

An Eye for the Elements

Nabil Gabriel Fayad finds the balanced view

Nabil Gabriel Fayad has been making furniture in Victoria for over 30 years. But he hasn't simply been making furniture; he's been creating masterpieces you can sit on. With his years of experience, a diligent attention to detail and a passion for his work, Fayad has developed what he calls "an eye" for perfection.

In 1973, Fayad took an apprenticeship here in Victoria. "It was lucky," he recalls. "I've never seen anything like it since." Within a year of completing the apprenticeship, Fayad went into business for himself and has consistently done well since. "Designing was a smaller part [at first]," he says. "But it grew. The more you do it, the more you want to do it." Now, Fayad offers two ways for people to buy his furniture: by choosing a piece he has already designed, or by working with him on the design process. People come in with a rough idea of what they want, or sometimes they don't know what they want at all, and through conversation with Fayad himself, a product is developed.

His furniture isn't made in a day—it takes time. Each piece is handcrafted and the attention to detail is exquisite. "It's a slower process," he admits. "The wood is done one-by-one." But, as Fayad explains, this furniture is aimed at people who have a bit of the eye already and know what they want: beauty as well as practicality. These people can wait for the finished item. "The accent is on aesthetics," he says. "It's to enjoy, and to reflect."

His Douglas Street shop—Alexandria—is filled with a vast array of beautiful rugs, piled or hung on display, and his furniture designs sit in the window. While Fayad's furniture is made locally, the rugs are imported. But



Furnishing with flair:
Nabil Fayad and a
custom chair in process



he does select them himself, and when he provides interior-design consultations, he brings together a series of elements to create an overall aesthetic that someone without his experience probably wouldn't be able to capture.

But it's the entire package that makes Fayad's furniture unique. "Typically-speaking, the finished product looks that much more distinguished because of all the elements," he says, then explains what these elements actually are. The frame consists of two things: wood and workmanship. If the quality of the wood is high but put together shoddily, then the chair (or chaise, or whatever the piece may be) will not be exceptional. And exceptional is certainly what Fayad is going for.

"Everything is made from scratch," he says. "The wood part—the frame—is hardwood, maple, predominantly." He pauses and smiles. "Often the frame itself is heavier than an entire chair bought from somewhere else." Next is the springing, which again requires a premium product and high-standards for assembly. The filler needs to be resilient; the fabric of the finest quality. And it all needs that "eye" again to finish it off, to find, as Fayad describes, "the balanced view."

"If there are 10 steps, suppose, the tenth step is most important," he concludes. Meaning that while each element could be perfect in itself, putting the wrong elements together will produce a piece of furniture that doesn't have that balanced view. At Alexandria, everything comes together seamlessly to produce furniture with poise and grace, at home and comfortable in any environment.

—Matt J. Simmons