



# SOUTHCOAST Artists Index

*This story was collected through our partnership with the SouthCoast Artist Index, led by Ron Fortier.*

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**Storyteller Name: Michael Pietragalla**

Ron Fortier

Hi and welcome to our. Podcast trying to think of what number it is, but it really doesn't matter. I'm your host John 40 year and we have. Mike Pietragalla with us today, who was our first ever guest and as I. Promise him and I tell everybody when they do their first podcast here. This is not a one and done. More likely you'll come back. So Michael has the distinction of being the first guy to do it the first time, and he's now the first guy to do it the second time. So with that in mind, and just for the heck of it, the the Pietro cause, I've got a question about Gilda Stone Stone. Rooster. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

OK. Well, thanks. Thanks for having me back, Ron. Welcome, fire away. Question about the name.

Ron Fortier

OK, Guild is I was trying to look it up before you walked in. Yeah. Does Gilda spell her last name different? Because, no, it's stone rooster. She reversed what? A stone rooster. Is that a? Different dialect or.

Michael Pietragalla

No, no, no, no it. I mean, she can name her place whatever she wants to name it. But if if you look it up in the dictionary, I mean, you know, Italian, English Dictionary, pietra stone and gala means to rise above effervescence. It's in the.

Ron Fortier

Right, yeah. Right, right. OK.

Michael Pietragalla

Fence float. Yeah. So that's where I got the name of my business. Floating stone or stone that floats again? Gala GALLA is is the word. Means the flow.



Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah. Right now.

Michael Pietragalla

It doesn't mean Rooster Bird, you know \*\*\*\*, male bird, anything like that.

Ron Fortier

Right. Unless it's Gallo GALL. Oh, yeah. Yeah, right.

Michael Pietragalla

Gala, right. Galina is chicken right, both in Portuguese and Italian. So I I just think it was kind of.

Ron Fortier

Right. Right.

Michael Pietragalla

I mean, she's had this business for years.

Ron Fortier

You saw the article right on her. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

Yeah. And I I wasn't about to go in and and correct it. Because it's like it's like.

Ron Fortier

Right. And I couldn't remember, it was an AO. No, because I know this the Chianti region, one of the best, it's like a cooperative. It's the gallinero, the black. \*\*\*\*, which is if you see that on on the bottle of Chianti and you can afford it, buy it, cause it's like one of the best chiantis. It's not like your mom and dad's wine in the basket, in the checkered tablecloth, little Italian restaurant kind of wine, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

OK. Yeah. Yeah. Ohh like what my grandfather used to make in his basement, right? No, like I said, she's had this business for, I don't know what. Maybe since 1969. Seventy. Maybe around that time anyway. So whatever they felt, the translation was at that time. I mean, it's besides Stone Rooster. It works better for a bar than it does for a woodworking business. You know what? I mean so.

Ron Fortier

Ohh yeah. Anyway, anyway, yeah. So let's let's, let's talk about you as an artist and I have a question because.

Michael Pietragalla

Anyway, that's. That's the story. That's the story. It's the family name.

Ron Fortier

Kind of on a parallel track, like with photography. So we had Peter Pereira, who's a photojournalist, but he's a photographer, and then is that, you know, then there's fine art photographers and photographers really take, you know, I mean, it's like when you say photographer, it could be a wedding photographer not there's anything wrong with that because there are really fine. You know, I'm not trying to be PC or anything like that, but you know, you don't offend anyone either by crazy assumptions. So now when this woodworking and furniture maker and please tell us all about all these different terms and what do they mean and how do you associate yourself with.



Michael Pietragalla

Them. Well, there's a connotation to, I mean, like everything has a name, I guess so woodworker 1 assumes that a woodworker is a guy who just kind of dabbles on weekends. And makes a table for the house or you know whatever. A furniture maker is only a term. It's a term that I only heard when I worked for the Formentioned Gary, who said he coined the phrase, which I don't think is true, but. Regardless of that, a furniture maker appears to be a person who has more more of a fine artist. It's like calling somebody a Carpenter. You know. Maybe in the old old days, you know. A Carpenter? Yeah. Did everything a Carpenter made furniture, a Carpenter, built the house, a Carpenter did everything. So I guess now everything has to have a name. So a Carpenter does framing and hangs doors and and, you know, makes closets and whatever builds houses.

Ron Fortier

And there was also more the British terms, which you see a lot of those thought that come back fitter and.

