

A Welsh-American Stick-back

Crispin Thomas is one of a team of four conservation-joiners commissioned to restore the Samuel Ware

conservatory in Chiswick House gardens. Passing his car on the way to work in the gardens recently, I was arrested by a handsome stick-back chair on the back seat of his car.

Crispin tells me he became interested in chairmaking from reading *Make a Chair from a Tree* by the late Jennie Alexander (1978), a classic book on American green chairmaking, which the Lost Arts Press has asked Peter Follansbee to revise for a new edition. The Lost Arts Press is a venture of Cincinnati-based chairmaker Chris Schwarz who, visiting Britain this year to research stick-back chairs, ran a chairmaking workshop at the University of Docklands in London. Schwarz is an admirer of the work of the Welsh chairmaker, John Brown, and is currently commissioning a biography on Brown from Christopher Williams who worked with Brown in his workshop near Fishguard.

The five-day course for just ten students was quickly fully subscribed. Since all were new to chairmaking, students followed a design created by Schwarz, coined 'Welsh-American'. Whilst timber was available, Crispin chose to use his own, making the seat, arms and back-rail of English oak with ash legs, finished with



Crispin Thomas with his stick-back chair in oak and ash, made in 2019. *Photo Jeremy Bate*

linseed oil and wax. A beautifully crafted compact chair with a very comfortable sit, it has the interesting detail of wedged spindles socketed through the arms; it is unlikely to be Crispin's last.

Jeremy Bate