

# TRADITIONAL WOOD, MODERN IDEAS



Faisal Malik is an old-school carpenter and woodworker who designs modern furniture from antique Thai wood. He shares his studio/workshop on Onnut Soi 11 with his wife Elodie who is a professional aerialist as well as sharing a love for wood.

Pieter and Stefanie Compagnol, founders of Ptendercool allowed Faisal to train and with their team in Bangkok while he developed his own work, and that is where he first learned about Thai woods, sanding, finishing techniques. He cites fellow Canadian Jeff Martin Joinery and Brit Adrian Swinstead as design influences while Father Giovanni Contarin of the St. Camillus Order has played a huge influence in his personal life.

Faisal has led a fascinating live, born and raised thirty minutes outside of Montreal to Pakistani immigrants, he speaks English, French, Urdu and some Thai. Growing up, his parents ran a crafts and flower shop. He used to go around collecting old barnwood to make shelving units, his start in carpentry.

From 2000-2003, he enlisted as an infantryman in the Canadian Forces, 1 RCR, based in Petawawa, where he specialized in mountain and cold weather operations and operated various munitions' systems and advanced communications.



Then in 2005, he moved to Pakistani Kashmir where he worked in Operations with the International Organization for Migration (IMO), collaborating with the Pakistani military, coordinating flights and air relief distributions during the earthquake of 2005, as well as supervising major road repair projects and managing aid distribution in high altitude areas. During this time, he worked with engineers, architects and woodworkers, so his building knowledge grew considerably. By the way, his father Yousaf is an engineer.

Staying in Kashmir, he moved on to be Operations Manager of Samaritans Purse managing the logistics and construction of 2.5 million USD project of building 300 homes.

Faisal then decided he wanted to do volunteer work and originally sought to go work with underprivileged in India through a Canadian connection, but Indian authorities were suspicious of his military background and the visa was not forthcoming. However he found a spot as a palliative care caregiver at the Camillian Social Centre in Rayong working with Fr.Giovanni. He stayed there for six months. Two years later, in 2009 he returned to Thailand to volunteer again with Fr.Giovanni at his new project in Bangkok for children with disabilities and life threatening illnesses. Whilst retaining his volunteer status he eventually became the managing director in effect of the Camillian Home for Children Living with Disabilities, a post he held from 2009-2014, when he left to start his own design firm.



Duties at Camillian included guiding and monitoring the overall workflow of the organization, coordinating fundraising initiatives, serving as the key spokesperson and media contact for the organization, and creating and implementing social development activities, child protection policies as well as developing many inclusive construction projects such as an aquatic therapy pool, community wheelchair accessible park, gardens and more. During that time, he also managed to obtain a bachelor's degree in mass communication and media studies from Bangkok's Ramkhamhaeng University.

Why is all this important? Because it has all helped to shape Faisal into the person and artist he is today.

When you talk with Faisal the occasional expletive depletive slips out – "army training" – and you get the sense that he doesn't suffer fools very well, but that he also demands a lot of himself. The attention to detail he learned in the Canadian army has served him very well in his work.

Faisal goes on reconnaissance work, scouring Thai coastlines in search of Makha and Padauk hardwood that was used in building old Thai fishing boats. Though not easy to find, once he does, he sands it down and reclaims it with a natural oil and wax finish. Faisal says, "I hope my work is seen as a continuation, giving new life to old Thai timber, which carries the energy and history of the past, reincarnated into functional sculptures to be enjoyed for generations to come." As reincarnation plays such a strong role in Buddhist belief it makes sense that Faisal would want to transform old pieces of wood and turn them into something usable today. "I want to harmoniously unite wood's innate beauty and history with modern elements," he says. Faisal is trying to preserve the spirit found in the original tree.

There's a story in each of his pieces, example, in his Amber Wood Coffee Table, "the grain evokes global wind patterns as observed from space, radiating an incredible depth of amber and golden hues," while you would be hard pressed to tell the surface of his Mercury Coffee Table and the surface of planet Mercury apart: both have mountainous ridges littered with pits and volcanic images.

But it's not just the wood that's interesting, the acrylic legs that Faisal uses are manufactured by a company that supplies NASA; they have beautiful optic qualities and are very strong, able to support 2,000 kg in weight.

Faisal cherishes his independence and calls himself a maker-designer. He can spend up to 150 hours working on a piece and doesn't mass produce items. He knows all his customers – again, old school. He estimates he spends five hours a day on carpentry, the rest goes to prepping, measuring, marking and, of course, the business side of things. One day, he hopes to get a large workspace with advanced German and Japanese machinery such as a 5 axis cnc, helical head planer, panel saw and much more but for the time being he's content where he is.

Most of Faisal's customers come by word of mouth. He has supplied many private residences and high-end hotels including the Mandarin Oriental and the Park Hyatt. His large furniture items such as benches and tables aren't cheap, with prices starting at THB 165,000, but his smaller handicrafts such as cutting boards, jewelry and cigar boxes and serving plates are quite reasonable and make for great gift items. Give him a call, or pay him a visit, to see if he can come up with that special gift for you or your loved ones.

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