Michael Pietragalla

Joiner a joiner, right. Right, which is involved with furniture. A lot of fine joinery you know. We you could go off into the Japanese. Join her in. Really lose your mind. I mean, I don't know how these people cut some of these joints, but they obviously take a long time to do them. Yeah, there's joiners, there's shipwrights. There's you. Coopers that made barrels, I mean everything connected with wood. So I guess maybe everybody has a little niche that they fit into.

Ron Fortier

Right. And if you stop and think about a barrel, I mean, that's pretty damn complicated, right? You got a lot of curving, there's, there's a lot of math involved in that, even the bands that go around that have to be angles for proper fit. So you've been doing this a long time. How have you evolved? How how did you, you know, we heard this in your first.

Speaker

OK. Right.

Ron Fortier

Podcast, but it doesn't hurt to go back. How did you start off and and and you know how? What was your journey and where are you now? Where? Are you going well, first of all?

Michael Pietragalla

You know, in a trade like this, I think you're learning, you're learning all the time, you know? And you know there there's an old saying that came about in the arts and crafts days that, you know, the life is so short the crafts so long to learn. And it's true, it's corny, but it's true. So I started out at Swain in Fine Arts as a painter and like so many people like. I think of Chuck Hawk off the top of my head, who was a sculptor, but he also does a lot of restoration of houses. You know, I got into doing carpentry. My landlord trained me. It took me in. Basically says, well, you got to pay rent, so I may as well give you a job. And he taught me some things about carpentry. And it's something I kind of fell back into between doing fine art and trying to make a living. So, you know, you needed to have a trade.

Ron Fortier

Bread, bread and butter.

Michael Pietragalla

Exactly. Exactly. My bread and butter now is is, you know? Yeah, I can still do some carpentry, but as a matter of fact, I am for some friends. But. I find the furniture restoration. Is also very interesting because there's new challenges that come for instance repair of veneer on antiques. You know, again that is called market, Trey. That's



another skill. And what do you do? You read some books, you can look it up online and you learn it. And you you do it. So the the woodworking is taking me down many paths.

Ron Fortier

The market trade, the Italians? I don't know if it's started with them or they got it from the Moroccans. And in North Africans and Middle Eastern because that's that's like their their thing that's it's almost like mosaics with wood. Yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

Right, exactly. Which is really exciting means some of the the things you see today that people are exhibiting. They'll do fine market Trey on a tabletop and it'll look like a letter and a, you know, a quill, and it's all done with different colors of woods. And it's, you know, it's two-dimensional, but it looks 3 dimensional when you look at it, it's unbelievable. You know right now I'm doing more what I call treasure boxes right now. Smaller things. And I'm thinking of doing a lid with some sort of simple marketer. Even even if something as simple as a compass rose, which you have to plan out. You know you have to sit down and do a drawing first, and a lot of these boxes I don't do drawings. I just think of a size. I think of a shape, a square one, an oblong 1A tall 1A shallow.

Ron Fortier

One didn't you say it? One that you actually they set off with scraps. So you were challenged by working with what you had? Yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

What I have? Yeah, I mean it's it's.

Ron Fortier

Which makes it kind of cooler. It's like, you know, the the the, the whale, the whale, the whaleman who were out there, you know, bored out of their brains long, long, long periods of of nothing. The doldrums. And they made things with what they had.

Michael Pietragalla

Scraps of ivory or whatever. On occasion I do mill up some wood, but it it seems kind of wasteful to use long wide boards which would use as a table top and making a piece of furniture and waist all that material just to make a small box. But. I do use what I have, you know. And like I said, these things evolve. They're not planned out. I'm having a difficult time right now because I'm working on a design for a Commission for someone. And he wants specific things for as a gift for his wife. He wants 2 trays. He wants this. He wants that this, this height, this width by this length. And I feel kind of. Constrained by this? Whereas when I'm making the boxes myself, it's like OK, I'm going to put a grid in the bottom and maybe I'll put a tray in it and maybe I'll put in the tray. Maybe I'll put ring holder, maybe I won't. I'll put a secret compartment in it, or maybe I won't. I'll use this wood. Oh, and Purple Heart looks good with walnut. Or, you know, Wingate looks good with a light wood or or whatever. And whatever it is at the end, that's what it. Is it's it's like. It's like creating a painting. Yeah, you don't always know what you're going to get until you're done. And sometimes I like it that way. But then again, you know, a guy comes to me and says I want to buy a jewelry box. I'm not going to say no. Yeah. Go away. Yeah, you'll get what I give you. I'm not Picasso, you know.

