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CRAFTS

So You Want to Be a Maker

It may sound romantic, but creating your line, whatever it is, requires hard work and never-ending real life hustle.

By Michelle Threadgould

When it comes to being a maker, it's all about the hustle. The *idea* of designing furniture, working with your hands to create a sculpture, or foraging wild-sourced ingredients from the most beautiful parts of California to create your line *sounds* romantic. But the day-to-day grind of being a full-time maker involves wearing many different hats and constantly evolving and

changing your work: Getting comfortable is your worst enemy.

Sergio Traverso is the embodiment of everything that a maker should be. He is kind, generous with his knowledge, and always willing to help other artists. His interest in being a maker first started while he worked on bikes, cars, and woodworking in his garage with his dad before going to college at San Francisco State University for industrial and product design. While there,

he realized, "I wanted to get my hands dirty, so I started working with reclaimed materials, and that's when I found Building Resources.

"I wanted to be involved with something that's good, that's completely guilt-free, and that's rewarding," he said.

San Francisco's Building Resources is a creative reuse center that takes materials that would have otherwise been discarded and then makes them available to artists, builders, and contractors for affordable prices. Traverso discovered that the materials he found at Building Resources inspired his creativity, leading him to create a gallery in the space and to take gigs designing furniture and displays out of reclaimed materials for local businesses.

It was at Building Resources that Traverso met a lot of like-minded individuals and began to learn from and collaborate with other makers in San

Photos by Nana Kofi Nti



Shawn HibMacronan, p. 75, and his work, above and right; the chair is by Sergio Traverso. Both are full-time makers and hustle a lot.

Francisco. Fast-forward to working at Building Resources for more than six years, and he has since become the co-founder of the nationally revered West Coast Craft, a craft and design show bringing together the work of the best local maker talent, and developed a furniture line, Four/Quarter, that he co-designs with Kenny Johnson.

In creating West Coast Craft, Traverso was able to draw upon his years of experience networking with other artists to create a fair that has given Bay Area makers a space to show their work, be discovered, learn from others, and foster community.

Like Traverso with an inherent fascination for how things work, sculptor and furniture designer Shawn HibMacronan grew up in Oakland with artist parents. You could say that HibMacronan is in love with car culture. He has spent the past four years carefully reconstructing an original 1960s Ford Van with original parts, while re-envisioning the inside as a geometric metalscape. HibMacronan has also earned a reputation for creating kinetic sculptures that use wheels, height, proportion, and impressive geometry and scale to establish awe in the viewer and create interactive art.

He shares a fabrication and metal working space with other artists on the Alameda naval base since graduating from California College of the Arts. When starting out after college, he lived with his parents, but after his first show at the Oakland Museum of California, he began getting pieces commissioned by private collectors as well as places such as the San Francisco International Airport, where some of his sculptures are shown today, and he now lives independently as a full-time maker.

In any given week, HibMacronan is juggling multiple projects: He teaches beginning wood-



working at The Crucible, creates sculptures for galleries and local collectors, and does commissioned furniture pieces. "There's no time to sleep. I wake up at 6 a.m. and I finish up at midnight, and that's mostly spent here working," he said. "I wear lots of hats. I'm always trying to learn the next thing, while also coming in here welding, and then I go to art exhibits, pass out my cards, and be a part of the arts community, because it's so rich out here, and I'd be missing out if I didn't go."

Creativity does not happen in a vacuum, and the growth and evolution of being a maker depend so much on having your hands involved in different projects. But being a maker also means being involved in all aspects of the creative and production process, as one of the founders of the wilderness perfume Juniper Ridge said.

"It's been a long and rocky road," said Obi Kaufmann the chief storyteller of Juniper Ridge. "Most successful companies grow exponentially until they're skyrocketing. We're never going to do that. It gets back to the maker culture that we are.



Every time we grow our business, we have to hire another person, buy another truck.

"Someone might think, 'Oh, those guys at Juniper Ridge are really blowing up.' And it's like, no, actually, those seeds have been planted for a long time," Kaufmann said.

Juniper Ridge is a line of wilderness perfume originally established by Hall Newbegin, made by 100 percent wild-sourced ingredients and plants native to California. Each scent is named after the area that it was harvested from, spanning the wildflowers of Topanga Canyon to the coasts and forests of Big Sur. The company employs 20 local makers to craft their line in its Oakland-based factory, paying each a living wage, taking regular hiking expeditions with staff to source their ingredients, and being involved in every step of the creation and distillation process.

Because of the old school distillation techniques that Juniper Ridge uses for its products, the cost of sourcing the materials, and a commitment to giving back to the environment, the business requires a high overhead. They are always living on the edge, according to Kaufmann.

Being a maker requires years of learning the craft, specializing in a niche, networking and creating opportunities while giving back to the community. It is a careful balance of having an entrepreneurial spirit, artistic vision, and also learning from failures. It does not happen overnight.