

## **David Osborne**

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You couldn't ask for a better place to learn about heritage carpentry, millwork and masonry than Perth, Ontario, David Osborne tells prospective students.

"We're surrounded by beautiful historical architecture ... it is our laboratory."



Restoration of the Almonte Agricultural Hall, 2004

Osborne is the coordinator for the Carpentry and Millwork program of Algonquin College's Heritage Institute. It is the only carpentry program in Canada which specializes in heritage woodworking. Algonquin College also offers a companion program in heritage masonry on the Perth campus.

Demand for the carpentry course is high, so the program is selective. Students from as far away as Labrador City, the U.S., and even Europe compete for one of the 48 spaces for new students.

The two-year diploma program combines classroom study with practical experience.

In first year, students learn modern construction techniques—framing, flooring, and finish carpentry. These are basic skills all carpenters need.

But in addition to woodworking skills, students study drafting, mathematics and blueprint reading. They even take a course in communication skills—to prepare them for the real work world.

In second year, they learn traditional building methods—timber framing, log construction, joinery and methods of restoration.

Osborne's description of Perth as a laboratory is apt. In conservation courses, students study local limestone buildings from the ground up—assessing the carpentry techniques they've been studying in class.



Restoration of the Almonte Agricultural Hall, 2004

On the job site, students use Ottawa Valley white pine for log timbers. Even if they have never held an ax before, they learn to wield a broad ax with finesse—peeling the log and chipping away neat dovetail corners.

And when it comes to projects, they have the chance to work on local buildings. Recently, students completed work for Earnscliffe, the official residence of the British High Commissioner, in Ottawa. They created reproduction finials and drop pendants.

Students in the program tend to be older than typical college students fresh out of high school. The average age is 28. They have varied work and educational backgrounds. Some have university degrees, and an increasing number are women—about 25%. About 80-90% find employment in carpentry, although not all work in the heritage field.



Restoration of the Almonte Agricultural Hall, 2004

There is really no obstacle to learning this trade, but you have to love working with wood, Osborne recommends. The program is both intellectually and physically challenging, with lots of opportunity for problem-solving.

Osborne is quick to point out that not everyone is a skilled carpenter when they complete their course. It takes years of work experience to master the trade.

Osborne himself was brought up in his dad's woodwork shop. After a university degree in mathematics, he went to Ireland for an

apprenticeship. It meant five days a week on the job—learning joinery, cabinetry and staircasing—and all day Saturday in school.

"In Ireland 90% of carpentry work is in old buildings—all carpentry is heritage carpentry," he says. By the end of five years, the young carpenter felt confident of his skills.

When he returned to Canada, Osborne took a job teaching night classes at Algonquin College. A colleague asked where you could learn to do carpentry on traditional buildings.

The question stumped Osborne. He looked around and discovered that there was no course to learn carpentry for heritage buildings.

He then took up the challenge, created something new, and Algonquin's Heritage Carpentry and Millwork program in Perth is the result.

Algonquin College—Heritage Institute  
<http://www.algonquincollege.com/Perth/>

Algonquin College—Carpentry and Millwork program  
[http://www.algonquincollege.com/Perth/home/carpentry\\_millwork/index.htm](http://www.algonquincollege.com/Perth/home/carpentry_millwork/index.htm)



Restored Agricultural Hall, 2004