

The Somerset Guild of Craftsmen Furniture Prize 2016

Chris Tipple, member of the Guild and organiser of the Furniture Prize 2016, tells us about a furniture exhibition for students and apprentices



Matt Duckworth (left) receiving his prize from Tom Kealy (right)

As the student makers arrive to collect their beautiful exhibits at the end of the 2016 Furniture Prize Exhibition, I am left with a slight feeling of emptiness. It has been a good exhibition, showing furniture designed and made to an exceptionally high standard and I will be sorry to see such beautiful work leave our gallery.

And so, from our new headquarters in Wells, the oldest Guild in the country, the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen, bring their 2016 Furniture Prize Exhibition for Student and Apprentice furniture makers to a close, and start looking forward to arrangements for the 2017 Furniture Prize.

On occasions, during the early months of organising an exhibition like this, I feel that I have been trying to push water up hill. However, when it all comes together, as it did so well this year, I am left with a warm glow of both pride and satisfaction, and that is all the motivation needed to start organising next year's exhibition.

It never ceases to amaze me how the student makers can achieve such exceptional standards of work, when many of them begin their course with little or no experience of working with wood. Clearly a natural talent is a prerequisite, but that talent has to be nurtured, encouraged and guided. As much as I admire the student's achievements I take my hat off to their teachers and mentors for bringing them to a standard to produce exhibits such as those in this exhibition.

The Guild's Furniture Prize Exhibition started six years ago, when the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen, together with Friends of Somerset Art Works, set a challenge to student furniture makers of Bridgwater College to create the finest piece of work for the year. Year by year the exhibition has grown. This year there were entries from four schools: Bridgwater College, City of Bristol College, Williams & Cleal Furniture School and The David Savage School of Fine Furniture. Additionally, Axminster Power Tools joined Friends of Somerset Art Works

“On seeing the high standard of the other competitors’ work, winning came as an unexpected but very pleasant surprise. I am planning to use the prize money towards my next exhibition – Celebration of Craftsmanship & Design. To receive the feedback I did from such highly respected judges was fantastic and a real confidence boost. I highly recommend next year’s competition to any aspiring designer-makers and a visit to the Somerset Guild for anyone interested in the crafts.”

*Matt Duckworth,
winner of the 2016 Furniture Prize*



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE DAVID SAVAGE SCHOOL OF FINE FURNITURE

Matt Duckworth's Mallard Desk was inspired by the elegant form of Louis XIV period furniture. The desk uses clean lines and compound curves to create the appearance of contraction. Using only native British timbers the piece is constructed from English walnut (*Juglans regia*) with spindle wood detail. The dovetailed 'piston' fitted drawer is made from wild English pear (*Pyrus communis*) with an English cherry (*Prunus avium*) drawer base. Each leg was laminated from four pieces cut from sequential boards of English walnut to ensure a grain match and to give added strength. The spindle wood feet and drawer slip runners create a striking contrast while also being hard wearing and ensuring longevity of the piece. To ensure consistency, Matt hand cut veneers for the desk surface from the same tree butt as the legs. Matt studied at the David Savage School of Fine Furniture

as sponsors. Not only did Axminster make a significant contribution to the winner's prizes but also offered a very generous discount, for 12 months, for each of the students who reached the high standard needed to exhibit at the Furniture Prize exhibition.

This year, Tom Kealy and Martin Lane gave their precious time to the unenviable task of judging the exhibits. They selected winners based on the quality of design and quality of workmanship. The standard this year left the judges with a real dilemma. Although choosing the winner was fairly clear cut, selecting the pieces for the next prizes was nowhere near so easy with four very different exhibits, any one of which could have been chosen for a prize. After long deliberation the judges, still unable to split the runners up, decided to award a First Prize and two equal

Second Prizes, rather than second and third. In addition to the judges' awards, visitors to the gallery took an active part in the selection, by voting the Popular Choice prize.

The overall winner of the 2016 Furniture Prize was Matt Duckworth, from the David Savage School of Fine Furniture. He set an exceptionally high standard with his Mallard Desk, and not only took first prize but also won the Popular Choice prize.

