



BY MARY GOW ✱ PHOTOS COURTESY NEW HAMPSHIRE  
FURNITURE MASTERS



# THE ART OF FINE FURNITURE

NEW HAMPSHIRE FURNITURE MASTERS AT THE FELLS

Portraits and sculptures often debut with unveiling ceremonies. Pieces by members of the New Hampshire Furniture Masters occasionally and appropriately make similar dramatic entrances. At an unveiling, a few words from the Furniture Master enlightens viewers about the inspiration and process that sparked the work. Then, a whisk of the sheet reveals the result of that creative vision and finely honed technique.

New Hampshire Furniture Masters, now 29 years old, is an organization of professional artisans producing top-quality custom fine furniture. Members' work is mostly in private homes and collections, so it is a treat when public exhibitions offer opportunities to see a selection of pieces from many of the Masters.



**Left:** John Hay Estate at The Fells.  
**Above:** NH Masters Main Event and reception at The Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH.

This summer, The Fells, the historic John Hay Estate on Lake Sunapee in Newbury, New Hampshire, hosts a season-long exhibition of the New Hampshire Furniture Masters. Most member Masters are represented in the show, with pieces on view changing as the summer progresses. A House Party Reception in August features an unveiling of new work. The Fells, with its lush gardens and stately home, is a compelling setting for the exhibition. Bringing these exceptional pieces into this extraordinary home opens connections between them and their shared quality and historic ties.

### **BUILDING UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION**

Founded in 1995, the New Hampshire Furniture Masters builds upon the state's centuries-long tradition of custom furniture making. Today, their 29 members are renowned furniture makers, many nationally and even internationally known. Highly skilled and stunningly expert in techniques and craftsmanship, each has unique creative expression.

“We are striving to put forward the pinnacle

of design and craft. What I find really interesting about the group is the extent to which it is not the slightest bit homogeneous in terms of style and the types of things that people are making,” says Owain Harris, chairman of the organization, noting that their work spans from traditional to sculptural and with influences of a spectacular range of styles—Federalist, Shaker, 20th century modern, and more.

From the beginning, it has been important to Furniture Masters to build understanding and appreciation of custom furniture. “One of the priorities of the Furniture Masters in organizing was to educate the public about what exceptional work looks like. It doesn't have to be outrageously expensive, but it's not cheap. You don't throw it away and get something else later,” says David Lamb, a founding member of Furniture Masters whose studio is in Canterbury, New Hampshire.

### **MEET THE MAKERS**

To connect with people who might be interested in and potentially purchase pieces, the Masters started two activities that continue today—the Main Event



**Above, top right, and below:** NH Masters Main Event, receptions, and silent auctions at The Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH; League of NH Craftsmen's Gallery, Concord, NH; and Kimball Jenkins Estate, Concord, NH.

**Bottom right:** (from left) NH Furniture Masters Richard Oedel, Ted Blachly, Lynn Szymanski, Jeffrey Cooper, Owain Harris, and David Lamb.

and House Parties. The Main Event, their signature fundraiser, is a public ticketed gala evening with exhibition, opportunities to meet the makers, and food and drink. Fundraising supports projects including the groups' Prison Outreach Programs in corrections facilities in New Hampshire and Maine.

House Parties typically are small gatherings hosted by owners of commissioned work. Recently, though, they are also larger public events, including the upcoming ones at The Fells. A House Party, for example, was the setting of the unveiling of a commissioned piece by Ted Blachly, whose studio is in Warner. Ted was commissioned to make a music stand for the host's teenaged daughter, an accomplished viola player. The young musician shared a few thoughts with him about it, and then deferred to his design sense. At the House Party, Ted shared his sketch that propelled the project—just a rough drawing, but with the energy, grace, and musical sensibility he sought. From there, he had moved into layers of precise planning and execution. The music stand, with airy curves of bent laminated ash and cherry legs, was enthusiastically received.

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The number of Furniture Masters has grown through its decades, but with membership always a juried process. Members are not hobbyists; they are professionals at the top of their field, working daily on their craft and creating work of the highest quality. The path to membership typically requires six years of experience and then a yearlong process.

The Furniture Masters now have a gallery in Concord at 49 Main Street, alongside the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen and Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce. They usually present four exhibitions each year, including one of work by incarcerated participants in the Prison Outreach Programs.

