

Craftsman's 'mad science' transforms salvaged material

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All of his adult life, craftsman Jaime Walton has dreamed of furniture designs. Whether it was to build a bookcase or chair, this desire went unrealized for many years, though you wouldn't know it by walking through his newly opened showroom and workshop, JME Makes, in Railroad Square.

One wall is covered with a bounty of tools and gears of varying sizes and purposes. Other walls feature Walton's creations. There are instruments turned into lamps like a violin wrapped with five strings of LED fairy lights to represent a musical score. Other designs include a light comprised of a fencing mask and the base of an old fan, a plastic replica of a marlin soon to be reborn as a mechanical fish, with metal scales and a sprocket around the eye, and a boat's gas tank reinvented as



a cat's face in the empty space that used to hold the carburetor.

"This is how my brain works," smiles Walton, demonstrating how a series of pipe organs might whistle after he assembles them into a doorbell for his workshop. "I have some things in common with hoarders in that I like to collect things, but for me, it's about the intrinsic value of an object."

JME Makes will have a grand opening during Railroad Square's March First Friday event where the public will be able to see Walton's metal, wood, stone, and glass works in person. He hopes to continue collaborating with



JAIME WALTON

Jaime Walton collects tools at his JME Makes workshop in Railroad Square.

community members on custom pieces, as well as offer up his handyman and design services and eventually offering classes in his workshop.

Straddling the line between artist and craftsman, he describes himself as a maker, juxtaposing the refined with the industrial. As a kid, Walton learned crafts like macramé and embroidery from his mother, and his background in construction as an adult gave him a familiarity with tools.

In Albany, New York, he worked odd jobs in plumbing and construction, enjoying the physical aspects of the work as well as solving the challenge of how to do everything efficiently. At one point, he answered a Craigslist ad for labor on a project that involved architectural salvage and was eventually hired by the late Fred Shapiro, former head of the Silver Fox Salvage compa-

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Walton

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ny. The demolition business would store salvaged items in its 10,000 square foot building, stocked with antiques and lighting from various projects. However, the main goal of the site was to attract visitors to the business' custom furniture building. Shapiro liked Walton's work ethic and hired him full time, which is where Walton found his forte constructing kitchen tables, cabinetry, light fixtures and more out of the store's massive inventory.

"By jumping in and building tables that were interesting, solid, and structurally sound, I impressed Fred and we started a relationship," says Walton. "A joke in the shop was that anything could be a light or a table. Fred was a forecaster and liked to reuse things but also thought there was an economic niche for it. The most valuable thing he gave me was showing me how to get from where I was to where I wanted to be."

Today at age 51, Walton can't imagine himself in any other line of work and believes in interrupting the waste stream to landfills by placing discarded items back into mainstream use. In Albany, he would purchase



Jaime Walton creates woodwork at his workshop in Railroad Square.

JAIME WALTON



Crafting furniture is a passion for Jaime Walton, who made this table from salvaged materials.

JAIME WALTON

items from salvage yards, auctions, and estates, but since arriving in Tallahassee has received many donations. He also creates with found objects, like an abandoned railroad tie whose sculptural qualities allow Walton to see

it as a future fireplace mantle or bookshelf.

Walton confesses to having "a mad scientist streak" and has concocted static electricity machines out of items like an apple corer and skate wheels. His more stylized steampunk items

have taken the form of shelving units, desks, and cabinets, made from pipes, valves, gears, perforated metal and various parts. Mostly, Walton is driven by the materials to either make the unexpected, like a floor lamp from a fire sprinkler, or a more functional customization like a cabinet from a printing presses' typeset drawers.

"It's like carving a feather out of stone," says Walton. "In a weird way the material stimulates you to be something other than what it is, and sometimes it's what the thing is that provides that stimulation. I like to combine metal with wood, and these are spur of the moment ideas. Ultimately, people are really in-



JAIME WALTON

Jaime Walton works on a lamp from salvaged materials.

terested in things that aren't like anything else."

Most importantly to Walton, he wants to continue motivating others to see the potential in castoff items. This philosophy is highlighted in many of his pieces, as he won't sand down imperfections or irregularities like saw marks in a piece of wood he salvaged from a tobacco farm.

If you go

What: JME Makes: Grand Opening at First Friday Gallery Hop
When: 6-9 p.m. Friday
Where: 663 Industrial Drive
Cost: Free
Contact: For more information, call 850-583-4563 or visit www.facebook.com/events/384498555249129/.

"I like things to show their life story," says Walton. "This wood is something that a farmer invested their everyday life in and so the wood in a way is imbued with his life. I think people see it as representative of something real. There's an enrichment that comes from having something that had a previous life, like you're making a difference in some way."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).