

[:: about ::](#)

[:: exhibited ::](#)

[:: media ::](#)

[:: order / contact ::](#)

[:: recycle with us! ::](#)

[:: links ::](#)



[Tables](#)



[Chairs](#)



[Barstools](#)



[Other Seating](#)



[Accessories](#)

New Spin on Old Bikes

Story by [FRIDA WAARA](#)

UPPER PENINSULA MAGAZINE May | June 2007 www.upperpeninsula.biz

Andy Gregg can't remember life without a bike. He grew up wheeling around Marquette and by the time he was 10, he was learning how to fix bikes, or at least scrounging parts from the scrap piles behind local bike shops. At 14, he saved enough from his paper route to put a down payment on a Mongoose Supergoose BMX bike. At the same age he officially landed a job as mechanic in a bike shop. Life was good and now decades later he still gets his hands dirty stretching tires and repairing rims, but not just to ride or race, this entrepreneur has put a new spin on old bike parts by remaking them into furniture.

From his one man shop in the warehouse behind [Lakeshore Bike](#) near McCarty's Cove, he forges found objects (junked rims, tubes, handlebars, forks and frames) into furniture (chairs, tables, barstools, coat racks and mirrors). His eco-friendly and fun useable art starts at \$80 for a mirror, \$200 for a table and \$350 for a chair.

His route to furniture making has as many climbs as the South Marquette Bike Trails. "At one time I was going to build bike frames," admits Gregg. "But it was too meticulous and regimented." Instead, his spirit craves play. Looking back he credits his creativity to games that began in Colorado. "I started collecting old inner-tubes at the bike shop where I worked at the time," remembers Gregg. "I was living above the ski shop at the base of Aspen Highlands near some tennis courts where I would ride my skateboard with friends. At some point that summer we started stretching a bunch of tubes across the courts to use as a slingshot on our skateboards." And that's not all his imagination would launch from that summer's sport.

During his stay in Aspen, Gregg also volunteered at the annual International

Design Conference. In exchange for his time, he was able to attend workshops and lectures. The events buoyed this future inventor.

In 1990, he moved to Boulder to open Quick Stop Bike Shop and again his stash of tubes came in handy. “In the spring we’d float down Boulder Creek on large inflated truck inner-tubes,” says Gregg, who details how necessity, or in this case, comfort, becomes the parent to innovation. “Boulder Creek is very cold so to keep my butt out of the water, I made a seat by stretching some of my stockpiled punctured bike tubes over the big truck tube.”

Form merged with function and it worked. Better yet, when not floating down the river, the truck tire chair became the favorite seat in the house at the bike shop. “It got me thinking,” admits Gregg, who blames all his success on riding his bike because, “Time on the bike provides a good space for quality thought.”

The following spring, 1991, Gregg studied art at Northern Michigan University, but of course he still tinkered at a Marquette bike shop, by the way, also named Quick Stop Bike Shop. “I was still pack-rattin tubes and rims when I made my first true chair for an assignment in a sculpture class.” His designs were making the grade.

With a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Photography he was hired in 1994 by The Resource Center, (the oldest and largest independent, non-profit recycling company in Chicago) to start a bike shop, Blackstone Bicycle Works. Gregg was a perfect match for BBW’s mission: to rescue bikes out of the waste stream and teach inner city youth how to repair them. In exchange, the kids not only learned job skills, but they also had a chance to earn a bike.

During that eight year stint, Gregg soaked up inspiration and a commitment to recycling from Ken Dunn, the Resource Center founder, and Dan Peterman, an internationally known Chicago conceptual artist and sculptor whose work investigates recycling systems and material waste.

He also studied furniture designers and architects from the early to mid-twentieth century: Marcel Brauer, Mies van der Rohe, Warren MacArthur, LeCorbusier, Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Jeanneret, and Charles Eames.

From that immersion, Gregg’s focus sharpened. “It makes you look at everything else from bridges to automobiles to other furniture.” He continues, “And not only how it is made, but what it’s made out of, and how it’s joined together.” Surrounded by a readymade supply of bike parts at BBW, his imagination flourished. Inspired by Eames, who believed, “Design is the appropriate combination of materials in order to solve a problem,” his

inventory grew.

And like Eames's design philosophy that, "The details are not the details, they make the design," Gregg believes. "It's not my desire to make pieces that look like they are bike parts or that they are necessarily bike-related, but to make well designed pieces that utilize the simple components — extruded/tubular steel and aluminum — that also happen to be used to make bicycles." Whatever the cause and effect, Gregg defines a true "re-cycler."

