

A photograph of a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing glasses and a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, working on a large wooden table in a workshop. He is using a hand tool, possibly a plane, on the wood. The workshop has a rustic feel with wooden beams, shelves filled with tools, and a large metal hood hanging from the ceiling. The lighting is warm and focused on the man and his work.

# BUILT TO LAST

Master woodworker Peter Thorne  
builds fine furniture  
and a strong community

WRITTEN BY SUSANNA OPPER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREGORY CHERIN





## Winds Eye

A very special place in the Chatham Hills. Views in all directions from the 80 acre parcel with two ponds. Main house is a revolutionary period saltbox patterned after the original design but 1/3 larger for 21st Century living. Built on this site with 200+ year old wideboard floors, raised paneling, doors, post & beam frame. Great attention to period detail. *Other amenities:* 3 bedroom guest house, garage, office/studio-apartment, indoor lap pool and hot tub. All-weather tennis court professionally landscaped. Much, much, more ... \$2,850,000

**THE KINDERHOOK GROUP, INC.**  
REAL ESTATE

2 Park Row, Chatham, NY 12037 Tel: (518) 392-8040  
3038 Main Street, Valatie, NY 12184 Tel: (518) 758-8100  
75 East Main Street, Cambridge, NY 12816 Tel: (518) 677-3135  
[www.thekinderhookgroup.com](http://www.thekinderhookgroup.com)

**P**ETER THORNE LEANS over the trapezoid-shaped walnut board and inspects it closely. "See how much darker this one is than the others?" he says as much to himself as to his listener. He stacks it with the other neatly cut boards. "Hopefully, I won't have to use it."

For a master woodworker like Thorne, each piece of wood and every project is unique. Like the members of a chorus, they must all sing together, but he also respects their individuality. Thorne makes an impression on those who know him not only by the quality of everything he produces, but also by the very way he works.

"I was amazed at his intensity and energy level," says client Jeff Goodman. "His work ethic is extraordinary because he works at a great pace all the time. I expect this characteristic in corporate executives, but I was stunned to experience it when working with a craftsman."

Goodman, who is currently building a house in West Stockbridge, Massachusetts, should know. He hired Thorne to tutor him on woodworking. "It was really a fluke," he observes. "I always wanted to build something out of wood, and I happened to walk past Peter's shop. The next thing I knew, I was building a dining room table." Along with his work ethic, Goodman was attracted to Thorne's passion for the woodworking process, his skill as a teacher, and his commitment to the quality of the outcome.

Thorne traces his woodworking lineage back to when he was eleven years old in a Welsh grammar school, "with thirty little lads in a shop with a guy called Baggy Morgan teaching us how to chisel and make simple joints," he says. "I was always the first one

## It's all in the details.



Our team of professionals will oversee every detail of your project: from concept to installation.

Your space will be transformed as our skilled designers assist you in customizing your order to fit your style and needs. At the time of installation, our licensed crew will work closely with the design professional to ensure a perfect fit. Quality craftsmanship and service is important to us because afterall... it's all in the details.

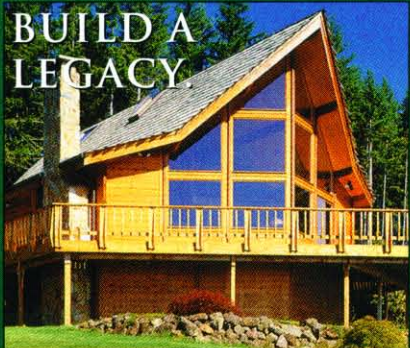
Lic. # CSO65866

Open Monday - Saturday  
3 Depot Street  
West Stockbridge, MA  
Tel: 413.232.7061  
[www.revisionscabinetry.com](http://www.revisionscabinetry.com)

**REVISIONS**  
Custom Design, Building  
and Fine Cabinetry



## BUILD A LEGACY.



### Superior materials and support.

For a home that stands the test of time, count on the expertise of your local Lindal dealer. For more information and a planbook set, see us today

**Lindal**  
CEDAR HOMES

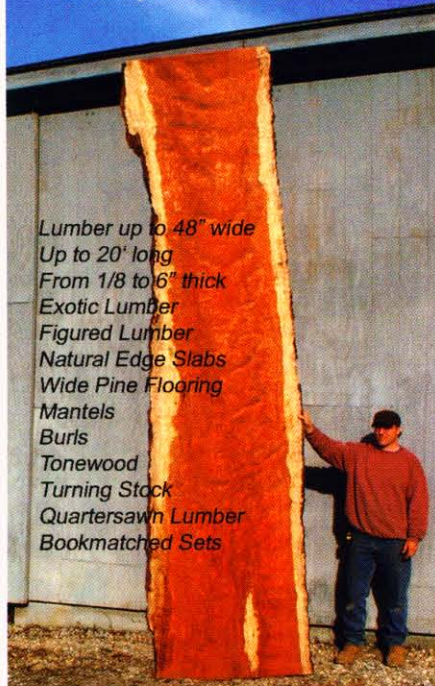
*Independently distributed by:*

**Berkshire Custom Cedar Homes**

Jct. Routes 8 & 20, Becket, Massachusetts  
P.O. Box 373 • Otis, Massachusetts 01253  
(413) 243-4949 • (800) 243-3113

