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## Vintage idea for new business

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GREENFIELD — “For the first month, this basement smelled like a stale bar,” laughed Tony Derricotte as he surveyed a stack of dried oak wine barrel staves, arranged neatly against the wall of his dark basement workshop inside the former Greenfield Steel Stamp Works building on Mead Street.

The smell of varnish hangs in the air and wisps of dust dance in the few beams of sunlight that poke through the room’s old windows and entryway. Piles of wooden barrel lids, staves of varying widths, cans of paint or varnish, and grey metal hoops inhabit one corner of the brick basement, separated by a series of tool-covered workbenches from the group of finished Adirondack-style chairs packed into the other.

Not long ago, the wood used to produce those chairs was hard at work in a California winery, assembled into barrels that were filled with red or white wine to impart subtle oak flavors into the beverage. Each barrel has a shelf life after which their flavoring potential runs out, though, and that’s where Derricotte comes in: since the spring, he’s been buying up old barrels, disassembling them and using the staves to produce the chairs, as well as some coat racks and bistro or side tables, for his new wine and whiskey barrel furniture business, Wood & Barrel Co.

Derricotte, a musician and music teacher by training who’s spent years working part-time as a carpenter and roofer to supplement his income, said he first began producing the Adirondack chairs after coming across the idea while surfing the Internet. After years of teaching music at local schools and through private lessons, Derricotte said he had to quit working to take care of his daughter who’d become sick, but when she was better decided to reinvent himself.

“I was just looking up cool stuff online, and I came across a picture of a chair. Initially, I didn’t know what it was, but I just thought it was the coolest, most comfortable looking thing I’d ever seen,” he said. “I decided to build a set for myself.”

After he had finished them, though, his wife posted a picture on Facebook, and a deluge of requests from friends to have a pair of their own built found Derricotte wondering how viable producing and selling them could be as a full-time business.

“As far as I could tell, I’d never seen one on the East Coast,” Derricotte said. “There are some whiskey barrel chairs, because you can get whiskey barrels around here, but sure enough I couldn’t find any wine barrel chairs.”

So, he ordered another 20 barrels from California, which he was able to get at a particularly good price due to an earthquake that had damaged them the previous year, and started refining his design and making it more distinctive.

Since then, he’s been working to find cheaper, more efficient ways to ship them — with the help of a Williamsburg blacksmith, he’s found a way to break them down into five separate pieces, allowing the customer to re-assemble them at home — perfecting different methods of applying finishes to the chairs to ensure they can weather the elements.

“I really want these to be something that can go outside and be able to take a beating,” he said.

He’s also ventured into using some of the wider staves to make coat racks with rail road spikes or vintage schoolhouse coat hooks as hangers.

Derricotte said he’s also been working on establishing a reliable supply chain, to ensure he can fill large orders in the future.

“I knew if I wanted to make a serious business out of it, I had to be able to fill a supply chain if I got 100 orders at once,” he said. “That’s a problem I’d really like to have.”

Recently, he took a trip to Sonoma and Napa, Calif., to visit and make connections with wineries and barrel restoration shops. He said each barrel generally equals one chair and he’s able to produce them in about two days, with another two to three days for applying the finish.

“There’s about 26 staves in the chair, and they’re pretty much the widest staves in the barrel. Each barrel has approximately 32 staves,” Derricotte said. “I’ve figured out how to get them done real systematically and I think I’ve got a pretty good system now.”

With the help of family, friends and the Franklin County Community Development Corp., Derricotte said he’s currently got about 60 barrels worth of wood, ready to be turned into furniture. Last week, he traveled to Provincetown to promote the business, where he said he’s already sold some chairs, and he’s sending some down to Nantucket to test the market there.

Derricotte said he's committed to using part of any profits that he reaps from the business to help support research into autoimmune diseases like the one with which his daughter was diagnosed. For his next project Derricotte said he will be designing a wine bottle rack using some of the leftover wood to give the product that the barrels helped produce a place to sit and age before — with any luck — they're consumed by someone sitting in one of his chairs.

"It's a bit cannibalistic, really," he said, as he tinkered with a prototype.

On the Web:

<http://www.woodandbarrel.com/>

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