

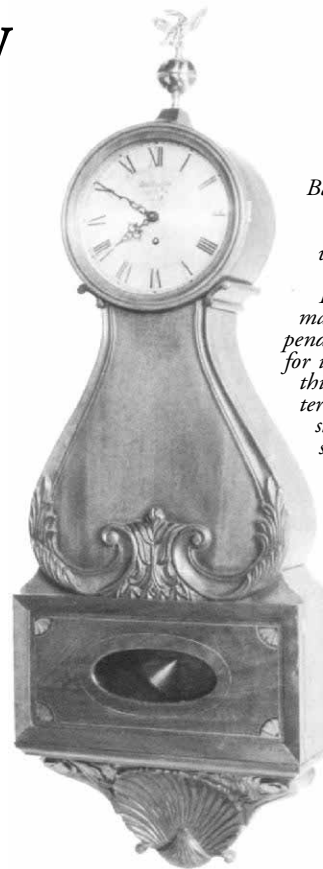
Portfolio: A.W. Marlow

... Museum quality furniture

EDITOR'S NOTE: Andy Marlow of York, Pa., designs and builds period furniture in the classical styles. He writes that when he received our Winter '77 issue (with a Philadelphia highboy on the cover) he thought, "Oh boy! There is a real craftsman. What a letdown when I discovered it to be an oft-photographed museum piece." He therefore volunteered select photographs of his own museum-quality furniture, as an antidote "to the brain-children of contemporary craftsmen." We asked him to add what he recalled about each piece, and those comments appear alongside the photographs.



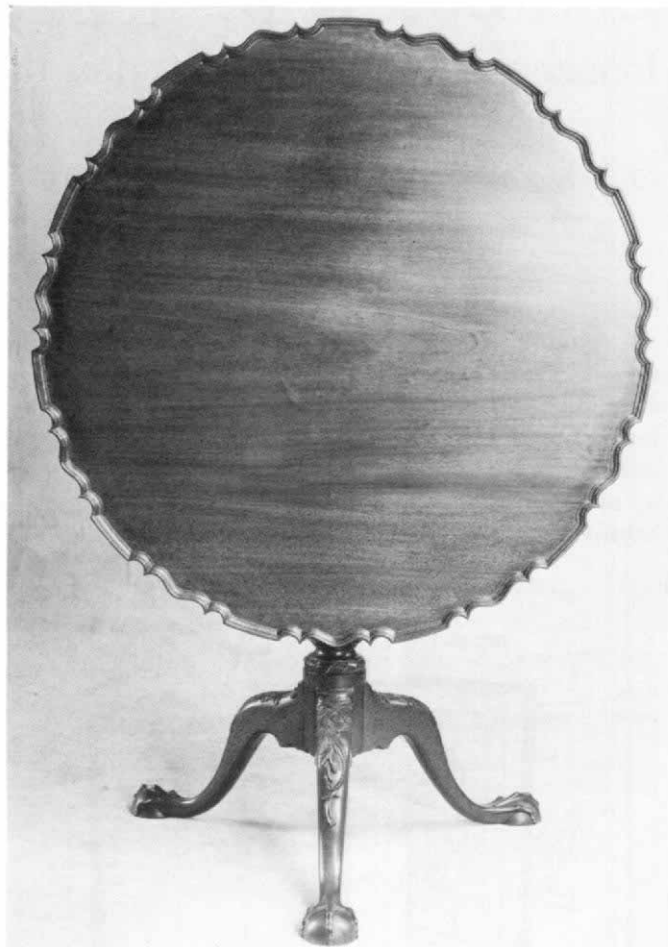
Very early in my furniture-making career, I received a call from a lumber dealer who said there was a carload of curly maple on the way and would I want some of it to fill a back order. This lumber was sight unseen by either of us. On arrival, it turned out to be beautiful 4/4 bird's-eye maple that had slipped past the veneer makers. I used that lumber for many pieces but have only the photo of this flat-top highboy (42 in. by 22 in. by 72 in.) as a reminder. Many of you will say 'amen' to the observation that all one can do with bird's-eye maple is to saw it and sand it.



Back in the 1940s, a telephone-caller asked if I would be interested in a clock removed from an old railroad waitingroom. Remembering the kind of timepieces made in those days, I was not surprised to find a well-made trapeze movement with a 19-in. pendulum. So, what kind of case to make for it? Finally settled on a lyre design like this one (42 in. by 14 in. by 5 in.). After hanging on a wall in our home for a short time, it was sold, much to my sorrow. I didn't make another until last year when I bought a few beautifully made trapeze movements of the same size. This new case does not equal the original because the best I can get now is mahogany from Honduras. The old one was made of exceptionally fine dark-brown wood from Santo Domingo. In both cases, the dials were an odd size so I had to make them of spun aluminum.



The coffee-table leg design is a copy of a stool that was displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art about 1953. Coffee-table legs must be adapted from stool or chair legs that are the same height, because coffee tables as such were not made at that time. Many cabriole-leg designs are acanthus-leaf patterns, which make this carving design particularly attractive, especially when the legs end in paw feet.



Back about 1953 you could visit a mahogany importer and reasonably expect to find at least one or two 4/4 boards 36 in. wide. That's what happened when I chose to make the 11-section table pictured here (31 in. high, 36 in. dia.). The tops of these tables were always made of one board width (no glue joints). Even though this is a Philadelphia Chippendale piece, the carving deviates from the usual acanthus-leaf motif.

I think the most stately piece of furniture ever designed is the highboy. The last one of the three-finial design that I made was sold on condition that it would not be removed from the premises until I made another to replace it. The replacement shown here is a copy of one in the Winterthur (Del.) Museum. It measures 43 in. by 21½ in. by 90 in.

All these years at our house we have lived with good furniture, so it is probably natural to be careless occasionally and mistreat some of the pieces. The block-front slant-top desk is a case in point: made about 1935, subjected to hard usage for maybe 20 years, shoved aside and forgotten to make room for a replacement. Two years ago we decided to see what would happen if we brought down chairs, tables, desks and mirrors that were made in the 30s and 40s, and the outstanding example was, of course, the block-front desk. After cleaning and polishing, the careless treatment it received was still apparent. I was ashamed to do what I did but thought, 'may as well go for broke.' I put a current price tag on it that was eight times the original cost. What happened? It didn't stay on the floor a week. The New York Chippendale chair made about the same time was priced on the same current basis and quickly sold.

