



INTO THE WOODS

THOUGH THE SIMPLE, STREAMLINED FORMS OF HIS FURNITURE SUGGEST A THROWBACK TO MIDCENTURY MODERN DESIGN, BENJAMIN KLEBBA'S CONTEMPORARY PIECES ARE HANDCRAFTED TO STAND THE TEST OF TIME.

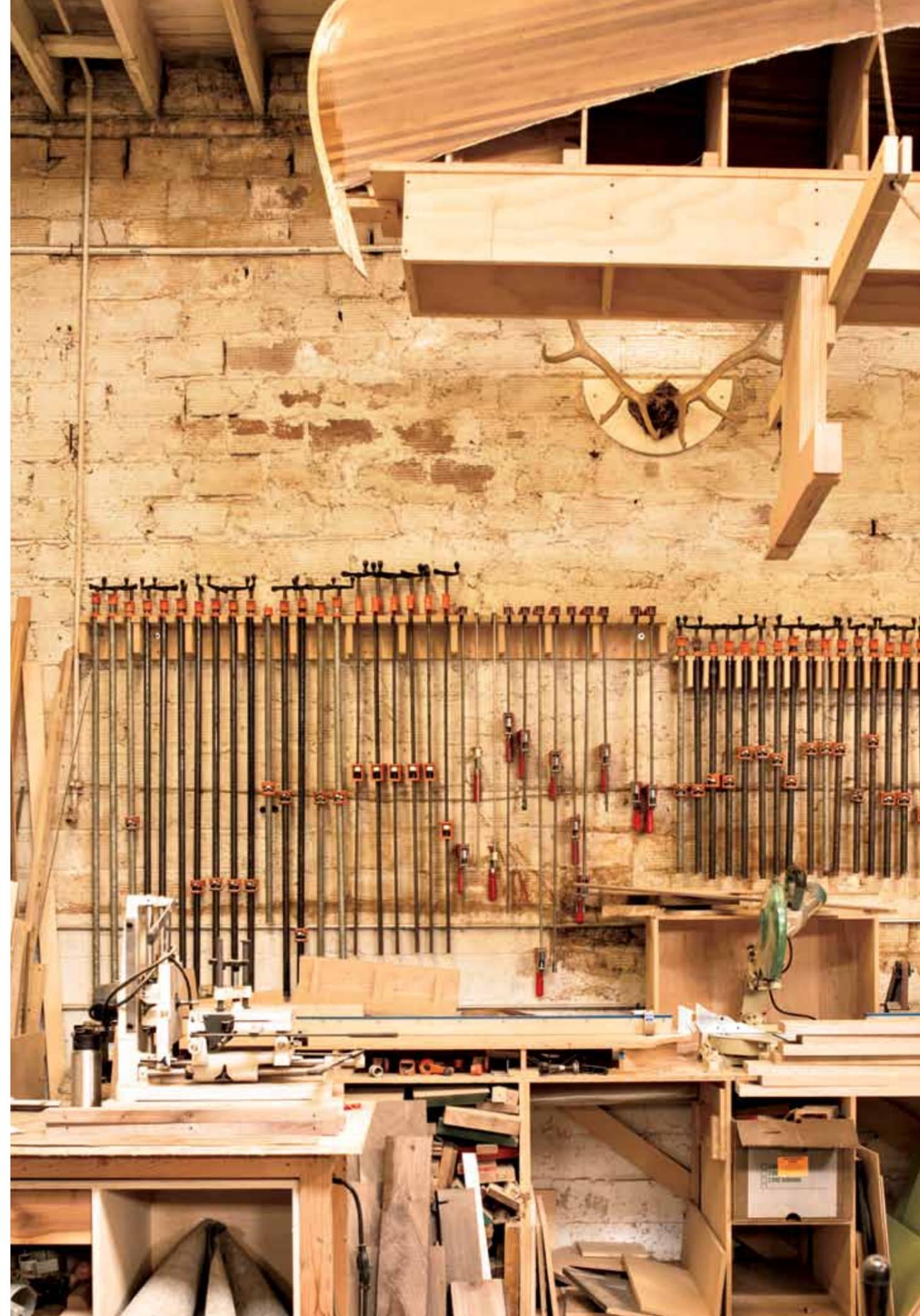
WRITTEN BY MELISSA JACOBS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY DINA AVILA



Stepping inside Phloem Studio immediately dispels the notion of a quiet Pacific Northwest woodsman whittling away to folk music. Here, the soundtrack is loud and driving to keep pace with craftsman Benjamin Klebba, who is wielding a set of chisels like a Samurai. Indeed, Klebba, who first honed his woodworking skills by building acoustic guitars, has mastered the art of crafting fine furniture with his collection of seating, beds and case goods made from domestic hardwoods. "Wood is a natural resource that comes from trees that were once living, and I think it's important to honor that," he says. "I named my company Phloem Studio to keep that awareness close, as phloem is the term for the vascular tissue in plants through which nutrients flow via photosynthesis."

This blend of synergy and sentiment runs through Klebba's entire line, whether it's the Leo highboy, the Maxwell lounge or the Regina loveseat. His favorite design, the Shaker-esque Harbor chair, was realized with his father, Ron, a craftsman himself who early on inspired Klebba to create. Working with his dad and a small team of artisans, Klebba stays busy with a custom, labor-intensive process that begins with sketches and evolves into life-size prototypes. It's here where he may fine-tune the angle and joinery or collaborate with textile artisans such as Leland Duck of Revive Upholstery & Design or Matt Pierce at Wood&Faulk for leather slings. "I love building furniture that will outlive the owner in a timeless fashion," says Klebba, who will launch a new line at New York's ICFF in May. "I want my pieces to have a voice, whether they reside in a contemporary glass house, a midcentury modern residence or a Craftsman bungalow."

As the day winds down, the music softens to 1950s jazz, yet the work almost never stops. "You have to go to the woodshed to perfect your craft," Klebba says, much like the way great musicians dig deep into their art when woodshedding, relentlessly dedicated to practicing and bettering themselves. "If you are going to be good at what you do, you have to always be open to learning and understand that it takes time. No one is going to do this for you. It all stops and starts with yourself." ■



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Above: Benjamin Klebba of Phloem Studio crafts timeless furniture with a contemporary lean—just take a look at the Harbor chair here and on the previous page—from inside his Portland workshop in the Beam & Anchor building, center and far left.

Left: The Regina lounge, shown in claro walnut wood and gray Maharam wool, is an example of Klebba's smart, tailored designs. Next up for Phloem is a collaboration with Revive Upholstery & Design that will add leather and a square tufting pattern to the Regina upholstery options.

