

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 until his family moved to Indiana when he was twelve years-old to find jobs. Terry encountered a lot of prejudice about “hillbillies” during his school years in Indiana. When he had an opportunity to go to community college in Kentucky, he took it. He transferred to the University of Kentucky, earning a degree in mental health. He worked for several years in community mental health in eastern Kentucky, but when funding was cut, he lost his job. He helped a friend build a log house and then built one for his own family – and he began building furniture. He wanted to learn all he could about the craft, so he visited every traditional furniture builder he could and set to work, using only a shaving horse and a drawknife for the first eight years. 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.”