

MASTER CRAFTSMAN



MASTER CRAFTSMAN DON DISBROW, ANTIQUE LUMBER CO.

So often, and in so many industries, new is better. The shiny, bright and perfect is the order of the day. Imagine a glimmering mansion built of unblemished, golden-hued shingles, impeccable white window frames and smooth, cavernous interiors with nothing out of place. But where's the heart? Where's the history? There's something special about a home with a tale to tell.

Don Disbrow, founder of Antique Lumber Co. has a different idea of what makes a house beautiful and interesting, and thankfully so do his discerning clients. For Disbrow, reclaimed wood—the planks, doors, windows and beams pulled from old barns and historic structures all over the country—has an appeal far superior to anything coming fresh from the mill.

“You can't achieve that look out of new material,” he says, “the patinas, the colors.”

——
“Any time I'm on the road,” Disbrow says, “it's an adventure, believe me.”
——

Each job is typically as unique as the time-worn and storied materials he uses, but everything Disbrow does is about putting these treasures from the past on display, creating a look that cannot be replicated with paint, stain or anything else one might try.

Of course, finding something that can only be created through the passage of decades or centuries isn't easy. It takes dedication, interpersonal skills and hundreds of miles searching rural backwaters along the open road. “Any time I'm on the road it's an adventure, believe me,” Disbrow says, describing long trips navigating the American countryside in search of old barns and derelict structures, and negotiating with the unusual cast of characters who own them.

“We've bought many a barn and dismantled them,” he explains. “Wherever the material is I need, I physically go and get it.” And so it goes that Disbrow finds himself driving his large truck on those less-traveled, blue byways to farms and villages in Southern states like North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia and Alabama, as well as areas farther north, such as Pennsylvania and Upstate New York.

“The scenery is breathtaking anywhere I go,” he says, recalling meetings with Amish, Quakers and Mennonites, to name a few of “the good ol' country folk” he encounters. “Ma and Pa on the front porch—Pa with his pipe,” Disbrow says. “A lot of interesting people.”

Once the wood is acquired, Disbrow cuts it into usable planks or simply stores it as-is in his mill and warehouse, located in Clear Springs, Maryland, until it's brought to the Hamptons for a construction job or display in his Montauk showroom.



QUALITY

There is a standard of excellence that Telemark aspires to, that is unsurpassed, that advances through progress and innovation, becoming the mark of exceptional quality by which all others are measured.



TELEMARK
The Mark of Excellence in Building

telemarkinc.com

MASTER CRAFTSMAN



Mostly, Disbrow finds himself on the hunt for specific wood requested by a contractor, interior designer, architect or homeowner, but Antique Lumber Co. also creates pre-made furniture, frames, live-edge countertops and shelving, among other things, at his mill. And all the work is done by Mennonites, who require woodworkers to apprentice for seven years before they're permitted to make anything for sale.

"I'm a furniture maker by trade," Disbrow says, pointing out that he graduated from Pierson High School in Sag Harbor and went on to study furniture and cabinetmaking at trade school before setting out on his own. He had a knack for designing beautiful furniture, but artisanal woodworking wasn't quite the profitable endeavor he'd envisioned. "I wanted to grow my business," Disbrow recalls, explaining how he got the idea to make use of his antique lumber contacts to supply others with this difficult-to-acquire resource. "Dealing with the antique lumber actually is lucrative, and there was so much construction going on out here." Soon, furniture evolved into flooring, beams, doors and planks. "Down South it was in abundance, at least back then," he says.

Disbrow opened his first showroom in Water Mill in 1998. He changed locations more than once but remained in the hamlet over the next 13 years before finally making the move to Montauk in 2011.

With nearly 20 years in the business, Disbrow has become the East End's go-to guy, serving everyone from rock royalty and movie stars to business owners, well-heeled hedge-funders, politicians and even regular working locals with an eye for sophisticated design. He's also discreet. Even when prodded, Disbrow refuses to name his high-profile or celebrity clientele on the record. "I try to appease everybody," he says, adding, "I will not be undersold by any local competitor."

Today, Disbrow says antique lumber is becoming scarce, especially as more buyers and sellers compete for what's available. "A lot of people over the years have caught on," he explains. But Disbrow has been at this a long time, and he never fails to deliver—even if that means using his expertise to suggest a viable alternative that's usually less expensive and won't hurt a customer's overall vision. "Sometimes the stuff just isn't out there," Disbrow says, but he finds solutions when others might give up or offer some sort of new facsimile. "I just have an eye for it, doing it so many years."

And the East End is lucky for it. As more old homes come down and new constructions rise up, Disbrow is incorporating a little history—some vestige of the past in what might otherwise be looming rows of the faultless and forgettable.

- Oliver Peterson

