

Alice in the Workshop

Working with your hands to make something original, solid, visible, useful, and making a living doing it is the pipe dream of many. We content ourselves with DIY cooking and other leisure pursuits, whilst spending our work time stuck like round pegs in square holes, in a work environment that sweeps us towards virtual reality at increasing knots.

Lorraine and Kath don't have this problem, although they have their own. They have a large furniture making workshop with big machinery and power tools to die for, and for the last 8 years they have been earning a living making the most extraordinary pieces of furniture. They have a flair for using recycled wood; not always hiding its history, but flaunting its used and battered beauty. *Wrinkles are in!* Their furniture has a fairy tale like quality, far from the conventions of the large Swedish concern. There are curves and twists, colours, shapes, even asymmetry, which suggest that this is where we might go when we get bored with wood that's straight.

Their craftsmanship has recently been acknowledged by Red Rose Forest; a reforestation project that aims to encourage local woodworkers to use wood from locally managed woodlands. They have awarded Kath and Lorraine's "Furniture Workshop" money to update their tools and machinery. So, along with recycled wood, they are making more furniture out of local hardwoods like oak, poplar, beech, ash, less commonly seen than woods of the great rainforests like mahogany and teak.

Katherine Furney, 36, describes herself as a furniture maker and restorer, - although she also has a qualification in upholstery, she tries to hide it! She trained at MANCAT in Manchester, taking the plunge after years of running a reproduction

business successfully, but wanting more. (Before that she'd spent 2 years floundering around in the countryside as a trainee ranger but the uniform put her off.) Kath wasn't totally convinced that she really wanted to make furniture until after the interview when she was shown the workshops. The sight of all those tools and machines won her over, and she has never looked back. After qualifying with an advanced City and Guilds, she set up "Blossom St Furniture" with 3 of her classmates. They were filled with grand ideas of a great collective and advertised for more furniture makers to join them. Lorraine was one of the people who answered the advert. A young furniture design graduate, who has had her work exhibited in Japan and New York, Lorraine had spent her former youth working in a casino, and then living on a beach in Greece. What she found at Blossom St, Manchester, was a huge dirty workshop with running water and a rodent problem. But she also found a group of friendly idealistic furniture makers including Kath, who was to be her work soulmate for the next 8 years and beyond.

Blossom St. was fun, but eventually broke up with it's members moving off in two directions; one into the highly commercial sector of MDF and chipboard kitchens, and the other which beckoned Lorraine and Kath, led to a more ethereal world of individually commissioned pieces of work with an environmentally friendly bias.

The workshop they have set up to do this ethereal work in is large and expensive to run which stimulates a heavy-duty work ethic. But this more serious attitude has not dampened their creativity. Their style is very much a fusion of contemporary design with traditional craftsmanship. A strange magic mixture of dove tails and recycled bits,. Strange curves and fanciful shapes. A warm experience, far from the cold and clinical vision of the contemporary that is as outdated as the science fiction of the 50s.

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As Lorraine say's "See it, feel it, touch it.... Its an object of desire."

Well enough said.