

Rockin' USA

written by: Titos Menchaca

photography by: Lance C. Bell

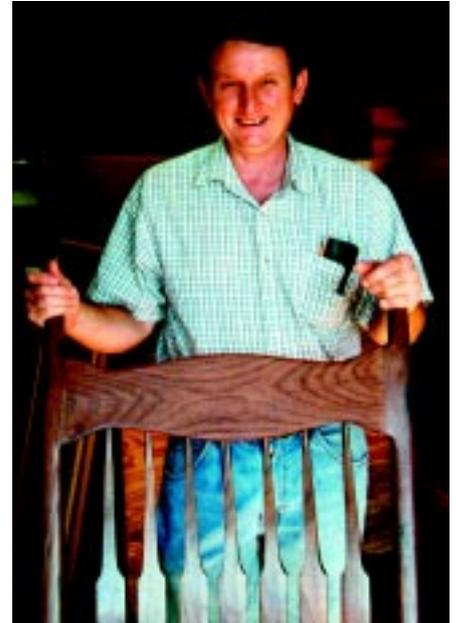
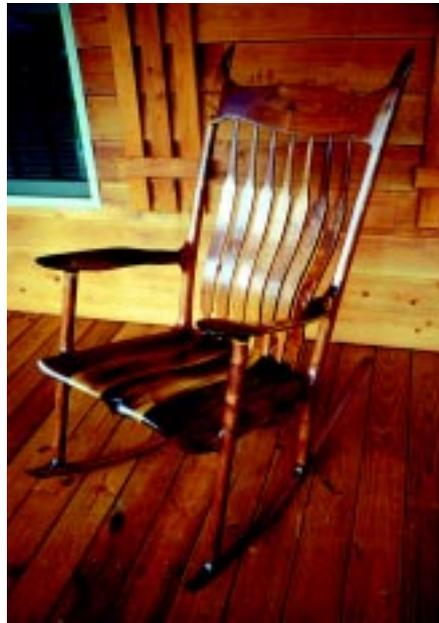
Some men pursue woodworking. Others have it thrust upon them. Then there are the Harold Dodsons of the world. Mr. Dodson is a man who can take about 40-odd foot of lumber — usually walnut but occasionally cherry, white oak, chestnut or curly maple — and, within a week or so, craft it into a gleaming showpiece that cradles the body, supports the lumbar and is sturdy enough to be passed down to your grandchildren's grandchildren.

"I do mostly custom work, so I try to get to know the person I'm making the chair for," says Dodson from his home in Pickens, SC. "I personalize it for them by taking into account their height and general build, although shorter people are usually still comfortable in larger rockers as are larger people in smaller ones."

A woodworker since 1976 — though he modestly concedes those early efforts were mostly 'junk' — Dodson first became enamored of the idea of building hand-crafted rockers when he saw a Sam Maloof design in a magazine in 1981. Six years later, he built his first one and gladly sold it for \$350 because, "I needed the money at the time." Since then he has produced 104 more, each signed, dated by year, numbered and sold — except for five: one for each of his two daughters, his wife's, his own and number 100, which he keeps as a business milestone.

"I really only started doing this full time about 3 years ago," he reveals. "And it's only started paying for itself in the past year. Now, I've got plenty of orders to keep me busy." Orders which come almost strictly by word-of-mouth. "Yeah, alot of my business comes from people sitting in one of my chairs that someone has and liking it so much they decide they want one for themselves."

40-odd foot of lumber— \$80-\$120. A Dodson original rocker — \$1500 and up. Knowing you've created a family heirloom — priceless.



Craftsman, Harold Dodson

The rocking chair is considered by many as an original American art form because it was invented here, in Pennsylvania, by none other than Benjamin Franklin. If the rocking chair is considered an art form then craftsman, Harold Dodson, has put the art into it as shown here. These photos show the detail in the joinery and quality of the wood.



Editor's Note: I have one of these chairs and it's the most comfortable I have ever been in— its contours and lumbar support are unbelievable. Its beauty, comfort and quality craftsmanship are what prompted me to do this story.

