



Tabb Adams constructs a barn door television console – the “bread and butter” of his custom furniture shop.

# MAN AND HIS PLACE

## Carpenter Takes Inspiration From 100-Year-Old Barn

**By Charlee Beasor**

Tabb Adams builds things to last, a practice instilled in him by his father and grandfather and inspired by his great-grandfather.

The fourth-generation carpenter operates his own custom furniture business out of a barn that is over 100 years old (and has been in his wife’s family all that time) in Sheridan in northwestern Hamilton County.

The pin-frame barn that used to house dairy cows was built in 1905. A well-worn crosscut saw hangs near the front door to Adams’ shop entrance. It was the inspiration for the name of his business, Cross Cut Vintage Designs.

*BizVoice*<sup>®</sup> traveled to his property in early November for a tour of the historic barn-turned-workshop. Adams, in his late 40s and with a greying beard, greets us wearing his work “uniform”: shorts, a flannel shirt and a ballcap (a peek at his social media presence on Instagram and Facebook shows those are his normal work threads).

Though it is a chilly November afternoon, the shorts make sense. When Adams converted the lower level of the barn to his workshop, he poured a concrete floor and insulated the shop. Portable heaters nearby keep the area toasty and a lumber drying kiln in the next room gets up to 120 degrees at times.

With steel guitar riffs creating a relaxed atmosphere, and after a look at some of the projects he’s currently working on, we sit down to talk about Adams’ one-man shop that he has infused with local history and a passion for using high-quality materials.

### **Working for yourself**

Adams admits he’s a bit of a “loner” and enjoys the solitude of working by – and for – himself.

He went to school to be an aircraft mechanic. Later, he was the building engineer for 13 years at what is now the Ruoff Home Mortgage Music Center (originally Deer

Creek). After growing tired of the daily grind, he started his own construction company.

“I got super burnt out. I couldn’t find my place,” he recalls. “Finally, I thought, ‘You know all the stuff about fixing things. Why don’t you just start your own construction business?’ ”

He was his own boss for 10 years before selling his company. A friend told him the Indiana State Fairgrounds and Coliseum needed a new facilities manager; he got the job and did that for about six months. But coming back to work for others after 10 years on his own was challenging.

“My stress level was through the roof,” he says. “I was sitting at my desk and I felt like I was having a heart attack. It was probably just a panic attack. But I was like, ‘Man, I can’t do this anymore.’ It was horrible. I’m just one of those people. I have to work for myself.”

He left the job and after some soul-searching and inspiration from his mother, he started Cross Cut Vintage Designs. She recently gave him the first piece he ever built: a shelf he made in shop class as a freshman in high school. He didn’t realize it had been hanging in his parents’ home all these years.

He started the business about two years ago, after taking time to restore the original

farmhouse that he and his wife, Ruth, live in.

Her great-grandparents owned the farmhouse, barn and about 3,000 acres.

Today, the property has 50 acres. Adams fell in love with the barn and property and knew someday he wanted to care for it as his own.

“My wife’s great-grandmother and great-grandfather lived here in about 1914 and both her great-uncles, her grandmother and her mother were all born in the house,” he says. “(We) got married in 1996 and I came from living a subdivision life, never lived on a farm. My wife’s great-uncle was still farming, and I got a crash course in farming and taking care of animals. I had always loved this barn. And I thought, ‘Someday when he stops farming, this is going to be mine to make a shop out of.’”

Adams gradually restored and improved the barn.

“I take a lot of pride that we’ve preserved this place. There are not too many of these old barns anymore. They’ve outlived their usefulness. You can’t get modern machinery in them. I thought it was important to take care of it and preserve it. I feel like my wife’s family has appreciated it,” he relays.

### Heart of the business

Adams says the custom farmhouse style is the most sought after design for his furniture. He calls his barn door console the “bread and butter” of his furniture business, though he admits that he’s a bit tired of building them.

He especially enjoys constructing mid-century modern (think 1950s, Frank Lloyd Wright, slightly-angled round tapered legs on tables and chairs).

“A lot of the millennials are crazy about mid-century modern. It’s one of my favorite styles to build. I have a couple pieces in my house that are mid-century modern,” he says.

But what sets Adams apart is his dedication to using furniture-grade lumber. He attempts to source it locally as often as possible.

“I try to educate my customers on the best thing to build furniture out of and it’s a furniture-grade lumber. All lumber has a moisture content to it, but with furniture lumber you want the moisture content to be between about 8 to 10%. The 2x4 from Lowe’s or Menard’s can be 25 to 30%. You build it and put it into your home, the furnace is going to pull moisture out and it’s going to crack,” he explains.

Building long-lasting pieces is critical for Adams and it connects him to the previous generations of family carpenters.

“What I’m building is a quality piece of furniture that I hope would last them a lifetime and they would pass down to their



The Sheridan farm has been in Adams’ wife’s family for over 100 years. Adams uses the original barn, built in 1905, as artistic inspiration for some of his custom furniture.



kids like my parents have passed down furniture to me. I hope my pieces would last 100 years,” he says.

It’s another trait he picked up from his father, who was a quality control engineer. He passed away earlier this fall.

“It was constantly driven into my head to do it right the first time and don’t cut corners, and the customer is also No. 1,” he shares.

“I look at it as carrying on a tradition that is important to me. My dad was from the eastern shore of Maryland. There are things my grandfather and great-grandfather built that are still standing there today. ... I get a lot of inspiration from just working in this barn.”

### Finding footing

Supporting local businesses also drives Adams.

“I’m a local business and I want to support a local business. When it comes to reclaimed lumber, I really hate to see barns torn down, No. 1, but I want to see that stuff recycled because it’s beautiful. And that kind of look is not around anymore because we’ve cut down a lot of old growth forest,” Adams adds.

“I want to try to support local business, especially the lumber yards. They’re few and far between.”

Adams uses Facebook and Instagram to advertise his business and connect with other furniture makers. Advertising on Facebook has given his business the biggest boost, he reveals.

He also has a store on Etsy.com and ships his pieces all over the continental United States, or drives the pieces there himself if it’s not too far. He recently shipped

Continued on page 65

## Tabb Adams

Continued from page 63

a piece to Oregon, which is the furthest he's sent his work to date.

While most things seem to roll off his shoulders, he does worry about one aspect of the future of his business: finding a qualified employee, should he decide to expand Cross Cut Vintage Designs.

"I'm to the point I could probably think about bringing someone on at least part time at the moment to help me do things. The skilled trades across the country and the world is struggling. That's a little worrisome to me," he expresses. "In high school, I had tons of different shop classes. But a lot of times it's not there anymore. I'm not saying there's nobody out there, but I think a lot of small businesses struggle."

When we speak with Adams at the beginning of November, he mentions being booked up until the middle of December.

What qualifies as success to him?

"I find success in that I'm happy. I'm low stress. When I get a customer, I try to not only make them a customer, but make them a friend, because I like that connection," he concludes.

"This keeps me grounded. I'm out here, I'm my own man in my own space."



Adams estimates he has created 30 to 35 barn door consoles. While the farmhouse vintage design is his most requested style, his personal favorite is mid-century modern.

**RESOURCE:** Tabb Adams, Cross Cut Vintage Designs, at [www.crosscutvintage.com](http://www.crosscutvintage.com)