On April 25, 2001, fire shut down Blackstone Bicycle Works and Gregg moved back to Marquette while the shop rebuilt. What he thought would be a couple of months took longer than expected (BBW officially re-opened October 14, 2006 at 6100 South Blackstone Avenue in Chicago). Spoiled by the easy access to world-class bike and ski trails in Marquette, Gregg is content to manufacture here and market through the internet.

Since January 2006, a feature on his furniture has aired twice on HGTV's "I Want That" and he was also featured on ABC's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." His designs also popped up on Yahoo.com's front page. Via the web, he's been publicized in Bulgaria, China, England, Germany, Korea, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Russia, Spain, Sweden and the United Arab Emirates. "My furniture is on websites that are in languages I don't even recognize," says Gregg, who has shipped furniture as far off as Singapore and the United Kingdom.

Because shipping is so expensive, he's working on redesigning some of his pieces so they can ship in smaller boxes.

Last February, he shipped his largest order, 13 pieces in four wheeled crates to San Francisco for the eight stage Tour of California bike event. "My pieces were used in a hospitality tent set up at the finish line of each stage from San Francisco to Long Beach," explains Gregg, who got to go along to set up the furniture.

Exposure to such a select audience of professional cyclists is good for business, but no matter where his chairs are on display, even non-riders have to take a turn and try them out, particularly the low slung and whimsical Milano Lounge Chair.

You not only lighten your load, but you also lighten your mood plopping into the stretchy rubber upholstery. Playfully sparked with racer-red armrests made out of tires, the Mini Deluxe model also uses bright red grips on the handlebar base. It can also be ordered with a horn at your heel. One blogger wrote, "This chair has inspired me to want to do more than just recycle. I actually want to

ride a bike again.”

Eric Shepard and Vince Labolito at the web’s Cardboard Monocle, agree, sort of. “These are truly amazing works of functional useable art that I would be proud to have in my home, if for no other reason than so I could feel like I was exercising without getting out of my chair.”

That’s probably not what Gregg intended. Fit and trim at 41, he’s addicted to exercise, or rather, play and motion. He reserves plenty of time for the “wheel deal” and you can catch him pedaling Marquette nearly year round. Ten years ago he began cyclocross racing in Chicago. “I really like cyclocross bikes because they are road bikes with the capacity to go just about anywhere,” he says, coming as close as this reserved and humble artist can get to gushing.

He honed his cyclocross skills racing in Chicago where years back he won the Tour da Chicago, a series of “Alleycat” events. Bred from the bike messenger culture, “Alleycat” races are often held at night with a personality all their own. “They are typically run through live traffic on city streets, and thus not legal,” admits Gregg, who confesses “Alleycat” racing was a big part of his life for several years.

One early morning epic race was captured in a chapter of Travis Culley’s “The Immortal Class: Bike Messengers and the Cult of Human Power.” Gregg came in second behind Culley, which according to Gregg is a good thing, “because he probably would not have written about it otherwise.”

It’s clear, Gregg’s passion for bikes hasn’t run out of heat, maybe just space. When pressed about how many bikes he owns today, he asks arching a dark eyebrow, “In my house?” Last count he figures he may have eight in his house, “But I think in total I’ve got 12 or 14 bikes in Marquette. I had to sell some when I moved from Chicago.”

His website displays photos and descriptions of his all-time 17 favorites and some he admits he will never sell. “I’ve got a rare BMX racing cruiser from the early 80’s,” says Gregg distinguishing, “That bike was given to me. I’m really not its owner, just its steward for the time being.”

Other bikes, like his Schwinn Cruiser, had to be cannibalized for furniture.” I turned over the original steel rims into bar stools,” confesses Gregg, who still uses the ride as, “My current foul weather commuter/town bike.”

To a guy like Gregg it’s obvious, the design, function, motion and lasting usefulness of its parts make a bike more than two wheels on a frame. And his work, in faithful step behind one of the world’s great furniture makers, is

testimony to the Eames philosophy, "Take your pleasures seriously."



Andy Gregg works on a chair made of recycled bicycle parts at his shop in Marquette.

Story by FRIDA WAARA • UPPER PENINSULA MAGAZINE May | June 2007
www.upperpeninsula.biz

Copyright © 2009 Andy Gregg / Bike Furniture Design. All design, manufacturing, and sales rights regarding the above product(s) are expressly reserved. Any unauthorized reproduction is strictly prohibited by law. All content copyright © Andy Gregg 2009. [All images © Andy Gregg / MQTphoto.com](http://www.upperpeninsula.biz)