Brian David Reid stands next to his Bleached Ice Jewelry Cabinet, which has five sections, including this bank of 15 drawers with freshwater pearl drawer pulls.
Brian David Reid is obsessed with turning patterns into livable works of art, no matter how long it takes or how many shapes he has to cut. By Annalieze Jakimides

B rian David Reid is a pattern guy. He’s also a craftsman—a fine furniture craftsman, specializing in parquetry designs, geometric patterns using thin slices of wood, or veneers. To Reid, pattern is everything. “It is how the eye works,” he says. “Everything is pixelated like pixels on a screen.” His 1936 Delta scroll saw—he now has a 1944 model, too—uses a jeweler’s blade to cut every veneer pattern he creates.

His work ranges from a tissue box—he makes 50-plus each year—on up to a 54-inch-tall, five-legged jewelry cabinet of bleached maple and white madrone with freshwater pearls and leather inserts. He’s made a sleigh bed of English yew and various veneers as well as a queen-size canopy bed of iron-stained mahogany, veneers, an antique quilt, and cotton drapery material. One project can require the cutting of thousands of the thin pieces of wood, and the subsequent placement of all of those pieces. Many of his designs are based on fabrics or quilts, reflecting different cultures and different regions.

Once he has used power tools to rough a piece out, he puts them aside and picks up the hand tools—planes, chisels, scrapers, and a lot of sandpaper. Every surface you touch or can see has been finished by hand.

Reid grew up in the suburbs of Seattle, Washington, building forts in the woods and riding his bicycle, assembling radio kits and jigsaw puzzles, and listening to Ella Fitzgerald while the rest of his world was into the Rolling Stones. He received his BS in anthropology with a minor in engineering from the University of Washington. Dabbling in woodworking on the side, he continued to work in engineering until he started calling in “sick” more and more so that he could make things in his shop. He quit his day job and went to England to study for two years under the renowned furniture designer John Makepeace at Parnham College. Only eight Americans have studied at Parnham.

He has taught in a variety of wood programs across the country and in Scotland, but for the last eight years Reid has been the Senior Fellow of the Studio Fellowship Program at the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Rockport. He calls himself the “answer man.” When the
students are stuck, they turn to Reid. When they are not, he makes his work.

A member of the New Hampshire Furniture Masters Association, the Furniture Society, and Maine Crafts Association, Reid is represented by Grovewood Gallery in Asheville, North Carolina. His work has been published in *American Craft*, *Fine Woodworking*, and *Woodwork* magazines, and included in publications such as *Finding Balance: Reconciling the Masculine/Feminine in Contemporary Art*. He has exhibited across the United States and in England.

**How do you select the wood?**

For a lot of furniture makers, it’s all about the wood, finding that really beautiful piece. That’s not me. It’s about how I tile things, the reflective pattern. I’m looking for fairly monotone woods. It drives people nuts. Sometimes I buy really nice pieces of burl wood, not because they’re beautiful chunks of burl, but because they have no grain direction and for a particular piece I don’t want the grain to influence how you perceive the pattern.

**What experiences have shaped you as a designer?**

Well, clearly, ending up at Parnham. It was the right place for me.

**Why is that?**

At the time—it was 1992—all you were seeing in America was art furniture. That’s
not for me. But contemporary British furniture was really elegant. Furniture’s about beauty. I’m not trying to make a message.

Any other moments that you see as critical?
I’ve followed a very strange path, but a pivotal moment, I would say, would be the woman who taught me how to do this [creating patterns with cut veneers]. That changed my life.

What is it about it that attracts you?
It’s meditative. Remember how when you were a kid, and you used to lie on the ground and look at clouds and try to figure out what they were? That’s what this is all about. You’re playing with patterns and it makes you open your mind and, whoa, you don’t know where you’re going, but you are definitely going there.

So how do you create a pattern?
I start with a stack of different-colored veneers, all cut into squares. These are my tiles. If I just take these four [holds up a yellow, rose, tan, and gray from a stack] and cut straight across, I can trade one for the other. I can just cut and recombine. Then I can cut and recombine and cut again. If you don’t like it, cut again. Certain ways of cutting will create different sorts of symmetry, but what it is actually going to look like when I’m done, I don’t know. And that’s why I keep playing around. I am fascinated by the possibilities.
What's the largest number you've used in a piece?
There are 10,000 triangles in *Hourglass* [a canopy bed]. It took me three months to cut them up. I used a 1930s Depression-era quilt in it and then created the same pattern in the wood of the bed itself. I had just finished it for a show in Houston when someone gave me a book on the quilts of Gee's Bend, [which is a style of quilting created by a group of women who lived in the poor African American hamlet of Gee's Bend, Alabama. Gee's Bend quilts take an improvisational approach to quilting, contrasting dramatically with the meticulous regularity that is usually associated with quiltmaking.] That's proved to be very influential. I have my philosophy: sloppy good, sloppy bad. I look at those quilts and that's sloppy good. So free, loose, that it all makes sense.

