

JANUARY 26, 2021

## ***Daily Inspiration:*** **Meet Joe Adams and Erich Elfeldt**



Today we'd like to introduce you to Joe Adams and Erich Elfeldt of TimberFire Studio.

Alright, so thank you so much for sharing your story and insight with our readers. To kick things off, can you tell us a bit about how you got started?

TimberFire Studio is the longtime collaboration of two artists, Joe Adams & Erich Elfeldt, who have been best friends since childhood. We both grew up in Houston with a strong family history of skilled artisans. Joe's grandfather was a certified forester & sawyer, while his great grandfather was a master blacksmith.

*VoyageHouston*

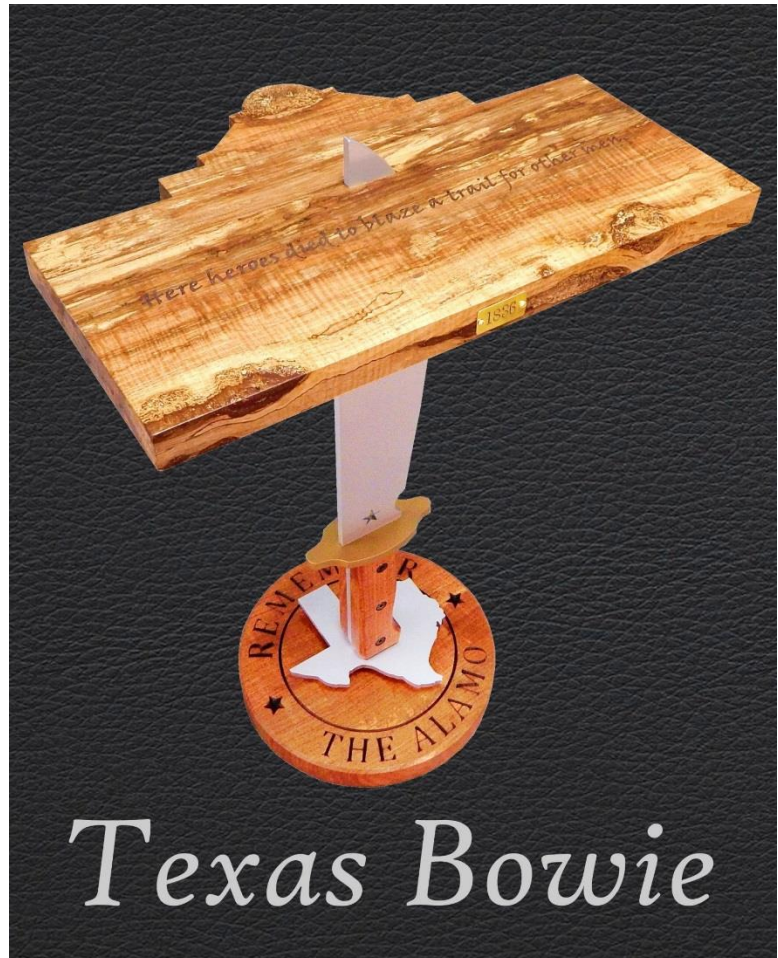
Voyage Houston is an online magazine that highlights the extraordinary life stories of everyday folks, told in their own words. [www.voyagehouston.com](http://www.voyagehouston.com)

# Houston's Most Inspiring Stories

Erich's father apprenticed with German cabinetmakers and his grandfather was an accomplished designer of European woodworking machinery. We started working with our hands at an early age alongside our respective fathers in whatever pursuit they were involved with at the time. This covered a lot of ground, from repairing car engines to remodeling the house. Growing up, it seemed like our hands were either covered in grease or sawdust, and the sawdust was much easier to clean off.

It was clear that our parents wanted more for us, and after high school we started attending college together at the University of Houston. We had to help pay for school, so we also had full time jobs with Erich working at a machine shop and Joe at a small community bank. After a couple of years, Erich decided to pursue a lifelong dream to serve in the military and traded the classroom for a four-year stint in the Army. He fought in Iraq serving in a scout platoon for the 101st Airborne during Desert Storm. Meanwhile, Joe finished getting a business degree and went to work overseeing financial reporting for a big insurance company in downtown Houston.

Over the next ten years, our career paths diverged, but we remained close friends. Joe was looking for a change from the corporate world at about the same time Erich had just returned to Houston from working as a site supervisor overseeing the rehab of a sprawling apartment complex in Kansas City. After Joe tagged along with Erich to the 1998 National Association of Home Builders



## Texas Bowie

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(NAHB) convention in Dallas, we decided to join forces and start our own construction company.

