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# The Thread Wrapping Machine

Why learn a craft when you can just invent your own?  
Anton Alvarez is creating his own rules and boundaries.

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Photography *Mårta Thisner*

Most design graduates use their final project to prove their mastery of an existing technique or craft. Not so for Anton Alvarez, the Swedish-Chilean designer who spent his time at the Royal College of Art inventing an entirely new craft.

Anton makes furniture by passing offcuts of wood or metal through the Thread Wrapping Machine – a sort of futuristic, pedal-powered spinning wheel – binding the raw materials with coloured threads into whole stools, chairs or benches, each one characterised by the unusual process used in its production.

## How does the Thread Wrapping Machine work?

**Anton:** On each [of the four] sides of the machine there is a thread-cone, a thread-tensioner and a glue-container. The machine spins the thread from the thread-cone into the tensioner, and finally through into the glue container where it is coated with glue.

The objects built with the Thread Wrapping Machine are composed of different types of material bonded together using glue-coated thread – no screws or nails are used. It is an external joint, which enables me to combine a range of materials more easily than if I used traditional methods. At the same time the different colours of the thread create a decorative pattern.

Wrapping the different pieces of material has to be done in a certain order. There are many different tricks that I'm starting to learn and I am constantly developing my skills in the craft of thread-wrapping. I'm discovering new ways to join pieces with the machine, and that's why it still feels exciting to work with it.

## How long does it take to wrap a complete piece?

**A:** In the beginning I was quite slow, making approximately one piece a day. But eventually, as with all skills, you get

better and learn how to work more efficiently. Recently I was commissioned by Outset Contemporary Art Fund to make the seating for a 180-guest dinner they were planning, so this left me with no choice but to get quicker.

## What are the possibilities of this process? Could it be used for anything other than furniture?

**A:** At first I was not making furniture, I was trying to work freely with the tool to see what was possible. Now I make furniture with it, but I am thinking that this is a period to understand the possibilities of the technique, to eventually grow out of the machine and make one that is more appropriate for the next step: the technique's potential within architecture.

## What made you interested in creating a process rather than a product?

**A:** By building my own machine and creating my own process I became independent, independent of industry and the people that are in charge of it. As I own my process it's up to me to make what I want, I don't have to wait for anyone to make the decisions for me. Also, by creating my own way of working I become independent of traditions and rules. There is nothing right or wrong in my way of working because it is purely up to me.

## Do you think it's important for people to be able to craft things themselves rather than only act as consumers?

**A:** If you can understand how things are made, and understand what type of material you are holding in your hand, you will create another type of emotional connection with the object. So yes, if you make your own stuff, or if it is built by someone you know, you will feel a greater respect for it. •

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