Ron Fortier

That's true. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was thinking, as you were saying, that it's almost like being back in school where. There, that was the assignment you were given. These restrictions. You can only use this kind of wood. You can only be this size. It has to have these components to it. And OK, now just take have the freedom to do what? You want you're like.



Michael Pietragalla

Really. Yeah. Well, it's challenging, but yeah, it's exciting too.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, now you do felting at all inside of. These things.

Michael Pietragalla

I do put different fabric or leather or. Even like. You know, I've I've used different textured matte boards sometimes to put on the bottom. That looks like a woven grass mat, things like that. It it depends what kind of a theme I'm looking at. You know, some of them have lids that lift off. Some of them are hinged. Some of them have knobs on top, some don't.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

You know, some have a a sliding top and you take things out. Whatever is in. So yeah, they're all different and they all.

Speaker

OK.

Michael Pietragalla

They all create a challenge. 11 challenge was. To create a piece that in Japan it's called a tomako, which means. It's it's a box that holds precious things. For instance, a Tea Bowl, which would be wrapped in a silk silk bag, which would go into a box. So I collaborated with a Potter and he gave me some tea bowls and his partner gave me some wine goblets. That she had created and. Which we actually sold that piece at Deanna Shaddix. The small work show this past December, but that. That was a challenge because then I had to find somebody to do the fabric. I had to find, you know, the right pieces. And decide how this thing was going to be put together to hold this object. So again it was I was confined to a size and a function and it worked out.

Ron Fortier

Actually, yeah. I mean it's a great collaboration too. I mean intended or otherwise we got a couple of questions. One of them about what is it about boxes? Now I know ever since I was a kid, I was always fascinated by boxes, even if it was something of the old, the old salted cod fish boxes. You would save them because you could put things in them and. The things that we put in there are. Kind of bizarre. I mean, little pieces of glass we found on the beach. Why do we do that? I understand that homeless children. Umm all. Over the world. Will have these treasures that they pick up. I mean, they'll just have the clothes in their backs and probably a blanket if they're lucky, but they'll have a little box, a little container, whether it's an Altoids tin or whatever, to put these things in and to other people. Why do we do that?

Michael Pietragalla

I I don't know. That's why I make boxes. Yeah, I'm. I have the same attitude. As these kids, I mean, I always felt, you know, as a kid, I had a wooden toy chest that my parents gave me. I put in games and and whatever crap I had as a kid, and it just seems that everybody has a box that they want to put precious.

Ron Fortier

Oh, things precious to.



Michael Pietragalla

Them. Yeah. Precious to them. Not necessarily worth anything that else could, like you said, it could be rocks you picked up on the beach or or shells or or whatever. A Locket. A photograph of a lost departed relative. You know, whatever it is.

Speaker

Yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

It's the whole thing about having a container to put things in. That are precious to you, or just just. To keep things. To keep those things somewhere in an orderly place, I don't know. I always had a fascination for boxes and. You know the boxes that I make are again very decorative, adorned with different inlays and and different colors of woods. The interiors match, or they don't match, or there's a geometric design or whatever it is. So the box becomes a precious object in itself.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, there's a preciousness there.

Michael Pietragalla

Like the Tea Bowl goes into a bag which goes into a box. It's put on a shelf and used at a tea ceremony, let's say. I don't know where this came from, why people do it.

Ron Fortier

We're about the same age, having lived in tenements in this city, there's the armoire, you know, every 3 Decker house as simple as it was, had an armoire, and you would have those precious things you put in, like the good China, which would be taken out for. You know the the special celebration, meals, the birthdays, baptisms, Christmas. You know the holidays. Mm-hmm. They'd also be the pudding dishes. Mm-hmm. That would go in the air. And those other things that weren't of the everyday, but they were. Precious because, as you said, sometimes they were like from somebody else. They were memeing, Pepe, as known as you know, it's it's kind of interesting.

Michael Pietragalla

They were handed down to your family or they were precious. Maybe they were wedding gifts or something like that. Yeah. And they weren't for everyday. So they would display in this case. Armoire, but on the other hand they were used. They weren't just. Put up there and said don't don't, don't touch that. Yeah, you can never.

Ron Fortier

Touch this. Although I had had an aunt that had a piano. That was just to look at, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

Well, I'm sure we both had relatives that had plastic on the furniture, right? Don't go in that room. It's for company.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, she she did, too. In fact, even if you did try to sit on. It you slide right off, yeah, I remember that.

Michael Pietragalla

Why do people do these things? I I.

