

# Couple Reproduces Shaker-Style Furniture

**BONNIE BRECHBILL**  
Franklin Co. Correspondent  
**CHAMBERSBURG** (Franklin Co.) — Five years ago when Paul and Bonnie Rung displayed their Shaker-style furniture at craft shows, they'd overhear people say, "I don't like this stuff, it's too plain." Now that Shaker furniture is "in," they're kept busy in their workshop to fill their orders.

Bonnie Rung attributes the heightened popularity of the style to the numerous magazine articles on Shaker furniture that have been published in the past few years.

All the furniture the Rungs make is in the Shaker style — utilitarian and simple in design, a reflection of the lifestyle of the Shakers themselves, members of a religious sect that practiced celibacy and an ascetic communal lifestyle. Some pieces are exact reproductions of pieces made by the Shakers, such as the arm chairs, rockers and ladder back chairs. Various Shaker communities had different styles of furni-

ture, Mrs. Rung said.

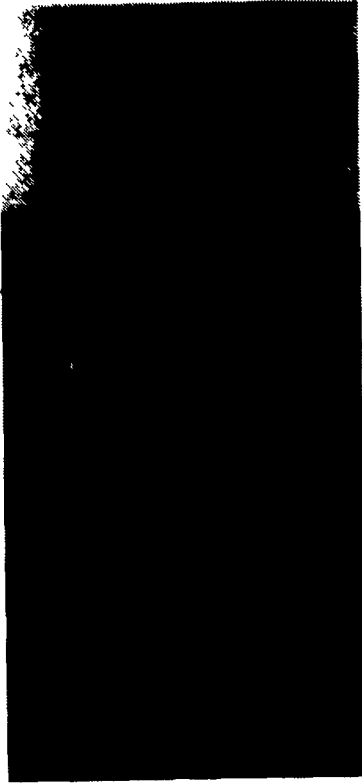
The Rungs also make some Colonial reproductions such as pencil post beds and Windsor chairs.

"Their pieces have a real authenticity," said Gloria Saberin, Chambersburg author, who has written three woodworking books. "They fit in well with real antiques."

The Rungs unapologetically use modern shop equipment to produce the old-fashioned furniture. "The Shakers would have used power tools if they had been available," Mrs. Rung said. "They probably would have modified them and made them better. They were a practical people."

Although they have a showroom at their Mont Alto Road workshop, juried craft shows are their main outlet. They attend about 25 shows a year from New England to Virginia.

Paul Rung, 49, became interested in Shaker furniture as a teenager. His father, who was in



This chest of drawers is made of birdseye maple and cherry.



Paul Rung gave up a teaching career to create Shaker and colonial style furniture with his wife, Bonnie.

construction, taught him the fundamentals of woodworking. Rung worked out the details of cabinet making for himself by reading, examining old furniture, and visiting other wood shops.

Rung was a forestry professor for 12 years, most recently at the Mont Alto campus of Pennsylvania State University. During his teaching career, he maintained his interest in woodworking by making small Shaker items for his family. Ten years ago, he quit teaching to create furniture full time.

"We had always wanted to do something together," he said. "We had started the woodworking business while I was still teaching, and we made a smooth transition."

But one night in November 1991 nearly everything the couple had worked for was lost. An electrical fire destroyed the two-story barn that housed their workshop. They had been at show in Connecticut the previous weekend and hadn't unloaded the van, so that furniture was safe, but everything

in the shop — machinery and inventory — was ruined.

"People we didn't know rallied around us. They offered us tools and shop space. We were at work the next week in two different locations," Paul said.

In January 1992, a barn-raising crew erected the present building.

Rung does the woodworking in his half of the shop, while his wife, along with some hired help, does the finishing in her half. All items are handfinished with oil-based stain and paste wax. Table tops receive a moisture-resistant spray.

The backs of the ladder back chairs and the top of the Windsor chairs are steam-bent. Rung steams the cut-out piece, bends it over his knee, then lets it dry on a frame. All the furniture has mortise and tenon joints, which are glued, then pegged.

Although patterns for the curved sections of furniture hang in the workshop, Rung said that he would never sell his last chair. He takes measurements from an existing chair when creating new ones.

The Rungs used to wholesale some items, but find they prefer dealing with their customers in person. Some customers want details of a piece changed, and, armed with a few measurements, Rung constructs it according to their specifications.

One customer, for example, wanted a Shaker storage cabinet made 4-inches deeper to accommodate her television set. He occasionally works from a photograph.

Rung finds the work rewarding. "It's fun to have people excited about having you make them something," he said.



Paul Rung does the final hand sanding on a Shaker linen press that will be used as an entertainment center.



Bonnie Rung hand finishes the furniture her husband makes.

# Homestead

## Notes