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## A Labor of Love for HGTV Star and Alumnus Ben Napier

**Napier crafts desk from Rowan Oak wood and donates it to UM English department**

FEBRUARY 16, 2022 BY EDWIN B. SMITH

FaTvLiErCoSMPrSt



ESPN writer Wright Thompson (center) checks out a desk built by friend Ben Napier (right) while a television crew and representatives of the Department of English capture the moment. Napier, an Ole Miss alumnus and HGTV star, built the desk from wood collected on campus and donated it to the university's creative writing program. Photo by Randy Sherrell

OXFORD, Miss. – Alumni give back to their alma maters in many ways, including contributing their time, money and expertise. That includes HGTV star and **University of Mississippi** alumnus Ben Napier, who has found unique ways to give back to the university through his skills and craftsmanship.

Ben and his wife and co-star, Erin Napier, have made many trips back to campus in recent years to speak to different classes and groups and to lend their support for fundraising efforts for the university. In August, they delivered a handcrafted desk to the **Department of English**, with a special touch of it being built using materials from campus.

"A friend of mine reached out to me explaining that he had gotten his hands on some wood from the campus at Ole Miss," said Napier, a 2007 UM graduate from Laurel. "There were two slabs of oak and the slab of cedar from **Rowan Oak**.

"My original thought was to mill the slab down and build a bookcase, but eventually I decided to leave it whole and build a desk."

Host of the popular HGTV series "Home Town," Napier had planned on building the desk, photographing it, auctioning it off and giving the profits to the university's creative writing program. But after he pitched the idea of featuring Wright Thompson on an episode of "Home Town: Ben's Workshop," the craftsman knew the desk needed to be gifted to the university.

The desk is not the first piece Napier has made for the university. Last summer, McCormick's bar and grill in **The Inn at Ole Miss** received the finishing touch with the installation of a bar top handcrafted by Napier.

"I drew up the plans for the desk weeks before we actually built it," Napier said. "I wanted the desk base to have a somewhat modern silhouette. I didn't want it to distract the eye away from the beautiful cedar top.

"That being said, we used some really beautiful oak that was left over from the **bar top we built for McCormick's**. It took us a couple of days to build out the base, but the majority of the work on the top had to be done on camera."



Wright Thompson (left) and Ben Napier help deliver a desk built by Napier to the Department of English. Photo by Randy Sherrell

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OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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#### Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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The desk is in the Hannah-Ford Room on the second floor of Bondurant Hall, which is a classroom and meeting space for the Master of Fine Arts in creative writing program.

"The producers of the show approached me to see if we would accept the donated desk, and if we had a good place to put it," said Matt Bondurant, associate professor of English and director of the Ole Miss creative writing program. "Ben wanted to donate it to the MFA/creative writing program at UM because of his love of literature, writing, etc., and his fond memories of being an English minor."



Hussain Ahmed, a student in the university's master's program in creative writing, tries out the desk made by Ben Napier from wood collected on the Ole Miss campus. Photo by Randy Sherrell

Napier's donation is a welcome addition to the department, said Caroline Wigginton, chair and associate professor of English.

"William Faulkner is an iconic Mississippi author, and we are honored to have Ben Napier's beautifully crafted desk," Wigginton said. "Its presence in the department represents our community's literary heritage and also our creative writers' talent for adapting the materials of the past to imagine a vivid and sustainable future."

Ben and Erin Napier live and restore homes in their hometown of Laurel. Embracing their passion for renovating historic homes, the couple has become well-known for their "Home Town" series and how home-buying families benefit from Erin's imaginative hand sketches and Ben's custom handiwork showcasing local reclaimed materials.

The episode featuring the handcrafted desk donated to the university is available to stream on [Discovery+](#).

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