

Paul Raciborski has been climbing a learning curve in more ways than one.



# Paul's Chairs

Paul Raciborski's love of mountaineering has seen him conquer Mont Blanc in France three times. In 2003 his passion for mountain climbing took him to the South Island of New Zealand with a

plan to climb Mt Cook. Part of the preparations for the climb was to acclimatise with a couple of alpine walks so that he and his family would be fit enough for the challenge.

## BAD TIMING

While walking across a gully a freak accident changed Paul's life forever. A boulder dislodged itself further up the mountain, raced down the gully that Paul was traversing and swept him off his feet and down a 5m cliff! Multiple fractures and a traumatic brain injury turned Paul into a rag doll. A Westpac helicopter airlifted him to Christchurch hospital. Paul was in a coma for two weeks, had seven surgeries in five days, followed by three and a half months as an in-patient. A year of rehabilitation had Paul relearning how to eat, speak, write and walk.

Paul made an excellent recovery and is now on the board of Synapse (Australia's Brain Injury Organisation). When I spoke to Paul, he said his recovery was due to tremendous support from family, friends and work, minimal frontal lobe injury, an inner drive to move forward and building projects found in *Australian Woodsmith*.

Woodwork has helped him recover his ability to plan, concentrate, hone his fine motor skills and fill his house with furniture that he has made.



HEIRLOOM PROJECT

## Welsh Stick Chair

If you've ever wanted to try your hand at building a chair, this handsome Welsh stick chair is the perfect project to get you started on your journey.

There are a few areas of woodworking that are categorised on their own. Chair-making is one of those practices. In the past, a woodworker could make a living specialising in building chairs. But the need for simpler, everyday chairs, instead of formal seating, drove several styles of chairs built by general furniture makers. Here's one of those styles—a Welsh stick chair.

**A SIMPLE CONSTRUCTION.** One of the defining features of a Welsh stick chair is the simple construction. While finer types of chairs, such as Windsor chairs, feature a variety of steam bending and turning, the Welsh chair is a utilitarian piece. Its legs are usually fluted instead of turned. The back rail is cut from a segmented blank instead of bent, and the joints are all basic construction—a round tenon fitting into a round mortise. It's quick to make and lasts a long time.

These changes made the chair more economical to build for the average furniture maker. A lathe wasn't required to turn the legs—a hand plane created the facets. Instead of turning tenons on a lathe, a rafter and tenon cutter took care of the joinery.

**BECOME A CHAIRMAKER.** Even though I've talked about the simplification of the building process, that doesn't mean the chair won't present a few challenges. Not to worry, however. A few basic chair-building fundamentals are all you need to get started. Well, that and some stock. So, turn the page to start your very own Welsh stick chair.



The profile of the back rail mirrors the shape of the seat. The rail curve combined with a centre bridge piece makes the chair comfortable to sit in for extended periods of time.

The shaped and contoured seat on the chair looks complicated. But a straight approach and an aggressive cutting disc in an angle grinder make shaping the seat quick and easy.

www.austliawoodsmith.com.au • 47

▲ The heirloom project from Issue 162 that inspired Paul to have a go at building a Welsh stick chair. He modified the design, kept the seat geometry build, but built tall backs.



▲ Prescription safety glasses, full visor face shield, earmuffs and ducted dust collection keep Paul safe in his workshop



▲ To reduce "chatter" when turning the spindles Paul reduces the speed of the lathe while roughing down to a round. The final cut is done with a large skew chisel.

### RARE CHAIRS

Paul has three degrees behind him and has had a successful career in corporate management. Woodwork has always been a life-long hobby.

Woodturning was a skill that Paul was keen to learn, so three years ago he enrolled in a weekend turning course at Trend Timbers and got hooked. In quick succession he bought a Carbatec lathe, a brace of Robert Sorby turning chisels, an EdgePro to keep them keen and some serious dust protection to keep his lungs in order.

Around the same time Paul spent a week in the Upper Hunter doing a residential course with Howard Archbold (from Rare Chairs) building a Welsh stick chair on a traditional pole lathe. His wife Julie was impressed but needed nine more to fit the jarrah dining table (that Paul had also built).

Paul was stoked when he opened Issue 162 of *Australian Woodsmith* and saw the plans for a Welsh stick chair. A visit to Trend Timbers to purchase some American white oak and Paul was well

on his way to building the featured chair. Paul then blended the design of the chair he had made with Howard Archbold and our chair to craft his tall dining chairs. The chair with the castors is for his desk.

It is a real pleasure to feature Paul and his chairs on these pages. When Paul sent in his photos for our gallery pages, we thought they deserved to be showcased in their own right. Paul is not only a clever woodworker; he is also a poster boy for brain injury recovery and the power of woodwork as a therapy. **W**



▲ Notice the leg billets to the left have all been predrilled with a drill guide. Paul is systematic with his preparation, planning and execution. The American white oak is kiln dried and stable, making it a good choice for the chairs.



▲ Each seat was fabricated out of three pieces of oak dominoed together and glued with Tite-Bond.