

BY / BECCA BROADDUS

# A Life {re} Design

CLINT HARP, BBA '00,  
KELLY HARP, BS '01  
OWNERS  
HARP DESIGN CO.  
WACO, TEXAS

IT  
was the hottest  
summer on record,  
and the heat was  
oppressive.

Houston was suffocating in the humid, 100-degree days of 2011. Across the state, from car to house to workplace, people clung to their air-conditioned respites. Clint Harp was working in his garage—sweating, hoping the heat would restore him and flush his stress out. Recently, he'd quit his six-figure sales job to pursue his dream of building furniture.

"I had this stupid thought," he said. "I'm just going to go into the garage. I was going to go in, bang on a pallet of wood, and just sweat for four or five hours."

And he did. He and his wife, Kelly, found themselves at odds lately. Clint was sugar-coating their situation, and Kelly knew it.

"After we put the kids down that night, I said, 'Kelly, I have no idea what I'm doing. I'm totally scared, and I feel like an idiot because I don't know how this is going to work.' She looked at me, and all she said was, 'All right. I can work with this.' At that moment, it was like, 'OK. We got this.' We'd still have these stressful times, but we could always go back to that moment where we knew that we were together in this."

So the Harp family moved forward—accepting the possibility of bankruptcy, foreclosure, car repossession, bad credit and debt—to follow their dreams.

Kelly wanted to pursue a master's degree, so when she got a full-ride to Baylor, the family moved to Waco. Kelly started classes, and Clint started volunteering at Habitat for Humanity. A few months in, they ran out of money.



ALUMNI PROFILE



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"I had parked my car somewhere, and I was just crying because I'm an idiot," Clint said. "I'm thinking, 'I've brought my family out here. We have no money. I have no job. I have nowhere to even build furniture, what was I thinking?'"

That day, Kelly suggested they take the kids to the park, and destiny intervened. They stopped to get gas on the way home, and Chip Gaines pulled up on the other side of the gas pump in a Magnolia truck. A few weeks later, Clint was building furniture for a home show Joanna Gaines was hosting.

Clint and Joanna decided to work together before he even had a place to build furniture.

Clint reached out to his friends at Habitat for Humanity to ask if they had suggestions for finding a shop. As it happened, Habitat for Humanity's original cabinet shop was being phased out, so they offered to rent it to Clint for about \$25 a month. He moved his tools out of storage and got to work.



## SIX months later, they filmed the pilot episode.

"What's funny is, we're filming a pilot for HGTV, but we're as poor as church mice," he said. "We're living off Kelly's stipend from school. I remember the whole time I'm thinking, 'I don't know how to tell these people that I'm literally applying for jobs right now. I have no money.'"

But then, things began to change. *Fixer Upper* gained popularity. Clint hired help. The business blossomed. Kelly left the master's program to help with the company.

"These little dreams started to come true," he said. "We built the pole barn. We closed in the front of the shop. We've got the paint shed over here. Then, our house got chosen for *Fixer Upper*. It was crazy."

"I had all these different visions of what this going to be, but ultimately, I wanted to work with my hands, build furniture and build a company where other people would want to work. We wanted to include other craftsmen and craftswomen who do their own thing. We had this vision of a store filled with not only goods that we make, but also goods that other people make, and information about those people. We're getting to do that now."

What began as a garage-based stress outlet from his sales job has become a thriving business with 12 to 14 employees, and two DIY Network backyard design specials airing this spring.

"It's kind of hard for me to remember even who that guy was, because that guy in that garage in Houston had no idea about anything," Clint said. "He thought he was going to be making tables out of pallets forever. That guy thought he was going to be in a garage by himself for who knows how long. I never had any plans of this." 🏠

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