

FREE
Maple Sugar
Event Map!

2004 HOME & GARDEN EXCLUSIVE

March/April 2004

VERMONT

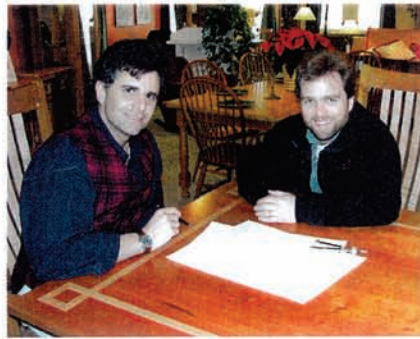
M A G A Z I N E

ClearLake Furniture

WITH A WORKSHOP IN Ludlow and a dozen employees, ClearLake produces furniture that's bench-made from start to finish by individual craftsmen. Brent Karner, a Massachusetts native, learned woodworking at the North Bennet Street School in Boston and began creating one-of-a-kind contemporary and historical pieces. Soon, his frustration with the limitations of making all-custom pieces—namely, the inability to refine the lessons he'd learned on one piece by applying them to the next commission—drove him to partner with designer Frank Procopio to create a line of furniture from which the customer can choose different design elements built on a basic line of frames and cases.

"There's no reason why you can't design contemporary pieces just like the finest antiques. Our goal is to make our furniture practical and beautiful," Brent says.

Incorporated in 1992, ClearLake Furniture began with a selection of five pieces;



one of the first was the Thatcher Console, a half-moon-shape table named after Brent's son that remains one of the most popular items they sell.

"I'd always wanted to live in Vermont. It was always part of my business plan to move to Vermont and have a Vermont-made furniture company," Brent says. He credits the welcome they received from the state of Vermont as a "huge plus," including the individual attention of the state recruiter with whom they worked at that

time, Jim Griffiths, who helped Brent and Frank look for the best location in which to set up shop. They bought the first place they looked at—an old barn on Route 100 in Ludlow—where they make furniture and have a showroom; a second showroom is in Woodstock, Vermont.

"The location was a big factor in the business plan," Brent says. "We ended up in close proximity to Boston, next to a ski resort, near a major route—and were able to harness the [marketing] power of 'made in Vermont.'"

The dozen or so employees are key to their success—Brent says that everyone he's hired in Vermont is still with the company—and each craftsman, using traditional 17th Century techniques, closely consults with the final customer during the process of creation before signing his name to the piece.

There's a strong sense of teamwork at ClearLake Furniture—Brent himself spends every day in the shop. "I need to have sawdust in my lungs," he says. Frank Procopio refines designs and consults with customers in the showrooms. "Our pieces fit in both very traditional and very contemporary homes—nothing faddish...very clean and classic design," Frank says. "Our ability to listen to the customer sets us apart—it's all about them."



Top: ClearLake partners Frank Procopio and Brent Karner at their Ludlow showroom. Furniture: Bowfront dresser and curved bed.