Ron Fortier

Don't know. Well, let's let's get to tables. Cause tables. I remember Burt Wolfe gatherings and celebrations and



rituals, gatherings, celebrations, I think knows the name of his book. And that absolutely floored me. When I heard him say. The table is so much overlooked, but look at a table. Where are the positions of honor? There's two of them. And then from the highest, because there's a higher position and in the second position and then especially at Christmas or Easter or whatever. And then as everybody the the eldest. Children sit next to the father because that was, you know, the old patriarchal position of honor. And then it went all the way down. And then you had the kids table, which was a card table, right, which as an adolescent, you were petrified to sit out because now your knees would hit the legs and it would disrupt everything that was on the table.

Michael Pietragalla

Able to spill things.

Ron Fortier

But your admission to the big table. Was kind of sad you had to wait for someone to die to divorce. Or to leave, you know, move away. So tell me about some of the tables that you've built and some of the preciousness has put into the table as. Much as the box right?

Michael Pietragalla

Yeah, well, there's all kinds of tables. I mean, you know, there's conference tables, there's dining tables, there's end tables, lamp tables, there's. Hey, there's collectors tables. Collectors tables. Yeah, the you know, a table probably about the height of a coffee table. It will have a glass top and we'll have things inside.

Ron Fortier

Of that, with the little drawers that.

Michael Pietragalla

Slide out little drawers or you could just see it through the. Glass. That's. On the top. And so what's in that? I don't know. Your stamp collection coins rocks again from the beach or whatever, but it's a collectors table that's sort. Of a big big.

Ron Fortier

Treasure box are those coming?

Michael Pietragalla

I don't think they've ever gone away, you know. It's a very, very classical design with a beautiful cabriolet leg, let's say and a drawer. Again, I can't answer a lot of questions about. The history of furniture and the different styles because I don't know that much. I know what?

Ron Fortier

I like, yeah. And what you've experienced, that's pretty much what I'm asking. Yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

Right. Again. Like I said, furniture making in this craft, you you learn, you keep learning every day until you die. There are different styles. There are different species of woods to work with and so forth that are that are native to that particular style, let's say. Again, you know dining tables. There are so many ideas about dining tables, you know, dining tables are a certain size and a certain width, and depending upon how many people you have in your family, how many people you want a seat, you know there's there's sort of a casual seating and then there's a a formal seating. How much space you need between each person. That's how you design a table. UM. And then sometimes some of these older tables have what they call a company board. Which would be sort of a wing that's fits on the outside edge of the table. So you maybe maybe would slide from underneath, so you'd extend the table when you have more people over a company board.



Ron Fortier

What a gate leg fit in that category? Is that a totally different tape kind of table?

Michael Pietragalla

You mean a leg that swings out?

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

Similar idea of a company board is something that you would have maybe 2 runners that slide out from the end of the table and you put this board in place.

Ron Fortier

OK Ohh I've actually.

Michael Pietragalla

Had and would sit there.

Ron Fortier

The neocolonialism that there was big during the 20s and then again in the 40s, Maple was like a huge wood that they used. I never knew that's what it was called because it was tucked underneath, right? And then you pull it out and it pop up like those old typewriter things that. You'd have on desks. Yeah, it's called. A company board. I'll be done. Yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

Several different methods of that same board, but then that's what it's so now the table is sort of convertible, it fits in the room and you know you can use it for every day. Use or the whole families coming over. So we take out the company boards like putting the leaves in the table. Same idea.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's that's that's pretty cool. As you were speaking to about conference tables and this kind of tables and the importance of tables, don't forget that the, the, the peace talks in Vietnam. Were all centered around what kind of a table they were.

Michael Pietragalla

Going to have, right? Right. And they they eventually settled on a round table, which goes back to the legends of King Arthur.

Ron Fortier

Right. Yeah. Yeah. Tell us more. About that. You you could see everybody basically right. There's there's no right angles, right?

Speaker

Well, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

It was like nobody special. Everybody's equal. Was seated at a round table that there's no head of a table now that goes back to what you were talking about. The Patriarch of the family sat at the.





Ron Fortier

Right.

Michael Pietragalla

Head of the table.

Ron Fortier

Right.

Michael Pietragalla

If you are honored by your family, you're a guest and in someone else's home here, sit at the head of the table. You can carve the roast or whatever it is, because you are our guest politically. Everybody's equal, so hence the round table.

