



Jude McKeever, Bruce McKeever, Maddox McKeever,
Kyle McKeever, Kaci McKeever, Jimmy Graves and Cade Norris



DEEPLY ROOTED

BY TIFFANY HORTON, HORTON DESIGN STUDIOS
PHOTOS BY MATT CORNELIUS

East Texas Grain & Knot owners, Kaci and Kyle McKeever's beautiful home is full of personal touches, each piece intertwining their family and business. When you dig deeper into their story, you learn it is all about family, faith and staying focused.

When the McKeever's married, they decided to rent and save as much money as possible to one day purchase land. After they purchased the land and paid it off, they saved again, this time to build a shop they could live in until they were ready to build a home. They planned for the shop to eventually be Kyle's hobby and hangout space. However, God had other plans for them and much bigger plans for the shop.

It was in the day-to-day grind of a desk job that McKeever realized he needed a creative outlet, and the corporate world was not where he wanted to be. "I knew that I had what I would call 'a basic, basic, basic understanding of woodworking,' and that I enjoyed it," he said. In their early days together, his first big woodworking project was a dining table he made for Kaci when they were dating. In hindsight, he says, "It was a horrible table, but I had fun. Later,

I made a bed, not even thinking about how I would get it out of the apartment when we moved. We ended up having to cut it into pieces and basically just destroy it," he laughed. With a little more experience and since they were already living in the 1,600 square foot workspace, McKeever recalls thinking, "I already own a shop, so maybe I can start making and selling some small projects after work for fun and make a little extra money too."

One of the first pieces he sold was actually a piece of pallet art. When the piece sold, McKeever said it was a great feeling; he thought, "Cool! I made something, and she liked it." He was hooked. He created a Facebook group and came up with the name East Texas Grain & Knot because he wanted something simple and straightforward. "I didn't want anything catchy. I just wanted it to sound old-fashioned, like a woodworking company." As people started buying from the group, McKeever started spending more and more time dreaming up his next projects. "I would get home from work at 5:00, hang out and eat dinner, then about 7:00 or 8:00 I would head into the shop," he explained. Often, he would



stay up until 2:30 in the morning working, all the while, Kaci and their kids were just on the other side of the wall.

McKeever's first big, commissioned piece was a wooden desk with the Phone Pros logo for owner Morgan Smith. From there, other businesses started asking him to create custom layered signs. As orders filed in, he and Kaci began to consider whether this could be a viable job. They both felt as though they would know when it was the right time to transition this pastime into something that was more than just a hobby. Shortly after their conversation, McKeever's high school friend, Cody Lorange, asked if he knew how to make cutting boards. "I told him, 'no, but I know I can.' And he responded, 'Okay, I want 100 of them.' I went home and told Kaci, 'I think this is it.' I can't say yes to this order, unless I quit. She has always been 100 percent supportive, never questioning anything, and said 'let's do it.'" The custom cutting boards were so successful, not only did Lorange continue ordering them for his business, Mortgage Financial Services (MFS), but other MFS locations placed orders for cutting boards to give to their clients as well. Then, businesses from other industries began to reach out. The cutting board side of the business has been so successful that McKeever's nephew, Cade, now works for him in the afternoons. Kaci will also leave her teaching career at the end of this school year to join the team, helping her husband in his endeavor to expand the business to new areas.

As the business took off and East Texas Grain & Knot needed more space, McKeever absorbed half the shop for working, leaving only half for living. This meant the family had only 800 square feet of space. After seven years of shop living and expanding from newlyweds to a family of four, it was time for construction on their new home to begin. With a new confidence and honed skills, McKeever had so many ideas on custom touches and extras he wanted to include, he was spending every day on work orders and every evening on the house. One look inside and you can see just how much passion he has for custom pieces. "All the heart and effort, all the after-hours that I have spent on the house, I really



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wanted people to see it," McKeever said. "I want them to really be able to see what we can do." Every door has been custom made and is very unique; one has a beautiful hexagonal pattern that mimics the tiles on the bathroom floor. Another set boasts a full diamond pattern while a pair of barn doors combine multiple cuts of wood and carved shapes, paired with wooden handles. Everywhere you turn, there is a piece of art he has made: a custom table, a beautiful wood accent wall, or even his most ambitious piece—still in the works—custom lighting for the entry. "We've partnered with a guy in Hot Springs who does blown glass. In the center of the wooden shape, there will be suspended glass in shades of red and orange." Referring to the light, Kaci said, "This is probably my favorite thing. As a math teacher, I have loved helping him figure out how to incorporate different shapes. It was fun to figure out the dodecahedron and hexagon."

While Kaci helps with the books, calculating shapes, being a second set of hands and everything in between, their two young sons Jude (9) and Maddox (6) are also very hands-on. They have dubbed Jude the "Master of Branding," said McKeever. "He

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brands all the boards, even in big 100 board orders. He's probably more OCD about it than I am." As for little brother Maddox, Kaci said, "He is out there [in the shop] all the time. He wants to be there. He will even sweep the floors if that's the only thing he can do." The family spends many evenings and weekends working together, often assisted by Kaci's grandad, who cuts the trees and McKeever's dad who helps him run them through the sawmill. "They are both really my mentors," McKeever said. "My dad works in a lumber mill and taught me how to use a chainsaw when I was pretty little. But Granddaddy is the man on a chainsaw. When he comes to help, I just stand back and let him tell me what to do. He's just so smart and always sharing his knowledge."

The support the family has for each other and for growing their business is evident in every aspect. Kyle credits his mom for encouraging him to follow his dreams and his wife for standing by his side. "Kaci is awesome. She's really laid back and supports my vision," says McKeever. As a team, they work long hours and stay focused on the goals ahead. McKeever adds, "I want East Texas Grain & Knot to be held to a standard. I want people to know that this company does next-level quality." 📍



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