The Prison Outreach Programs, launched in 1999, are now offered in the New Hampshire State Prison for Men, Maine State Prison, and New Hampshire Correctional Facility for Women in Concord. Incarcerated people who have met certain expectations in the system may apply to participate. In hands-on classes taught by Furniture Masters, they begin with fundamental skills. Many go on to learn advanced techniques. As in the greater population, the experience is positive on many levels, from the

### DAVID LAMB

David Lamb, one of the six founding Furniture Masters, has his studio in Canterbury, New Hampshire, in the same setting where he began fine-furniture woodworking. David, New Hampshire's Artist Laureate from 2010 through 2014, grew up at Canterbury Shaker Village. As a teenager there, he met master European cabinetmaker Alejandro de la Cruz, whose studio was next door, and with whom he apprenticed, the apprenticeship rooted in old-world values of "tradition, classicism, and integrity in work, design, and living," he explains on the Furniture Masters website.

In his intense three-year training, "bench work was the focus to train the hand, eye, and mind to work in unison and without hesitation." Subsequent study at Boston University's Program in Artisanry with acclaimed furnituremakers Jere Osgood and Alphonse Mattia expanded his technique and further developed his artistry.

Elegant pieces by David often bring together the familiar and the unexpected. For example, in a demilune table with legs recalling the Federalist style, bracing between them rises in a sweeping curve, capped by a rounded finial that may bring to mind Shaker style.

"The reason exceptional pieces of 18th and 19th century are highly valued is because they are aesthetically pleasing and show exemplary design and craftsmanship. Not because they are good copies of an earlier era. The same is true today. Good design can take departures, and they can also show an evolution of design thought that captures the desirable qualities. yet show brilliance and inspired design with new ideas."  
[www.davidlambfurniture.com](http://www.davidlambfurniture.com)



The New Hampshire Secretary, birch. Collection of The Currier Museum of Art. Photo by Bill Truslow.

## TIMOTHY COLEMAN

Form and function are at the forefront of Timothy Coleman's designs. Add to that his stunning surfaces with low-relief carving, bands of embossed figures, and marquetry and parquetry, where the grain and pattern of wood plays with light.

Timothy, whose studio is in Massachusetts, has been a member of Furniture Masters for 20-plus years. From childhood, he was drawn to make things using whatever tools were on hand. The attraction endured, and after his undergraduate degree in writing, he turned to making and building, which led to study with renowned furniture maker James Krenov.

Timothy is a master of chatoyancy, that iridescent quality one sees in a cat's eye gemstone, that occurs in some wood because of its grain patterns. Building on that chatoyancy with marquetry (an inlaying technique) or parquetry (a piecing technique), Timothy creates luminous surfaces—a "cracked ice" table vividly brings to mind the light one sees on a shattered pond.

"The patterns and textures create a lively interplay with the form of the pieces, bringing forth objects which straddle the line between furniture and sculpture," says Timothy. Nature informs both the structure and decorative elements of much of his work—leaflike tapering legs, structural elements that may recall a tree branch emerging from a trunk.

[www.timothycoleman.com](http://www.timothycoleman.com)



*Something About Yew,*  
made with English  
sycamore and yew wood.  
Photo by to John Polak.



## LYNN SZYMANSKI

"I've always been interested in carving and shaping," says Lynn Szymanski, a five-year member of the Furniture Masters, whose studio is in Rollinsford, New Hampshire. "I like being a little loose and intuitive with my work," she explains, noting that craft and good craftsmanship are always fundamental.

Now with over 20 years as a fine-furniture maker, Lynn came to the field after her undergraduate studies, subsequently earning her Master of Fine Arts Degree in Furniture Design at San Diego State University.

Lynn's pieces have a poetic sculptural quality, often with curves, sometimes slightly skewed. "I am inspired by the Modernist language of simplicity, focusing on small details, imperfection, and nuance. Wavering lines, asymmetrical forms, and slumping shapes are all part of this vocabulary" she says in her artist's statement.

In recent work, Lynn has been drawn to the vessel form, an influence from potters she has taught alongside at the Worcester Center for Craft. Tool iconography, another element in Lynn's work, connects, in part, to her grandfather, who was the lead carpenter for Bell Helicopter, carving wood propellers for aircraft. His tools have since been passed down to her.

Lynn and fellow Furniture Master Leah Woods teach woodworking to incarcerated women at the New Hampshire Correctional Facility for Women in Concord.