Tell me about the [Bleached Ice Jewelry Cabinet] you have here.
This is the first time I worked in the round. The whole pattern is a takeoff on a traditional Asian pattern called “cracked ice,” which initially looks like it’s random, but it’s not. It took me a while to figure it out, but then I could apply the sort of code to the pentagonal symmetry I decided on. It doesn’t look like a piece of Chinese furniture now, but it did in my first drawings. Twenty-five drawings and several models later, through many points of departure, here it is, more Greek column than anything else.

Look at those freshwater-pearl drawer pulls. I love it.
I love it, too. But I wouldn’t live with it. It’s very interesting, what you like and what you like to make are often two different things. In my own house, I’d just as soon have some Shaker furniture, very simple. But I don’t enjoy making it at all.

Where would you say you are in your development?
I feel I’m just coming into my own. I have enough of my own ideas that I feel like I have my own language. And I am skilled in other people’s languages, too. I can show someone not just how I might solve a problem, but how five other master furniture makers might. But, in reality, I’m still at the beginning. A 12-year-old furniture apprentice in Japan in 1790 knew more than I’ll ever know about furniture.
In this month’s topic I would like to discuss endometriosis. This female condition has shown a rapid rise in recent years. I have seen and treated many females with endometriosis quite effectively as many female patients come to see me for infertility and endometriosis is a significant cause.

“TCM” classically defines endometriosis as blood stagnation in the lower burner. Western medicine defines endometriosis as a disease in which functioning endometrial tissue is improperly present in sites outside the uterine cavity. Common symptoms include pelvic pain, pelvic masses, alterations of menses and infertility.

Acupuncture combined with Chinese herbs is extremely effective in eliminating this condition!

Avoiding alcohol, caffeine, animal fats, butter, dairy products, fried foods, hydrogenated fats, junk food, fat food, red meats, salt, shellfish and sugar is essential for complete recovery.

Endometriosis

Dr. Zev J. Myerowitz, D.C., Dipl. Ac. (NCCAOM), LAc., F.I.C.C., DABCA

Myerowitz Chiropractic and Acupuncture Clinic
291 Main Road, Holden • 989-0000

Screen with a View: curly maple, bleached maple, bleached quilted western maple, bleached white oak. 56” x 2” x 72” tall.

making. His great-grandfather had worked there, his grandfather, his father. He went into the shop at age 3. I went into it at 34, and my father worked in insurance.

How would you describe the work you’re doing now?

It’s meditative. It’s all those catch words—peace, joy, calmness—for me, that is the meaning of it. I’m not an artist. I’m a craftsman. To me, it’s all about the process rather than what I create. It’s about attitude. That’s the one thing I’m trying to teach the most. If you can’t be patient, if you can’t free yourself up creatively, you’re never going to be a craftsman.

Is there something that you dream of making?

OK, here’s the dream. I want to do a whole room—the furniture, the ceiling, the walls, the light fixtures, plates, the silverware. All in a pattern. Maybe five rooms, and find five artists. Well, maybe six rooms—you need a workroom. Process art, who better to do it than a real craftsman? The whole message is about making it. I know several people who would be great. That’s my dream. I want to find a patron. You could even have cameras there and make a movie of it.

Wow, you’re really pushing the envelope.

I don’t think I am pushing the envelope. I’m just trying to create beautiful things that have pattern in them because I love pattern.

WHAT ARE YOU MISSING?

The punchline of a funny story? The amount due at the checkout? The date & time of your next appointment?

Hearing loss can affect the quality of your work, home life and social activities. If you …

• Have difficulty following conversations in a noisy room
• Complain that others mumble or fail to speak clearly
• Have trouble grasping dialogue on TV
• Are accused of having “selective hearing”
• Experience ringing in the ears …

…it’s time for a thorough evaluation of your hearing by the experts at Audiology Center of Maine.

Your hearing is important. Don’t wait … make an appointment with us today to find out how you may hear better.
—Mary Bromley Toothaker, MA, CCC-A, Nationally Certified & State Licensed Audiologist, CEO

207-664-2123
77 Beechland Road
Ellsworth