitions during this time. Each of them has spent the years between interviews studying, training, and creating studio furniture.

Five of the nine women have been furniture making/design teachers at some point in their careers. Three of them are still teaching - two at university level, and one at her own school. Two are retired, two work in state government jobs, one is a college president, and one has migrated from furniture making to ceramics. None of the women interviewed are doing furniture commissions any longer. Several mentioned that they would sell their existing work if asked. Two are making work for exhibition only.

The level of creativity and craftsmanship displayed by them throughout their careers is extremely high. Several of them have migrated to other venues such as sculpture, while still incorporating their woodworking skills. They have all experimented with different materials - metal, ceramics, fabrics, shells, plastic, and incorporated them into their designs of furniture.

Conclusions

By examining the literature review and the data analysis, one can conclude that the number of women studio furniture makers has not significantly increased. However, there are a number of ways that younger women could be encouraged in this field based on these women's long experience in this field, as shown in their interviews:

1. Join The Furniture Society. This national organization promotes, educates, and connects studio furniture makers. All of the nine women interviewed were members.
 2. Research and join local guilds and professional societies such as New Hampshire Furniture Masters (NHFM). Currently, NHFM has only one female member. Since they promote their member's work, it would benefit women to join.
 3. Submit work to design fairs such as Wanted Design and ICFF, and also to galleries and other exhibition venues. Rosanne Somerson mentioned how her students are getting exposure for their work through design fairs, both domestically and internationally.
 4. Consider pairing furniture making with other skills learned, such as teaching
- Most of these women also taught furniture design and furniture making, many at

college level or through their own schools.

5. Get more publicity for studio furniture. Perhaps the many maker organizations such as American Craft Council and The Furniture Society could band together and hire a public relations firm.

6. Use social media and have a current website. As shown in Table 1, most of the interviewees currently have websites.

7. Partner with other organizations for commissions and to expand the field to other women. Leah Woods is building a new woodworking program at the women's prison in Concord. Jamie Ann Yocomo and several others partner with colleges. Many of these women sit on arts boards and other community councils.

Future research could include how and why younger female students, such as Millennials, enter the field of studio furniture making. Another topic is whether the growth of maker spaces provide more opportunities to both enter and remain in this field.

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APPENDIX A: 2005 RECRUITMENT



Score	Rule Triggered	Explanation
0.517	FROM_ENDS_IN_NUMS	From: ends in numbers
0.075	MSGID_FROM_MTA_HEADER	Message-Id was added by a relay
-1.665	BAYES_00	Bayesian spam probability is 0 to 1%

FROM: "Mia Hall" <miahall68@hotmail.com>
TO: ann@rockler.com
SUBJECT: Questionnaire
CONTENT-TYPE: text/plain

Hi Ann,

I saw your posting on the FS website and would be willing to participate in your research. I'm 37 (born in 1968), a recent graduate from Wendy Maruyama's graduate program in San Diego and a furniture maker. Even though some of my recent work is verging on sculpture I am a maker at heart and all my peices have aspects or traces of furniture remaining in them.

Hope to hear from you,

Mia Hall

Express yourself instantly with MSN Messenger! Download today - it's FREE!
<http://messenger.msn.click-url.com/go/onm00200471ave/direct/01/>

APPENDIX B: 2020 RECRUITMENT

Recruitment Form

Hello, my name is Ann Jackson. About 15 years ago I interviewed you as part of my graduate program in the Department of Design at the University of Minnesota. After a long hiatus, I am back in Graduate School. I have finished all my course work and now just need to complete my thesis. I have committed to completing it by the end of spring quarter in May, 2020.

My thesis is a longitudinal study describing what has changed in the world of studio furniture making. I would like to ask you 10 of the original questions again, along with 5 or 6 additional questions. I can arrange to ask you the questions online, or with a program like Zoom.

You would be one of ten women studio makers.

I realize that you are a professional and I would be glad to offer you a stipend of \$150 or a donation to your favorite charity.

Participation is voluntary. If you are willing to participate in my research program please let me know by email at ajackson@rockler.com.

If you would prefer phone my number is [REDACTED]

When finished, I would be happy to share the final paper with you. Thank you!

Ann Jackson

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Women and Studio Furniture Making

You are invited to be in a research study of the different ways women have become studio furniture makers in the second half of the 20th Century. You were selected because you are a woman furniture maker between the ages of 29 and 58. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Ann Jackson, Department of Design, Housing and Apparel, University of Minnesota

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to determine the ways in which two different generations of women came into studio furniture making. It will investigate the various factors that have contributed to, but also inhibited, the development of women studio furniture makers among these two generations. It is hoped that this comparative study will reveal practical information that can be used to aid future generations of women studio furniture makers, as well as women interested in woodworking generally.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you do the following things: Participate in a 20-question interview, to be conducted over the phone or via email. This conversation will be audio taped, or saved as a computer file.

