

Bill Smithers' career has always revolved around wood, from his early days in a wood planing mill, to his years as the resident boat builder at the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, up to now as he does custom woodwork and boat refurbishing out of his home workshop in Hammond, NY. Smithers has always believed in the self-sufficient lifestyle, from building his own home, boat, and furniture to providing his own food. He is largely self-taught, learning from reading books and magazines, which has allowed him to develop as a craftsman as well as a woodworker.

His early inspiration was his grandfather, who was a beekeeper in the summer and antique repairman and cabinet maker in the winter. He also found inspiration from Tom Duffy, a pine furniture maker he met in the North Country when he moved back to the area in the 1980s, and Simon Watts, a boat builder whose workshop Bill attended before becoming his assistant at the museum.

In the artist's words: "I've never concentrated on one specific thing, so I've done all different kinds of things, which I think is a lot more fun and interesting." He often chooses a type of piece to make and learns all he can through his reading. Then he continues building the same type of object to develop his skills and style. Smithers is currently focusing on chairs and stools, though he also makes many boxes in different sizes and styles.

Smithers uses some locally sourced wood including ash, black walnut, and butternut, and he has acquired hardwood from a wide variety of sources including auctions, friends and neighbors, and a nearby Amish mill. He also has an incredible collection of woodworking hand tools including some he has made himself for very specific purposes.