[www.lynnszymanski.com](http://www.lynnszymanski.com)



*Reliquary Cabinet, Mixed Media.*  
Photo courtesy of UNH Photo Services.

excitement of first successfully using tools and making real objects to honing skills and expressing creativity, and for some, building expertise that may transition to career opportunities in the outside world.

Community, on many levels, is central to the Furniture Masters. In the big picture, Owain notes, this includes the makers themselves; people who appreciate fine furniture, some of whom purchase and collect these custom pieces; and people who are drawn to the craft, professionally or personally. The Furniture Masters brings together people “who find meaning in these things and get excited about them. The objects that you choose to surround yourself with have such deep meaning. I think that anybody who thinks at all about the things that they put in their home would appreciate coming to our exhibits or events, not even necessarily to buy the furniture, but to come and look at it and get ideas and inspiration and talk to people who are excited about these things,” Owain says. 🌸

## ABOUT THE FELLS

American statesman and diplomat John Hay (1838–1905) lived a life of service. From his years as private secretary to Abraham Lincoln through the Civil War when he was only in his 20s, he then held diplomatic postings in Europe. From 1898, he served as Secretary of State under both William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt.

Seeking refuge from public life, Hay acquired land on Lake Sunapee and had a leading architect of the time design his summer house. His cherished retreat, which he named The Fells, was finished in 1892 and was an anchor for the rest of his life.

On his death, The Fells passed to his son Clarence Hay and his wife, who transformed it into an exceptional estate and working farm, including remodeling the house and landscaping with extensive gardens. For three generations, The Fells was the family home with each generation shaping its legacy.



One of New England’s finest early 20th-century summer estates, The Fells’ 22-room Colonial Revival home is open to the public from Memorial Day to mid October. Trails on the 83.5 acres and renowned gardens are open year-round.

### SUMMER HOURS

House is open Wednesday through Sunday, June 12 through September 2 from 10am to 4pm. (Main House is closed Mondays and Tuesdays except Monday holidays).

John Hay Estate at The Fells  
456 Route 103A  
Newbury, NH  
[www.thefells.org](http://www.thefells.org)



Making Realty Dreams a Reality  
*Buy · Sell · Join*



*Luxury Home and Waterfront Specialists*

Jessica Dolan, Principal Broker  
[jessica@dolanre.com](mailto:jessica@dolanre.com)

C: 603-359-9177

Anthony Dolan, Managing Broker  
[anthony@dolanre.com](mailto:anthony@dolanre.com)

C: 603-359-9881

474 RT 11, Sunapee, NH 03782

O: 603-763-6033

207 Main St., New London, NH 03257

O: 800-526-7374

[www.dolanre.com](http://www.dolanre.com)

UPCOMING NEW HAMPSHIRE  
FURNITURE MASTERS EVENTS



**May 25–October 12**

**Summer at The Fells**

John Hay Estate at The Fells

Newbury, NH

thefells.org

Exhibit reception: July 17, 4–6pm

House Party reception: August 8, 4–6pm

**June 20–August 30**

**Prison Outreach Programs Exhibit**

Furniture Masters Gallery

49 South Main Street

Concord, NH

www.furnituremasters.org

Monday–Friday 8:30am–5pm

**October 19**

**The Main Event: Exhibit and Fundraiser**

New Hampshire Historical Society

30 Park Street

Concord, NH

5–7pm

**November 29–December 31**

**Holiday Show and Sale**

Portsmouth Historical Society

10 Middle Street

Portsmouth, NH

# NEWPORT GOLF CLUB

An 18 Hole Championship Phil Wogan Course in the beautiful Sugar River Valley.

- Clubhouse and Sunrise Pavilion - Air conditioned and heated - perfect for your special events.
- Farm-to-Table Delights at Farmer's Table Cafe - where every bite is a delight.
- Rental Clubs - Forgot your clubs? We've got you covered.
- Instruction & Clinics - Elevate your game.
- Warm Hospitality: Enjoy a welcoming atmosphere where exceptional service is our top priority.

 [newportgolfclub.nh@gmail.com](mailto:newportgolfclub.nh@gmail.com)  
603.863.7787  
[www.NewportGolfClub-NH.com](http://www.NewportGolfClub-NH.com)



## ACTIVELY PURCHASING



GOLD



DIAMONDS



ROLEX



PATEK PHILIPPE

AND OTHER FINE TIMEPIECES.

**N+T+FERRO**  
Estate & Custom Jewelers  
[www.ntferro.com](http://www.ntferro.com)  
11 Central St, Woodstock, VT