

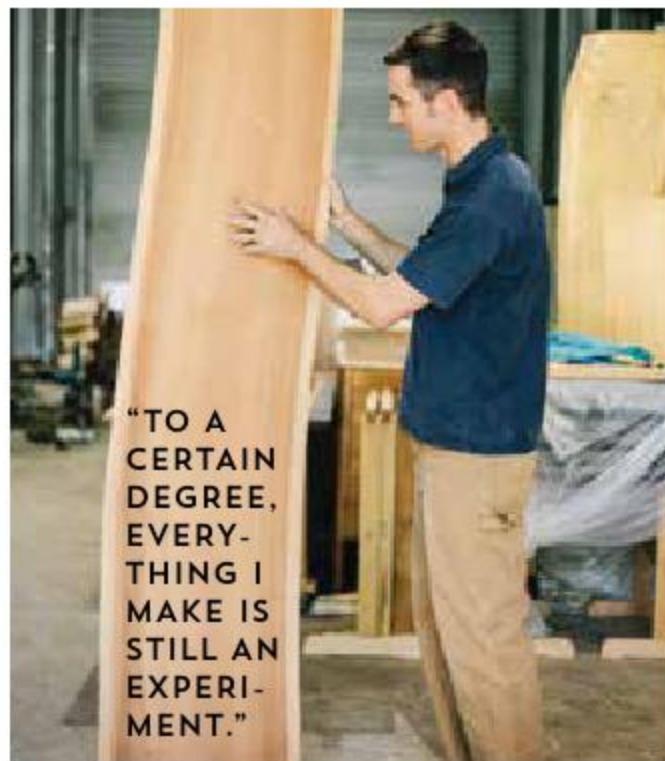
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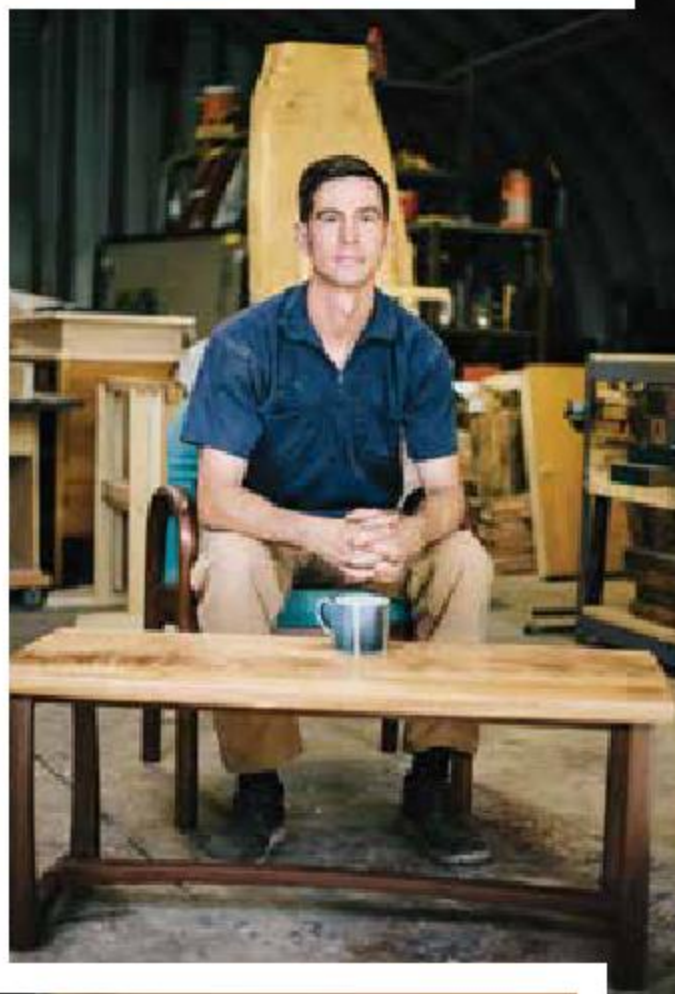
A LITTLE BLOOD, SWEAT, TEARS, AND A LOT OF LOVE.

BY JORDAN GASS-POORE'

PHOTOS TRAVIS EMERY
& PARKER THORNTON



“TO A CERTAIN DEGREE, EVERYTHING I MAKE IS STILL AN EXPERIMENT.”



WOOD GRAINS IN HIS VEINS

BONNER ARMBRUSTER OF B.C. ARMBRUSTER FINE FURNITURE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS WORK.

Bonner Armbruster's first house may have been built on a ranch by his dad and grandpa (along with some of the furniture inside), but his family's love and encouragement made it a home.