Second prizes were awarded to Damian Robinson's Writing Desk and Chair and Ali Buchan's Torii Gate Console Table.

All in all it has been a joy and a privilege to be involved with the Guild's Furniture Prize and I will look forward to 'pushing water up hill' again next year, if only to see the amazing standard of work that the students produce.





Damian Robinson made this writing desk and chair for his father-in-law. The primary work surface of the desk is topped with leather and has an elevated rear section that opens to reveal storage compartments and two removable pen trays. The strong angular lines present a modern, clean and simple design. The piece is made out of solid American black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), selected for its beautiful crown and mostly straight grain patterning. The rich brown tones and natural lustre of the wood all combine to give the desk and chair a sleek, timeless finish. Damian studied at the Williams & Cleal Furniture School



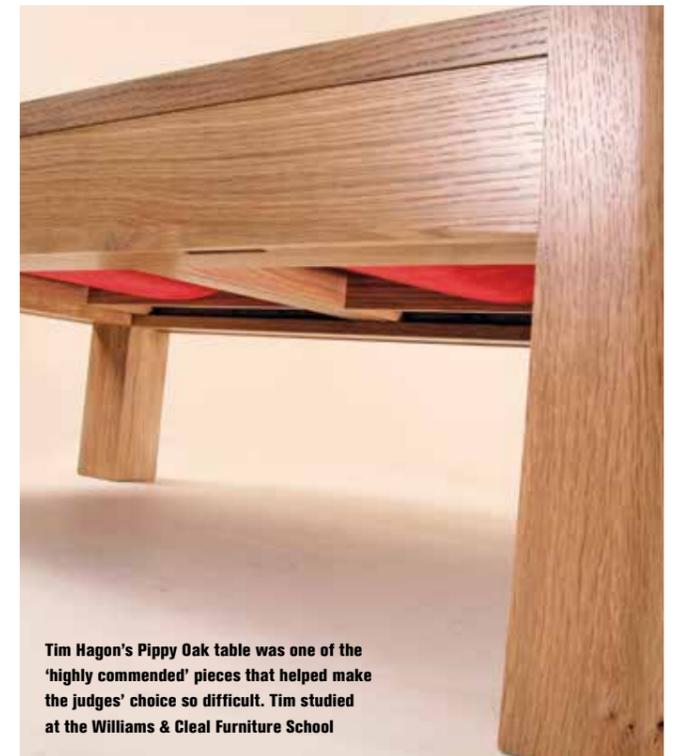
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE WILLIAMS & CLEAL FURNITURE SCHOOL



Ali Buchan's table design is based on the famous floating Torii Gate at the Itsukushima Shrine in Hiroshima, Japan. The console table surfaces are made from African wenge (*Millettia laurentii*) and the rails and legs made from West African bubinga (*Guibourtia demeusei*). He chose these timbers mainly for their colours, so that the finished piece would mimic those of the torii gate. The surfaces had to be very dark and the legs and rails a rich red. Ali studied at the Williams & Cleal Furniture School. For more photos of this piece, see page 16