Ron Fortier

You know, yeah. In your restoration work. You've probably run across some, I mean. I think anybody who's tried to restore an old piece, whether it was a hand, me down or something you found in the thrift store or whatever. But the veneers you mentioned veneers before that cause that was the first thing that popped in in my head a lot of that. I think Grand Rapids MI was where was the epicenter of the in? I don't know what they call that mass produced furniture making it it. You know, everything was made by the local Craftsman and then. In Grand Rapids, they just started mass producing furniture, and that's what most of the people of the 20s and 30s and 40s got their furniture. How has all that evolved and and how does that affect you as? A furniture make.

Michael Pietragalla

A woodworker? Well, go go back a little bit further. Furniture was mass produced. At the turn of the century by Gustav Stickley, who came out with the simple design, this was sort of post Victorian. He didn't like all this sort of frilly carving. It was very simple, which again, I believe it was influenced by Asian design. A lot of it's very boxy. They call it mission style arts and crafts, whatever it is. A lot of people jumped onto that bandwagon. So you found a lot of people in New York, the Midwest as far South as you know, the Virginia and so forth. They were mass producing. This sort of arts and crafts mission style furniture, so is Gus Stickley, Stickley brothers, Ellen JG Stickley. I can't think of some of the other names off the top of my head, but there were a lot of other people who joined onto the bandwagon, sort of maybe twisted the designs a little bit, but it was mass produced. And as I looked at furniture, I've I've had a few pieces come in to my shop that were. You know, stamped or branded with Stickley's name on it. And later on you could see where they. They also started to cut corners. You know, back in the day you'd have a leg, you know, a wide, let's say, a 6 by 6 inch table leg that was cut in such a way. So the grain pattern was pretty on all four sides. OK. So they they they did what they call, they quartered the leg. In other words, they had a special cutting tool that would quarter that leg. It would fit together like a puzzle. So you had the pretty grain on all four sides. Later on I've seen tables where they glue like 1 inch strips together. To get that same thickness and they'll put veneer on both sides. Mm-hmm. So they started to cheap out as.

Ron Fortier

Time went on. Yeah. Yeah. And a lot of metal started screws, wood screws and and brackets and such.

Michael Pietragalla

Instead of a A A through tenant which you know the the the tenant or the OR the joint would go through the leg and. Extend out on the other side.

Ron Fortier

What mission style was pretty known for that?



Michael Pietragalla

Right, right. They, they they wanted to show the method of joinery words that prevailed on the earlier pieces. Again, as time wore on closer to the turn of the century into 1910 and 1920. That was a dowel joint and they glue a little piece on the other side to make it look like a through Tenon. So I've seen a lot of these things. It's like, oh, yeah, stickily. Well, you know, he had to save some money.

Ron Fortier

Too, yeah, yeah. I I had a 2 Gustav Stickley. Cafe chairs that had his sticker on the bottom and they were bent wood. So I guess that's steam. They were steam bent, but over time what happens is they start to read. Fracture or whatever, yeah. And nobody wanted to touch that, because nobody could fix that.

Michael Pietragalla

Well, a lot of that furniture and like you said, you know from from Michigan and so forth, the mass produced furniture. Well, it's similar to what we have today, except it's not quality at all. You look back on that furniture and you say, well, that was a well built chair or a table or whatever. Now the biggest competitor is places like IKEA. You know where you've got particle board with veneer on it, or melamine or whatever. You know, I get pieces like that too, and I'm working on a piece right now, which is a beautiful piece made by the lane company. It's kind of mid century modern as.

Ron Fortier

They used to make hope chests right, right? Yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

It has nice turned legs and has a beautiful top which sort of looks like sort of dovetails cut in the in the design on the top, the two different veneers. And somebody decided they wanted. Maybe somebody dropped a cigarette on it or something like that and they stand it against the grain. So that's been my project to try to get that tint that color to get those sand marks out, but they're never going to come out because they've gone right through the veneer, into the substrate, which is cheap particle board.

Ron Fortier

And they're broken. Yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

So it it is what?

Ron Fortier

It is. Let's let's you mind talking about finishes because I I think that that you know the veneers is obviously a finish but finishes the old French, French, French, Polish. Yeah. And and those other things you you you tell us about that and your use of them and and.