Visit us on the Internet:  
[www.Lindal.com/berkshire](http://www.Lindal.com/berkshire)

## New England's Largest Selection of Unique Lumber and Burls



Lumber up to 48" wide  
Up to 20' long  
From 1/8 to 6" thick  
Exotic Lumber  
Figured Lumber  
Natural Edge Slabs  
Wide Pine Flooring  
Mantels  
Burls  
Tonewood  
Turning Stock  
Quartersawn Lumber  
Bookmatched Sets

**Berkshire Products, Inc.**  
Route 7A, Sheffield, MA 01257  
(413) 229 7919  
[www.BerkshireProducts.com](http://www.BerkshireProducts.com)

done." As it turned out, Thorne's early schooling in Abergele, North Wales, was his only formal woodwork training. Everything else he's learned on the job.

Thorne came to Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1963 with his mother and three siblings. He went to Searles High School, but didn't like it much; eager to leave the Berkshires, he joined the U.S. Navy. After leaving the Navy and hitchhiking to California, he returned to the Berkshires at the age of 20, supporting himself by doing odd jobs like driving a taxi and working as a night clerk at a local motel. "It was then that someone put a hammer in my hand," he recalls.

In the two decades between then and 1990, when he set up his woodworking shop in West Stockbridge, Thorne worked as a carpenter building houses and learned to make furniture. For three years at Hancock Shaker Village he was part of a small group of woodworkers making limited production runs of furniture from the museum's collection. "It was a wonderful schooling about proportions and construction," he recalls, straightening his lean body and removing his glasses, allowing them to hang by the cord around his neck.

But for Thorne, it's the design and problem solving that really get his juices flowing. "I



**Table Matters:** An intimate custom-designed dining table that seats ten.





have the skills to set up jigs and tools to produce furniture, but what I love is doing design."

In the winter of 1996, a woodworking shop on Route 7 burned down. When Thorne heard about it, he launched into action, calling everyone he knew in the woodworking community. In less than twenty-four hours, he had raised over \$800 from fellow craftspeople to help lumber dealer and woodworker Tarn Peters get back on his feet.

A year later, Thorne and his wife Sarah were involved in a personal growth and leadership program that required them to take community action. Thorne thought of his community—the woodworkers who had joined him in the effort to help Peters. He invited them over for a discussion, and the Berkshire Woodworkers Guild was born.

Today the group has around forty members and meets monthly to explore new trends and discuss the challenges and opportunities of the woodworking trade. "We compete with each other in some ways, but we have also built an institution for all of us based on cooperation and mutual benefit," says Peter Murkett of New England Modern, in Monterey, Massachusetts. Murkett serves with Thorne on the group's seven-person board of directors. "It's a guild in the old sense, as we trade tips and learn from each other—except we're not mediocrally secretive."

Each summer, members show off their wares at a guild furniture show and silent auction at the Berkshire Botanical Garden. The sixth annual event takes place this year on July 9-10. "Getting ready for the show pulls us together," says Ken Smith of Cullen Grace Joinery in Becket, Massachusetts. "Peter is so persistent. At times it



Peter Thorne



furnishings for home and garden

Peter Murkett  
www.newenglandmodern.com  
413.528.9937



HYDROPOOL  
HOT TUBS • SWIM SPAS



**LEISURE POOLS**  
DESIGN • CONSTRUCTION • RETAIL

789 South Main Street,  
Great Barrington, MA 01230  
(413) 528-1765





## East Street

Lenox, MA

- 2.15 private acres
- Built in 2001
- Approximately 5700 sq. ft. of living space
- \$1,795,000
- Call for details

RICHARD  
**TUCKER**  
ASSOCIATES  
Realtors since 1957

392 Merrill Rd., Pittsfield, MA • 413-499-4760  
info@tuckerassoc.com

## TWELVE OAKS VILLAGE

An active adult community of distinctive  
condominiums in the heart of Lenox, MA



Visit our furnished model Thursday thru Monday  
10:30 - 5:00 or by appointment

168 Pittsfield Road  
Lenox, MA 01240  
Tel: 413 637-1244

Toll-Free: 1-877-339-1419  
www.twelveoaksvillage.com  
twelveoaksvillage@gmail.com



must seem thankless, but he doesn't let up on his enthusiasm."

Although guild members are sometimes involved in head-to-head competition, the network also provides opportunities for collaboration that would be less likely without the organization. Thorne found this out during a recent two-year project. Responsible for the cabinetry at a new construction complex that included a house, barn, guesthouse, and greenhouse, he used six different guild woodworkers. The project involved "lots of drama, interest, and challenge," says Thorne. There were cabinets in the kitchen, farm office, and bedrooms. Besides a refrigerator surround, the job included turnings, carvings, and a circular banquette.

