

INSIGHT

ON THE JOB: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

FUTURE FURNISHINGS

The future? For these young entrepreneurs, the future is right now.

By **Kimiko Martinez**

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After years of traveling with racing teams, mechanics John Slater, 30, and Blu Lindgren, 32, now have the best of two worlds. Since starting Forward Fabrication Inc., a custom furniture design and fabrication business that uses composites like carbon fiber and Kevlar to build their modern home furnishings, the duo now dabbles in the racing world while owning their own business.

So how often do you still go out and help racing teams?

Lindgren: We try to do it about once per month.

Slater: We fly in for the weekend and help out our friends.

It used to be that if a car crashed you'd think, "Great, there goes the next two weeks." But now it's like, "Sorry, guys, see you later." We get to take the best parts of racing and leave out the bad.

We're never going to let it interfere with the growth of our business. When I was in Las Vegas and L.A., I handed out tons of cards. We get to travel on someone else's dime and use that time to advertise and market ourselves, tell people what we're up to now. If we had to spend money to do that ourselves... there's just no way we could do it.

It's things like marketing and bookkeeping that really seem to kick new business owners' butts. Do you have any advice for people looking to start their own business?

Lindgren: Do a lot of research before you start. Be prepared for the business side of how to run everything. And save or raise a



Utter fabrication: John Slater, 30, and Blu Lindgren, 32, both recently quit their jobs as mechanics in the racing industry to start their own business, Forward Fabrication, which manufactures and sells custom fabricated furniture and architectural elements. Here they work in the office/showroom of their Northside shop.

lot of money.

Slater: Know what you're getting into, too. And make sure it's something you believe in. I can see now why people have to hire office staff. Blu or I could spend all day working on accounting, going through e-mails, returning phone calls, following up with clients.

We really have done everything conservatively. But we knew for the last year of employ-



Men of steel: This bar, which Forward Fabrication made for a real estate investor in Las Vegas, is made from stainless steel with a carbon fiber top.

Pumped: This toilet paper holder in the Forward Fabrication office was made from an old gas pump nozzle.



Submitted photos

ment that we were going to start this, so we could build it up and feel strong enough to leave. We would come here at night after work. It felt like we were working two full-time jobs for a year. And even now, it feels like we're working all the time.

It was nice to have that safety net of having a paycheck still coming in. And it sort of helps train you for working around the clock.

Since you spend so much time together, you two must be pretty close.

Slater: I've quickly learned to refer to Blu as my business partner. I used to say, "me and my partner Blu," but people were getting the wrong idea.

What's been the best part of starting your own company?

Lindgren: We get to set our own schedule — we can take a week

off to go do a race and work around it.

Slater: The whole reason we wanted to do something else is because of the potential to take care of ourselves in the future. If you're investing in yourself, your own property, you have more control over that. We don't want to be relying on someone else for our success and future.

It's amazing what a difference it makes to do something that

you're passionate about — to come in and do something that you really love to do. It frees you up mentally and emotionally. I'm a much nicer person now, aren't I?

Lindgren: Oh, yeah.

Slater: I don't yell nearly as much as I used to. Plus, when you have a wife, it's nice to have the flexibility to spend time with her.

OK, so what exactly are you guys doing now?

Slater: I just got back from installing a bar in Las Vegas. But I've always been interested in furniture, modern furniture especially. I remember being dragged around to antique shows with my parents when I was younger. There is nothing being made today that's going to be an antique or even noteworthy 50 or 100 years from now.

We build things you can't purchase. Customers will come to us when they find something they like but they want it a different size or say, "This table would be great, but with a granite top."

To me, it's an opportunity to have the furniture you want exactly how you want it. We're building a desk for a client — he and his wife are both accountants and sit behind their desks all day. It's Brazilian cherry and stainless



Fired up: Blu Lindgren welds together a small architectural piece for Forward Fabrication.

steel and they'll say, "It would be nice to have a drawer here," and I'll say, "Well then, we'll try to put one there."