Michael Pietragalla

Not at all. Power Polish. I really like to do hand rub finishing, you know, on some of the more modern pieces. Of course I'm using urethanes and so forth. But, and there's all kinds of things on the market now. There's rub on Poly to give you this sort of hand rubbed finish. Look, the jewelry boxes for instance, I use Tung oil, two coats of Tung oil and wax and it's buffed to a beautiful shine, which is also very easy to repair shellac. Is another beautiful finish. It really makes the grain pop. You know, six coats of shellac and I usually go over it with a varnish to protect it. I'm sure many people know from experience rings on table tops, left from something very hot or wet or whatever. Usually that was a shellac finish. So we put a coat of varnish over to protect that French Polish that's shellac and final Tung oil and. With very vigorous brushing with a pad. That sort of you put a few drips of of linseed oil on that and you rub the shellac in. Rub it right into the grain so the grain fills, and then you Polish it.



That's another beautiful finish. And there are different methods to that I've kind of adapted my own, which is still the same idea with linseed oil and a rag and shellac, but some people make Figure 8 some people go back and. With that, that Figure 8 is what you've got to perfect to have your hand get that motion in.

Ron Fortier

There. Yeah. Yeah. And that and that all comes down to time.

Michael Pietragalla

Ohh, it's all time consuming, yeah.

Ron Fortier

And therefore time equals cost, right? Cost equals value of, you know purchase value of of the. Sort of a crazy question maybe, but Formby's former's Formby's furniture restorer. Did they, in a way, create in the 70s a? People relooking at stuff in thrift stores and saying, hey, I can fix that because so many pieces of. Really nice furniture have been painted and they've done God awful things. So and yeah, they will mass produce pieces, but they're still far better than anything you can buy now.

Michael Pietragalla

Well, I mean, Formby is the brand. Yeah. Yeah. I've heard good and bad about that product.

Ron Fortier

I mean he. Was like the Orville Redenbacher of furniture Polish. I mean, I mean, that's the only analogy I could.

Michael Pietragalla

Well, yeah, well, there's. There's form beast. There's minwax. Like I said, everybody comes out with these new finishes. Old Master is another finish. You know the old fashioned finishes I think are tried and true. There is still a company in in Maine I believe that does the oil and wax finish. That's all they do is oil and wax. They don't use polyurethane or anything like that. They use that specifically because it's repairable, easily repairable. You have a a burn mark or a stain on something that is got a urethane or a varnish finish on it, and sometimes you have to strip the whole thing right down. Which is? I mean I I work sometimes with a a person who does furniture stripping. And he's always busy. He's always getting things in. He's always getting in antiques and beautifully hand carved things that you know, post pre war. I mean like civil war, you know, things like that.

Ron Fortier

So this OK, let me ask you. A question now. The separation of art and crafts because you know everybody well, most people. Who remember there? Our history realized that the Arts and crafts movement was a backlash to the industrial revolution. It took them a while to get, get, get that in gear because it that was around the 1840s in in, in England but. When you're a furniture maker, a woodworker we talked earlier about photographers. Now photographer can do weddings. They can do photojournalism, they can do, you know, fine art photography, so on and so forth, where those lines are, they get blurry in your, in your I was just say in your craft.

Michael Pietragalla

Trade slash art. Well again it's it's a. A person still has to eat and pay the bills and pay the rent so. If you're just a furniture maker, I mean, there are some people out there who are lucky enough to make a living just by making furniture, maybe because they've built up a clientele over the years or whatever it is. There are some people that I know who make, who are influenced by the same people I'm influenced by. And they they teach. So by teaching, what does that tell you? You know, they still need some sort of supplemental income or do they just want to share their knowledge with everybody? I mean, for me, I think it would be both. Well, that's another thing too. Yeah, go ahead, legacies. Yeah.



Ron Fortier

And I remember, and we were discussing that that gentleman before, I mean, I came up with the slogan creating. Tomorrow's heirlooms today. When, when? When you're making these these pieces? There is that legacy. There is that continuity there is that hand me down. This right pass down. What? Whatever you want to. Call it. Yeah, right.

Michael Pietragalla

I I don't think that prevails so much anymore. I think we've come out of that sort of. Young people hanging on to the chest that grandma brought over on the boat, you know, from the old country. Whatever it was. I find that. I don't know if it's just the millennials or or what, but it seems like people nowadays. Are buying experiences I I may have said this the last time we spoke? It's it's difficult. Yeah. It's nice to have tomorrow's heirlooms today or whatever you want to call it. Everybody has a slogan. Another person I knew had a slogan called Shaker with A twist. Whatever it is made by hand, there are a few people out there who still want things made by hand, but I don't think it's the younger people today. Older people who want to collect something that was made by hand that's unique, like one of my treasure boxes, let's say, or a person wants me to build them. A bar atop out of. Out of live Edge pine, which is another project I'm working on right now. That's sort of a hand me down. He's giving me the wood that his grandfather cut down from some tree that was on their property. So these huge 2 inch slabs of live edge pine. He wants a bar. Thought for his backyard. So that's granddad's wood. That means something to.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. And we've come down to now with with income that the discretionary is far overlapping the disposable because you've got bills to pay, school loans to pay auto bills, and it just goes on and on. So the. The disposable income. It becomes very thin, so you have to put it towards these other things, even though in your heart of hearts you want to get something that. You want to leave to. Your child or whatever, which hope chests.