There was a "DIY ethos" on that ranch outside of Campwood, Texas, according to Armbruster. "They knew how to figure things out," the former Texas State student said of his dad and grandfather's woodworking ability.

It was that problem solving aspect that initially drew Armbruster to woodworking.

Some children read more because they have access to books. Armbruster built more out of wood because he had access to his dad's tools, though there was no formal instruction. "I soaked up a lot just by watching," Armbruster said.

He became used to repairing items, rather than discarding them.

Although Armbruster made small wooden items as a child, he got serious about the profession in 2005 when he inherited a friend's tools and moved into a larger space in Austin.

With a newly purchased cordless drill and circular saw in hand, along with scavenged materials ("being a scavenger is part of my DNA") from a construction site, Armbruster built a table, whose only endearing quality was that it could stand on its own, he said.

The table stood on Armbruster's porch for a while, until he gave it to a friend who thought it looked cool.

Armbruster may not always like the furniture he creates, but he can always find a friend who will take it off his hands.

"To a certain degree, everything I make is still an experiment," Armbruster said.

Today, Armbruster's shop in San Marcos, B.C. Armbruster Fine Furniture, is housed in a large galvanized steel structure, half filled with his restored vintage woodworking tools and another business's diesel engines.

It's about 50 yards from Armbruster's home, where he lives with his wife, Samantha Armbruster, San Marcos' Main Street program manager, and their daughter.

"I love wood as a living, breathing material that will challenge you," he said.

B.C. Armbruster Fine Furniture
bcarmbruster.com
BCArmbrusterFineFurniture
512-584-4931



“AS LONG AS I GET TO MAKE MONSTERS AND ALL THAT FUN STUFF” HE’LL DIE A HAPPY MAN.

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN SAN MARCOS

LOVE OF A MOVIE LEADS TO A SPECIAL EFFECTS CAREER PATH.

When San Marcos-based special effects artist Jason Zentner was eight, he watched the horror-comedy “An American Werewolf in London,” following the aftermath of a werewolf attack on two young American backpackers.

Zentner said he spent the next month howling and growling at people.

The werewolf transformation scene in “An American Werewolf in London” was groundbreaking, Zentner said, because it was more than “just a guy growing hair.”

“How the hell did they make this happen?” he

remembered thinking as a child. Watching the cult classic was a transformative experience that didn’t pass with the full moon.

Now, at 39, Zentner makes monsters of his own, but holds the movie close to his heart. He’s in the process of getting a werewolf tattoo on his chest from an artist that’s housed in the same building as his mask store in San Marcos.

Zentner opened J.T. Zentner Studios next door to Electric Empire Tattoo & Piercing off LBJ Drive in August.

The former Texas State student – he’s five classes short of an anthropology bachelor’s degree – honed his craft in San Marcos.

After a community college art teacher told Zentner that his horror-themed work wasn’t well respected, he left his hometown of Cuero for San Marcos. There Zentner spent time making “crazy, little films” with a former girlfriend and her fellow Texas State theater

