



Sylva  
Summer  
School  
2021



Sylva  
summer  
school

## Thanks

We are indebted to Steve Fowkes and the Forestry Commission for supporting the project.

We are very grateful to Dougal Driver and Grown in Britain for collaborating with us and supporting our Summer School programme.

Thanks to our speakers for kindly giving up their time and providing an excellent catalyst for the week: Gabriel Hemery, Steve Fowkes, Tom Barnes, Rachel Lawrence, and Sebastian Cox.

We could not achieved much without our excellent tutors and assistants, whose support made all the project outputs possible: Dr Lynn Jones, Hattie Speed, Daisy Lula Brunsdon, Fergus Hooper, and Rae Sellen.

And finally, we thank all of our participants for being so amazing: Stefania Atzea, Honey Birch, Lisa Doyne, Hannah Girvan, Amy Hague, Beth Meehan, Daisy Sparling, Katy Thompson, and Nina Varnham.





## Foreword

At the Sylva Foundation Wood School we care passionately about trees and people. We aim to nurture a wood culture, enhancing the potential of a home-grown timber supply and the benefits of managing woodlands for people and nature. We are promoting excellence in creativity and craftsmanship using home-grown timber. This week-long summer school has been the perfect vehicle to educate, collaborate, and innovate.

Our plan was to bring together a group of passionate creative people and provide them with all of the necessary ingredients to explore, design, and create prototypes in our professional workshops.

A series of talks by industry leaders inspired and educated our delegates about the potential of under-utilised home-grown timber, providing context for the fast-paced design-and-make experience that followed. We encouraged and fostered a 'thinking through making' approach, supported by a brilliant team of tutors.

The added dimension of a group who all identified as women or non-binary created a community of makers that went against the grain of most furniture craft courses, and indeed the wider industry. This led to some supportive conversations about gender and hopefully a group that will continue to support one another into the future.

We were totally blown away by the experience and know that everyone involved went home exhausted yet inspired. The results were incredibly impressive and represent the hard work of this remarkable cohort.

Joseph Bray, Head of Wood School, Sylva Foundation



Home-grown timber

# The state of UK forestry

Sylva Foundation was established in 2009, inspired by efforts, recent and past, to improve the condition of Britain's woodlands. When John Evelyn wrote his book *Sylva* in 1664, its purpose was to inspire the creation of a strategic reserve of timber. Today, we recognise the myriad benefits that trees provide for nature, for society, and for the economy.

Britain is the second least-wooded country in Europe, so it is no surprise that we import a huge amount of timber each year (£7.5bn). However, many will be surprised at the scale of this, and to learn that the country is the 2nd largest timber importer anywhere in the world. At the same time, the public are increasingly distanced from the land, and many are unaware of the challenges and opportunities for land managers. Together, we refer to these issues as a 'dysfunctional wood culture'.

Whilst this imbalance between what we can grow, and what we need, can never be met, even if we planted the whole of the country with trees, we can at least do a better job at looking after the woods we have already. For instance, we know that only 54% of forested land in England has a management plan in place. It is just as important that we bring the remaining woods into good condition, as it is that we plant more trees to address our low tree cover.

Sylva Foundation has a number of influential projects to support its mission. Chief among these is its myForest platform which is used by more than 7,500 owners and 1,500 land agents to map and manage 135,000ha of woodland across Britain. The charity runs a novel environmental auction platform called NatureBid to support environmental restoration and enhancement, and the Woodland Wildlife Toolkit to help landowners conserve rare and declining wildlife. It also runs a respected national survey to gather evidence of action, awareness, and aspiration among practitioners.

[sylva.org.uk](http://sylva.org.uk)



Gabriel Hemery  
Chief Executive  
Sylva Foundation

# The importance of people to woodlands.

It is an unprecedented time for foresters, the government's manifesto pledge to plant more trees is now in the system. The Nature for Climate Fund was announced in spring 2020 with a £640m budget, £500m of which is focussed on woodland creation through the England tree planting programme.

The target is to support net zero carbon by 2050 by building a resilient and long-lasting treescape that contributes to a green recovery.

To meet this target we will need to plant 30,000 ha/year by 2025 in the UK. To put this in context our highest annual planting rate to date is 6,800ha in 1971 in England and in 2019/20 we only managed to plant 2,330ha in England, so we have a long way to go.

