



LIFESTYLE *for a* LIFETIME

TAKE A STEP BACK IN TIME AT UWHARRIE CHAIR COMPANY

By Waynette Goodson



JASPER CHAVIS HAS WORKED ON AND OFF with Uwharrie Chair Company for 15 years. At 72 years young, he's amassed about 40-something years working with wood.

At Uwharrie, he operates the bandsaw, taking 12- and 14-foot-long boards and deftly running them through the saw, following the lines of the chairs traced on the boards—and chewing gum as he goes. His hands, the size of catchers' mitts, gently guide the wood through as easily as slicing a loaf of bread.

"Jasper does the bandsaw four boards stacked at time,"

says JR Lloyd, company co-owner. "Not everybody can do that."

When asked why he keeps coming back to Uwharrie, Jasper answers. "I enjoy the people and the work. What we do here and the quality of it."

While he helps craft every stick of furniture in the catalog, Jasper couldn't name his favorite piece. "They're so many of them," said the longtime Thomasville, N.C., resident. "I like them all. They're all so beautiful and unique."

Plant manager Brittany Sechrist is beholden to the

Continued

classic Nantucket collection. “It’s so different, and it has details that set it apart from the others,” she says.

Brittany wields a power drill as effortlessly as most women use a curling iron. She followed family members to Uwharrie in 2015 and hasn’t looked back.

“Everything is so hand-built,” she says. “We’re a small company and we’re able to talk and get to know each other. We’re all like family.”

And Uwharrie Chair Company has been all in the family since it started 25 years ago in Archdale, N.C. In 1993, the original owner, Rick Price, started the business with a friend, Don Greeson, out of his garage.

Eventually his partner left, and Price and his family, led by his daughter, Rebecca Ly, then president, built it up. Three years ago, Price retired and sold Uwharrie to the current owners in September 2015.

“We had heard they were closing the doors, and we had done our research on the company,” says Erica Lloyd, co-owner and wife of JR Lloyd. “We knew it was a great company, great history, great product and great value, and we believe in it. We hated to see them walk away.”

“Everybody recognizes this furniture,” adds Jan Butner, co-owner. “It’s like taking a step back in time.”

Respectful of the company’s heritage, the new owners were careful not to change the collections too much. “Most of the product, about 75%, we never took out of the line,” JR says. “Now we have 18 different lines and over a thousand SKUs.”

The products run the gamut from planters, arbors and swings to rocking chairs, hutches and bars—and



Top: Patterns for chair parts hang on the wall. Center: Jasper Chavis uses the patterns to trace lines on the boards; then he cuts out the chair parts with a bandsaw. Bottom left: Brittany Sechrist assembles a bench.

everything in between.

“The No. 1 chair is still the original chair they started with 25 years ago—the classic Adirondack style,” Erica adds. And white is still the No. 1 color.

NEW ENERGY

But the new owners have worked hard to freshen up the lines and add more contemporary styles and colors, such as the new Kabo sectional in both pine and polymer, which is already doing well.

“Last year we started a

new poly, and it’s increased by 20%,” JR says. “It’s colored through and through, comes in 12 finishes, and it’s just as heavy as the pine. One of the chairs weighs 60 pounds in pine and about 70 pounds in polymer.”

The company prides itself on being one of the last to handcraft furnishings in Southern yellow pine, which is sustainably harvested at a lumber yard in Virginia.

Treated and kiln-dried, the pine can be painted in a choice of 30 Sherwin Williams colors, or left its natural

honey hue. Customers also have a choice of three finishes: pristine, washed or distressed.

Meanwhile, the new poly comes from a factory in Chicago. “It’s much more durable,” JR says. “It’s for people who want no maintenance. There’s a market for both pine and poly; the pine is still huge, but there’s a bigger market for the poly.”

Uwharrie operates out of a 12,800-square-foot building in Archdale, where it receives, builds and ships out of the one location. Not counting the Lloyds and Butner, there are seven employees: two cutters, two builders, a sander, a painter and a customer service manager.

COMPLETELY CUSTOM

“We do 2,500 pieces per year, and run from 15 to 20 pieces per day,” JR says. “We do a lot of singles: one chair, one table, one dining set.”

Erica chimes in, “We’re a custom company with no minimum order, we drop ship directly to the customer, and nothing is cut on a CNC machine. We have no stock. Everything is custom.”

Recently, a customer requested a three-color poly table, chair and bar stools in lime, Twilight blue and turquoise. Uwharrie delivered.

Another company out of Canada regularly orders 10- and 12-foot dining tables, as well as coffee and sofa tables. Notably, the No. 2 seller is the Behron’s dining collection.

Uwharrie pieces have found their way from celebrities’ homes such as Whoopi Goldberg’s, to the Darden Restaurant Group, which regularly orders Wave settee rockers for its Bahama Breeze chain.

“We work with a lot of designers,” Erica says, “and they can be contract or



Uwharrie Co-owner JR Loyd with an ancient spindle machine.



The Original Uwharrie Chair in white is still the No. 1 seller.

residential. We just re-did the dining room at the Jekyll Island Club Resort.”

Lead times average three to four weeks, and five to six weeks during busy season. And each piece carries a limited lifetime warranty, thus the company’s tagline, “A lifestyle for a lifetime.”

Some customers in Florida report having Uwharrie chairs in the same place in the dunes for 17 years, unmoved by the frequent storms and hurricanes. They like the weathered, rustic look of aged pine.

NEW PRODUCTS

What’s next for Uwharrie? The company is interested in developing new styles. “We just released the Companion

Club chair that’s easier to get out of for older people,” Butner says. “It’s great for retirement centers, and it meets wheelchair standards.”

Another winner: The new Cooler Table, with . . . you guessed it . . . a drinks cooler lodged in the middle of it. “It has really taken off in the last three months,” Erica says. “The Millennials love it. They want to do everything outside. Outdoor living is becoming the new indoor living.”

But the key component for Uwharrie is still one word—quality.

“We want to make sure we move forward keeping the quality,” Erica says. “We would also like to come up with a chair to reach a different market. But we

always start with quality and design.”

And that means job security for the rare craftsman like Jasper Chavis, who just

might retire someday. Still, the septuagenarian doesn’t look like he’s slowing down any time soon—and neither does Uwharrie. **ct**

FETCH MY CHAIR, JEEVES

What happens when a handcrafted boat company teams up with a hand-built outdoor chair company? The Jarrett Bay Collection by Uwharrie Chair.

Designed by architect Jon Wesley Rahman, who spent his summers growing up around Beaufort, N.C., the prominent motif is the boat builders’ “Carolina Flare” design. The Flare ensures a smoother, more comfortable ride in the rough, choppy waters of the Atlantic.

“The essence of the Jarrett Bay brand is reflected in all



our products—our custom sport fishing boats, our full line of men’s and women’s clothing and our new Jarrett Bay Furniture Collection by Uwharrie Chair,” according to Randy Ramsey, president of Jarrett Bay Boatworks,

based six miles north of the town of Beaufort.

First announced in the spring of 2016, so far the collection includes Adirondack chairs, side tables, a dining table, dining chairs, a pub table, a bench and swings. “Last year, the chair was our third-best-selling chair,” says Uwharrie co-owner JR Lloyd. “People love them around a fire pit.”

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Uwharrie (pronounced “you-WAH-ree”) is the name of a national forest in south central North Carolina. It’s known for an abundance of wildlife, recreational lakes and peaceful, natural beauty. The name is also synonymous with rustic charm and relaxation. So it’s only fitting that it’s the inspiration for the Original Uwharrie Chair.