

Terry Ratliff

“I have been heavily influenced by the work of the renowned chairmaker Chester Cornett who used to say, ‘It takes half a fool to make a handmade basket and a pure fool to make a hand carved chair.’ “

Terry Ratliff was born and raised in eastern Kentucky. His family moved to Indiana when he was twelve years-old to find jobs. Terry was not happy in school in Indiana. There was a lot of prejudice against “hillbillies.” He returned to Kentucky to go to a community college. He transferred to the University of Kentucky and earned a degree in mental health. He worked for several years in community mental health in eastern Kentucky. Then funding was cut for mental health programs. He lost his job. He helped a friend build a log house and then built one for his own family. He also began building furniture. He wanted to learn all he could about the craft. He visited every traditional furniture builder he could find and learned from them. For the first eight years he used using only a shaving horse and a drawknife. Eventually he added a drill press to make it easier to make holes in the chairs.



Terry is proud that he makes chairs by hand. He is also proud of his mountain heritage. He says, “I’ve worked wood long enough to know it flows right up out of the ground like the flow of a stream. If there is an adversity there, if someone’s tacked barbed wire to it, it will swallow it, surround it and make it part of it. In ways it makes that tree stronger. I feel the same way about adversity that comes into your life. If you can, embrace it, deal with it, it can become part of you and make you stronger.”



Terry learned to make chairs by hand by finding craftsmen who practiced the tradition. Are there any traditional craftsmen in your area?