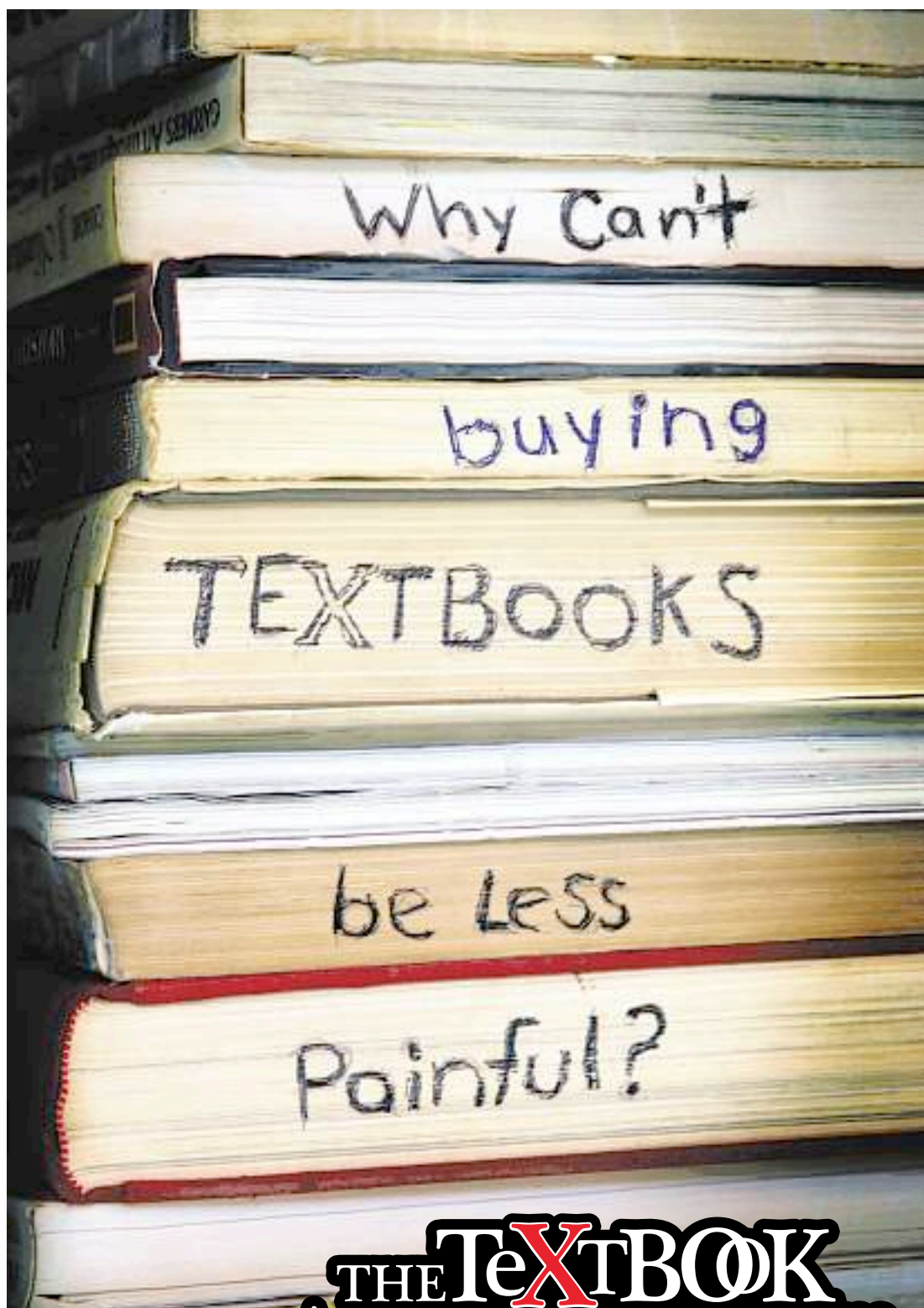
It's very high-end stuff for discerning people. We're probably overdoing everything, but that really is our premise. Maybe only 10 percent of people will recognize the details, but that's OK.

If you're using carbon fiber and Kevlar, it's obviously something I could never afford.

Slater: The price points are high because we're not interested in doing inexpensive things. We want to be known for doing high-quality pieces.



Room on fire: Inspired by their shared love of 1950s-era hot rods, designers John Slater and Blu Lindgren of Forward Fabrication used various car parts to design and decorate their office lavatory.



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