



Tabula Rasa Furniture

Colin Andrews, a furniture maker from London, England, grows his business in Crosslake

WRITTEN BY CARA LANZ | PHOTOGRAPHED BY NELS NORQUIST

HAVE YOU EVER LOOKED AT A PIECE OF CHEAP FURNITURE AND THOUGHT, “I CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT.” So you did, and then started your own furniture business? No?

Well, that’s precisely what Colin Andrews did. After his first endeavor at making furniture was a success, he built Tabula Rasa, a home furnishing and décor company he runs out of his home in Crosslake, Minnesota.

Tabula Rasa is a Latin phrase that means “clean slate.”

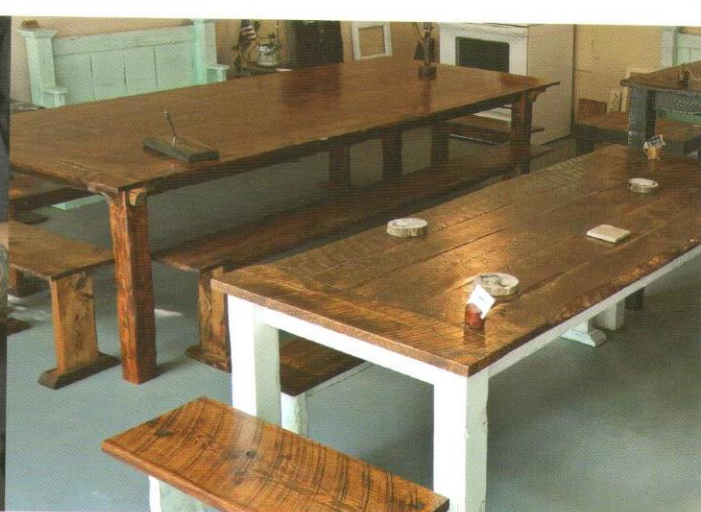
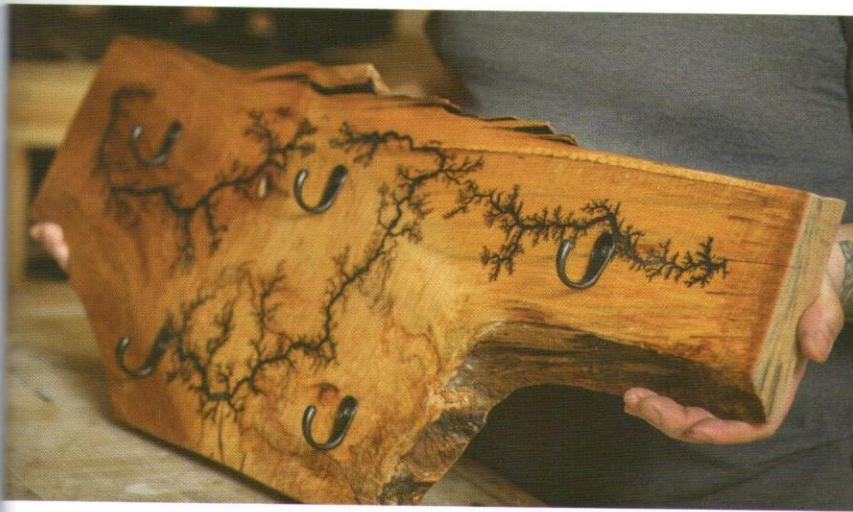
“It’s about people having a fresh start, with no baggage,” Colin explains. “When you get a new house

or you’re moving, why not start again? When you get a piece of furniture, you don’t have to have the same thing.”

But clean slate also describes the journey that brought him to where he is today.

His journey across the pond

In his homeland of London, England, Colin was trained in the building trades and worked in construction. A serious motorcycle accident put him out of work for six months, so he busied himself with writing a book. When it came time to design the cover, he turned to Twitter for assistance.



Answering the call was Carissa, a graphic design guru from Brainerd, who helped him put the finishing touches on his book cover.

But their story was just beginning, and it wasn't long until their relationship blossomed into a whirlwind romance. Starting fresh with a clean slate, Colin packed one bag and made the move across the pond. Two and a half months later, they were married.

Once he was settled stateside, it was in their living room that he noticed a television stand he thought was "just the ugliest thing ever," so he made a media center from pine with a rich dark walnut stain. Happy with the finished product, he put it up for sale—and it sold in three days. So, he built and sold another one. And another one. And he quickly realized making furniture was something he was meant to do.

Casa Tabula Rasa

A visit to the Andrews' household quickly reveals that where home ends and Tabula Rasa begins is a blurry line, at best. Colin's handmade pieces—tables, chairs, mini bar, countertops, ceiling fan blades—pepper every room in the house.

And each piece Colin builds begins with a fresh start. You see, his furniture is made from local fallen trees or reclaimed barn wood (no medium-density fiberboard or particle board, ever). And if the wood doesn't have the rustic charm he's looking for, Colin has been known to give it "the chop of an ax or the whack of a hammer," for a been-around-a-while look.

"The most rewarding part," Colin says, "is taking a tree that's laying in someone's yard and turning it into a finished product. And the only person who's touched that was me. I've done all of that and it was fun."

Colin is always looking for new ideas that will set his furniture apart and, lately, it is the elements of fire and water that give his work an electrifying arc and a tranquil twist.

Elements of art

Lichtenburg figures, or fractal wood burning, involves a complex—and dangerous—process that

sears tree-like patterns into pieces of wood. Once Colin perfected the method, fractal work quickly became a pet project. "I love messing with that stuff," he chuckles. And to give the pieces a burst of color, Colin fills the branch-shaped grooves with glow-in-the-dark resin. The finished fractal work is incorporated into tables, doors, art pieces, even stair treads.

When it's time to put the fire out, Colin cools off with live edge river runs. He creates a channel by lining up the live edges of two pieces of freshly-cut wood, runs a stream of epoxy resin through it, then layers in whatever strikes his fancy: glass stones for texture, amber for warmth, LED lights for illumination. River runs can cascade through his handmade countertops, tabletops—you name it.

A family affair

Colin may do much of the work himself, but he also has a built-in crew. The whole family pitches in. Carissa takes orders; sons Pacey, 17, and Mackenzie, 14, cut and stain; and Colin builds. Daughter Holly, 21, supports from the UK; while son Evan, 13, daughter Ellie, 9, and son Kaelen, 4, wait for their turn (yes, there are six children).

Their efforts are paying off and word is getting out. Customers can't get enough of their dining tables, benches, and media centers. And it's not just the locals who are impressed. They get orders and inquiries from across the U.S.

For a touch of Tabula Rasa in your home, call 218.330.4414 or email info@tabularasamn.com to order your own custom art or furniture—prices range from \$100-\$2,000 or more, depending on your specific needs.

Who knows, artistic, real-wood furniture from Tabula Rasa just might give you the fresh start you're looking for.

To learn more about Tabula Rasa, visit tabularasamn.com or find them on Facebook and Instagram. 