



Surgery led wood sculptor Rob to creative change

WOOD has been at the heart of craftsman Rob Heard's working life since he was a teenager.

But while most artists 'grow' their talents, Washford-based Rob has gone in reverse, turning his focus from life-size timber playground equipment to exquisite and intricately carved miniature 'bough house' sculptures.

The 45-year-old, who lives in a timber house he built himself in the grounds of Bardon Manor, constructed the giant pirate ships at the nearby Tropiquaria animal and adventure park.

But an injury to his wrist put paid to his tree trunk lugging days.

Six months spent at home recovering from surgery gave him time to scale down his creations - but not his ambitions.

Rob had always developed small working models for clients as part of the planning process for his playground projects, which often became favourite playthings for their children.

In fact, the first bough house he made around 18 months ago was for his three young daughters, who still love playing with it.

He has now completed three of the unique sculptures and is currently working on the fourth.

Each bough house takes around 450 hours of painstaking work, so the production line is anything but fast.

Rob works with raw materials that are cut

from local trees or found lying in the fields close to his home, with willow his favourite.

Each individual element, from the walkways to a tiny tile on a turret, is hand carved or cut and fixed for robustness with pins and glue.

"They are designed to be played with, so they are very strong," said Rob.

"Each house is unique and I never know when I start out how it is going to end up.

"The only limit is the height of my workshop ceiling and maybe that's a blessing.

"It is incredibly satisfying work - it's a labour of love but it's also a war of attrition.

"Most people start producing things on a small scale and go larger - I've just done it the other way round."

Rob has been a 'man of the woods' since he was 18, living out a lifelong affinity with timber that began in childhood when he accompanied his father - who crafted cricket bats - on forays to harvest willow.

Rob has been building up a collection of bough houses in the hope of having an exhibition, probably in London.

Although he has yet to notch up his first sale, there has been plenty of interest in the product and he is hopeful that his passion will in time be shared by many.

Anyone interested in buying or learning more about the bough houses should visit www.rob-heard.co.uk or contact Rob on 07815 307047.