For John Hartcorn, of Hartcorn Furniture and Design in Housatonic, Massachusetts, the guild was a godsend when he moved to the Berkshires two years ago. "In Boston, I worked in a building with twenty-five woodworkers. If I had a question, I

could just ask someone. If I needed to use a machine I didn't have, there was one next door. Here, I'm all by myself." It's not only tools that members share; they share resources on solving the myriad of perplexing challenges presented by their craft. Recently, Hartcorn was working on a large wall unit with an odd number of doors.

*"...with thirty little  
lads in a shop with a  
guy called Baggy  
Morgan teaching us  
how to chisel and make  
simple joints. I was  
always the first one  
done."*

Normally, he would alternate the veneer in a pattern called book matching, but in this instance, he feared it would look odd. Talking the problem over with guild members helped him find the solution.

For Thorne, it's all about collaboration, even though—like most woodworkers—he's pretty independent. Great Barrington-based interior designer Barbara Boughton has worked with Thorne



off and on for twenty years. She recalls her favorite collaboration, when they set about beating up the work Thorne had just finished constructing.

Distressing wood is a process often used to make modern furniture appear antique. In this case, Boughton's client wanted an expandable dining table and a coffee table, products that weren't made a hundred years ago. So Thorne built the furniture and then the design team had at it with nails, rocks, chains, and even burning cigarettes. "I had a clear vision of the result I wanted," Boughton recalls. "Still, some woodworkers wouldn't have welcomed the collaboration. Peter did, and we had a lot of fun doing it."

Thorne collaborates with his clients, too. Mary and Seth Nash (co-founder of Blue Q in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which creates cleverly packaged creams, balms, magnets, and soaps, including the "Dirty Girl" line) wanted a different dining room table for their new home in Lenox, Massachusetts. They looked all over and nothing suited them, so they turned to Thorne. "We wanted an



intimate table that could seat ten or twelve people, so it had to be narrow and long," says Seth Nash. "Peter was incredibly gracious about the number of meetings we had. We all sat around a piece of plywood just to be sure the legs wouldn't get in the way. And when it came to the chairs, he made a mockup just to be sure we'd like the design."

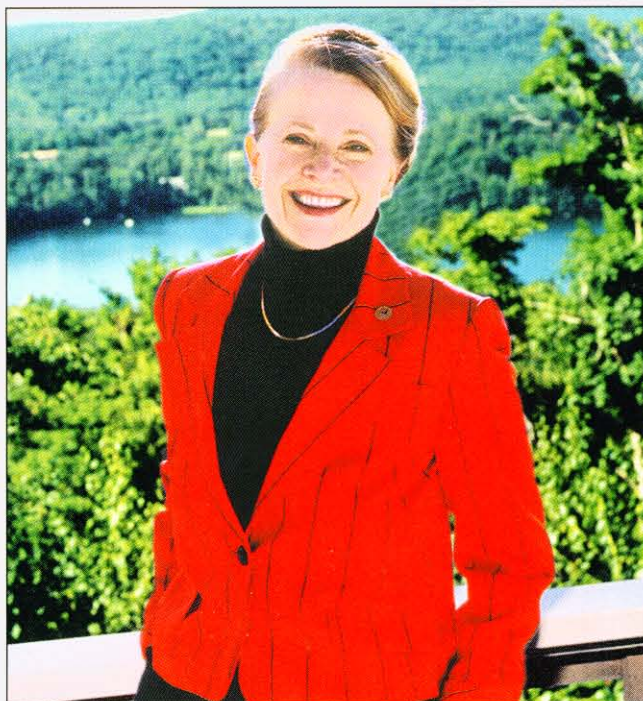
Nash also makes the point that custom-designed, locally built furniture doesn't usually cost more than store-bought furniture, but it's a lot more interesting and personal. "Every time I sit down to dinner, I think of Peter." **BI**

**{the goods}**

**Berkshire Woodworkers Guild**  
413.232.7098  
[www.berkshirewoodworkers.org](http://www.berkshirewoodworkers.org)

**Sixth Annual Furniture Show and Silent Auction**  
July 9-10, 10 to 5  
Berkshire Botanical Garden  
Routes 102 and 183  
Stockbridge, Mass.

*Susanna Opper writes for and about business. A regular contributor to Berkshire Living, she wrote "What Ever Happened to Governor Jane?" in the Apr/May 2005 issue. She lives and works in Alford, Mass.*



**Every Community Has At Least One Realtor Like Nancy Kalodner.**

*(In the Berkshires, it's Nancy Kalodner.)*

**BENCHMARK REAL ESTATE**

413-528-9595

©2005 COLOR for REAL ESTATE. All rights reserved.

*Ashrey*



It is our great pleasure to introduce a rare Berkshire treasure: an estate in North Egremont village which combines some of the most spectacular views to be found anywhere with a house and 80 acres of private lands so lovely, so instantly welcoming, they will make you wish you were already home.

View on-line at:

[www.benchmark-ashreyhouse.com](http://www.benchmark-ashreyhouse.com)

**\$4,500,000**

**Nancy Kalodner, ABR, CRS, GRI, CBR, Broker/Owner**

**BENCHMARK REAL ESTATE**

413-528-9595