FOR THE LOVE OF LAND LAND CONTROL OF LAND CONT

THESE TALENTED ARTISANS EXCEL AT HANDCRAFTING FINE PRODUCTS FROM WOOD AND LEATHER.

BY JOHN ROSS

ost of us are enamored of wood and leather. They speak of hunts long remembered, of gunstocks and forearms, of boots and scabbards. I suspect most of us had our first encounters with sporting woods and leathers on a rifle. Mine was a bolt action, clip-fed Stevens .22. When I was 12, I became intimately familiar with walnut by smoothing its stock with 00 sandpaper and working in coat after coat of boiled linseed oil. A little saddle soap and neats-foot oil reconditioned its army surplus leather sling that cost, I think, about a buck.

How our tastes have evolved over the decades. We've come to admire much finer workmanship in wood and leather. And given the opportunity, we surround ourselves with furnishings—chests, tables, chairs—and accouterments—luggage, bags, gun cases—that reflect superlative craftsmanship. Just looking at such an item, let alone using it every day, brings us joy.

Over the last few months, I've become acquainted with three craftsmen whom I'd like you to meet: Chuck Zeller of Chuck's Wood Barn, Capers Cauthen of Landrum Tables, and Steve Collett of C+C Leather Artsans.

CAPERS CAUTHEN

he love of wood is also engrained in Capers
Cauthen as strongly as the culture of South
Carolina's Low Country and its native longleaf and shortleaf pines. Thirty years ago, Capers was making do as a laborer building houses around Charleston. That's when hurricane Hugo ripped through, killing 27 in the state and devastating hundreds of century-old homes.

During the recovery, Capers saw huge timbers of longleaf and shortleaf pine just being thrown away to be replaced with pressure-treated yellow pine.

"The wood that was used to build Charleston was indigenous to the state and was never going to be available again," he explains.

Waste of that historic wood gnawed at him more and more over the next decade while he operated an antique business with his father. Then, when learned that his grandmother's old barn had fallen over, he decided to gather up some of the old wood and build a table he could sell at his shop.

"I stuck the table in my little antique business and in a few days it sold. I was like 'wow, that was pretty fast."

From other lumber reclaimed from his grandmother's barn and remodeled historic houses, Capers began to build more tables.

"Because the wood is different, no two tables are ever alike. Each piece of wood has its own character. I try to save as much of that as I can, because that's where the true beauty is."

Farm tables, trestle tables, round tables, coffee tables, sideboards, kitchen islands topped with stainless steel, Capers can build any traditional style a customer might want. He's famous for his splay leg design. Slim and straight-tapered, these legs project outward slightly, adding graceful stability to tables with narrow tops. His tables exhibit a subtle modern flair, nurtured by his





four years as an interior designer.

He mostly lets the wood tell him how his tables want to be treated. The tops, of course, are as smooth as the finest oil-finished gunstocks. Legs and panels may show toothmarks from the old band and rotary saws with which the lumber was originally milled. At times, if a customer desires vestiges of historic color, Capeers will rub the wood with paint from the period, then wipe it away, leaving faint traces of age.

From vintage Low Country pine, Capers Cauthen handcrafts fine tables and rod/gun stands that will bring a touch of class to any trophy room.

In addition to tables, among Capers' repertoire is a delightful two-drawered stand for five guns or fishing rods. When he builds one, his mind can't help but drift to the inshore waters he loves to fish for sea trout, redfish and black drum or wander down that road on the 2,500-acre hunting lease he shares with 10 buddies. When he's sitting in his pop-up blind looking down a long farm road waiting for a buck to cross—that's the way he prefers to deer hunt—you can bet that somewhere in the back of his mind wheels are turning on new design.

LANDRUM TABLES

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