

## Sitting Firm

Dave Green developed a love for chair-making and especially the Windsor chair during his time at Rycotewood College not far from High Wycombe and the heart of the Chiltern and Thames Valley chair-making industry. After working for companies like Minty he realised he valued his independence and decided to set off on his own, forming Sitting Firm in 1989. The search for a suitable affordable workspace led him to a delightful rural setting just outside Coventry, where he works with a dedicated team of highly skilled craftsmen chairmakers in a purpose-built factory on the site of an old saw-mill.

Sitting Firm attracted orders right from the start from companies like John Lewis. The firm grew so that at one stage there were 42 employees. But Dave decided to scale

back as he felt he had become more of a manager than a craftsman. He now employs about 20 people.

Meanwhile the product has changed from traditional Windsor chairs to innovative, modern chairs by British and international designers. A large part of that change was in collaboration with sculptor and furniture designer Chris Eckersley. In 2008 Chris asked Dave if he had considered making a contemporary version of the Windsor chair. This resulted in Chris designing the Arden chair which went into production the following year and has become a modern classic. Following this success, Chris went on to help set up Bodging Milano where nine designers learned about traditional green wood chair-making and were inspired to make contemporary chair designs. Sitting Firm has developed and manufactures their and other modern furniture designers' chairs.

We assembled in the small reception area where we admired and tested the comfort of a selection of Sitting Firm's chairs. Amongst these was Katie Walker's Windsor rocker, a truly remarkable chair, which demonstrates both her skill as a designer and Dave's as a craftsman. Central to the design is a continuous circle of ash poling steam-bent into the elegant curves of the rocker. A specially-made jig holds the steamed pole in the rocker's complicated shape.

It was a joy to see the skilled craftsmen at work using a variety of conventional woodworking machines, most of which would be familiar to anyone working in the High Wycombe chair-making industry in the 1950s and 60s. But Sitting Firm has embraced modern technology



with a CNC router and machine to adze Windsor chair seats. No doubt other modern technology will follow but not at the expense of craftsmanship. There is a team approach to building the chairs but no production line. The end of the process is the finishing room where the chairs are waxed and oiled, usually to exploit the natural beauty of the wood.

*Neil and Sally MacLennan*



*right* Dave Green explaining the form he developed to produce a multiple bend for the Windsor rocker designed by Katie Walker. *Photo Jeremy Bate*

*below* Ash Windsor rocker designed by Katie Walker

