

In full swing

Swing seats and fun rope swings will find a place in any garden, no matter how small, especially when they are original designs made by an experienced carpenter with sustainably sourced wood

WORDS **SUE BRADLEY**

Craftsman Martin Young has the National Gardens Scheme to thank for the birth of his business, Sitting Spiritually. Six years ago, his garden on the Devon/Dorset border was turned down for inclusion in Scheme's *The Yellow Book* because, surprisingly, it did not provide enough places to sit down.

And when a trip to his local garden centre failed to come up with anything suitable, he made the most of the woodworking skills he had learned as an apprentice and started building his own swing seats.

Martin's highly personal creations quickly proved a hit with visitors to his garden in Uplyme near Lyme Regis, many of whom were keen to know where he had got them.

This positive feedback - combined with Martin's concern that travelling 35,000 miles every year for his job as a salesman might prove damaging to his health - prompted him to return to his woodworking roots and set up a business making beautifully hand-crafted garden furniture.

Nowadays, Martin is fully content with his life. The satisfaction of creating seats from wood that he knows comes from sustainable sources, and of providing work for several artisan craftspeople within his community, including members of his own family, is a source of much pride and joy.



'I started my working life as an apprentice carpenter and joiner with the City of Coventry,' Martin says, 'and I remember my father saying that an apprenticeship was like swimming - you could always go back to it.'

'I had wanted a swing seat for the garden, but I soon discovered that the choices were pretty flimsy and made from imported wood from questionable sources. I ended up trawling the internet and ordering a set of swing seat plans from the USA, which showed me the different angles.' And that

was the start of his business. The name of the company, Sitting Spiritually, was inspired by Martin's long-standing interest in meditation. Not surprisingly, his swing seat designs have appropriately relaxing names, such as Harmony, Serenity and Tranquillity.

English oak is Martin's medium of choice, because of its strength and durability, and also the beautiful, and endlessly different, patterns within its grain. He also has a penchant for Western red cedar, which features high levels of natural preservative oil, thereby eliminating the need for any chemical treatment. Both woods are bought from managed estates in Dorset and Devon. 'One of the benefits of buying wood locally is that I can personally choose the pieces I want,'

he says. The company's Harmony range uses painted pine imported from sustainable forests in Scandinavia.

Martin's interest in the ancient Chinese belief system of feng shui constantly influences his designs. Hard angular lines and sharp edges are not for him; he prefers to follow the natural contours of the wood, with each piece having its own flow and patterns. 'Every piece of wood is unique - you can get some wonderful curves, which are structurally strong because the grain follows the curves.'

'Our swing seats are a mixture of traditional

skills and modern technology: they are all underpinned with marine-grade stainless steel to make them as strong as possible, and we often use suspension springs to ensure that swinging on our seats is a unique experience.'

Customers can choose from his basic designs for swing seats - of which his Kyokusen (meaning 'curves in the air' in Japanese) design was singled out for a John Makepeace Design Award in 2008 - or discuss their individual ideas with his daughter, Lucy Young. There is also a wide range of benches, tables and rope swings, with the latter hand-carved with simple phrases such as 'just a bit of fun' or 'will you marry me?'

Swing seats and frames take around a week to complete, with Martin bringing in craftspeople to help him at busy times or to provide specialist skills. Individual pieces can feature carvings, created by a craftsman just down the road, or inlaid with ammonites found along the Lyme Regis coast nearby and polished by a local fossil hunter. Cushions are made by Martin's wife, Celia.

'We firmly believe in supporting local businesses - whether it's a local estate for the wood itself, the guy who makes the chains for the swing seats or the joiners and wood carver who help us,' says Martin.

'We are now making between 60 and 70 swing seats and more than 100 rope swings every year, and are proud that our British-made garden furniture is ordered by people all over the UK, as well as exported to Italy, Germany, Spain, Sweden and France. The only thing I regret is not being able to deliver all the orders myself, to see the reactions of customers.'

For more information, go to Martin's website at www.sittingspiritually.co.uk



FAR LEFT Martin young gave up his job as a salesman to become a successful woodworker. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The Kyokusen swing seat features a unusually curved frame and won the John Makepeace Design Award in 2008.; Planing wood for a superb smooth finish; This charming rope swing will appeal to children and the young-at-heart - who could resist 'a bit of fun?'; Martin Young in his woodworking studio; Whether you've got a tiny terrace or an extra-large plot, treat yourself to least one sitting space; Martin's wife Celia makes all the cushions for the seats; The Harmony swing seat features a simple yet elegant fan back, and is painted in Farrow and Ball 'Pointing' paint; Martin Young in his woodworking studio. OVERLEAF The Japanese inspired Kyokusen Swirl Back Two Seater swing seat gives an idea of the amazing craftsmanship of Martin Young.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

THE ENGLISH
GARDEN

AND

 **SITTING SPIRITUALLY**
Exclusive handcrafted wooden swing seats



Sitting Spiritually Ltd.
Bramble Hayes, Yawl Hill Lane
Uplyme Lyme Regis
Dorset DT7 3RP

T: 01297 443084
M: 07837 651283
E: martin@sittingspiritually.co.uk
www.sittingspiritually.co.uk



SITTING SPIRITUALLY
Exclusive handcrafted wooden swing seats

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
**THE ENGLISH
GARDEN**