

# CELEBRATE KINGS: *Pride in our people, places & products*

## *Local chairmaker helps seat the world in timeless comfort*

“Original Windsor Chairs – The Timeless Art of Frank Hill” reads the sign tucked inside the red-sided workshop nestled on the mountainside south of Kings County’s Gaspereau Valley.

Overlooking the beautiful Cape Blomidon and Minas Basin, the workshop is home to Melanson Mountain Chair Works. At this location is produced a selection of handmade Windsor chairs by owner Frank Hill.

Though the chairs come in a variety of designs, each is true to what makes an authentic Windsor chair. It is a design of construction – and of art.

Every chair is unique and comes, not from a set pattern, but from Frank’s vision of his product.

“The pattern comes out of my head, which gives the chair personality,” says Frank. “I can only make about 30 chairs a year, and I always have at least a six-month waiting list.”

Each chair is hand-hewn using a large selection of tools. From the log-splitting through to finishing, each step reflects Frank’s creativity. Every chair is made of a quality to last 200 years, and has its own serial number, brand, and penciled signature of the builder.

“These are not reproductions or copies. Though the legs have the components of traditional turnings, these are mine. From my own hand and my own imagination.”

With a love for working with wood, ten years ago Frank put his labors into becoming a professional “bodger” – defined as a Windsor chair maker, or a maker of that chair’s components, with a history ranging back centuries to King George of England.

Frank learned his craft through trial and error. He would build a chair, tear it apart and then rebuild. A true, high-quality Windsor chair must have turned or round components with the back assembly independent of the legs. To hone his abilities, he also spent a week studying with the United States’ foremost expert and author on the building and revival of Windsor chairs.

Franks’ creations are true Kings County products. “They’re natural wood from trees grown within five

miles from here, and they’re naturally finished.”

Chairs from Melanson Mountain Chair Works are sold worldwide. “The four rocking chairs I’m working on right now are going to Minnesota, Salt Spring Island in BC, Toronto and here in Wolfville,” says Frank. “Thirty per cent of my market is in the US.”

Frank markets his products very simply. He displays at four large craft shows a year, is a member of the Nova Scotia Designer Craft Council, and belongs to the Evangeline Trail Association. He also advertises in a couple of Nova Scotia tourism-related publications.

Frank believes being a bodger and an artist in Kings County is very positive. “It’s a golden triangle for marketing - from Grand Pre and Wolfville, to Canning and to Gaspereau Valley. It’s becoming an artistic destination.”

For tourists and locals alike, Melanson Mountain Chair Works helps make the triangle complete.



*Frank Hill shapes the wood on a shavehorse.*



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