



Material

Making and the Art of Transformation

Nick Kary

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“People mourn the trees, wish to hug them and talk to them, speak of ancient forests and then go and shop at IKEA.”

In our age of computer-assisted design precision, mass production and digital living, the traditional skills of the craftsperson or ‘maker’ are hard to find. Yet the desire for well-made and beautiful objects from the hands-and minds-of skilled artisans is just as present today as it ever has been. Whether the medium is wood, metal, clay, or something else, traditional makers are living links to the rich vein of knowledge and skills that define our common human heritage. More than this, though, many of us harbour a deep yearning to produce something—to imagine, shape, and create our own objects, imbued not only with beauty and functionality, but with a story and a spirit drawn from us.

In *Material*, craftsman Nick Kary explores what it means to be a maker. Reflecting on how the fluid creative act becomes manufacturing, and what making means in a world where consumers are disconnected from the creative and material process. He tells the stories of craftspeople from around his home country of England, asking them why they “make,” and the challenge of earning a living out of a practice that was once a necessity. He quickly finds a commonality with each of his fellow makers, feeling kinship in their studios and workshops, and is fascinated by the unique ways each harmonizes their own vision with the natural movement of their material.

Underlying his visits with other makers are the author’s own reflections about what and who influenced him to value and make with materials from the earth. For nearly four decades, he has worked on commission to make fine, distinctive furniture and cabinets from wood for clients as notable as Madonna and Elton John. During this time, he has been both a teacher and a student, fascinated with the philosophy and practice of craft work of all kinds.

Through beautifully crafted writing filled with memorable makers, landscapes, stories, and scenery, *Material* is a rich celebration of what it means to imagine and create, finding that connection through a sense of place, which in the end is the essence of being human.

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Nick Kary has spent a lifetime making, teaching, and writing. Over the past 35 years he has developed his skillset as a craftsman and designer of fine furniture from workshops in London, Mexico, and Devon, for clients including Terence Conran, Madonna, and Elton John. A part-time lecturer at Plymouth University and Schumacher College, Nick also teaches furniture making from his own workshops at The Brake, the home and creative center he established with his wife Dolly, outside Totnes, England. It is here that he can practice his passion for helping others find another way of “thinking through their hands.”

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