The 2017 Furniture Prize Exhibition

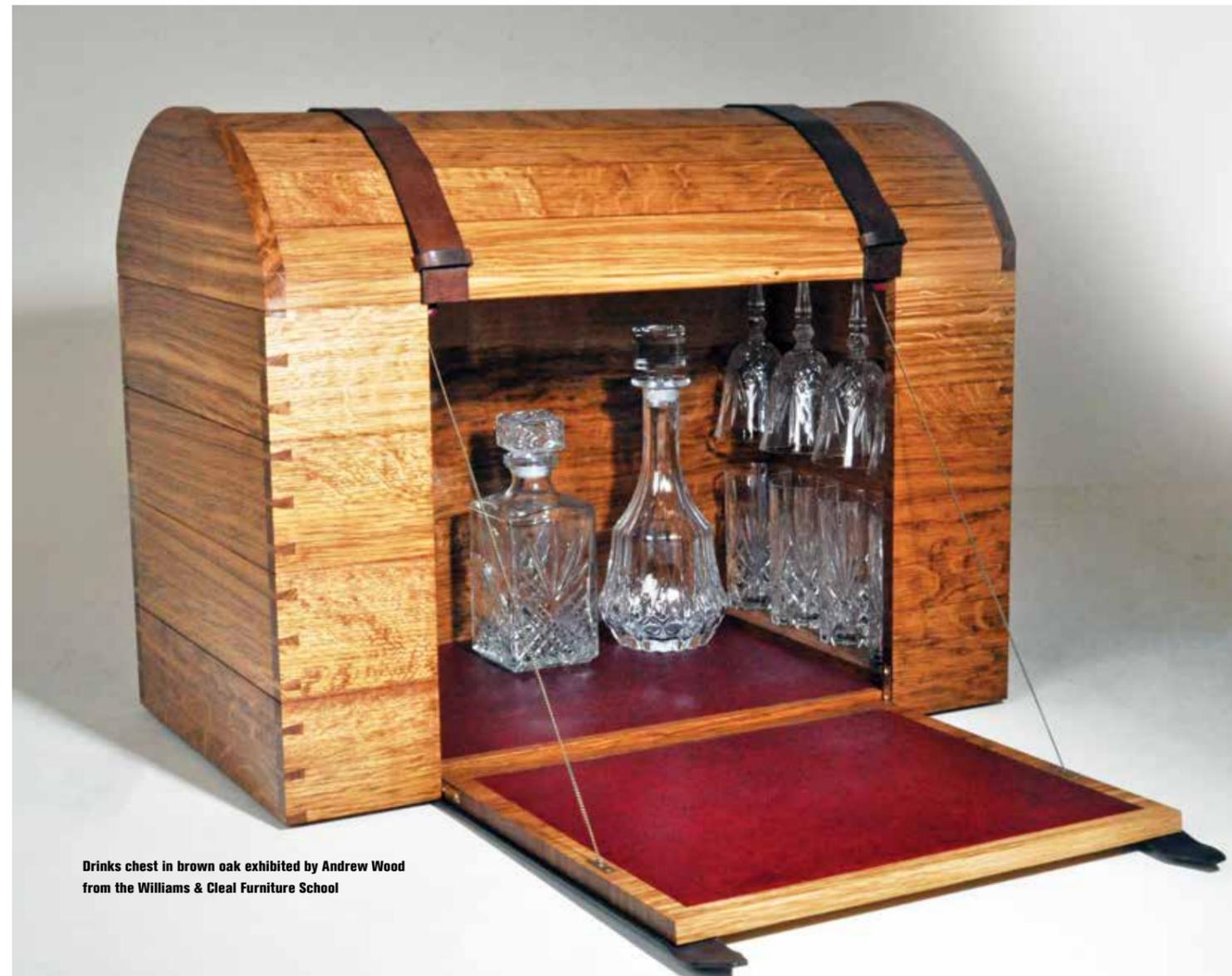
From their new gallery in Wells, the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen is aiming to grow a big oak tree from a little acorn and, by taking one step at a time, develop and steadily expand the Guild's Furniture Prize Exhibition beyond the southwest. Through our Furniture Prize the Somerset Guild is hoping to increase the profile of furniture design and making, and will welcome any enquiries from students, apprentices or schools who may be interested in entering the 2017 Furniture Prize. The Exhibition is planned to start on 24 June, 2017 and will be open to the public for five weeks until 29 July. Any students, apprentices or schools who may be interested in entering the 2017 Furniture Prize should contact the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen at:
Email: gallery@somersetguild.co.uk
Web: www.somersetguild.co.uk



Tim Hagon's Pippy Oak table was one of the 'highly commended' pieces that helped make the judges' choice so difficult. Tim studied at the Williams & Cleal Furniture School



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE WILLIAMS & CLEAL FURNITURE SCHOOL



Drinks chest in brown oak exhibited by Andrew Wood from the Williams & Cleal Furniture School