



ART MEETS FIRE AND STEEL IN THE MCNAIRY COUNTY WORKSHOP OF DAVID MANN

FIRED & UP

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TRENT SCOTT

Fire was celebrated by our earliest ancestors. It provided warmth on cold nights and safety from predators. It brought light to the darkness and fundamentally changed the way we consumed food. Fire was a significant part of daily life. While technology has reduced our dependence on fire, most of us are still instinctively drawn to it for comfort and safety. There are few things better on a chilly night than sitting around a fire with the people you care about. From his workshop in Finger, Tennessee, David Mann hand crafts fire pits that are both functional and astonishingly beautiful. **Mann gives us a reason to celebrate fire once again.**

David Mann's path to creating custom steel fire pits had some turns along the way. He learned to weld and use a cutting torch at age 13 by helping at his father's trucking company. "Things are always breaking, and you can't hire it out every time," says Mann. "I taught myself. You just have to learn to do stuff."

Though Mann always enjoyed drawing, a career in trucking and later forestry provided few opportunities for artwork. As he got older, he began to ask hard questions about what he really wanted to do.

Mann had been making hexagonal fire pits as a hobby until something he spotted on the side of the road caught his attention.

"I was driving down the road one day and saw an old propane tank," said Mann. "I started thinking about how I could cut it up — take the ends off and use them. So that's what I did."

Mann's fire pits were originally simple bowls until a mistake led to real inspiration.

"It was about 2 in the morning, and I melted through a bowl," says Mann. "I had accidentally turned the heat up on my cutter, and I burned right through it." He pushed the "mistake" to the side but built a fire in it the next night. "I could see the light from the fire coming through that hole."

Mann realized that he could cut designs on the bowls, allowing light to pass through, adding, "If I had more area to draw, I could make larger designs." This led to the idea of putting two bowls together to make a sphere.

Still little more than a hobbyist, Mann rented booth space at the 2016 Fall Tennessee Craft Fair at Centennial Park in Nashville. "I got stuck in traffic and was 15 minutes late the first day," laughs Mann. "When I finally got there, I came around the corner, and my booth was surrounded by people."

Mann sold every fire pit he had in five hours. Word spread, and

his Mann Made Fire Pits quickly became more than a hobby.

"I'm still getting better," says Mann. "I love the challenge of creating custom designs."

Each of Mann's pits is a one-of-a-kind creation that will last for generations. "These are heirloom pieces," says Mann. "You can literally pass these on to your children."

"We're in a world of smartphones and tablets — busy, busy, go, go, go — and it's nice for friends and family to get around a fire pit together in the evenings and just talk — forget about the phones," says Mann. "If you can bring families together, and if I can be a part of that — that's really nice to think about."

Operating his business from rural Tennessee has helped Mann. The cost of overhead is much lower, and that has allowed him to expand his operation. "I love the Nashville area," he says, "but this is where it started." With a new workshop completed earlier this year, he plans to continue growing his business from McNairy County.

Ninety percent of the materials he's used were headed for the scrap yard, he says. Instead, they've emerged from Mann's workshop as functional works of art and centerpieces of backyard life.

Mann's passion is infectious. "We're selling more than fire pits — we're bringing people's ideas to life."

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Learn more

Learn more about Mann Made Fire Pits online at mannmadefirepits.com or call 731-610-0326.

This page: David Mann stands next to an incomplete sphere fire pit outside his workshop in Finger. Opposite page, clockwise from top: Mann cuts the Nashville skyline into a sphere. A patriotic sphere is backlit by a fire. Mann and niece Paisley roast hotdogs over a Mann Made Fire Pit. An incomplete fire pit features a music theme. A completed sphere is a showpiece at a customer's home. Alyssa Cody traces David's chalk sketches before he begins work with a plasma cutter.