Michael Pietragalla

Right.

Ron Fortier

Have they ever gone away if they have, are they making a comeback or are they've gone for good because?

Michael Pietragalla

That I don't know, but I think it goes back to what I said. There are a few people out there, fewer people. Who want grandma's hope chest? I mean, I still happen to have. One that was my grandmothers. That was my mother's, and now it's mine. It's a cedar chest in my front hall that I. But you know the winter gloves and and then in the summer time.

Ron Fortier

Has that sense? The scent of cedar.

Michael Pietragalla

Yeah. And it's, it's I've refinished the top and it's a beautiful carved thing on the front and it's, you know, it's obviously, you know, just around post war, you know. What's going to happen to it when? I pass. It'll go to some thrift shop, maybe, or get thrown out. Who?

Ron Fortier

Knows. Well, that's a sad thing, because when my stepmother and my stepfather, when I always refer to as when the trolley started going off the tracks with the both of them, almost at the same time because one exacerbated the other and. They have those things in the armoire, and so on and so forth. And I went to a couple of people



that I know in this area that are antique dealers. And you could almost say the business friends and they look at me and say we can't take anymore of this, even if it's Staffordshire or even if it's. You know Revere, I mean, you know, plate, forget about plated silver wear. It's a dime a dozen. I mean, they sell it to people who actually pull the the silver off of it and and then trashed the rest of. Because there's there's a flood on the market of so many of the the. The World War 2 era passing on that. The value is just totally dropped.

Michael Pietragalla

Well, the furniture that I grew up with was suddenly popular. I I don't. I don't do that much with selling antiques. I just see what comes in and out of my shop, but that's sort of.

Ron Fortier

Oh, the mid century.

Michael Pietragalla

Mid century Modern it's just sounds good. Yeah, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Stuff I love how they call that that. 1950s.

Michael Pietragalla

Yeah, I mean I I still have several pieces. Yeah. When my father passed away, I took those pieces and I have them in my house and they're great. They're solid wood. They're Maple, they look fantastic. But. You know antique Steelers, as you say, they're full. Nothing's moving. I'm like, I'm not in that market, so I don't know why I can't say why. All I can say is what I said before. I think people are buying less heirlooms, they're buying experiences, they're buying IKEA furniture that you know. Their sons or daughters leave behind in the dorm when they leave because it didn't cost much, and it's probably falling apart anyway.

Ron Fortier

Right. What's the best piece you've ever created?

Michael Pietragalla

Them created.

Ron Fortier

Piece of yeah. Or maybe you could top five. You know the top. Of your head, the.

Michael Pietragalla

I don't know. I I have a lot of favorite pieces that I've done. You know my my first. Ambitious piece. That was my favorite. I still get compliments on it. No one's bought it yet, even though I've had a few nibblers on it. It's it's a sideboard that's sort of modeled after the green and green style, but it's very obvious and. It's made of mahogany. And has two drawers in it. The other two pieces are one is an end table that is obviously. Very Japanese inspired. It has an inlay in it of. What we call a Suba or a Japanese sword guard, and it has little copper adornments in. And I have another tea table that I've made. That has that same inlay and it's sort of like a trademark on different tables and that that small tea table has two chairs that go.

Speaker

OK.

Michael Pietragalla

With it, I had a great time making these pieces and I get a lot, a lot of compliments on them. But I don't think



people want to pay for. I mean a piece like that, a one-of-a-kind piece to me. You know, \$2000 is not that expensive, especially for the amount of time and work that you put into that.

Ron Fortier

\$2000 seems like nothing compared to other markets. You could probably get 20 for that in like LA.

Michael Pietragalla

Or something. And I'm not talking about a conference table. I'm talking about a small coffee table size piece.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

UM. And the chairs that I made to go with it are chairs that basically, I mean, in Japan, they sit on a cushion on the floor. These chairs. I don't remember the Japanese name for them, but they have little backs to them, more for the Westerners to experience that. So there's the tea table and the two chairs and whatever the prices I have for the set. Always get compliments. Nobody pulls out their checkbook, but these these three pieces are perhaps to me the best I've made so far.

