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# THE HANDCRAFTED HOME ON THE RANGE

Handmade pieces create a welcoming atmosphere and help a Western home tell a story.

By Ellise Pierce

No matter what Western vibe you're aiming for—Colorado mountain cabin à la Ralph Lauren, Southwestern adobe chic, or refined ranch rustic—one of the secrets to really making your décor come alive lies in handmade pieces. We talked with Jeremiah Young, the creative director and principal of the interior design firm Kibler & Kirch, in Billings, Montana, about how

“handmade” elevates the ambience of a Western home. And we explored the handcrafted appeal of a Wyoming ranch that remains Young's favorite project.

*Cowboys & Indians: You're a big fan of using handcrafted items in the client homes you design. Why do you rely on handmade over mass-produced, and how important is that in creating the ambience you're after?*



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF KIBLER & KIRCH



**Jeremiah Young:** It's crucial. Over and above the function of a space is to be satisfying to the human condition, and there's no better way to give a place some soul than to gather up, procure, and place some handmade things in a house. There's a project I did not long ago where everything, down to every screw, was handmade. There are all of these small moments that don't always come to the level of consciousness, but all of these small things add up to giving a lot of soul to a space. I think there's no greater thing than to say something was made by human hands. There's a big difference between something that's machine-made and things touched by human hands.

**C&I:** Tell us more about how handmade pieces give a space "soul."  
**Young:** It's a sense of history. A sense of place. A sense of quality that's been vetted over time, so the solution that was found for this door, this piece hardware, or maybe it's even a vase or a footstool, this is a solution that somewhere down the line, there was a tradition developed of how to do it and how it was constructed. Because machines are relatively new in our history, there's a collective soul of objects and tradition, the way things are constructed. Most of the time, the old ways are best.

**C&I:** How do you go about choosing handcrafted pieces for your projects. What do you look for?

**Young:** You try to use materials that get translated into objects, wood or stone or metal or bronze. You select things that get better over time, through use and through us touching them and using them, they look better and become better with age. The objective with handmade things is to have them look their best when they're quite old.

**C&I:** What are your personal favorites when it comes to handmade elements in a room?

**Young:** Things made of leather. Original art — the ultimate handmade thing. And case goods. Wooden furniture. There's no machine that can make a curved, bow-front English dresser. It has to be done by hand.

**C&I:** Where do you stand on mixing contemporary elements with handmade Western ones?

**Young:** It's sometimes really nice to contrast the two — a coffee table with a glass top and on top is an old bowl that's been used and has gouges and knicks and darkness around the rim because humans have touched it and used it. Handmade elements can be mundane objects made of wood, elevated to a piece of art.

**C&I:** Besides being pleasurable for the eye, how can handmade things help to tell our own personal history?

**Young:** All of these objects have a story. Whether it's that object and who used it and how, or the story about why that object even exists — this ladderback chair, this particular style. Then you take it a step further: As designers, we're telling that story, too. Our interiors, the whole of them, are telling stories of place and material and the tradition that you're working in.

**C&I:** What are some key handmade pieces that you rely on again and again for your projects?

**Young:** A tooled ottoman, a leather-framed mirror, a great leather bag of some kind. Our recipe is to have a sofa in fabric because we find that to be more comfortable, and pairs of leather chairs. I'll take a great leather chair over a leather sofa any day. New World Trading makes some great hand-tooled leather ottomans. We've placed more of these in homes than I can count. House of Mercier — from Peru — is my go-to for leather frames, which we have used to make so many pieces of art. They are a great resource for mirrors as well. It's hard to beat Hancock & Moore and Hickory Chair for leather chairs, but my favorite styles are from smaller, family-run companies like Classic Leather and McKinley Leather. I call on them to do custom things that the bigger companies just won't do. Of course,

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## RESOURCES

- **Old Hickory:** Handcrafted in Shelbyville, Indiana, since 1899 and popular in state and national park lodges. [oldhickory.com](http://oldhickory.com)
- **New World Trading:** Hand-tooled leather furniture. [newworldtrading.com](http://newworldtrading.com)
- **McKinley Leather Furniture:** “Custom designs handmade by heart” in the U.S. [mckinleyleatherfurniture.com](http://mckinleyleatherfurniture.com)
- **House of Mercier:** Peru-based maker of fine leather frames and furniture. [houseofmercier.com](http://houseofmercier.com)
- **Hancock & Moore:** Upholstery furniture, “the broadest leather inventory in the industry.” [hancockandmoore.com](http://hancockandmoore.com)
- **Hickory Chair Furniture Co.:** Custom craftsmanship in furniture since 1911. [hickorychair.com](http://hickorychair.com)
- **How Kola Furniture by Tim Lozier:** Molesworth reproductions and custom furniture. [howkolafurniture.com](http://howkolafurniture.com)
- **Marc Taggart & Company:** Furniture in the Molesworth tradition. [marctaggart.com](http://marctaggart.com)
- **Glenn Gilmore:** Fine and custom-designed metalsmithing. [gilmoremetal.com](http://gilmoremetal.com)
- **Chapman Design Inc.:** Leather bonded furniture, architectural elements, and home accessories by leather sculptor Christina Chapman. [chapmandesigninc.com](http://chapmandesigninc.com)



I also like to use Molesworth-style chairs, and Tim Lozier at How Kola Furniture can make anything we can dream up in that genre.

**C&I:** *You said you'd take a leather chair over a leather sofa, but I happen to know you have a fondness for a good Chesterfield. . . .*

**Young:** True. There's a Chesterfield from McKinley Leather I particularly like. Tufts like that, among other things, can only be done by hand. It's such a handsome piece, and we love using things like that in our interiors.

**C&I:** *What do all of the handcrafted pieces you're drawn to have in common?*

**Young:** I can close my eyes and visualize it. It's the quality of an old saddle that's been used, that's burnished with marks on it, and it's been oiled and cared for over time. That same quality could show up in a table or in a chair or in a lamp or in the handle of your favorite handbag or satchel. Things that are well-used but beautifully cared for. Things that are warm and welcoming.

**C&I:** *How would you describe your style and approach to design?*

**Young:** I revel in the challenge of pulling out from my clients what's really satisfying to them. Sometimes that leads to a rustic path, and sometimes it's a contemporary path. But one thing we always have is an interesting mix of old and new and an interesting mix of styles. My favorite pieces of furniture are ones that I return to over and over again. You can't exactly pin down what that style is — it's that chair that's a little art deco or Western or contemporary but ends up fitting in different interiors. So, in terms of what my style is, it's the art of the mix, the challenge of the mix.



Molesworth-style chairs by Marc Taggart: (top) hand-painted by Gina Taggart, (bottom) hand-painted by Don Matteson.