

# Wood Works

Timberland's Pete Lankford challenges himself every time he designs. BY JOCELYN ANDERSON

Long before Pete Lankford ever became a footwear designer, he enjoyed watching his dad at the workbench, carving wood and making furniture.

But the creative director of the Timberland Boot Co. and Earthkeepers brands never thought he'd follow in his dad's footsteps.

"It's funny, you grow up thinking you're going to define yourself in complete contradiction to your parents," said Lankford, who has been at Timberland since 1998. "As you enter your adulthood, you realize they've managed to shape who you are despite thinking otherwise."

Almost 14 years ago, he got serious about learning the trade. He'd picked up a lot from his father, but decided to take evening classes at a local woodworking school near his home in Newmarket, N.H.

Fast forward more than a decade and Lankford is now using similar techniques in all his design work, including footwear. For every project, he gives himself a challenge to create something great within certain parameters.

"That's the fun of it," Lankford said. "Instead of saying I can do anything — well, anybody can do anything — it's more interesting to present myself with a limitation and see if I can do something wonderful within that."

Usually such restrictions mean adhering to what Lankford calls "tripod simplicity," the idea that having more than three legs on a table is overkill and fewer is unworkable. What is the minimal amount of bells and whistles needed to make an item useful and attractive?

In woodworking, Lankford recently challenged himself to make a chair for his 4-year-old son, Soren, carving the seat and back out of one piece of wood. He found a local sawyer to cut an L-shaped piece of pine and then shaped it in his workshop. He sculpted legs and inserted them into holes in the bottom of the chair, with wedges holding them in place.



Pete Lankford in his home workshop in Newmarket, N.H.

"It's very simple," Lankford said. "It's basically a back and a bottom all in one piece, and then four splayed legs sticking out from it."

The same minimalist philosophy also works in footwear design, he explained.

"If I'm designing shoes, I try to take away every extraneous bit until the design falls apart, either visually or functionally, and then I put that part back," he said. "It's a good test."

A new shoe in the spring '12 Earthkeepers line is his best example of this way of working.

Lankford and the Timberland team dared themselves to use the minimal amount of materials on a shoe that also sticks to Earthkeepers' eco-friendly mission. They ended up utilizing four materials: organic cotton for the upper, recycled aluminum for the eyelets, natural latex rubber in the sole and some scrap pieces of vegetable-tanned leather from the factory floor.

The result is four different styles, including a chukka boot, available in natural canvas and dyed

hues. And the color was applied as the last step before the uppers were sewn to the sole.

"In shoemaking, there is a lot of waste," said Lankford. "The idea is to only use the dye you need on the shoe."

For Timberland Boot Co., the process is the same, but the challenge is different. In that line, Lankford is tasked with making classic, utilitarian footwear that might have been seen between 1900 and 1945.

"I look to that era and use techniques and materials that were in that era," he said. "But instead of creating an antique, I adapt it to how we live today."

And always, in footwear and in furniture, Lankford gravitates toward classic, clean designs.

"What I'm after is a piece that resonates with the use, where the product says, 'I understand you and what you care about,'" he said. "And it is expressive without being full of flash and bang and frivolous details that you tire of quickly."