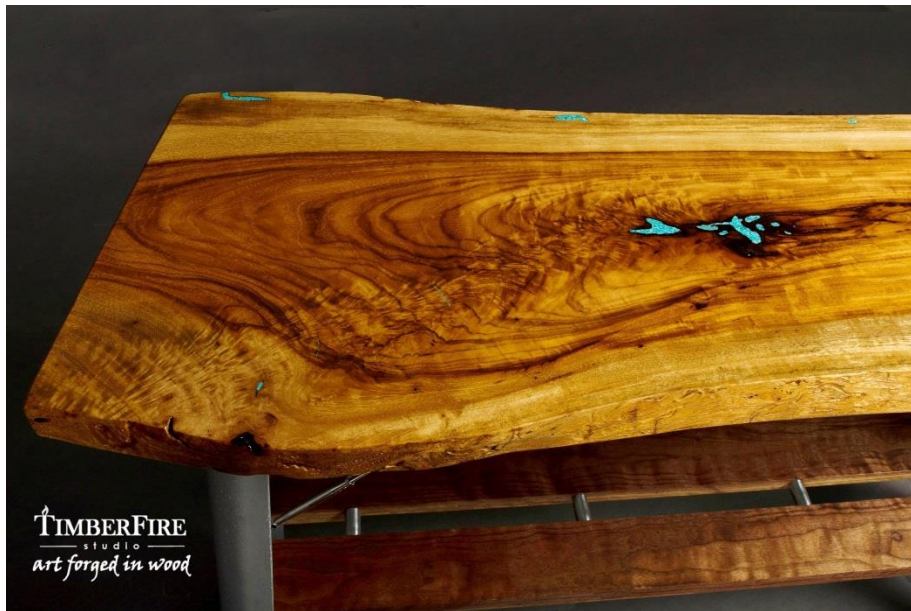
Joe's father was concerned and said, "Son, you're not larcenous enough to be a contractor." We wanted to bring a healthy dose of honesty to an industry where that's not always the case. Our motto was "Quality built on Integrity," and we did most of the work ourselves. We quickly developed a reputation for being able to



satisfy discerning customers who demanded the highest possible quality and professionalism. Our unique skillset and background meant we not only understood how to properly accomplish a variety of renovation tasks but also had the planning and management experience to get it done efficiently. We were never the low bidder because, like so many things in life, you get what you pay for. That's something else we learned from our fathers – Take your time and do it right because fast, shoddy work is worthless.

# Houston's Most Inspiring Stories

We have both always been creative. Erich filled his grade-school notebooks with imaginative sketches and excelled in drafting classes at Bellaire High School. Joe attended Houston's prestigious High School for the Performing & Visual Arts, where he split time between studying instrumental music and photography. We are also both quick studies and spent considerable time researching different architectural styles to gain an understanding of harmonic proportion and form. It wasn't long before we were coming up with original plans for our jobs without the aid of an architect.



Our clients appreciated our ability to remodel a kitchen, bathroom, or home office that combined a thoughtful approach to functionality along with beautiful detailing. Our originality and craftsmanship motivated more than one customer to encourage us to design and build

furniture. As it so happened, we had always enjoyed woodworking in our free time as if we did not get enough sawdust during the day. Halfway through 2014, we decided the time was right to take our creativity to a new level and hang our shingle as full-time studio artists making unique furniture, lighting, and home décor items.

In many ways, we feel like we're in the third act of our professional lives, and everything that's happened previously has prepared us for this moment. It is certainly the most gratifying work we've ever done. We put our heart and soul into everything we make, along with the very best materials we can find. We view the products that come out of our studio as our legacy and want them to be family heirlooms that end up on Antiques Roadshow in another 100 years.

# Houston's Most Inspiring Stories

Can you talk to us a bit about the challenges and lessons you've learned along the way. Looking back, would you say it's been easy or smooth in retrospect?

Mark Twain famously said, "Find a job you enjoy doing and you will never have to work a day in your life." While it's not quite that simple, we are fortunate to be able to do this for a living. The truth is the struggle of any artist is real. The hours are long, the process is arduous, and there is plenty of angst as we obsess over getting all the details just right.



We like to joke that everything we make includes a little blood, sweat and tears. Splinters are an occasionally painful part of woodworking as we labor to transform unruly raw materials into something refined and beautiful. All the while, the consequences of a mistake amplify with every step as a project progresses to fruition. It's never easy but overcoming adversity is how you grow as an artist and a person.

It all seems worthwhile when a client falls in love with a piece and takes it home with a proud smile. After Hurricane Harvey flooded much of Houston, one of our clients contacted us to share that although she lost all of her other furnishings, she was able to save the table we made her. The value she placed on our work was a humbling revelation and reinforced the belief that we are fulfilling our calling in life.

