

**A PORTRAIT
OF THE**

AMERICAN CRAFTSMAN

A COLLECTION BY
TADD MYERS



LABOR

The American craftsman refuses to become extinct. While computer-controlled robots and Chinese factories are churning out most of the products that feed the great machine of consumption, along the less traveled backroads and in the dustier corners of our economy, the craftsman keeps an older, slower, more picturesque kind of work alive. He, or she, shows up in the workshop day after day and proves that it's still possible for beauty to trump efficiency and for individual imagination to work perfectly well without the dubious direction of focus groups and consumer polls. The craftsman's work defies most contemporary notions of commerce. Nobody goes into the stagecoach manufacturing business expecting it to become the next big trend in transportation. Nor would the typical entrepreneur take years learning how to turn old auto parts into cowboy equipment because it seems like the

OF LOVE



path to financial success. Oh, they do make a living at it, pay the bills, put the kids through college. In their way, they live a rich life. But it's not profit in the financial sense that drives the craftsmen these pages. You don't have to delve very deeply into their motives to find something that could only be called love, or to probe very far into their job satisfaction to discover that their most valued form of compensation is pride in the work itself. Not that the craftsman is indifferent to the marketplace. He's simply happy to make his product for a smaller niche than most of his fellow business folk might deem adequate. The world hasn't become completely digitized and homogenized yet. The American craftsman still thrives, because when it comes to getting certain things done well and with beauty, a human hand guided by a human eye, ear, and imagination can still be the highest technology of all.

FOREWORD





“A working cowboy will get three or four months out of a pair of factory-made boots or three or four years out of a pair of mine.”

~ CARL CHAPPELL



TRAIL TOWN CUSTOM BOOTS → SAINT JO, TEXAS

B

etween the vagaries of weather and cattle prices, the moods of ranch bosses, and the sheer wear and tear of long days on horseback, cowboys don't get a lot of guarantees in life. Carl Chappell gives them one thing they can count on. His custom-made boots will fit, guaranteed. Priced from \$800 up, Carl's Trail Town and C.T. Chappell custom boots far outlast cheaper factory-made products, so they're cheaper in the long run for



working cowboys. Carl offers a “cowboy layaway” plan; customers can pay a little each month, and by the time the boots are ready in a year or two, they're paid for. Son of a boot maker father and grandson of a saddle maker, Carl spends up to 60 hours crafting a pair of boots. Customers come from as far away as Japan to be fitted. Three times a year he holds boot making schools for students from across the United States and Canada, sharing his knowledge to ensure that custom boot making will never be a lost art.



PRO SADDLES & SPURS → GAINESVILLE, TEXAS



For their raw material, earlier generations of spur makers salvaged axles and driveshafts from Model T Fords. They weren't cutting corners. The steel had the ideal carbon content to make it both strong and easy to shape. It took Bruce Cheaney years to find one of those old-school masters willing to share the secrets of the craft. Part metallurgist, part sculptor, part silversmith, part entrepreneur, Bruce creates one-piece, silver-decorated steel spurs that fetch up to \$2,500 a pair.

Each pair takes days of steady work to sketch, forge, hammer, decorate, engrave and polish. His raw material of choice: an aircraft alloy surprisingly similar to the Model T steel. Also a famed saddle maker with customers as far away as Australia, Bruce is the fifth generation of saddle makers in his family. His son, Tom, is the sixth.



“I MIGHT HAVE TO WORK FROM NOW ON, BUT THAT’S KIND OF THE WAY I WANT IT. YOU CAN DREAM UP MORE STUFF THAN YOU CAN BUILD IN A LIFETIME.”

~ BRUCE CHEANEY

PAWLESS GUITARS → **GAINESVILLE, TEXAS**

Being laid off turned out to be an opportunity for Vince Pawless. Let go after more than 20 years climbing the career ladder with a Dallas retail chain, he used his severance package to turn his hobby, guitar making, into a new life's work. Jack Ingram was the first well-known musician to discover the beauty and pure vintage sound of Vince's handmade instruments. Soon Texas legends Jerry Jeff Walker and Billy Joe Shaver joined the scores of other purists waiting up to three years for a custom Pawless guitar. Vince's signature material is mesquite wood, beautiful and with fine acoustics but too challenging for mass manufacturers to work with. While most so-called handmade guitars use parts cut by machine and glued together, Vince sticks steadfastly to the methods of a century ago. "To me, it's simple," he says. "Build it like an old guitar and it will sound like an old guitar."



"I've got close to 100 guitars out there and I remember every one of them."