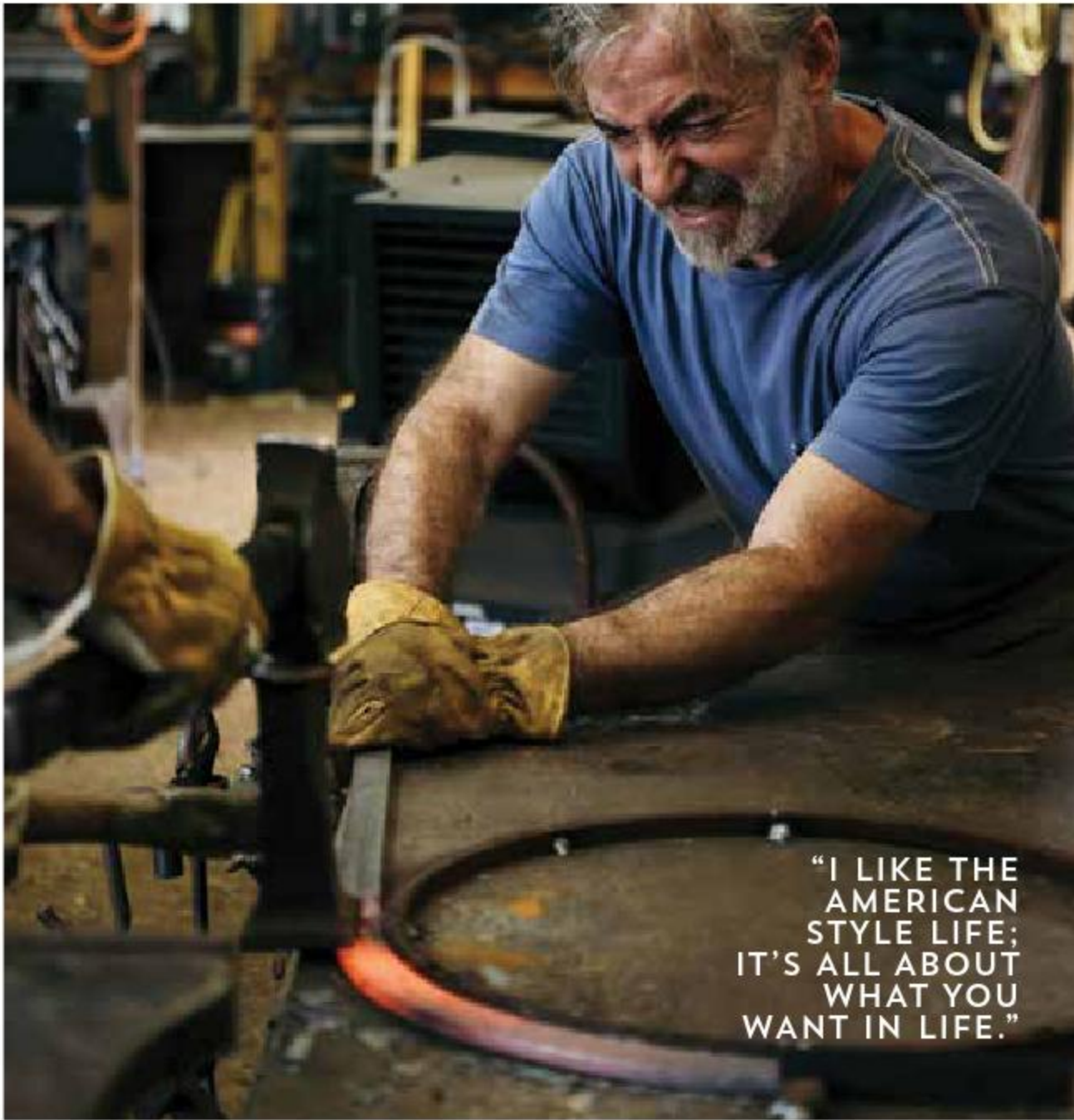
major friends. Two theater classes and textbooks and YouTube tutorials on special effects also gave him insight into the movie industry.

To date, Zentner has been the special make-up effects artist for a number of independent short and feature-length movies, such as the festival circuit runner “Meet Me There” and entries for the horror anthology series “The ABCs of Death.”

Although Zentner continues to do this work, he said life’s less stressful making masks and makeup prosthetics.

“As long as I get to make monsters and all that fun stuff” he’ll die a happy man.

J.T. Zentner Studios
jtzentnerstudios.webs.com
 512-644-7019
 [jtzentnerstudios](https://www.facebook.com/jtzentnerstudios)



“I LIKE THE AMERICAN STYLE LIFE; IT’S ALL ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT IN LIFE.”



MEET THE REAL IRON MAN

LOCAL BLACKSMITH FORGES HIS WAY TO SUCCESS

Heat radiated from the furnace. Kyle-based blacksmith and owner of Italian Iron Works Lorenzo Fortunato placed a strip of iron using tongs inside the fiery mouth of the small machine.

When Fortunato pulled the iron out after a few minutes its tip glowed, a sign that it was ready to be forged into one of his functional pieces of art.

For Fortunato, working with fire was the most intriguing aspect of being a blacksmith.

He began the trade as a teenage apprentice in his Uncle Giuseppe's shop in Mola, Italy, where some of his family members still live.

“I see this thing coming out of the forge real hot; that’s really cool,” Fortunato, 55, remembered.

Many years and some singed arm hair later, Fortunato has honed his craft by developing techniques allowing him to use a hammer and an anvil to transform metal into furniture, gates and sculptures, among other one-of-a-kind items.



Much like his Uncle Giuseppe, Fortunato, now the sole blacksmith in his family, will make almost any item a client requests, oftentimes using his uncle's tools.

These tools were given to him when his uncle died from cancer, years after Fortunato moved from Italy to Texas in 1978.

Fortunato moved to the U.S. after visiting an uncle who lived in Houston, with limited English proficiency to find work.

“The economy over there is bad; if the economy was good I’d stay there, but the

economy of Europe’s not good,” he said.