To do this we must strengthen the forestry sector, to ensure both the tree supply and the workforce are ready to meet the necessary scale of tree planting, alongside increased and improved woodland management strategies. Together, we must work to build a pipeline of people coming into woodland and forestry related sectors.

“You can't buy a stick at a toy store”

We have become increasingly aware of the importance of woodlands for people, particularly during the pandemic, many more people are accessing woodland for recreation. We now need to consider the importance of people to woodlands right through from collecting seed to timber processing.



Steve Fowkes  
Policy Advisor  
Forestry Commission

# Home-grown timber - an emotional rollercoaster

Vastern timber is a family business and Tom is the fourth generation supplying timber to the construction and furniture industries. He explained that *'home-grown timber is an emotional rollercoaster.'*

Processing UK sourced timber is a challenging business, from the dangers of the sawmill, to finding markets for the material. However, we can see considerable opportunities through urbanisation, housing demand and decarbonisation. Timber will become a critical commodity in the future as we strive to meet these needs.

It is a wonderful material; it sequesters carbon, it is renewable, children learn better and people recover better when surrounded by wood. Timber and cellulose has significant potential as a replacement for many common materials including plastics and concrete in construction.

*'If it were a country, concrete would be third largest carbon emitter in the world.'*

Current challenges in the sector include the shortage of supply and price increases of imported material, perhaps local sourcing is a sensible approach. Future threats to a home-grown supply include; the impact of climate change, pests and disease, lack of planting and subsequent management of woodlands, public perception, misguided government policy and sometimes perverse outcomes from grant structures.

It seems daunting, but we can make a difference! We need to encourage wood users to ask questions of their suppliers and to increase demand. We need to be advocates, explaining the incredible value of home-grown timber and tell compelling stories that change hearts and minds.

[vastern.co.uk](http://vastern.co.uk)



Tom Barnes  
Managing Director  
Vastern Timber



# Forest product certification and provenance

Grown in Britain (GiB) works at every stage of the forest product supply chain to support the use of UK timber. Rachel posed the questions: why certified timber, and; what is meant by sustainable forestry? There is a legacy of people believing that cutting down trees is bad, actually it increases biodiversity, increases light to the forest floor and creates layers that support differing habitats. Managed woodlands provide cleaner air, reduce flooding and enhance wildlife habitats.

Timber certification typically includes two main components: certification of sustainability of forest management; and product certification. Certification of forest management covers forest inventory, management planning, silviculture, harvesting, road construction and other related activities, as well as the environmental, economic and social impacts of forest activities.

In product certification, round-wood and processed timber products are traced through the successive phases of the supply chain. Timber certification is a process which results in a written statement (a certificate) attesting to the origin of wood raw material and its status and/or qualifications, often following validation by an independent third party. It is designed to allow participants to measure their forest management practices against standards and to demonstrate compliance with those standards. GiB is the only scheme that ensures UK provenance.

Rachel stated that the current expansion of our woodlands is exciting, but also scary! Will we plant more woodlands that are not well managed into the future? We must now go beyond the right tree, right place, right reason, and create the right long-term management.

[growninbritain.org](http://growninbritain.org)



Rachel Lawrence  
Business Manager  
Grown in Britain

## What is possible with home-grown timber?

Sebastian has been working with home-grown timber, often sourced from his own woodland in Kent, for his whole career. He challenged us to invert the current system of exploiting resources to shape our material culture around the materials the natural world wants to yield. He asked whether in a climate emergency, is sustainability enough? He encouraged us to go further, to be regenerative, and to positively contribute to our planet. He called on us to focus on wood as the material for the next century. He passionately described the diverse and highly-prized characteristics designers search for in materials; lightweight, strong, biodegradable, warm to touch, growing all over the planet ideally with only light from the sun, and rainwater. All characteristics of wood, a material that is still often overlooked.

As a woodland owner he has become a forester, and by planking its own timber, his company can also be considered millers. This immersion in all of the processes, from woodland management to hand and digital fabrication, allows them to be responsible and gives a much deeper understanding of the value of timber. 'We see our woodland not as standing boards for furniture, but as a living ecosystem, which we can glean material from and increase life within it.'

