

Showing His Handiwork

A Vermont furniture maker's poker tables are anything but flops.



AN UNFINISHED POKER TABLE made of mahogany, ebony, maple, and satinwood sits in the center of Mark Lackley's workshop in the Vermont village of Quechee. The walls of the shop are hung with sheets of wood and a framed portrait of Elvis Presley. "I grew up in the South," Lackley explains, "so it makes me feel good to have Elvis watching over us."

As Elvis looks on, Lackley is completing the custom-made card table while also planning a 10-foot-long dining table, which will have ends that flip over to reveal backgammon boards. "We design as much for structure as we do for style," Lackley says, noting that sometimes he has to stop himself from making a design too complicated. "We make sure everything has a structural integrity, and we make sure our tables have the functionality without going over the top and being ridiculous."

Lackley, a broad-shouldered, 41-year-old graduate of Yale University, where he majored in political science and played guard on the football team, speaks with the hint of a Southern drawl that, like his Elvis painting, reveals his Georgia upbringing. After graduating from Yale, he worked as a crime reporter for a newspaper in Savannah, Ga., and then as a writer for a business journal in Mexico City, before he returned to Georgia at age 28 and took a job with a furniture maker in Marietta. He relocated to the Northeast when he married his wife, Kim, who was studying at Harvard Business School. Kim now runs the business side of their company, Mark Lackley, Furniture Maker.

Depending on the complexity of designs, Lackley can build from two to four tables a month, although, he notes, because of the number of orders he has received, it may take him two to three months before he can begin working on a new project. One such order is for an Art Deco-style poker table. "This is the kind of stuff that we really excel at and we really get off on," he says, as he flips through a reference book of Ruhlmann furniture, the style after which he will model the table. "We take traditional pieces—forms built for hundreds of years—and give them our own flair."

Lackley poker tables usually cost from \$8,000 to \$16,000, depending on the material and the design intricacy. Most measure just over 7½ feet long and 3½ feet wide and weigh about 200 pounds. A reversible poker table, one with a dining tabletop underneath, can cost as much as \$20,000. "We find that the guy wants a poker table, but the woman wants the dining table," he says, "so they compromise and get both."

Lackley's designs can be quite creative. When a military history buff commissioned him to build a poker table, Lackley used 75 mm World War II naval artillery shells for the cupholders. "I'm sure I'm on some FBI watch list for buying those shells," he says with a laugh. But such unique touches, he adds, can distinguish his work from others'. "We really don't invent anything," he says, "but we adapt good designs to the uses of our customers. If you can think it, we can build it." —SHAUN TOLSON

Mark Lackley, Furniture Maker, 802.457.9286, www.lackley.com

With leather inlays and hand-finished mahogany, a Mark Lackley custom poker table offers card players a superior piece of furniture.

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