

By Jana Schiowitz
 Photography by Brian Franczyk
 Headshot by Jim Luning

come together



Since he was a child, Michael Dreeben has been fascinated by how things are put together. Legos

and Lincoln Logs led to woodworking in his parents' basement, and in college, the Chicago native finally succumbed to his fascination—switching from majoring in U.S. history at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, to pursue independent studies in welded steel sculpture, and then earning an MFA in sculpture at the University of Chicago while working as a carpenter, art rigger, and creator of pattern work for a few of designer Jordan Mozer's interiors.

He continued his joinery studies, completing an apprenticeship with a master cabinetmaker in Chicago, studying woodworking as a Fulbright Scholar in Rajasthan, India (he still frequently visits and works with local artisans there), and in 1999 founded his namesake furniture company.

Michael W. Dreeben, Inc. offers design, material, and theme diversity—he uses matched solid wood slabs, CNC milled aluminum, roto-molded plastic, fiberglass, and formed leather to develop organic, traditional, and machine-manufactured constructions. “My work emphasizes the inherent properties of the materials I use as well as the mechanisms through which they can be assembled,” says Dreeben. His furniture and fine objects are divided into three collections: wood, metal, and special edition pieces, all illustrating strong craftsmanship.



Clockwise from top: The Billet Chaise, offered in a polyester or cowhide seat, with stock and custom color options; the Rolling Dresser with Turned Cocobolo Wheels displays an open-frame construction (shown here in mahogany); and the Turned Wooden Wine Gift Box, made of a single block of old-growth, reclaimed Southern Yellow Pine.

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Reap(lenish) What You Saw: “Over the past five years, I’ve planted roughly 20 times the number of trees we have sawn,” says the eco-conscious designer. And to reduce carbon emissions, Dreeben uses a sawyer in Fillmore County, Minnesota, where mature hardwoods are selected and milled to his specification.

Under the Influence: “A key influence in my professional development was my graduate advisor Herbert George...he impressed upon me the importance of maintaining flexibility of approach—remaining open to ideas as the design process is occurring,” he says, pointing to Hans Wegner, Isamu Noguchi, George Nakashima, Antoni Gaudi, the Shakers, and his parents as other major influencers.

The Year Ahead: This year Dreeben will extend his collection to include a new take on his Rolling Dresser and the Credenza, and is working on furniture, fixtures, and treatments for a new Chicago tapas restaurant from operator Howard Natinsky. He is also completing the Spline Collection, a group of furniture highlighting spline joinery. “I think it will serve as a thematic bridge between my earlier designs in wood and my machined aluminum pieces.”

For more information about Dreeben and his current and future work, log on to www.dreeben.com, call 773.394.5761, or email mdreeben@gmail.com.



Clockwise from top: Southern Yellow Pine Lamp made from recycled Yellow Pine beams and Jain monk bowls (Jain monks have used these for centuries in North India to gather alms), both part of the Special Editions line; the Billet Chair, weighing just under 10 pounds, has a seat and backrest made of hand-formed saddle leather, with the seat in roto-molded plastic, shown here; and the Spline Chair, part of Dreeben’s new Spline Group of furniture inspired by Shaker forms.

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