Ron Fortier

We're we're getting to the end of this and the the next question is. We talk about legacy and handing down and so on and so forth. Would you live on in your work?

Michael Pietragalla

I hope so. I I hate to. Think like it'll all be forgotten, but I mean, I have pieces that are all over the country.

Ron Fortier

Mm-hmm. That was. No, that was going to. Be another question.

Michael Pietragalla

Yeah. I mean, when I first started before the economy took a turn, umm, I've, I've been shipping all over the country, you know, California, Florida, Michigan. New England, Connecticut, elsewhere. But will they live on? I don't know. I mean, I'm certainly not a Gustav Stickly. Yeah. Say you.

Ron Fortier

I mean, if you ever found your work on on ever found your work on on, on, on an auction site? No. Doctor Richard Connor found one of my early pieces in Miami. That was at an estate auction.

Michael Pietragalla

I'm not as prolific.

Ron Fortier

And he's like, I know this is yours. Like, oh, my God, it is. It's like fantastic. Was it like, my best piece ever? But I mean, we sort of, you know, it is like feathers. You open up a a pillow, a feather pillow and let those feathers go. Yeah. And they're all over the place.

Michael Pietragalla

And well, I. I to answer your question I I don't know. I mean it would be cool, but I won't be around. To find out, so it doesn't matter.



Ron Fortier

Yeah. Well, that's the whole purpose of this whole project. You know, this is the the South Coast Artist Index website project. Mm-hmm. That's the official name of it because this conversation will someday be heard by somebody who has your peace. And goes, Oh my God, that's him he's talking. I can. Hear him? Yeah. You know, I mean, just like Jessica Broccoli, her anniversary. Her, her, her partner brought her flowers for their anniversary and took a photo of it. And. In the background this a painting, I wondered. Whatever happened I. Was like oh. My God there. It is, you know? Yeah, it was my painting, you know, I mean.

Michael Pietragalla

That's your painting.

Ron Fortier

There, there is a thrill in that and.

Michael Pietragalla

Ohh it yeah, it is a thrill. It's all ego. Let's. Face it, you know.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, it is. It is. I mean it's it's an ego, you know. Yeah, right.

Michael Pietragalla

Yeah, right. Yeah. I mean, yeah, I I would think that, you know these three pieces, the, the ones that I feel that are expresses my artistic ability at this point in my life. Yeah. I mean, if sometimes someday in the future, they become collectors items. I think that would be.

Ron Fortier

Fantastic or even one of their methods at some point in time gets picked up by somebody who's admired you and now uses that to pass on to their students. And they refer to it as the the Pietragalla joint or something, yeah.

Michael Pietragalla

As the floating stone joint.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Fantastic. Fantastic. Thank you so much.

Michael Pietragalla

Can I give a plug before we go? OK, there's going to be a an exhibit at the Marion Arts Center the month of April that I'm curating. It's called the vessels.

Ron Fortier

Again, sure for it. Go for it. OK. All right.

Michael Pietragalla

And it features myself with my boxes the the ceramicist that I've collaborated with, Hollis Angley, and a very fine painter, Craig, collegial, who's also with Swainey. And how do they all collaborate together? Well, my boxes, hollis's tea bowls.

Ron Fortier

OK.



Michael Pietragalla

And Craig is a beautiful still life artist, even though he does some great landscapes. So this all ties together. So if anybody hears this before the show opens.

Ron Fortier

OK.

Michael Pietragalla

I'm not sure the.

Ron Fortier

Exact opening. Yeah, it may. It may not because of, you know, how we're we're so far ahead because we have a whole stack of stuff and we just let one out a week. But it also may become we've been talking about legacy and maybe now that you've mentioned this show, which somebody will pick up on like Carl Simmons wherever you are.

Michael Pietragalla

It's month of April.

Ron Fortier

You've got to get yourself in here because this is the kind of thing that we're talking about promoting. Fine. But now you're we're we're hoping that we're giving somebody a piece of information that gets that. Oh, my God. Feeling going in there and and and makes a. Real exciting. Give some excitement to people so. This in Focus podcast is brought to you in part by the artists index.com. The Artists Index is a local resource for artists, art professionals, and art lovers. Until the next time, thank you from all of us at. The Artists Index thank you very much. That was great.