

Robert Race – Toy Maker



Bob began by telling us that his father designed furniture for a living so he grew up knowing all about the design process and how it could be used to make exciting things. He had never been taught woodwork but enjoyed messing about and playing with tools and materials as a hobby.

He had always been interested in traditional children's toys and how they moved. He had also spent holidays travelling abroad which gave him an interest in toys that were played with by children in other countries, many of which had been designed by the children themselves.

Initially, Bob went to university and trained to be a science teacher in a secondary school. Although he enjoyed teaching, he enjoyed spending as much of his spare time as he could making things.

When he was thirty five, he decided to stop teaching to try to make a living from making toys. Luckily he had a garden shed that he was able to turn into a workshop and, after buying more tools such as fret saws, circular saws and drills and a range of hand tools he was ready to begin his new career.



To start off with, he began by designing kits that were based on toys from the past e.g. like the ones Victorian children had, but which had to be modified quite a lot as he made them from different materials. These designs were easier and quicker for Bob to make, as well as affordable for people to buy.

He then showed us a number of toys that he had created using materials that he had collected from Portland in Dorset. He liked the wood because it was weathered and coloured by nature and, as well as looking good it's also free.



He explained that when he first started making toys it was hard to make money and that even now, finding a place to sell his work is the hardest thing to do. When he first began selling his toys, he had to find small shops and craft fairs to sell them at. He explained that he also sold toys at exhibitions of his work. Here, as well as small toys, he also showed larger pieces. He explained that these don't really sell but do tempt people to buy something smaller. He explained that when things are sold he gets some of the money and so does the shop or gallery. He said that his job won't ever make a fortune, as it takes him a long time to make each piece, but it is lots of fun!

When asked if he had a favourite toy, he replied that it was usually the new piece he was working on as he liked exploring new ideas. The most difficult thing he had ever made was his seaside machine because it had so many parts.

He ended by saying that whatever toy he is making, he needs to spend a lot of time researching and trying out ideas until he gets it right. He said that it's sometimes very frustrating, especially when things don't go right but it's important to find the problem, keep thinking about it and find a way around it. Despite the fact that he has been making toys for thirty years, he is still learning new skills every day!

