

# 20 minutes with... Walke Moore Tools

We speak to Alan Walke and Aaron Moore, the brains behind hand tool company Walke Moore Tools

Based in upstate New York, Walke Moore Tools designs and manufactures high-quality hand tools using only the finest materials. The company was founded in 2012 by Alan Walke and Aaron Moore, a professional woodworker and a mechanical engineer respectively. They make tools that are either not readily available or that are currently being made to an inferior standard. As a premium tool manufacturer, their goal is to 'design tools that function flawlessly, look beautiful and last for generations'. All of their tools are 100% American made, they design everything in the range and components that they cannot make themselves are outsourced to local businesses. They are constantly seeking to expand their range and improve their tools based on feedback from their customers. This is a young but ambitious company with an admirable dedication to the traditions of their craft.

**F&C:** Would you agree that we're experiencing something of a hand tool renaissance right now and are you happy to wear the 'Artisan Tool Maker' hat?

**Aaron:** Absolutely. The quality of the tools being made today is without historical equal and we believe the hand tool revival going on right now is the result of these tools being made available. We are so used to cheaply manufactured products today that the experience of picking up a premium



Alan Walke - left - and Aaron Moore - right

tool is shocking. It actually works the way it's supposed to right out of the box. Using these tools to create a beautiful piece of furniture is rewarding both during and after the project is complete. If people consider our tools on par with the top tool makers of today, we would not only be happy to wear that hat, we would be honoured.



Drawer-slip cramps. Sold in pairs and available in cherry or maple

**F&C:** Walke Moore Tools is, relatively speaking, a new company. What were you doing before you launched into making tools for a living?

**Aaron:** About the same thing I do now. I work during the day, see my wife and kids when I get home, and hit the shop in my available nights and weekends. It's just what I work on in my shop that has changed.

**Alan:** Before we started the company, I was making more furniture and cabinets. I am still doing that kind of work but the tools have become more of a priority.

**F&C:** Is Walke Moore Tools a full-time job for you both?

**Aaron:** No, not yet anyway. I work as a mechanical engineer during the day. Right now that job pays the bills while the company is getting off the ground. Ultimately, I'd like to make this my full-time job, but that will take time and I'm not in a hurry.

**Alan:** I wouldn't say it's a full-time job right now only because I'm stretched pretty thin between this business, my furniture/cabinetmaking and handling much of the business side of my wife's jewellery making business. Hopefully over the next few

years those different time commitments will balance out a little more, though, and I will be able to spend more time focused on our tools.

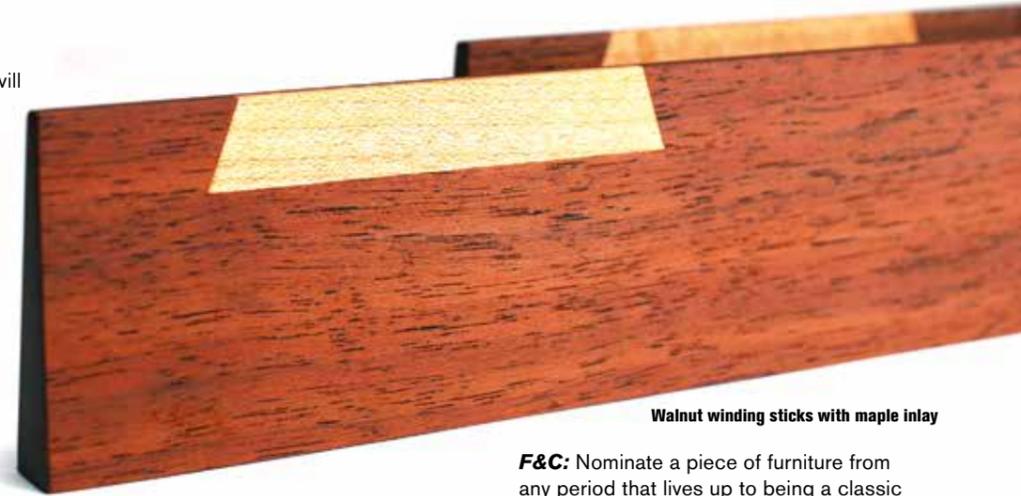
**F&C:** Even though the products you make are intended for use by hand tool enthusiasts, do you incorporate a lot of powered woodworking in your production methods?

**Alan:** It's a blend for sure. The typical milling and shaping operations are done with power tools. That just makes sense for producing multiple repeatable items and helps keep our labour costs down. The finishing and detailing work, like fitting the inlay in our winding sticks, is largely done by hand.

**F&C:** With a fully equipped workshop to handle, do you still get to produce furniture items now and then?

**Aaron:** Yes, but not as much as before. That's just the reality of owning a business – there has to be some trade-offs.

**Alan:** Over the last couple of years, I have done more cabinet work than stand-alone furniture pieces. Also, my wife and I bought a house a couple of years ago that has needed a lot of work, so I would add carpentry and trim work to the list of things that have taken priority over furniture. I do try and have at least one furniture project going at any given time, though.



Walnut winding sticks with maple inlay

**F&C:** What style of furniture do you usually produce?

**Aaron:** Anything where I get to incorporate a lot of hand-cut joinery – that's probably my favourite part of woodworking.

**Alan:** My personal work has always had a pretty modern aesthetic. The actual construction methods involved with a lot of that work just wasn't very satisfying, though. So over the past few years, I have really come to appreciate Shaker designs. It can often work just as well in a 200-year-old farmhouse or in a Manhattan loft and the craftsmanship required really satisfies the 'wood nerd' in me.

**F&C:** Nominate a piece of furniture from any period that lives up to being a classic

**Aaron:** For years I've wanted a pair of Morris chairs with leather cushions, but lack of time and upholstery skills have kept that dream from materialising. Still, they stand out as pretty classic in my mind.