Whether timber is gleaned as small sections of round-wood from their own coppice, or home-grown timbers from mixed managed woodlands, the question of species and quality becomes interesting. Rather than sourcing prime oak with minimal defects we should ask the question; what can we make with non-perfect, underutilised timber?

[sebastiancox.co.uk](http://sebastiancox.co.uk)



Sebastian Cox  
Designer  
Maker  
Environmentalist



The ingredients



# Workshops

Our Grain Store workshops were established during the first national lockdown in March 2020, to provide an industry standard working environment for students wishing to learn professional making skills. We have sourced the best quality fixed and portable woodworking machinery, and provide in-depth training to ensure they are used safely and efficiently.

This space is complimented by our Teaching Barn which acted as a base, design studio, and dining room. Allowing seamless movement between the two spaces gave participants the opportunity to build their confidence and take ownership of their projects.

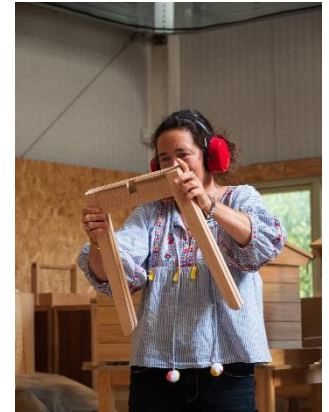
We were pleased to see everyone honestly share their previous experiences and, after a thorough induction, work within our guidelines. By providing tutors with excellent practical experience we were able to support the use of all of our machinery one-to-one, giving everyone the opportunity to try out new tools and techniques while developing their own design. We created an environment that was not only safe but open, creative, and inclusive.

# The participants

We were delighted to offer free places for designers and makers on this year's summer school thanks to the support of the Forestry Commission. We were particularly keen to invite applications from individuals who identified as women or non-binary as we are very aware that furniture craft education and industry is skewed towards men. We received significant interest, making selection very challenging, but ultimately gathered a brilliant group of participants.

We looked for those with some previous woodworking experience, a keenness to learn, and a willingness to be thrown into a fast-paced experience. The sharing of experiences and comradery we witnessed in such a short time was incredible. Stefania, Honey and Daisy are currently studying at universities around the country and will go back with renewed enthusiasm for their final year. Lisa, Amy, Beth and Katy are all graduates of furniture-related courses, while Hannah and Nina are at different stages as trainee furniture makers.

We did not quite know what to expect, bringing together a group of creative people from all over the country with varying skills and experiences felt quite risky under such a tight deadline. What happened far exceeded our expectations. They were remarkable! To achieve so much in such a short time is dedication to their level of commitment and we know they will move forward with confidence and a new network of like-minded friends.





## The tutors

**Joe Bray** joined Sylva Foundation in 2018 after more than 13 years delivering furniture education at Rycotewood in Oxford. He is passionate about bringing education to life through industrial partnerships - leading to live projects, study trips, work experience, internships, and sponsorship for students.

**Daisy Lula Brunson** is one half of Lula-James furniture which is based at the Sylva Wood Centre. She can mostly be found in our workshops designing and making bespoke furniture. She recently appeared on the BBC production 'Saved and Remade' putting her skills to great use. Among the diverse skills Daisy shared during the week, she facilitated all of the woodturning.

**Fergus Hooper** is a recent graduate of Sylva Foundation's Professional Course. Subsequently, he has been awarded a fellowship to continue his development in the school's workshops. His in-depth knowledge of the workshop and equipment was invaluable.

**Dr Lynn Jones** was formerly the Furniture Department Manager in a large university possessing a leading reputation for furniture design, craft and manufacturing. She continues to be a furniture specialist External Examiner at several universities in the UK and abroad. She also offers furniture career guidance, employability talks, and graduate workshops for universities, colleges, trade associations and community groups. She misses the MA Furniture course she ran for almost twenty years, but thoroughly enjoyed our summer school.

**Hattie Speed** is a designer, maker, teacher, and creator of the inclusive community 'This Girl Makes'. While studying BA (Hons) Furniture Design and Make, Hattie initiated a blog exploring the lack of diversity in craft and design education and industries. She works as an occupational therapy technical instructor for the NHS while somehow finding the time to develop her own work, write books, and teach part-time.