Fortunato started Italian Iron Works in Austin in 1992, after stints as a welder and a salesman.

Italian Iron Works relocated to Kyle about 17 years ago. The piece of land has a workshop and a mobile home that serves as both showroom and office. Future plans include video and on-site demonstrations.

“People have no idea how it’s made,” said Fortunato of his work.

It can take three days for him to complete a dog or baby gate, his most requested item. Other items, like a wrought-iron mailbox with detailed foliage and accompanying cattails, take three weeks off-and-on to complete.

Installation is included for clients who live in Texas, and all items can be shipped.

Being a blacksmith may be sweaty, physically demanding work, but Fortunato is fortunate to be living his American Dream.

“I like the American style life; it’s all about what you want in life,” he said, as he wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand.

Italian Iron Works
italianironworks.com
 512-653-3115
italianironworks@aol.com



"DESPITE WHAT HOMEMADE SOAP LOOKS LIKE, IT'S INFINITELY BETTER THAN WHAT YOU BUY IN THE STORE,"

Dutton said some people don't realize the importance of their skin. "When you put something on your skin it's absorbed into the blood-stream almost right away," she said.

That's why Dutton tries to avoid chemicals, including fragrances, in her products.

Her newest soap-face mask, Black and Tan, which mixes charcoal, pink Himalayan sea salt and essential oil, will be sold at the San Marcos Farmers Market from October to January.



Clarasage
[etsy.com/shop/clarasage](https://www.etsy.com/shop/clarasage)
 ClarasageSoaps

GETTING UP ON HER SOAP BOX

SAN MARCOS RESIDENT AIMS TO CLEAN UP THE SOAP BIZ.

An F in high school chemistry didn't stop San Marcos' Anne Dutton from conducting her own experiments.

Trips to Whole Foods left Dutton disillusioned – the "all-natural" soap sold there was either not affordable or the packaging was misleading. "It was an eye-opener when I started reading the ingredients," she said.

So Dutton decided to figure out how to make her own.

The quest resulted in the body product line Clarasage, available online at Etsy.com.

The key ingredient was right in Dutton's backyard. That's where 18 female goats reside, received from a friend's goat meat ranch outside Prairie Lee, and they provide the milk for the soap.

Goat milk, she says, has naturally occurring vitamin A, exfoliates and capric acid that bonds moisture to skin to keep it plump.

Each loaf of soap, equal to 20 bars, takes about 30 minutes to make in Dutton's home kitchen, then four weeks to cure in an oak armoire.

She then packages and ships the items or sells them at various San Marcos locations, including the city's farmers market, Paper Bear and the Mochas and Javas on Wonder World.



"IT'S LIKE SAYING GOODBYE TO A PUPPY I RAISED AND TRAINED,"

MAKING SUITE DREAMS

NEW BUSINESS SPRINGS FROM A FAMILY CRISIS.

The not knowing was the hardest part. John Thornton had no idea where his daughter was or whether she was still alive. After many sleepless nights worrying about her whereabouts, he could finally rest easy.

Thornton received a phone call from a police officer, who told him that his daughter had been arrested and sent to a Los Angeles prison for 56 months.

At least he knew she was going to be safe, but then he learned she was five months pregnant. What would happen to his grandchild?

Against the odds and the naysayers, Thornton picked up his new grandson in California two days after he was born and drove him back to Texas.

Talk about converting his life. Once a married man, remodeling homes and other projects in Austin, Thornton was now a single stay-at-home grandfather, beginning a friend's garage-to-studio-apartment conversion.



The 2010 project wasn't complete without a "Murphy" bed (hinged at one end so it can be folded and stored vertically against a wall or closet).

Thornton's foray into creating a custom bed turned into a business, Suite Dreams Murphy Beds, allowing Thornton to work from home and care for his grandson, who accompanied him on sales calls and deliveries.

"He is my 'why' and the CEO of this growing business," Thornton said.

It's a sad day when Thornton takes one of his antique armoire beds to a customer, he said, because of the time and energy he put into creating it.

The self-described antique armoire fetishist has three-to-four of these beds stacked in his showroom and shop.

So, when they're sold, "it's like saying goodbye to a puppy I raised and trained," Thornton said. "Sometimes it's hard to let go."

So, when they're sold, "it's like saying goodbye to a puppy I raised and trained," Thornton said. "Sometimes it's hard to let go."



Suite Dreams Murphy Beds
thebestmurphybedsintexas.com
 512-618-8220
 SuiteDreamsMurphyBeds