

# Megan Pinch works in a new medium: wood

Jay Phyfer's "passion for teaching and the incredibly diverse offering of photography classes at VI," drew Megan Pinch to join the photography department at Virginia Intermont College in 2010. She remained here four years until its closing.

Originally from Rochester, New York, Pinch taught photography and digital media for 10 years in New York, Massachusetts, Texas, and Alabama, before coming to Bristol.

She says that she grew as a person and an educator during her time at VI. "I was challenged to teach things I had not taught before. I got to be more involved in mentoring students than I had before at large universities."

Since VI closed, Pinch has made a drastic change in her artistic direction. She's using her photography to promote her furniture designs.

"After VI closed, I took some time to re-group and reevaluate my priorities. I had to sell my house in Bristol, and I moved in with my boyfriend Nelson (Adolphson) in Limestone, Tennessee. He worked for a big box store installing kitchen cabinets, decks and doors, but I started to realize his talents were going to waste there. Looking around our home, there were so many beautiful pieces of furniture he had built. I was sure I could use my photography skills to sell them.

"We quietly started our business, Mountain Mule Hardwoods, in November 2014. The first thing we sold was cutting boards to friends in January 2015. We lugged Nelson's tools out of our basement into the driveway to work, weather permitting. The table saw was on sort of a skateboard to move it more easily. I think we did some damage to our heat pump with all the sawdust flying around, and everything in our house had a fine film of dust on it.

"My skills in photo, graphic design, web design and social media have helped make our business successful. I apply my art background when I am designing a new piece of furniture, and when I'm selecting pieces of lumber to use for a project, so I guess my new medium is wood," Pinch says.

They began by selling cutting boards to stores in Abingdon, Virginia, and Asheville, North Carolina, and tables through their website. An Asheville store asked them to build a simple bed for their organic mattresses and within several months that became the largest part of their business.

"Soon I had to learn how to pack and ship a bed across the country; it was a steep learning curve," Pinch says.

They had a 30' x 40' shop built on their property in late 2015. Adolphson started building furniture full time in early 2017, and they now have a staff that includes Adolphson's daughter Emilie.

"Beds are the most popular thing we make, and we keep adding more styles and options. We still make some cutting boards and a lot of heirloom boxes, but furniture is our primary focus. We love the idea that our furniture will be handed down from generation to generation. Our pieces are made from kiln-dried furniture-grade solid American hardwoods and we use low-VOC clear finishes to let the natural beauty of the wood be the focus. We don't do any staining or painting, and we don't use barn wood. Our aesthetic is clean, simple and modern, with a lot of Shaker influence.

"People come to our shop by appointment, and we can show them different wood choices, show them pieces in progress, and discuss measurements and how we would build their custom furniture. We have gotten so much repeat business, and we now make bigger things such as dressers, dining room tables, cabinets and even built-in bookshelves. We get to work with and sometimes even meet really interesting people — customers from New York, Dallas and Idaho have driven here to pick up their pieces," she says.

Pinch, whose photography was featured in numerous publications, juried gallery exhibitions and won awards and grants, says the highlight of her career is now.

"Being my own boss and working from my beautiful wooded property make me happier than I ever was teaching. I get to use my skills every day and no

Right: Megan Pinch

Bottom: This four-drawer cabinet is an example of Pinch's new artistic direction.



two days are alike. While I do miss teaching, I have no pressure to get awards, publications or exhibitions, and there's no room for politics in my shop," Pinch says.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in studio arts and Russian from College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. She attended Rochester Institute of Technology for the first year of graduate school and received her Master of Fine Arts degree in 2001 from SUNY Brockport's Visual Studies Workshop.

To see Pinch's furniture, visit [www.mountainmulehardwoods.com](http://www.mountainmulehardwoods.com) or their online Etsy shop. Pinch's images can be seen at [www.meganpinch.com](http://www.meganpinch.com). A!