



Gene Kelly: Woodworker Extraordinaire

By Melissa McKenzie | Image Courtesy of Gene Kelly

It has often been said that if you do something you love you'll never work a day in your life, and Sacramento-based woodworking artist Gene Kelly is a testament to that statement.

As a child, Gene was always artistic. He would often pick up random sticks and whittle, cut up a discarded piece of plywood to make a fort or use his allowance to purchase balsa wood and an Xacto knife to design and carve a model airplane. When those items weren't available, he would create pencil or pen and ink drawings, watercolor paintings, or create pyrography, but these endeavors were always in conflict of the career paths he was pushed into pursuing. In fact, Gene once told his parents of his desire to become



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a professional furniture maker, but they dismissed the idea, telling him it would be a difficult journey that would cause him to suffer financially.

Without his parents' support Gene, who began working with wood around age 6 or 7, pursued a career in veterinary medicine. When his chosen occupation didn't work out according to plan, he began learning the building trades and eventually obtained his general contractor license.

As a contractor, Gene was able to create, but still yearned to make a living woodworking.

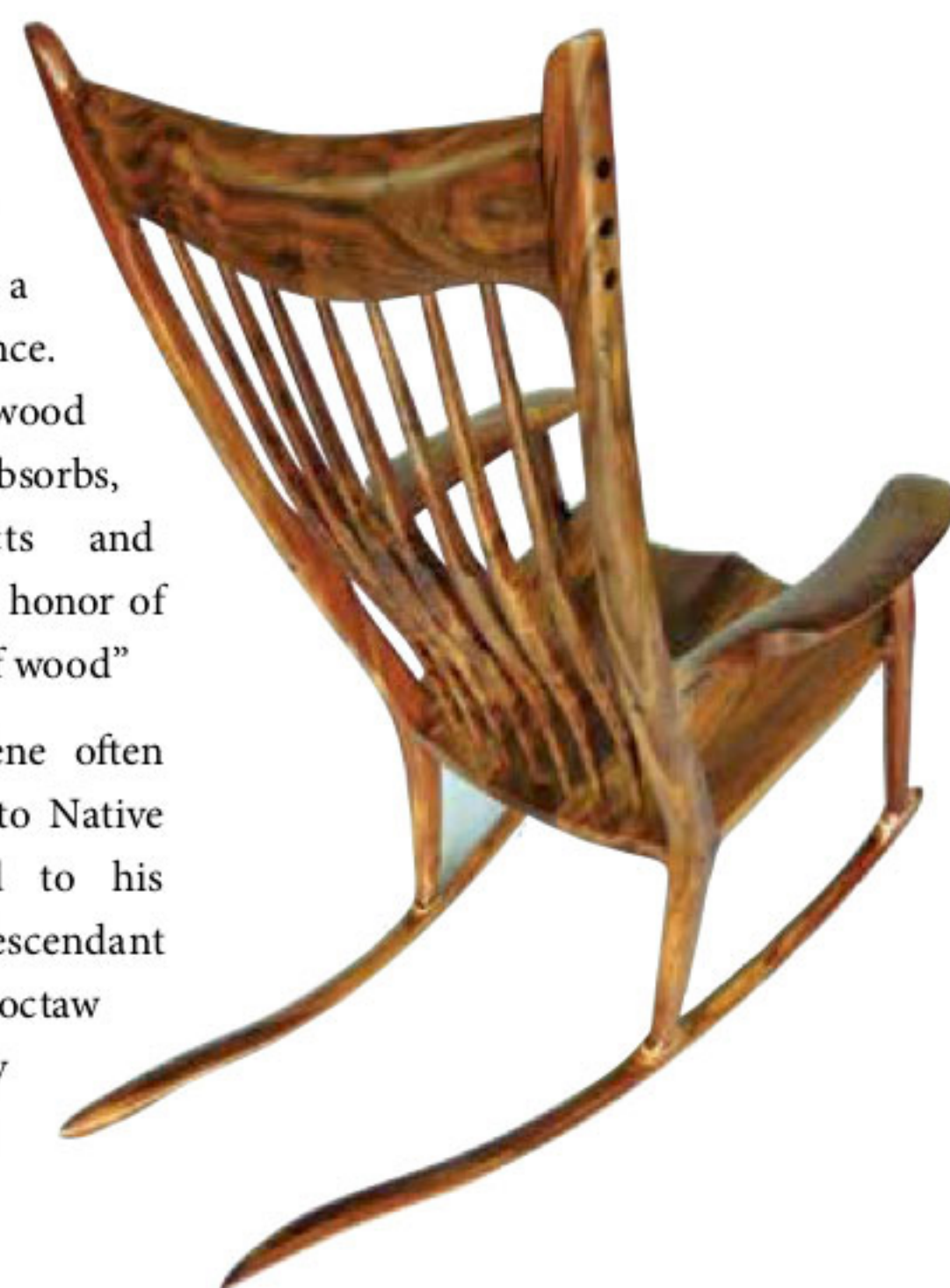
"In one period of my career, I built custom balustrades, many in Atherton and the surrounding area," he says. "In the meantime, I always found a way to nurture my love of designing and creating wood pieces, whether it be sculpture, carving, lathe turned work or furniture. I was offering and selling my work during the time that I was also contracting custom homes, as well as custom stairs."

After weathering two recessions, Gene continued his contracting career, but when the third economic downfall hit about 10 years ago, and

he became a casualty of the banking industry, Gene made a decision. Instead of feeling sorry for himself, Gene threw all of his energy into his passion and began creating beautiful and intricate wood art and furniture.

"There has always been an attraction to the medium that is a living entity and begging to remain relevant," he says. "I enjoy being a facilitator in that relevance. Even when harvested, wood continues to breathe. It absorbs, expands and contracts and changes color. I have the honor of highlighting the beauty of wood"

Within his work, Gene often finds himself returning to Native American themes, and to his understanding, is a descendant of the Cherokee and Choctaw tribes. While deeply fascinated by that facet



of his family history, Gene also says those themes are influenced by time he spent living in New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona. Additionally, he says he's inspired by nature and "the free flowing comfort that can be found in the most unlikely places."

Gene notes that his early segmented turnings are influenced by Ray Allen and Malcolm Tibbetts, but finds his more recent style unique to his work, and although he is attracted to the Mission style movement, Sticklely and Greene & Greene, his current furniture is reflective of Sam Maloof.

"I rarely dwell on any one influence for very long," he says. "I try to incorporate elements of the styles that please me. What always wins in my design process is comfort – comfort to use or comfort to look at."

At home in Sacramento, where he lives with his wife and spends his days working in his onsite shop, Gene finds himself nurturing his small collection of Bonsai Trees, enjoying his Koi pond, tending to his laying hens and bicycling, although his current workload has hindered him from finding the time to ride.

"It has been years of feeling my way towards the path of success, but I have turned the corner and am quite happy with the way things are going," he says, adding, "You have to want it. I have always wanted it."

View gene's work at www.gkellywoodworker.com or contact him directly at gkellywoodworker@gmail.com or 916-698-1129 for additional information.