# The Brief

We shared this brief, along with material samples, on Tuesday afternoon; this meant the participants had to react very quickly. They were inducted into the workshops on Wednesday morning giving only three days to make their prototypes.

## *Home-grown timber*

*Alder* has been overlooked in British forestry yet provides much potential, possibly as a replacement for the many ash we are undoubtedly about to lose. It is a soft, fine grained timber that can be easily worked yet its lack of attractive figure means it is typically not used by furniture makers.

*Beech* is synonymous with products designed for use with food but far too often they are not made using home-grown timber. We have many Beech trees reaching maturity, woodlands have not all been managed effectively and the furniture industry they were planted for has changed significantly (considerably reducing demand).

*Douglas fir* is an under-utilised softwood that has beautiful figure and great potential to be used in furniture making.

*Sweet chestnut* was brought to Britain by the Romans and is cultivated for both its timber and nuts. Its timber closely resembles oak however it is less dense and strong. That said it is more durable and frequently used for fencing and other outdoor products.

Your brief is to work exclusively with these under-utilised home-grown species - to design and prototype an object, piece of furniture or collection for the Café | Restaurant | Kitchen that has the potential for batch-production in the UK. We would like you to consider ideas that could initially be tested in small runs to then be scaled up for higher volumes - considering the production methods and costings.

Grown in Britain and the Sylva Foundation are two environmental charities that champion the use of home-grown timber and both look forward to seeing your solutions!

Try not to overcomplicate your outcomes - think simple - you only have 3 days!

We hope that you will enjoy the opportunity to explore the characteristics of the different timbers.



## The timber

The retail furniture market is dominated by furniture made from oak and walnut, predominantly American timber and mostly manufactured outside the UK. Whilst we are pragmatic we would like to imagine a future that makes better use of our own timber resources. We selected four home-grown species, alder, beech, Douglas fir and sweet chestnut that whilst available from our suppliers are considered underutilised by furniture makers. We only selected timber that we were certain has UK provenance through its Grown in Britain certification. Thank you to our suppliers Tyler Hardwoods and Vastern Timber.





## Thinking through making

Thinking and making are two intertwined activities that are inseparable. We believe that a 'thinking through making' approach is one that places great value on the practical experience. Reflecting on the experience of often intuitive working, leads to a deeper understanding and knowledge.

We encouraged the participants to leave their laptops and sketchbooks to one side so that they could immerse themselves in the development of their ideas through practical exploration and making. A significant advantage was immediate feedback – learning about timber characteristics, the viability of structures, and making aesthetic decisions all completely tangible.

Feedback from our Summer School participants suggests that it is liberating to work in this way and also great fun! The outcomes produced speak for themselves.

# Wood Working For ALL

The students attending this workshop identified as women or non-binary.

## Why does this matter?

'Girls are not offered furniture making as a subject option in most state schools within the UK. Textile design, graphics, fine art, illustration, ceramics, and fashion are more often part of the art & design 'diet' at school. By comparison, furniture making is an invisible subject title in school, and girls, like me, STILL only stumble across it by chance. When I studied furniture design and making at university in the 1980s, I was the only female. Today, figures have improved on some furniture and product design courses, but not to the extent where there is equal gender balance on furniture making courses, so it's no surprise that there are so few women and non-binary woodworkers.

Many female and non-binary graduates, often with first-class degrees and MAs, end up working in shops, bars, cafes and other non-related, low-paid work because they don't think they are 'good enough' at making. Drop in self-esteem or confidence are perhaps of greatest concern. They also leave the furniture industry more often than their male counterparts, citing discrimination in workshops as a common reason, so they have to be more inspired to both enter and then to remain in the furniture industry than men.'

