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Shepherd's Custom Woodworking

Many Hands Make Light Work

The Shepherd's Woodworking story really began a long time ago, when David Shepherd was just a boy of six years old. He started to learn woodworking from his dad "building little things from the scrap wood in his workshop," Shepherd says.

When he got to high school, he enrolled in the carpentry program at the local career center and after graduation started to work at the same cabinet shop as his dad. Eventu-

ally, this shop closed, and he decided to go out on his own in 2009. "With my dad's help, I started Shepherd's Custom Woodworking from the pole barn in my backyard," David says.

About a year later, David met Kelly, an avid fiber artist, and, as it turned out, his future wife. "His 38th birthday was our third date," Kelly says. Kelly recalls exactly when she and David first met using the ages of the children. "Becky



Left: Shepherd's Custom Woodworking's popular yarn bowls. Customers appreciate the way they smoothly feed the yarn out during knitting and crocheting.

Right: A variety of different sized "sock blockers." Kelly explains that the large one is a copy of an "antique that was hanging in a friend's house with baby pictures taped behind the holes." Inspired, they created various sizes of sock blockers. She adds, "Sock blockers are used to block and dry socks. The sock makers I have met are either firmly pro-sock blocker or anti-sock blocker – no in between!"



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Right: Hand carders, used to get fiber ready to spin by aligning the fibers and to aid in cleaning it. "Hand carders are a great way to get fiber ready to spin," Kelly says. "They are very portable and much less expensive than a drum carder, so they are great when you are just getting started processing fleeces for yourself or are wanting something that will travel with you easily." Shepherd's Custom Woodworking makes and assembles the wood components. The wire cloth is made by a company in Maine, Howard Brush, the only U.S.-based company that manufactures carding and blending cloth. Carders are graded by tines per inch (TPI), and Shepherd's Custom Woodworking sells carders with TPIs from 72 (coarse) to 190 (very fine). "Anything over 120 is good for alpaca," Kelly says.



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would turn seven a few weeks later, and Zoe would have been eight," she says. Today Zoe is 16, and Rebecca, "Becky," is 14. In 2013, Shepherd's Custom Woodworking officially became a family affair. "Zoe and I moved in with David and Becky five years ago," Kelly says.

When she saw his work, Kelly asked David if he could make her a crochet hook out of wood. At this stage, he was familiar with woodworking but not fiber arts. David says this was when Kelly "introduced me to the world of fiber tools."

David began to work, and Kelly was the product tester. After two

months and "countless tries," David says he was just about to give up. But just when he had reached his limit, Kelly really liked the last crochet hook he had made.

"It was made of walnut," Kelly says. "It had a hand-rubbed paste wax finish, and it was long, much longer than a store-bought hook. It had a nice, thick handle that made it easy to hold. The head and throat were smooth, and the yarn just glided across it. I would have to say the best part of it was that David took the time to make it for me. That is what was most special about it to me."

In 2014, Kelly had another idea.

She wanted a bowl to hold yarn steady while knitting and crocheting instead of chasing a ball of yarn around. She asked him to make cuts into the side of his beautifully lathe-turned bowls. The cut accommodates the yarn as it gradually spools out to create the garment.

David's friends couldn't believe he could make the cut in his beautifully turned bowls, and he admits, at first it was hard. But David explains, with a husband's wisdom, "It was what she wanted."

She says, "David cuts 6x6 inch pieces of wood and laminates them together paying special attention to

Opposite: The left two cubbies hold nostepinnes, used for hand winding center-pull balls, made out of domestic hard woods such as walnut, cherry, ash and poplar. Long before crank ball winders, this is how you would make a center-pull ball for knit or crochet. In the right cubby are Andean plying tools in maple, used to ply a spun single evenly. This is accomplished by wrapping a single around it in a set pattern. Once you are done, "you can take the beginning end and ply the single back to itself evenly," Kelly explains.

Right: From left: Lady, the shop dog, Zoe, David, Becky and Kelly Shepherd.

Below: Displayed on the rack: lathe-turned Russian, Support and Tibetan spindles of walnut, cherry and maple, used with the bowls in front while spinning. The bowls featured inset acrylic countertop material, which makes them spin smoothly. "We use old samples and leftovers from the cabinetry shop for a lot of our fiber tools," Kelly explains. "Support spindles are used for short, fine or slippery fibers such as baby alpaca, llama and camel down," Kelly says.



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grain patterns, colors and variations in the wood to make them unique and to highlight the wood. They are turned on a lathe to shape and are then hollowed out. They are finished with a furniture grade lacquer and the bottom is felted. Yarn bowls work well with both hand-wound balls and center-pull balls."

But yarn bowls are just one product in a range of fiber art tools by Shepherd's Custom Woodworking.

Yarn caddies are made to hold center-pull balls. Kelly says, "By working from the outside of a center-pull ball, you don't have to worry about it tangling or the ball collapsing as you work from it. They are made from three main parts: the base, the under-base and the spike. The base and the spike are both lathe-turned to shape and sanded. The under-base holds the ball bearings that allow the caddy to gently spin as you knit or crochet."

Many of the most eye-catching tools at the AOA Natural Fiber Extravaganza are turned from blocks made of multiple species of laminated wood, which creates a beautiful multi-colored stripe effect.

Everyone has their role at this tight-knit, family-run company. Both

Zoe and Becky knit, crochet and spin like Kelly and are learning customer service skills in conjunction with their handiwork.

In all fine woodworking, sanding is always a pernicious task and especially so when the pieces you are working on are small and fine, like crochet hooks. Zoe and Becky help



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ing dictates which of their products will be most popular. "When we are in spinner-heavy areas," David says, "our spindles are very popular. In a more knit-and-crochet area, the yarn bowls and our yarn caddies are a big hit."

"This year, we are vending at 20 plus shows ranging from traditional craft shows to alpaca and sheep and wool shows," David says. "We also spend a week at the local county fair demonstrating fiber crafts, lathe turning, and we just added broom making. Fiber shows tend to be our best shows, with the alpaca shows very close second."

Whichever item they are creating or selling, the Shepherds like to put quality and practicality first. Their goods are built to be used day-to-day by fiber artists, not just to be admired.

David notes that they stick to "traditional styles and try to showcase the natural beauty of the wood, making functional, timeless fiber tools."

Shepherd's Woodworking aims to bring back the quality craftsmanship of a different era, one crochet hook at a time. ●

Left: Meyla Bianco Johnston holds a 25mm or size "U" Tunisian (Afghan) crochet hook at the Shepherd's Custom Woodworking booth at the AOA Natural Fiber Extravaganza in July 2018. Both the walnut body and maple finial were turned on a lathe.

with that and in turn, learn patience and excellence of craftsmanship.

Headphones help with the monotony of sanding, but David strives for perfection. As a company, they spend a lot of time ensuring tools are smooth, and this extra care ensures no fiber snags on their tools.

They've found that the region of the country where they are sell-

