A PORTRAIT OF THE

## AMERICAN CRAFTSMAN

A COLLECTION BY

TADD MYERS



# LABOR

The American craftsman refuses to become extinct. While computer- 1 path to financial success. Oh, they do make a living at it, pay the controlled robots and Chinese factories are churning out most of bills, put the kids through college. In their way, they live a rich life. the products that feed the great machine of consumption, along the less | But it's not profit in the financial sense that drives the craftsmen traveled backroads and in the dustier corners of our 🗙 in

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 ear, and imagination can still be the highest technology of all.

these pages. You don't have to delve very deeply

OF LOVE X

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,

FOREWORD









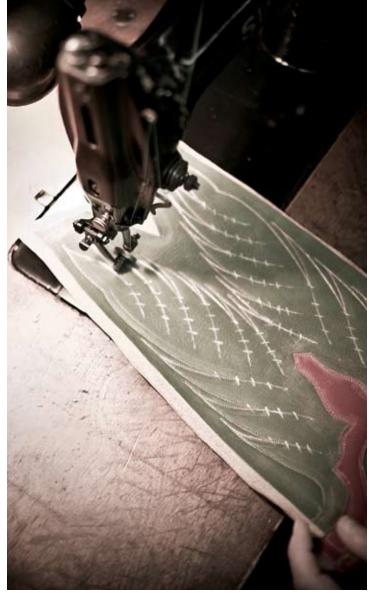












### TRAIL TOWN CUSTOM BOOTS 🛥 SAINT JO, TEXAS



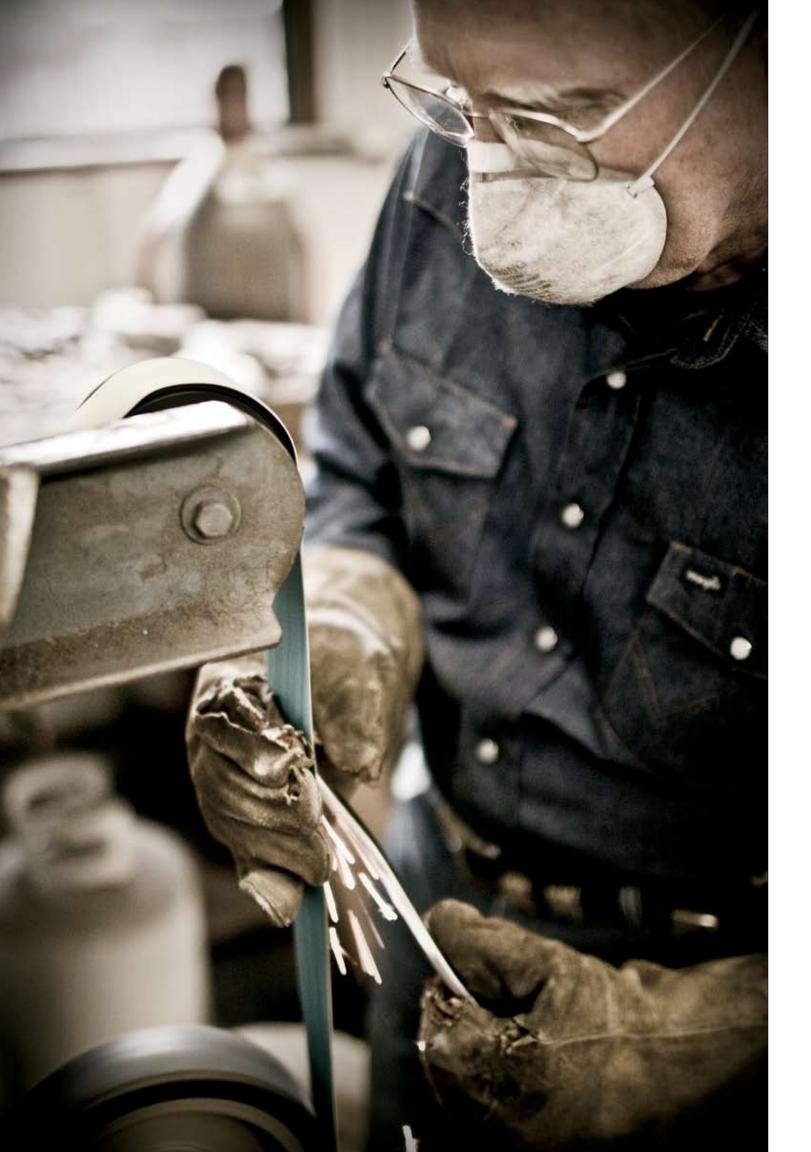
etween the vagaries of weather and cattle prices, the moods of ranch bosses, and the sheer wear and tear of long days on horseback, cowboys don't get a lot of guarantees in life. Carl Chappell gives them one thing they can count on. His custommade boots will fit, guaranteed. Priced from \$800 up,

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.