## We were all role models at this Summer School!

Dr Lynn Jones, Independent furniture specialist



## Quotes from our Summer School 2021 students

*'I wish I had longer arms. I can get stronger but I can't get longer arms.'*

*'Tools are always too big for my hands. But some men have small hands too, right?'*

*'Why is workshop wear only available in brown, grey, black or white? More colours please!!'*

*'Gender balance needs to be equal – it's far more healthy.'*

*'Unique to be in a workshop environment with only females present. Very comfortable, very supportive, very happy and very nice.'*

*'Not having the critical eye (of a man) made this workshop refreshing and stress free.'*

*'We have experienced the biggest increase in confidence in the shortest amount of time.'*

*'What a fabulous week! This is an amazing course. I needed this course so very much. My memory of it will stay with me forever. Thank you. So much.'*

# Makers & projects



# Stefania Atzei

Currently studying furniture design at London Metropolitan University

Made from GiB certified beech and sweet chestnut

'Porta Tutto' was designed as a simple solution for hanging objects in the kitchen – keeping utensils close to hand. Whilst it was designed for the kitchen it could be equally at home in anywhere around the home. It combines two easily produced profiles, round and square, making a feature of their intersection.

Stefania said *'I now appreciate more the importance of sourcing local materials and choosing the right timber for the right project'*.

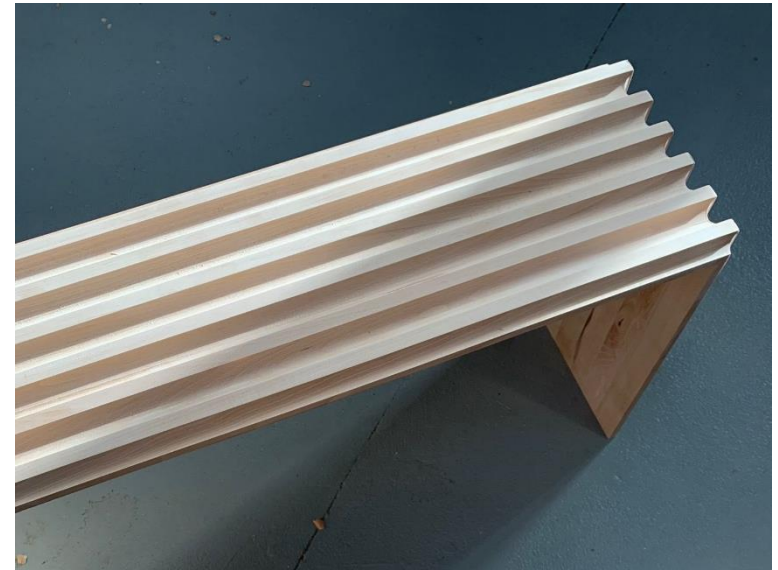


# Honey Birch

Currently studying furniture and product design at Kingston University

Made from GiB certified beech

An exploration of grooving and profile making using workshop routers and the spindle moulder informed this architectural form. Whilst prototyped here as a bench, the repetition of form generated from a single component could be used to create a variety of objects. Removing material creates a three dimensional surface that reveals the depth and beauty of the grain not evident in flat surfaces.





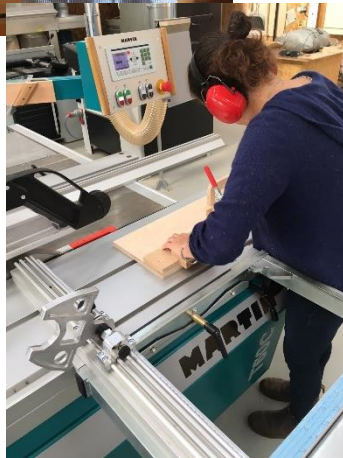
# Lisa Doyne

Professional maker course graduate, Sylva Wood School

Made from GiB certified beech and sweet chestnut

Combining timbers that contrast in colour and texture was foremost in Lisa's mind as she examined the samples provided. Chestnut is lightweight, has an open grain and has the darkest tone contrasting with beech which is much heavier, close grained, and a paler colour. Her cocktail table is simple in form, but subtly connects you with the grain of the two timbers through the moulded edges and faces of each component.

*Lisa said 'the enthusiasm, energy and camaraderie of this course was amazing from start to finish. It felt like the woodworking version of 'Bake off' - fast-paced, challenging, hilarious, exhausting and hugely satisfying. An incredible learning experience, thank you Sylva for the opportunity.'*





# Hannah Girvan

Currently employed as a trainee joiner

Made from GiB certified beech and sweet chestnut

The lightness and durability of sweet chestnut made it the most appropriate timber for this aid to communal eating. Hannah had a strong desire to develop an object that could function as both a table and serving tray, to bring people together to share food. Using a technique akin to coopering, each component is faceted and jointed to create a subtle curved surface. Beech serving/chopping boards are shaped to perfectly nest inside.

