It took a move to Barcelona for David Tragen to figure out what he wanted to do in life. The talented furniture designer and maker, from Chorlton, studied an International Business degree before teaching English as a foreign language in Sicily. But it was when he went to the Spanish cultural hotspot that everything fell into place.

He said: ‘I knew being an English teacher wasn’t going to be forever. I really wanted to find something inspiring and I knew I wanted it to be creative.

‘It started when I moved into my own flat. I needed to fill it with furniture. In Barcelona people would put out unwanted furniture in the street for them to be taken to the tip. I saw that as an opportunity. It was a light-bulb moment for me.’

David, who spent six years in Barcelona, started collecting and restoring these discarded pieces and making lamps. He did work for private clients as well as bars and restaurants and also spent a year making furniture in Ibiza. It was during this time on the Spanish island that the then mostly self-taught craftsman decided to do more training.

He moved back to the UK and worked in Devon for a year in what is considered to be one of the best workshops in Britain. He then worked for another year as a cabinet maker in Chester. But it was in 2004 that he decided to launch his own business, Tragen Design. He now produces all of his work, which is all handcrafted and limited edition, in Islington Mill, Salford.

He said: ‘I knew I wanted to do something a bit different. People let themselves think they can’t do certain things but there was no reason I couldn’t do it. I really wanted to make my own things, rather than doing it for someone else.

‘I get excited about designing something and then making it come to life. Sometimes I wake up at 5am and I have an
I love being able to create pieces that hopefully people will love.’

The 43-year-old has already done many commissions for private homes and commercial premises in the north west and further afield, including the Menorah Synagogue in Gatley, near Manchester, and Withington Methodist Church. He also made a clock for Manchester Grammar School, which he attended as a boy, and a four poster bed for a Manchester United footballer.

He produces everything from lamps and mirrors to coffee tables, wardrobes and dining table and chairs. His pieces can cost anything from £85 for a clock to several thousand pounds - his most expensive commission to date has been £16,000 for a dining table and chairs. He uses many different types of wood, including some he sources from Greater Manchester TreeStation Ltd, a Gorton-based company that supplies ethically and locally-sourced woods. His striking designs are inspired by nature, sculpture and architecture.

David, a former winner of the Best New Maker Award at the Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair, now wants to develop more ground-breaking, sculptural pieces that he will be able to show at exhibitions and will help get his name more recognised. He has already produced a Beating Wings coffee table, a contemporary design using more than 100 components to create 50 layers. He is also working on another piece which takes inspiration from a sea urchin and will use more than 200 components to build a table. He will show them at Makers, a selling exhibition being held at Cube Gallery in Manchester from May 15-25.

He said: ‘My work is in between the fields of art and design and I want to do more of those kinds of pieces. Some of it is sculptural too and I want to develop that.

‘What really excites me is this freedom to design pieces I have always wanted to do as well as interpreting clients’ ideas. I love the whole process, from dreaming up the initial ideas to seeing the shavings coming off my hand-plane. To be able to make my living designing and working in wood is truly a privilege.’

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