

IRISH VOICE

IN FOCUS

GABRIEL McKEAGNEY

OCCUPATION: Irish Furniture Maker



What is your Irish background?

“I grew up in Tempo, Co. Fermanagh, the second of six children. My parents, Johnny and Teresa McKeagney, still live in Tempo. I have two siblings living very close in California and three brothers residing in Ireland.”

“I am a fifth generation woodworker. However, the trade did skip a generation, and I learned mostly from my grandfather. I grew up surrounded by old tools, artifacts, and stories of cart-wheel construction. I spent my apprenticeship in Ireland making custom furniture and constructing new homes. I then spent three years in London specializing in architectural reproductions of historical woodwork in many of London’s preserved buildings.”

When did you come to the U.S.?

“I moved first to New York in 1993, and then permanently to Southern California in 1996. In 1998, I founded Tempo Carpentry & Design, Inc., a national award-winning woodworking company and a forerunner of European woodwork in Orange County. I now live with my wife and three children in San Juan Capistrano.”

What does your company do?

“The company is a designer and manufacturer of a unique and distinctive collection of home furnishings. It artistically celebrates the cultural rebirth of the Celtic tradition in hardwood furnishings. It’s main pieces include a striking bard’s

chair, an ornate music stand, and our most popular creation, the whimsical mushroom collection of table and chairs.”

“Working with an innate knowledge of the Book of Kells and the Celtic oral tradition, Irish Furniture is attractive to the eye, functional in the home, and fascinating to the imagination. To see our collection log onto our website at www.irish-furniture.com.”

What inspires your work?

“Irish Furniture is the creative manifestation of one man’s journey far from home. For me, it reconciles the disparity between the deep-seated traditional Irish culture in which I was raised with the overwhelming, fast-paced newness of the American lifestyle. Arising from my love of Irish culture, I was naturally enchanted by the haunting tones of the uilleann pipes, and have been playing the instrument for several years. This innate connection with traditional Irish music, coupled with an element of American vitality, prompted me to create my original piece for Irish Furniture, the bard’s chair.”

“I’m also co-founder of the Southern California Uilleann Piping Club, which, nine years after it’s founding, boasts over 50 members. I host monthly piper gatherings in my home, as well as an annual Tionol, which attracts over 60 musicians from across the globe.”

Interview by April Drew