*Hannah said 'I am extremely appreciative to the tutors and all those who attended the summer school, I had no idea how hard creating a curve would be and their patience, kindness and guidance helped me massively'.*



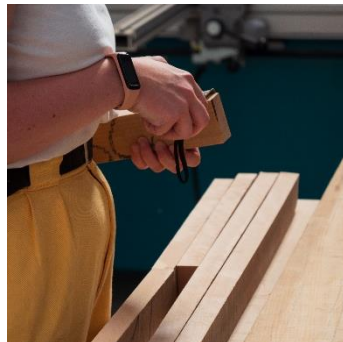
# Amy Hague

BA Hons 3D Designer Furniture and Product graduate, Northumbria University

Made from GiB certified beech

Reflecting on two conflicting issues drove the development of this bar stool. Firstly the need for somewhere to securely hang a bag and secondly not conceal it so that it might be left behind! The result is a slatted structure that provides security (without hiding completely), gives rigidity to the frame and is easily replicated and constructed using a portable domino jointer.

Amy said *'the thinking through making approach was certainly different to my university experience but so fun and freeing'*.





# Beth Meehan

BA Hons Product Design graduate, Lincoln University

Made from GiB certified alder and Douglas fir

A tray and table developed to showcase the physical and aesthetic qualities of the alder and Douglas fir. The attractive grain of the Douglas fir is prominent on the table top and in the bent band that wraps around the tray, much like a shaker box. Practical exploration of all the available timbers determined that it was most flexible. The close grain of the alder was perfect for the turned legs of the table.

Beth said *'the combination of everything is what made it a fantastic experience for me - the location, the people, the resources, the materials. There are a lot of home-grown timbers at our disposal, they have many potential uses and we should be using them more!'*





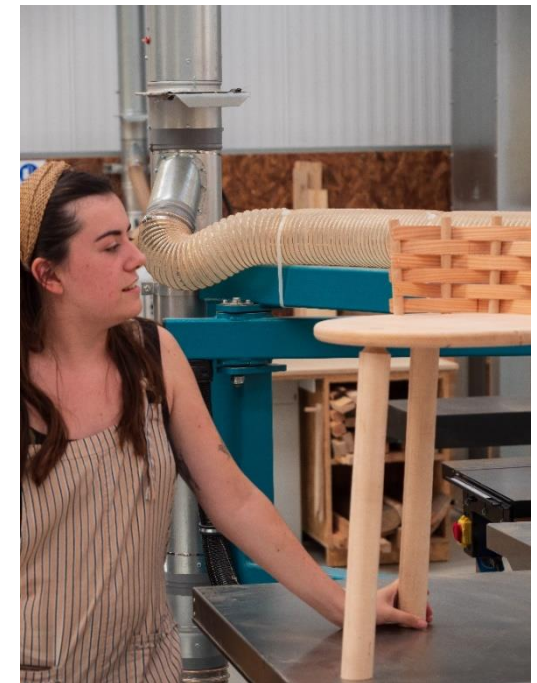
# Daisy Sparling

Currently studying BA (Hons) Designer Maker at University of Plymouth

Made from GiB certified beech and Douglas fir

This three legged chair was designed to be versatile and make good use of the characteristics of the timber provided. Daisy was keen to use a lathe to turn components and weave timber. The flat surface is intentional, allowing it to be used as either a table or seat. She appropriately selected beech for the seat and turned legs and took advantage of Douglas fir's flexibility in thin strips.

*Daisy said 'I've never made a chair. Can you believe from initial design to finished product it took just three days! Neither can I - It was a whirlwind'.*