- VINCE PAWLESS



**MADE IN
USA**





**“IF YOU STARTED FROM SCRATCH,
IT WOULD TAKE THREE MEN
EVERY BIT OF FIVE MONTHS TO
BUILD ONE. EVERY PIECE
IS HANDMADE.”**

~ JAY BROWN

JAY BROWN STAGECOACHES → WEATHERFORD, TEXAS



It started with a Wild West show. In the 1960s and 1970s Jay Brown, his wife, and their trick-riding daughters spent summers working theme parks and fairgrounds across the country. Jay, then a vocational agriculture teacher, began studying the stagecoaches used in the shows. He restored a couple. Then, after painstakingly copying every part of an antique coach, he started building them from scratch, following the specifications of the Abbott Downing

Company, the New Hampshire enterprise that built the first stagecoach in 1827. Today Jay Brown stagecoaches appear in Hollywood films, Wells Fargo Bank commercials, and in private collections around the United States. Representing weeks of work, handmade to the last detail, a historically accurate, wooden-bodied stagecoach costs \$65,000 for a basic model. In his one concession to modernity, Jay offers budget-minded customers a fiberglass-bodied model for \$20,000 less.

NOKONA ATHLETIC GOODS COMPANY → NOCONA, TEXAS



The way they make baseball gloves at Nokona Athletic Goods Company is a lot like baseball itself: unrushed, well thought out, and rooted in tradition. While every other major baseball glove company has shipped its manufacturing overseas, Nokona has stayed right where it started in 1933: tiny Nocona, Texas, famous for leather work since the days of the Chisholm Trail.

Working in American cowhide and buffalo and in supple Australian kangaroo, Nokona craftsmen cut, sew, lace, and line their gloves, turning out around 200 a day in a process unchanged in 75 years. And it's not likely to change in the next 75. Baseball glove making has stymied every engineer who ever tried to automate it — a fact that gives the Nokona craftsmen nearly as much pleasure as lacing up a big-league-quality fielder's glove.



“Some automation specialists thought they could tell us how to automate stuff. But you have to do this by hand.”

~ NELL ANN MCBROOM





“The simplicity of the clean lines and the intricacy of the detail are exciting to me. It’s something that fills my soul.”

- BRENT HULL



HULL HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURAL MILLWORK → FORT WORTH, TEXAS



Like many entrepreneurs before him, Brent Hull started his company in a garage. Unlike most, Brent could turn that garage into a Renaissance palace. Trained for two years in the art of preservation carpentry at Boston’s famed North Bennet Street School, he returned home to Fort Worth and formed his company. Working with a hand-picked team of fellow craftsmen, Brent was soon taking on everything from the restoration of Victorian

courthouses to, on one recent project, replicating 15th- and 16th-century joinery in antique wood for an English Revival house on the East Coast. His company, Hull Historical, also produces a line of architectural moldings sold through professional lumber yards. A noted author and speaker, Brent has become one of the nation’s leading advocates for craftsmanship in homebuilding, urging architects, builders, designers, and homeowners to preserve the dying art of great design at a human scale.



BUSINESSES FEATURED:

TRAIL TOWN CUSTOM BOOTS

SAINT JO, TX
CARL CHAPPELL
107 S. Broad Steet (HWY 82)
Saint Jo, TX 76265
940-995-2600
trailtowncustomleather.com

PRO SADDLES & SPURS

GAINESVILLE, TX
BRUCE CHEANEY
318 S. Lindsay Street
Gainesville, TX 76240
940-668-8607
prosaddles.com

PAWLESS GUITARS

GAINESVILLE, TX
VINCE PAWLESS
118 Pawless Lane
Gainesville, TX 76240
972-816-6139
pawless.com

JAY BROWN STAGECOACHES

WEATHERFORD, TX
JAY BROWN
4850 E. Bankhead Drive
Weatherford, TX 76087
817-594-8196

NOKONA ATHLETIC

GOODS COMPANY
NOCONA, TX
NELLY ANN MCBROOM
901 E. Hwy 82
Nocona, TX 76255
940-825-3326
nokona.com

HULL HISTORICAL

ARCHITECTURAL MILLWORK
FORT WORTH, TX
BRENT HULL
201 Lipscomb Street
Fort Worth, TX 76104
817-332-1495
brenthull.com / hullhistorical.com

CREDITS:

PHOTOGRAPHER Tadd Myers / taddmyers.com / 214-752-2372

DESIGN The Matchbox Studio / matchboxstudio.com

TEXT David Culp / 214-850-4689

MEDIA RELATIONS Vicki Young / theyoungcompany.net

PRINTING Lincoln Press / lincolnpres.biz

CUSTOM ENVELOPE Graphic Converting, LTD. / 972-554-8000

PAPER NewPage, Centura Matte 100C & 100T / newpagecorp.com
Clampitt Paper, Dallas / clampitt.com

Tadd Myers is an award-winning photographer based in Dallas, Texas and specializes in advertising, corporate, and editorial projects around the world. To see more images on this project, please go to americancraftsmanproject.com or taddmyers.com.



AMERICANCRAFTSMANPROJECT.COM