



Sideboard, 95% dowel construction

'I have always felt that a fair percentage of the population, men and women, would consider woodworking as a hobby, but hesitate because of the difficulty in creating accurate joints,' says Jim Lindsay, inventor of the Dowelmax joinery system. 'The craft is inspiring, creative and can result in pieces that are truly unique. So to create a device which brings this craft within reach of the novice is fulfilling.'

Jim's dowel-based system has made carpentry much more accessible to all kinds of people – but perhaps the most uplifting experience he himself has had was when he met John Cook. He explains: 'John is completely blind, his eyes were surgically removed while in his twenties because of a rare disease, yet he has a complete workshop and designs, builds and finishes fine pieces of furniture all by touch. Since Dowelmax is tactile, John is able to use it for most of the required joints and has done for years.'

'When I learned he couldn't see I could hardly believe it. I saw photos of his work and the pieces were all first class. I was absolutely elated – I had inadvertently invented something that, due to the

inherent design, was tactile and could be used by people with disabilities.'

Some of Jim's earliest memories are about repairing clocks and other mechanical devices. His father was an artificer in the Royal Navy and sustained wounds which led to numerous amputations. At a time when the family was strapped for cash in the 1940s, to make sure he was always on time and didn't lag behind other workers, he converted an ordinary clock into a battery-operated alarm clock. Jim recalls: 'At an early age I was fascinated by this process, and I think this may have been the beginning of my interest in invention.'

Jim didn't start working with wood straight away, but after an apprenticeship joined the merchant navy as a junior engineer officer, serving aboard both the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth. In the mid-1960s he began working on cross-Channel ferries and rose to the post of Chief Engineer. In 1974 he emigrated to Canada and joined the British Columbia Ferry Corporation, later incorporating a marine

investigation company in Vancouver.

Jim says: 'I always had an interest in woodworking and furniture design, and for years had been aware of the complexities and difficulties in creating perfect wooden joints. I then decided to devise a way to create wooden joints in a more efficient and less time-consuming way. At that time, the mortise and tenon was considered the crème de la crème of joint systems – and it was, but it was also time-consuming and laborious to complete. My goal was to create a joining system that would be 10 times faster without compromising strength. Other methods on the market were, in my opinion, inferior and weak.'

'At that time, I felt the most logical approach was dowels, but these were notoriously difficult to align properly. Initial attempts at a new design proved fruitless and became so difficult I almost gave up. I did persevere however, and a few weeks later the answer became clear. It was bizarre: what appeared to be an extremely complex problem was resolved with a simple solution – the application of the mirror image.'