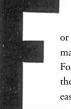
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"A working cowboy will get three or four months out of a pair of factory-made boots or three or four years out of a pair of mine." ~ CARL CHAPPELL



#### PRO SADDLES & SPURS 🛥 GAINESVILLE, TEXAS



or 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.



**"IMIGHT HAVE TO WURK** 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



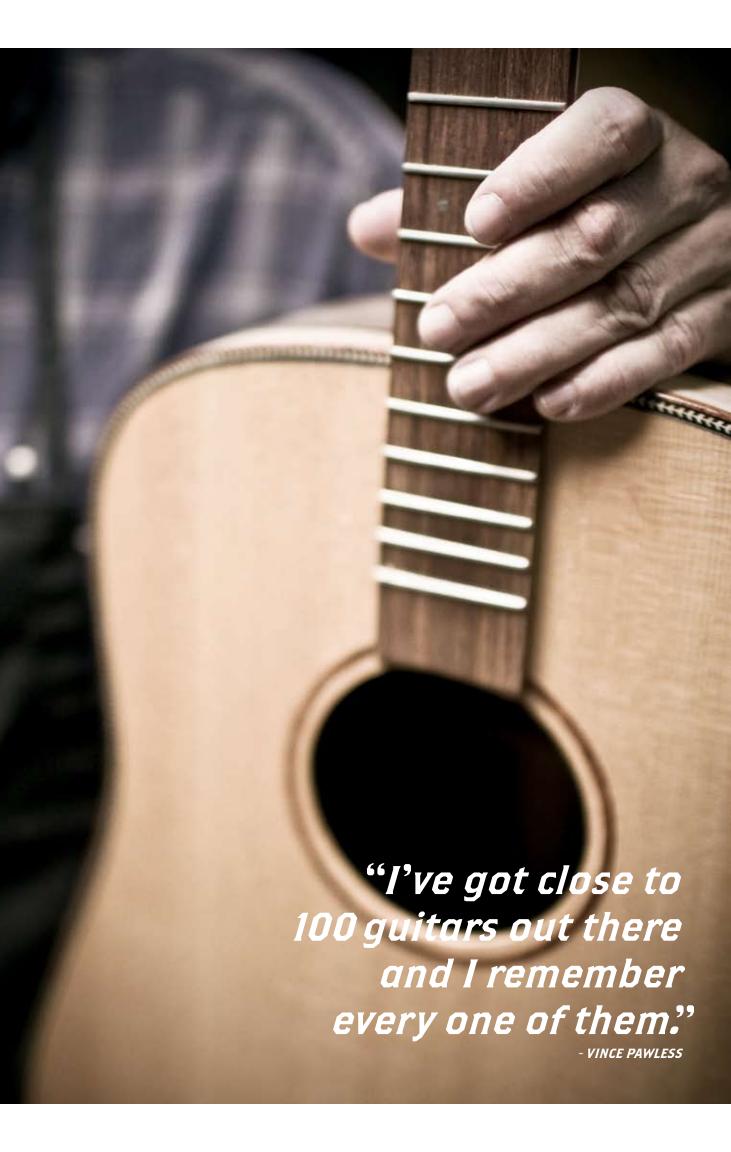
#### PAWLESS GUITARS 🛥 GAINESVILLE, TEXAS

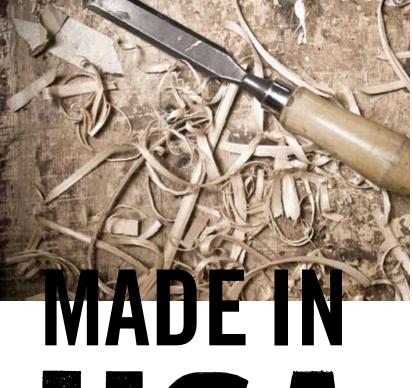
eing laid off turned out to be an opportunity for Vince Pawless. Let go after more than 20 years climbing the career ladder with a Dallas retail chain, he used his severance package to turn his hobby, guitar making, into a new life's work. Jack Ingram was the

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."



















**"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

t 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

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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

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he 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.

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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.





