



A vase table, aerofoil benches and coopered carvers, all made from olive ash: 'It's an amazing privilege to have an idea, manifest that idea and be paid for it.'

and sends streaks of darker colour through it, adding to the narrative and beauty of the grain.

'Rippling is more technical,' he continues, 'caused by incorrectly coded DNA in the gene responsible for producing the growth-promoting auxin, a plant hormone. Instead of producing straight growth, the auxin makes the tree grow to the right, recognises that's the wrong way, countermands so that it grows to the left, then recognises that it's still growing the wrong way, so countermands to the right – as the tree expands we get this extra rippling growth and when it's cut through it reflects light in a beautiful way. We use ash or oak in our frames, drawer bottoms and panels but I seek out those aberrant individuals for face material, for showing off to the world. Occasionally we use bog oak, which can be as

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much as 5,000 years old... so I'm quite content to make furniture from ordinary British trees, from managed and windblown sources.'

Known for creating bespoke freestanding furniture, Matthew accepts both corporate and private commissions, enjoying the different challenges. His work can be seen in a number of museums, corporate headquarters, public spaces and homes throughout the UK and abroad. Commissions range from designing seating for museum galleries to private libraries and unique individual pieces. 'I love to go where angels fear to tread,' he says, 'and that is working for individuals.' His clients can be exacting. 'One was a serious player in the world of Formula 1. He asked me to move an entire room 25mm to the left because the builders – who had gone – had not put the dome in the centre of the room to his satisfaction. He persuaded the Germans to build one of their top-of-the-range cars in Britain, so he is delightfully exacting.'

And then there was the 'tricky' commission for M – yes, M as played by Dame Judi Dench in fiction, but known in real life as C: '... in the MI6 building, C's office, the one that was blown to bits in *Skyfall*... that was challenging. We couldn't talk directly to the client, we talked through intermediaries, and they were tricky. In the end we had to use a special route through to C to get certain things organised. C ended up with wonderful furniture that is still giving good service to queen and country.'

Matthew admits to an unexpected favourite piece. 'I designed it in the really early days. My wife Celia and I didn't share the same logic as to where to keep the keys. I thought if I could design something simple and beautiful and put it on the wall, perhaps we would coincide. I made a key cabinet, put it on the wall, my wife loved it and it's given us good service. This was 25 years ago. We then made 10 and launched it at a show, and they all sold, so then we made 20 and they all sold, and now we make them in 40s. They live in apartments, palaces, mansions, council houses, offices, across the board. I'm proud of the key cabinet because it is innovative in its construction, witty in its aesthetic and eye-catching and achingly beautiful, so it's touched many of the prerequisites I am searching for when designing pieces. In a way it's a metaphor for our approach to design. I'm inordinately proud of most things that go out of our workshop and the makers that help me to do that, but that particular design truly touches the spot.'

He recently came close to touching another spot when he was shortlisted by the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers to create the high chair for the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's son Prince George. 'The other five designers were all exemplars and it was very flattering to be in such company,' says Matthew, smiling. 'Unfortunately, we were pipped at the post. But we nearly had the prince's buttocks in our grip.' **V**
www.matthewburt.com

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A wine connoisseur cabinet made from tigered oak with pale rippled ash interior, made for private clients for the accoutrements of wine – decanters, glasses, bottle openers...