

Inside Pool

Pages 38-50

May/June 2002

Custom Cue Maker's Corner

If you look in Webster's Dictionary for the word 'perfectionist', this is the definition that you will find: *A predilection for setting extremely high standards and being displeased with anything less.* When this is applied to custom cue makers, there are several who undoubtedly deserve to have this word used in descriptions of their workmanship. Keith Josey of Savannah, GA is one of those cue makers.

How does one become perfectionist? Since our parents are such strong influences in our formative years, having parents who preach that gospel to you on a daily basis could do it.

Keith's father, Skip Josey, became a builder of custom homes after spending 7 years as a machinist, working to exacting specifications. His attention to detail earned him a reputation as a perfectionist at custom woodworking. Keith grew up working for his father, building custom homes alongside his four brothers. At the end of a hard day's work pounding nails, Skip and his five sons often

went to a local poolroom to unwind and relax. During the day, Skip instilled his professional attitude into his sons. At the end of each day, he would check the brothers' work, looking for bent nails and substandard work. The work had to be redone until it was perfect. "We could have a two-story house that we were building, and way back in the last rafter you could bend a nail," Keith said when talking about his up-bringing. "Bend it, ram it in there, and put another one in. He would go back and check everybody's work, and if he found a bent nail you could hear him hollar. We'd have to climb back up there, pull the nail and do it right." At home, it wasn't a lot different. "My mom was the same way. If you made up the bed and it had wrinkles in the sheet and she came back in to check what you did, she'd rip everything off the bed and say, 'Now do it again, and do it



right."

This unerring quest for perfection and work ethic is reflected in the zealous attention to detail readily apparent in his cues. It was that perfectionist in him that got him involved in first repairing, and then making, pool cues. In 1998, Keith took his own cue to a local repair shop to have the ferrule replaced. When he got it back there was a cut on the ferrule, so naturally Keith took it back and expressed his displeasure with the job that had been done. It was nowhere near the quality of work he was used to in his father's cus-

tom homebuilding business. “The guy told me, ‘Well, sometimes that happens.’ I didn’t like the job of the excuse, so I bought a kit and started doing repair work.” This was a definitive moment in Keith’s life. “It triggered something in me,” he recalled of the botched repair. Soon afterward, while Keith and his wife Sherri were in Tampa visiting Sherri’s father, Keith went to a Tampa billiard shop and bought a repair kit. When he asked if anyone local was working with cues, he was directed a few blocks away to the shop of Wayne Gunn. “I told him that I was trying to learn repair work and he said, ‘Well, if you promise to do a good job, I’ll teach you to do repair work.’” Keith spent all the time he could at his father-in-law’s home in Tampa, apprenticing with Wayne. He was fortunate enough to also learn from and have his work critiqued by Dale Perry of DP Custom Cues, another well-known custom cue maker.

With the help of his father-in-law, Keith was able to purchase his first lathe, opening up many new possibilities for his cue repair business. As his client base grew, Keith added new pieces of woodworking equipment, investing his profits with

an eye on a complete studio, capable of working on a cue from start to completion. By 1992, Keith was ready to build a cue on his own. The first cue which rated the Josey signature was a break stick that he made for a local Savannah player Paul Brown, a two-time winner of the Southeast regional collegiate championship in ’87 and ’90, while playing for the Georgia Southern University billiard team. “He made that cue as a break stick because I already have a rare Bill Stroud Josswest cue,” Brown said. “I happened to be in Savannah and had left the Josswest at the house. I had the break stick in the back of my car and started shooting with it. After a few games, I said, ‘My God, this is wonderful.’ I packed up my Josswest.”

In the last 10 years, Keith’s reputation as a perfectionist has garnered him acco-

lades from not only players using his cues, but also from his peers. He has been called a master cue maker and one of the ten best in the world by Shawn Putnam of Youngstown, OH, a top-rated professional player who used his Josey cue to become Player of the Year on the Viking Cue 9-Ball Tour the last two years, and also scored several impressive finishes in larger professional events while climbing through the rankings. The weight-forward balance and stiffness of shaft exhibited by Keith’s cues are the reason Shawn likes them so much. “The stiff shaft allows me to jump balls so well that I sometimes will push out to a jump shot in 9-ball, just hoping they will pass the shot back to me.” The consistency of hit makes it easier for him to be more accurate with his jump shot. “You’d have to pay me a lot of money to switch



cues,” he said. “I can tell you I wouldn’t have been able to win all those Viking tournaments without the Josey.” His fellow cue makers have elected Keith to the five-member Board of Directors for the American Cuemakers Association, an indication of how they perceive him.

Keith’s attention to detail is built into each one of his cues, whether the order is for an expensive one-of-a-kind custom cue or a Sneaky Pete. Each of his cues is built with the same devotion to detail and perfection. Keith’s philosophy is to make a constant effort to build the best cue possible, regardless of the price range. His willingness to discuss every detail with the customer goes beyond that of many other cue builders. Keith stands behind every cue he builds because he never wants a Josey cue to be seen as less than perfect. Keith’s goal is, “to become the foremost maker of handmade, superior-quality cues.”

Adorning the butt and forearms of many of his cues is a unique pattern, which serves as a sort of trademark for his more decorative cues. The medieval shield and an intricate web of decorative patterns cut from precious materials like malachite, turquoise, mother-of-pearl, and

ivory is the dominant theme, but it is expressed in myriads of different combinations by



the designs of Timothy Lilek of Chicago, a former touring pro player and cue collector. Tim’s intricate medieval web-work designs are transferred to a floppy disk, which he sends to Keith. Through the use of a \$22,000 computer numeric-controlled (CNC) router, these ornate patterns are carved into the butt of the cue as receptors for the precisely cut inlays, which fit them exactly. By using this computer-controlled device, Keith can duplicate whatever Timothy can dream up. “Now I’m not limited by design. I can do anything,” he said. This duo continually pushes the envelope by only using a particular pattern a few times in different variations before moving on to ever more complex and unique combinations, to insure that if you buy a Josey cue, you won’t run into a player at a tournament with a carbon copy of your ‘one of a kind’ custom cue. Ever the perfectionist, Keith uses an optical

magnifying lens to go over every inch of each cue that he makes before he ships it to the customer.

Savannah’s proximity to several military bases has been a great help in spreading the reputation Keith has won as a quality craftsman. Servicemen who have been transferred away from Georgia to the far ends of the globe have carried their Josey cues virtually around the world. Keith has shipped cues to an ever-growing clientele in half a dozen foreign countries, as well as all across the US. The demands of the growing business take the combined efforts of not just Keith, but also his wife Sherri, who handles the business end of the business, while Keith handles the cue-making end of it. As a team including Timothy Lilek, they have made their mark as top-notch builders of custom pool cues with a promising future ahead.