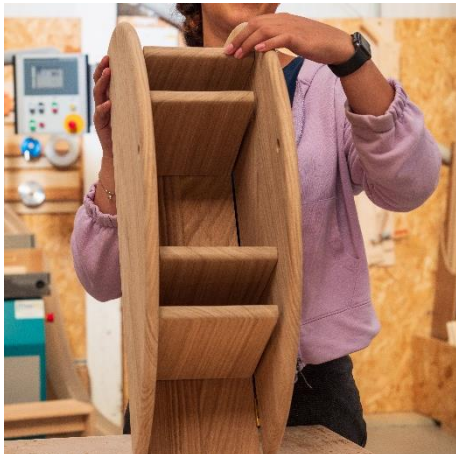
# Katy Thompson

Graduate BA Hons Product and Furniture Design at Birmingham City University

Made from GiB certified sweet chestnut

Katy wanted to create a portable, sturdy, and versatile picnic table. She selected sweet chestnut, being lightweight and durable it was the perfect timber. The challenge she faced was keeping the wide table surfaces flat while allowing wood movement. A sliding dovetail was the answer, a traditional mechanical connection between the surface and leg components. This allows expansion and contraction of the top, keeps it flat and elevates it from the ground – a neat solution. When folded the table can be tied together creating a handle and the internal void is perfect for carrying a bottle and your picnic food!

*Katy said 'I had the best four days the summer school, I've never learnt so much in such a short period of time!! So inspiring to be in a workshop full of women.'*



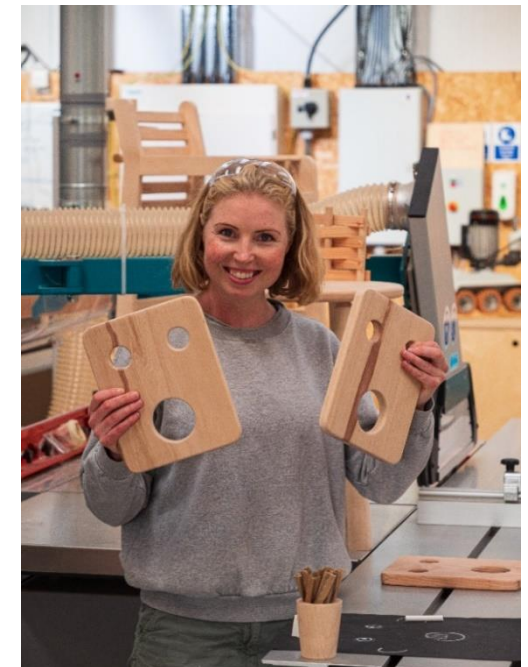
# Nina Varnham

Currently employed as a trainee furniture maker

Made from GiB certified beech

Nina made a very insightful observation about the challenge of keeping children engaged and entertained when eating in a café or restaurant. Her serving board has been thoughtfully developed to combine the presentation of food and a template for drawing faces. Once the bowls of chips and dips have been taken away the board can be traced onto a paper placemat and used as the basis for imaginative play.

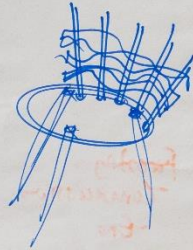
What really brings these well considered objects to life is the grain of the timber – the natural variation of colour and texture in the grain allows your imagination to see different facial features, including eyebrows and hair.



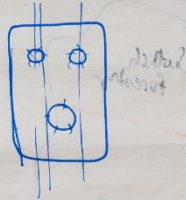




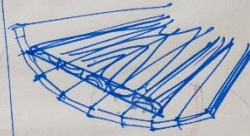
Daisy



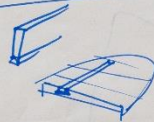
x Nina



Hannah

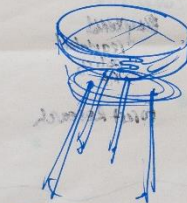


Katy



Beth  
Augs (angled) hinges  
slates in and slides

x Amy 4,5,6,8,10



4 Hinges



copper nails.

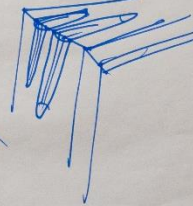
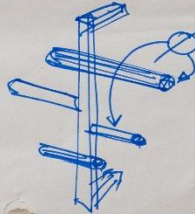
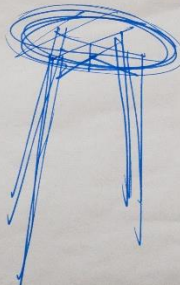
Lisa

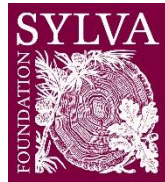


Stefania

+

Honey





[woodscool.sylva.org.uk](https://woodscool.sylva.org.uk)