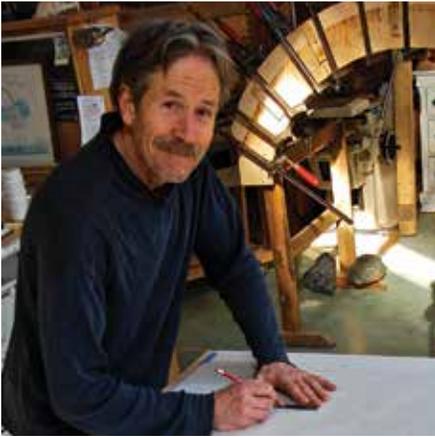


# FORM & FUNCTION

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN



*"I started relieving the place where my sitting bones were feeling pressure by carving it out with a bench grinder. I was amazed at how much I had to remove; how far those ischial tuberosities protrude. Before I knew it, I had two holes in the seat."*

*Geoffrey Warner*



**D**uring an end-of-day phone conversation with *Lake Living* designer Dianne Lewis this past April, I happened to mention that my back was bothering me from too much time seated in front of the computer. Well aware of the complete lack of ergonomic benefit from the chair I was then using, she said I should look into getting an Owl Stool. Intrigued, I brought up the Web site and within minutes made the bold move of ordering one. The fact that I'd put off buying a proper chair for years because I wanted to fully research it was blown away with one quick click of the submit button.

My mate will tell you that I'm the only person he knows who put more research into buying a toaster than most people invest in buying a car. And while it's true that it took me a while to find a toaster

that, a) wasn't manufactured in China and, b) would look good on the counter, I bought my current car on a routine trip to the dealership to have the previous one serviced. I like to think that my impulse buys are guided by my good instincts, which are in turn guided by a strong belief in the marriage of form and function.

It was guided by a similar commitment to form and function, in his case one strongly influenced by Scandinavian and Japanese design, that Geoffrey Warner designed the first Owl Stool at his custom design furniture studio in Stonington, Maine. Warner studied with Danish-born woodworker, educator and author Tage Frid at the Rhode Island School of Design and then spent the better part of the next three decades honing his skills as a designer and custom craftsman of high-end furni-



ture. When the recession hit in 2009, he began brainstorming ways to weather it by designing a production piece of furniture that was more affordable and equally, if not more, comfortable than the rest of his custom line. He landed on a three-legged stool and began by using the seat for his Stonington Continuous Armchair as a model for the seat, but discovered that without the supporting back of the armchair he was conscious of pressure being exerted on his ischial tuberosities, more commonly known as sitting bones.

"I wasn't really aware of healthy sitting at that point. I was probably slouching like everybody else does in our culture," says Warner. "I started relieving the place where my sitting bones were feeling pressure by carving it out with a bench grinder. I was amazed at how much I had to remove; how far those ischial tuberosities protrude. Before I knew it, I had two holes in the seat. I worked on the shaping of it and the comfort until I had sort of a mock-up. A guy I had working for me at the time, Steve, looked at it and said, 'Geoff, it looks just like an owl's face.' Hence the name."

Warner brought the completed prototype to the local farmers' market and had people try it. Based on their feedback, he continued to hone the design until he felt he had the perfect ergonomic stool. He sent it to a CAD designer, who scanned it and machined the first batch of ten seats. Warner then fitted the legs and finish-sanded and oiled the stools. As a final step, he brought a completed stool to his chiropractor, who recommended angling the seat slightly forward for optimal spinal alignment. The enthusiastic response to the stool at the farmers' market led to shows, and before long Warner realized he had successfully designed the production piece of furniture he conceived of in 2009. That home-grown environment also gave birth to the idea for workshops that would give people the opportunity to make their own Owl Stool and take it home with them at the end of the day.

On his own, Warner worked with specialists to substantiate the science behind the seat. In 2012, a Maine Technology Institute grant was awarded for an ergonomic study on the Owl Stool. Pressure map results showed that "the Owl seat designs were very effective at reducing the peak pressure concentrations at the ischial tuberosities. The ability for sitting in an attentive posture is increased." It further

concluded that the hole spacing in the Owl Stool is the perfect average for both male and female subjects.

With the study to back it, the Classic Owl Stool line grew to include the Rolling Owl®, the Pro Owl® and Pro Owl Perch, all of which are mounted on a sturdy cast aluminum base with a gas cylinder allowing for variable height settings. Three- and four-legged kitchen, bar, musician and meditation stools are also available. The most recent addition to the line is the Owl Standing Desk. Current research supports a combination of sitting and movement and the adjustable desk allows easy transition from sitting to standing.

Over the course of its nearly eight year development, the Owl Stool has changed Warner's awareness. He speaks of a philosophy of sitting correctly and references Thomas Myers' book *Anatomy Trains: Myofascial Meridians for Manual and Movement Therapists*. He explains that when we sit in a traditional seat for a long time, we tip the pelvis back to relieve pressure on our sitting bones. In other words, we slouch, which in turn causes strain and eventually pain in the lumbar spine. With room for your sitting bones to "seat" themselves, the spine stays naturally aligned.

"I've talked with thousands of people over the past seven and half years about how they sit and I'm amazed by what I've learned but also by what I've seen . . . the amount of people who come into our booth with back pain, and it's usually down here," Warner says as he places his hand on his lower back. "There's so many who have that because they have not been taught [to sit properly]. I've become really aware by watching people with their hurt backs. Furniture, when designed conscientiously, can be considered an extension of one's body, thus helping us work through daily tasks with ease and mobility."

After decades of sitting in traditional

chairs (here's where I confess that I'd been using an early-1900s press back Larkin), it took some getting used to my new Pro Owl Stool. For one, I got a bit carried away with the fact that it's height adjustable and I no longer had to look up at my computer screen, which is too high, and I overextended the base. Secondly, it wouldn't accommodate my accumulated bad habits, namely, crossing my legs. Despite my initial attraction to its form, I was beginning to wonder if I'd been impulsive with regard to function. I called Geoffrey and told him about my reservations; how my left leg was bothering me at the end of the day. He patiently stayed on the line with me as I measured the height to which I'd adjusted my stool, asked me my height and suggested that I lower the seat. I adjusted it to his recommendation and have been in love with my Owl Stool ever since.

Like so many things made in Maine, the Owl Stool combines craftsmanship with commonsense. It can add a unique design element to your decor or tuck tidily under a desk if you're interested in saving space. The seat is beautifully crafted in cherry, maple or walnut wood with a durable tung oil finish. The base is available in five branded design colors. But make no mistake, the Owl Stool is not just another pretty piece of furniture. It will get you to sit up straight. ✨