# Houston's Most Inspiring Stories

**Thanks – so what else should our readers know about your work and what you're currently focused on?**

There is a quote we love from Louis Nizer who said, "A man who works with his hands is a laborer; A man who works with his hands and his brain is a craftsman, But a man who works with his hands and his brain and his heart is an artist."



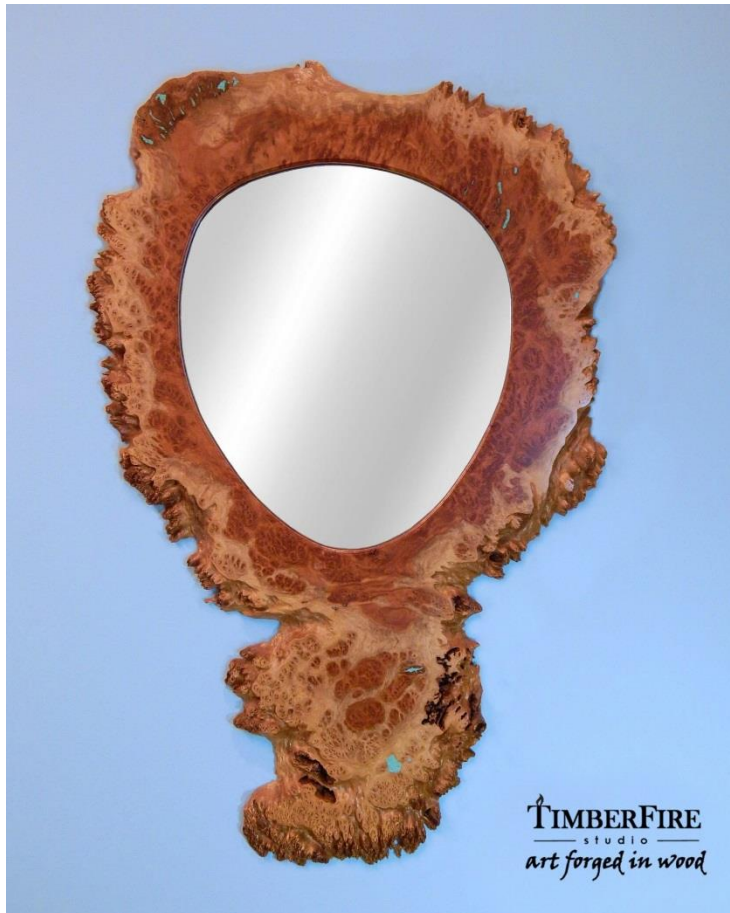
We refer to our furniture as "Functional Art" because we're creating one-of-a-kind items that deliver both form and function. Working from the heart, our hands impart a bit of soul into everything we touch that cannot be replicated by a machine in a factory.

We were raised with a deep appreciation of the majesty of the outdoor environment and consequently put a lot of effort into curating the finest specimens of figured wood that Mother Nature has to offer. It's important to us that these be responsibly harvested so we obtain our timber from sources that are known to be eco-friendly. We even go to the extra effort of importing a lustrous and durable wood finish from Europe because it is engineered from natural plant oils and waxes.

We are honored to have our work repeatedly recognized for excellence at the annual Texas Furniture Makers Show. Last year, we won the coveted Best Texas Style award for a pair of unique table lamps. That was our sixth ribbon in six years at the statewide competition.

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We try to design pieces that are visually compelling with clean lines, judicious use of negative space and meticulous attention to detail. Our projects range from urban reclaimed to western flair to custom commissions and always reflect a sense of refined elegance. We're not interested in building traditional styles and replicating established forms from centuries past. Instead, we're trying to invent new objects that are unique, beautiful, and built to stand the test of time. That's what we're striving for – Art Forged in Wood.



## Can you talk to us about how you think about risk?

When he was in the military, Erich used to parachute out of perfectly functioning airplanes as well as fly around underneath helicopters suspended by a rope. Risk is inherent in everything we do, and while it can often be mitigated, it cannot be entirely eliminated. At some point, you have to choose faith over fear if you want to live life to the fullest and fulfill your dreams.

Entrepreneurship requires a substantial leap of faith. You can't possibly have all the answers before you get started. Hopefully, you have a general

plan, marketable skill set or product, and working capital, but after that, it takes guts to take that first step when you can't see where you will land.

When we look back over twenty-something years and wonder if we made the right choice, the immediate answer is a resounding yes. This is not the path for everyone, and it certainly hasn't been easy, but we love what we are doing and wouldn't change a thing.

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## Image Credits

Joe Adams

## Six Flags Over Texas