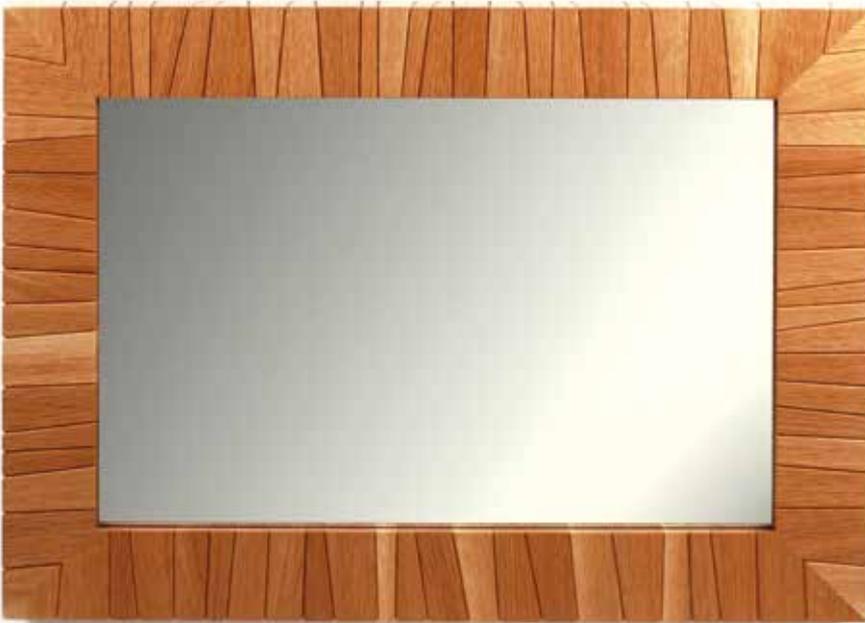
**Alan:** Like I mentioned earlier, I think most Shaker designs are classic but specifically I would nominate the Shaker tall clock.

**F&C:** I'd imagine that furniture makers are as much an inspiration to your company as tool makers. Who would you list as your greatest influence?

**Aaron:** There are so many people making nice furniture that it would be impossible for me to pick one based on their work alone. Having said that, Nakashima and Krenov



Long grain shooting board with adjustable fence for repeatable board widths or tapers



Mirror in white oak by Alan Walke, 460 x 610mm, 2012



Damascus steel marking knives.  
Spear-point and right-hand skew

stand out to me not only for what they made, but also for how they wrote about their work. The care they took in making their furniture and the love of their craft is something I think about when I'm in the shop.

**Alan:** I'm not sure I can name just one. Going through the School for American Crafts at RIT – Rochester Institute of Technology – gave me the chance to meet and work directly with some amazing furniture makers: Wendell Castle, John Eric Byers, Andy Buck, Rich Tannen and Richard Newman just to name a few. Their insistence on the highest level of craftsmanship for everything they make, whether it's a \$100,000 piece of furniture or a one-off jig, is the main thing that has stuck with me, especially in terms of tool making.

**F&C:** With so many top quality new hand tools on offer, are you ever tempted to seek out vintage items?

**Aaron:** Sure, in a way that's why we started the company. Whenever we need a tool that we can't buy from

a premium maker, we look to the vintage market. When we struggle to find one there that's worth owning we ask: "Why is no one making this?" That's why we're focusing on releasing tools that are not readily available as opposed to things like hand saws or chisels that are already being made at a high level of quality today.

**F&C:** What was the last tool you bought and what's the tool you can't do without?

**Aaron:** I think the last new tool I bought was a limited-edition 50mm chisel from Blue Spruce Toolworks. My most recent purchase was a vintage 10oz Warrington hammer. And there are at least a dozen tools I couldn't do without, but for sentimental reasons I might pick my Lie-Nielsen No.7 jointer plane.

**Alan:** The last tool I bought was a JDS multi router and I have a feeling that over the next year, it will quickly become a tool I can't live without. In terms of hand tools, it has been a while but I think my last significant purchase was a Lie-Nielsen dovetail saw.

**F&C:** I guess at the moment your market is primarily local but do

you have aspirations of going global any time soon?

**Aaron:** We're not opposed to it and it's easy enough with online sales. The cost of shipping is the only real hurdle. Having distributors around the world is another option, but that could impact the cost of the tools. Time will tell.

**F&C:** Do you have any plans to exhibit your tools at any woodworking shows this year?

**Alan:** Not yet. We're focussed on rolling out some new tools at the moment and then we'd like to start looking into shows.

**F&C:** You currently have the drawer slip clamps and winding sticks in your catalogue, what can we expect to see next?

**Aaron:** If all goes smoothly we will have our clamps, winding sticks and Damascus marking knives available online by the time this article is released. We also have prototype parts for a traditional brass bound level with adjustable vial. That may be sold as a complete tool, or we may supply the brass and vial as a kit, or both. We're also considering a thin-kerf version of our marking knife with a wooden handle.

**F&C:** On a scale of 1-10 just how pleased were you to be taking home the Ron Brese infill plane after Handworks last year?

**Aaron:** On a scale of 1-10 I'd crank it to 11 – if you'll allow the *Spinal Tap* reference! It's an amazing piece of craftsmanship and Ron is a great guy. I think the only thing I'd ever won prior to that plane was a Kit Kat bar.

**F&C:** Alan, how long was it before Aaron let you try it out for yourself?

**Alan:** I still haven't. Whenever I ask to come over and try it out he's always got some excuse about needing to wash his hair or being too tired, so whatever!

### Contact

Web: [www.walkemooretools.com](http://www.walkemooretools.com)