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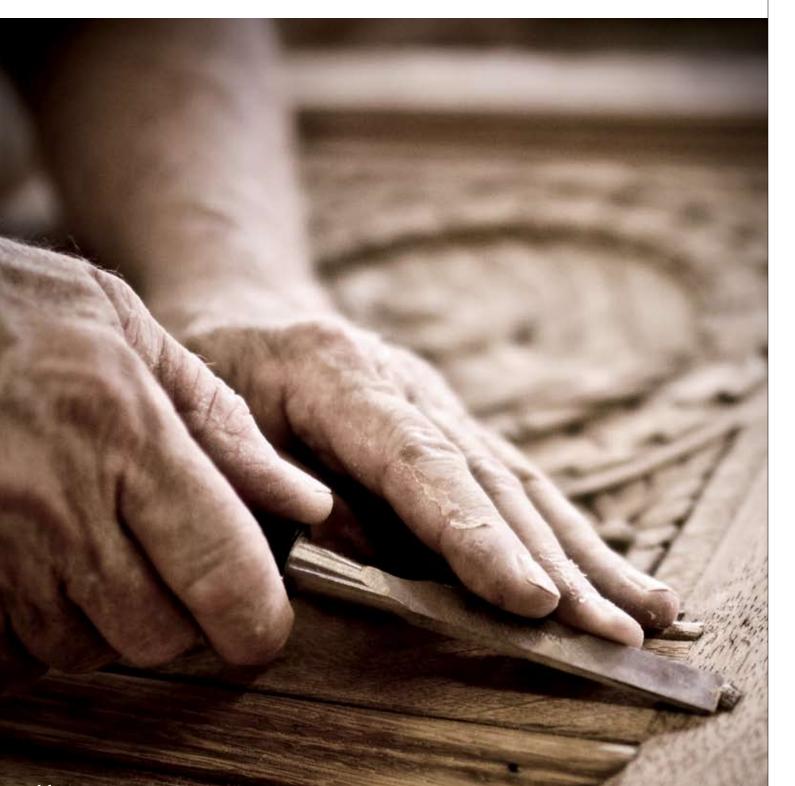






"Some automation specialists thought they could tell us how to automate stuff. But you have to do this by hand." ~ NELL ANN MCBROOM





" 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

ike 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 16thcentury 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.

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#### **BUSINESSES FEATURED:**

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

TRAIL TOWN CUSTOM BOOTS

#### PRO SADDLES & SPURS GAINESVILLE, TX BRUCE CHEANEY 318 S. Lindsay Street

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

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

#### NOKONA ATHLETIC GODDS COMPANY NOCONA, TX NELL ANN MCBROOM 901 E. Hwy 82 Nocona, TX 76255 940-825-3326 nokona.com

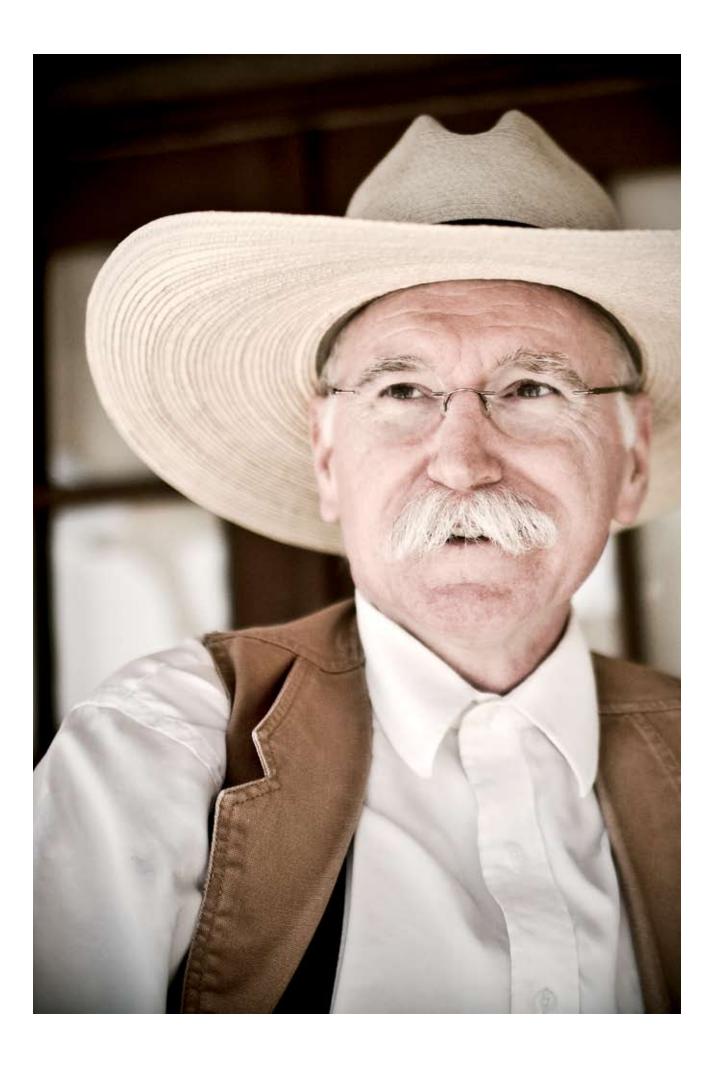
#### HULL HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURAL MILLWORK FORT WORTH, TX BRENT HULL 201 Lipscomb Street Fort Worth, TX 76104 817-332-1495

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 / lincolnpress.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.



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