Risks and Benefits

There are no physical or psychological risks to participating in this study.

Compensation

You will receive payment in the amount of \$100 for your participation in this survey.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All audiotapes will be stored privately by the researcher, and disposed of after five years.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota, or The Furniture Society. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Ann Jackson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Mrs. Jackson at 900 Partenwood Rd., (763) 478-8216, ann@rockler.com. The researcher's faculty advisor is Stephanie Watson, who can be reached at (612) 624-3205 or swatson@che.umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: 2005 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Demographic Background

1. Name
2. Year Born
3. Place of Birth
4. Father's Occupation
5. Mother's Occupation
6. Siblings (Gender and Birth Order)
7. Highest Level of Education Obtained

Furniture Making Background

8. How long have you been a studio furniture maker?
9. How did you become interested in making studio furniture?
10. How did you learn your craft?
 - a. Formal learning?
 - b. Informal learning?
11. Who were your role models in terms of studio furniture making?
12. What were their influences in terms of studio furniture making?
13. Did you encounter any obstacles in your career as a studio furniture maker?
14. Do you feel other women have faced obstacles in becoming studio furniture makers?
15. Have you made any sacrifices in pursuing a career as a studio furniture maker?
16. How do you stay significant?
17. Who is the audience for your work?
18. How do you market your work?
19. How has your style/technique changed over the years as a studio furniture maker?
20. Does your work differ from male contemporaries? And if so, how?

APPENDIX E: 2020 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Furniture Making Background

1. Are you still a furniture maker?

IF YES:

2. If yes, what has changed for you over the past fifteen years regarding
 - a. Techniques?
 - b. Marketing?
 - c. Technology?
3. Have you been involved in maker spaces?
4. Do you do more commissions or do you build and then sell?
5. Are you continuing to learn more about your craft, and if so, how?
6. Are there any differences in terms of being female then or now?

IF NO:

7. Why are you no longer a furniture maker?
8. What are you doing now?
9. Are you still involved with any furniture making organizations?

APPENDIX F: FURNITURE MADE BY PARTICIPANTS

Furniture made by Jamie Ann Yocono. Cabinet with inlaid, handmade tiles (left). Helmet display case for U.S. Air Force Thunderbird pilot. Photos courtesy of the artist.



Furniture made by Leah Woods. For Rose Bertin cabinet, 2010. Hall table detail, 2007. Photos courtesy of the artist.



Furniture made by LiLi Jackson. *Tetra Collection*, 2015: recycled foam, nylon mesh. *Tiny Porcelain Chair*, *Tiny Porcelain Chair Series*, 2019: porcelain, glaze, rubber, metal. *Tilia Chair*, 2013: hand turned and laminated birch, elastic cord. Photos courtesy of the artist.



Furniture made by Meredith Beavans. *When Will You Learn Drawers*: reclaimed school desks, oak, painted MDF 2'W x 2'D x 5'H. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Furniture made by Jen Schwarz. Double walnut bend table: walnut, glass. Fish coffee table: cherry, glass. Photo courtesy of the artist



Art/furniture made by BA Harrington. *Personhood*: basswood, MDF, milk paint. *Ecstasies in Red*: plywood, paint. Photos courtesy of the artist.



Furniture made by Rosanne Somerson. Dressing Table With Curl, 1992, figured pearwood, glass, copper leaf, mirror

Tall-backed Chairs, 1990, curly maple, pau ferro, patinated bronze and silk

Both photos are by Dean Powell Photography.



Figure 8. Furniture made by Linda Sue Eastman. *Thinking of Bugatti Stool*, 2006: hand-tooled, dyed, and antiqued leather, hand-stitched suede, and carved mahogany. 19" H x 27" W x 18" D. Paisley chaise lounge: hand-tooled, dyed, and antiqued leather, hand-stitched Asian water buffalo hide, maple, 42"H x 24"W x 60"L. Photos courtesy of the artist.



Furniture made by Cindy Vargas. *Euterpe-Music Stand*, 2008: walnut and copper.
Blue/red chest of drawers: 1999, Oak, hand dyed silk, milk paint, 54”H x 32”W x 16”D
Pedestal for Los Angeles Philharmonic, Walt Disney Concert Hall 2004 Padauk, oil finish. Photos courtesy of the artist.

