



Brian Reid in the woodshop at the Maine State Prison in Warren.

ART

Woodworking Behind Bars

Brian Reid teaches prison inmates how to craft fine furniture.

BY EDGAR ALLEN BEEM PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARTI STONE

Brian Reid spends most of his Sundays in prison. Reid, a Rockland woodworker who teaches at the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Rockport, arrives at the Maine State Prison in Warren at 8 A.M. and remains locked up until 3:30, teaching fine woodworking skills to 10 prisoners.

The Maine Prison Outreach Program was started in 2012 by Reid and Tyra

Hanson, owner of the Gallery at Somes Sound, in Somesville, after Hanson admired a high bow back chair made by a New Hampshire inmate through a program run by the New Hampshire Furniture Masters Association. With the help of association founding member Terry Moore, Hanson and Reid won the approval of the Maine Department of Corrections for a similar program here. Woodworkers Dylan Fuller, of Thomaston, and Howard Hatch, of Augusta, have taught in the program along with Reid.





“When these guys are released, they want to be part of society, but they have a record, and many of them have no education,” Hanson says. “This program gives them a second chance in life.”

All of the prisoners taking part in the fine woodworking program are veterans of the Maine State Prison’s industries program, in which prisoners are paid to make novelties and furniture to be sold at the Prison Showroom on Route 1 in

Thomaston. Whereas the industries program uses power tools, however, the Maine Prison Outreach Program uses hand tools, most of which were donated by Lie-Nielsen Toolworks, of Warren.

Reid began the program by teaching basic skills with hand chisels, planes, and saws, and then he led the prisoners through a series of self-designed projects. As his students have developed more expertise, he has added lessons in advanced woodworking techniques, such as veneering, laminating, and marquetry. Most of the participants are now able to pursue complex, long-term projects, with Reid available to consult. There is a waiting list to get into class, and Reid hopes eventually to establish a similar program at the prison’s Bolduc Unit pre-release facility.

For Reid, the program is an opportunity to “help people who can’t help themselves.” His students have confided that, besides making

constructive use of their time behind bars, crafting furniture offers a respite from the daily grind of prison life. “When you’re in prison, it is a constant struggle with the pecking order,” explains Reid. “Sundays, we’re in there by ourselves – 10 guys, me, and the guard. It’s a holiday from the social stresses of being in prison.”

“Fine woodworking class has been the best program that I’ve ever done,” affirmed one inmate in a telephone interview. “The skills that I’ve learned will help so much when I keep building after my release.”

Furniture created in the Maine Prison Outreach Program, including nightstands, dressers, and dining tables, will be exhibited for sale at the Gallery at Somes Sound, 1112 Main St., Somesville, during the week of June 14–20. Ninety percent of the proceeds will be donated to the program. 207-244-1165. galleryatsomesound.com

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