

Armando Magnino, Maker of Fine Furniture.

In August, 15 members and guests had an informative, relaxed and entertaining evening at the studio of Armando Magnino. Armando describes himself as a “designer and maker of fine furniture” and works from a former ceramic factory on Charles Street, Warwick. The old kilns are still in working order and he is joined, from time to time, by various ceramicists. Armando had an earlier career as a youth worker and then, in his mid 30’s, decided he wanted something more tangible to show for a day’s work and retrained as a furniture maker at the Warwickshire College. It was clearly the right career move, as he rapidly progressed to running the department. However, his ambition of being an educator in term time and a producer of his own work during the holidays didn’t materialise, for reasons that anyone who has taught will understand. So, he gave up the day job and, for the last five years has focussed on his own work, with some parttime teaching.

During his talk, Armando was keen to emphasise that he is a designermaker and doesn’t quite feel that he is an artist. He quoted the Italian artist and inventor, Bruno Munari (1907 – 1998), *“The artist works with fantasy, while the designer uses creativity.”*

He explained that his father had been an engineer and that he had been brought up exploring how and why things worked. He enjoys problem solving, making cabinet tops slide (seemingly) without sliders, small tables stand on one leg and sets of bookshelves hold themselves up. While he is more than capable of producing a dovetail joint, he finds this sort of work



Bookstack, English Sycamore 145cm x 105cm

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fiddly and dull, much preferring bigger problems. His work is usually meticulously planned out, using lifesize, technical drawings on sheets of MDF. He believes, "if you can't draw it, you can't make it". From time to time, he relearns the truth of this the hard way and has to adapt a design as he goes along.



In Armando's workshop

Inspiration is varied, but the number five and pentagons recur with some frequency. A large clock is divided into 25 segments (giving an extra hour in every day) and tables, especially circular ones, have five legs. This is not just for visual reasons, five legs, like three, do not wobble. Curled and spiralling forms, taken from nature, but adapted as

needed, envelope mirrors and shelves. The inside out design of the Pompidou Centre was inspiration for his cantilevered, seemingly self supporting bookcase and his daughter's 1950's retrostyle frock, with its swirling skirt, found itself reemerging as a coffee table.

An item of great interest was the Waltham Cabinet, which is best explained in Armando's own words, taken from his web site,

"In 2011 the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, London underwent a major refurbishment. To celebrate their reopening they decided to host an exhibition to explore the legacy of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement. For this purpose they approached the Society of Designer Craftsmen and invited the members to submit designs in response to a brief. The selected entries were then commissioned and exhibited in the show, "Everyday Encounters" that ran at the Gallery from October 2012 to February 2013. In realizing this piece I aimed to show how in my own everyday practice I embody much that was part of the Arts and Crafts agenda. A simplicity of form that eschews applied adornment and decoration and a quest for beauty in everyday functional objects. In essence the piece was designed around the central detail, inspired by a print by Georgia O'Keefe that hangs in our bedroom." Find out more here, <http://www.magnino.co.uk>

This cabinet and an audience question about computer controlled cutting of materials and whether he did this, lead on to discussion about a modern version of Arts and Crafts. Armando pointed out that to cut, say, a large set of complex, twisting spindles by hand, would not only make a piece prohibitively expensive, but the spindles would not be the same. He also explained that, while computer controlled cutters can be programmed to do what the maker requires, this, in itself, requires craft skills, understanding the wood, its grain and the desired shape. In the hands of the inexperienced, a computer controlled cutter will easily shred a piece of wood. The craft skills have simply changed over the past century and Armando uses this new technology as necessary.



Yes that is a mirror on the wall!

Within his own workshop, equipment is more traditional. There are rows of familiar tools hung on the walls and large, solid floor standing machines, which combine circular saws, planers and drills. Materials are, of course wood, ranging from the mundane plywoods and MDF to temperate zone timbers such as cherry and sycamore.

Armando Magnino, Maker of Fine Furniture Continued.

We were then introduced to a material, probably new to most of us, Valchromat. This is a finer grained version of MDF and comes in many colours. If this tempts you, have a look here, www.lathamtimber.co.uk/products/panels/mdf/valchromat

The evening finished with Armando answering the question, "What next?", and it seems that it is the time of year for shows and exhibitions. The first being the Celebration of Craftsmanship and Design held in Cheltenham, from the 22nd to 31st August and then off to TENT London for a major exhibition from 24th to 27th September. You can find both shows here, <http://www.celebrationofcraftsmanship.com/index.aspx>

<http://www.tentlondon.co.uk/exhibitorlist>

All in all, a most enjoyable evening!

Katharine Barker.