

Eric Gorges

Working with your hands as therapy



Eric Gorges grew up in a woodworking family in Detroit, Michigan; his grandfather was a professional cabinetmaker and his dad was a serious hobbyist. But Eric's career path led him to a lucrative corporate job. In his twenties, he began suffering panic attacks, but the road to recovery was found by working with his hands. Eric took up metalwork, then started a custom motorcycle shop that became very successful. These days, he hosts *A Craftsmen's Legacy*, a TV show that shines a light on all kinds of craftspeople and the work they do. Read on for more of Eric's story. —Chad McClung

WM: How did you start working with your hands?

EG: In my 20s, I was working in IT at the Xerox Corporation, and I loved it. But I got sick, and during that time, I refocused what was important in my life. A friend suggested that I work with my hands because

that's what I love to do. So, I decided to work with my hands for a living. I was torn between wood and metal, but metal won out because, ya know, torches.

WM: What do you mean when you say you got sick?

EG: I developed an anxiety disorder that later became agoraphobia. I didn't eat, didn't drive, didn't leave my house. I needed to find something that brought peace to my mind because I was literally going crazy. But I rediscovered my love for making. It was a meditative pursuit in a way.

WM: You say a friend suggested that you work with your hands?

EG: When I say friend, I mean shrink. I can remember his question like it happened yesterday. He said, "Eric, if you could do anything in the world, and money didn't matter, what would you do? I didn't even miss a beat, I said, "I'd definitely work with my hands." I just knew it, I didn't even have to think about it.

I was an avid biker up to that point, and I worked on bikes as a hobby. I wanted to learn how to build motorcycles from scratch. Then over a couple weeks, I fleshed it out and started my bike shop, Voodoo Choppers.

WM: So, working with your hands is your therapy.

EG: Absolutely. Working with your hands allows you the opportunity to lose yourself in time and focus solely on creating one thing. And you're in control. You're able to take your work to the highest level of quality possible.

WM: Tell us about your TV show.

EG: Well, like everybody, I had an idea for a TV show. I was involved in a couple of other shows, so I had a bit of taste for television. But my idea was about craftsmanship. The creators of the show and I highlight individuals who work with their hands to create an object. They could work with wood, they could work metal, or ceramics, or glass, or textiles, or whatever. We talk to them about what they do, and then go into their workspace and learn how they do it. The show highlights the work they do and their personality.

I always like to ask potential guests of the show how they see themselves. Are they an artist or a craftsman? That's the biggest split in who we feature—the art/craft divide. I think you're a craftsman if what you're creating holds a utilitarian value.

WM: WM: Which one are you?

EG: I'm a craftsman.

WM: While learning about these various crafts, has anything stuck?

EG: I rekindled my passion for woodworking. I've been slowly adjusting my schedule so that I can fit in more woodworking. I recently got into turning and I'm really enjoying it. Wood carving too. And I've been incorporating metal into my designs.

WM: What advice would you offer somebody just starting out?

EG: Surround yourself with positive people. You gotta have folks in your life who inspire you. There are plenty of people in the world who'll tell you that you're gonna fail. Don't listen. Don't give up. Don't let other people tell you can't do something. And don't let anybody else hold your star.

Sometimes you have to learn lessons the hard way. But always be willing to learn. ■

onlineEXTRA

Go online for the full interview, a link to Eric's show, and the first few episodes of his new web series, "Woodcraft 101."

