

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

'Archi-Technical-Artist' invents a new clothespin



Robin Clifford Wood | BDN

Charley Earley holding three of his new smart clips, for clotheslines and more. *Buy Photo*

By [Robin Clifford Wood](#), Special to the BDN

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There are two stories in today's column. One recounts the life of a man, the other the life of an idea. Both stories begin in Virginia, travel overseas for 20 years and end up back here in Maine.

In a voice lightly accented with a Virginian drawl, Charley Earley talked about being a 6-year-old who liked to take flashlights and ballpoint pens apart.

"Occasionally I'd even put them back together," he said with a smile.

Charley was fascinated by the way things work. That same fascination, combined with an innovative streak, convinced him once he was grown that he wanted to go to "this wild architecture school" at Virginia Tech.

Charley is highly intelligent, and also highly unconventional.

“If I try to think like other people, I don’t feel well,” he said.

Even his entry into the world of architecture was unusual: “I got into architecture school on a 3-by-5 card.”

Initially, Charley was accepted into Virginia Tech’s art school, but not into the architecture program. He poured all of his creative energy into one of his early assignments, “a box reconfiguration,” which earned him a B-plus. Disappointed by his teacher’s assessment, he brought the cardboard creation over to the architecture building for a second opinion.

“What do you want?” asked the professor, intrigued by Charley’s design.

“I want to be an architect.”

The professor handed Charley an index card and asked him to write down his name and address.

Over Christmas vacation, a letter arrived inviting Charley to enter the 5-year architecture program.

It was probably here, in this free-thinking school that asked students questions such as, “what is red?” that Charley’s inventive ideas began to germinate.

“For me, architecture is an energy, driven by the user’s need. It’s not just bricks and mortar.”

After graduation, through a family connection, Charley found work with an architect in Europe.

Basel, Switzerland became home base for the next two decades. He married a Swiss woman, had four children and commuted to work on architectural design projects all over the globe.

For a while, Charley also worked for his father-in-law, Dr. Hermann Keck, a chemist and inventor who created specialty plastic clips for laboratories. Part of Charley’s job involved working on patents for Keck’s inventions. Keck told Charley something that stuck with him forever: “Find something everyone uses, work hard and sincerely improve upon it, then maybe you will be on to something better.”

During that time, in 1997, Charley first began his work on “EKLIPSE,” a new and improved version of a clothespin. It was many years before Charley returned to the work of fine-tuning his design idea into physical form.

In 2000, the Swiss architecture market was down, the U.S. market was up, and the Earley family decided to move to the states. Charley found a job in Bangor, a home for his family in Winterport, and started anew.

Having been abroad for 20 years, Charley brought a unique style to his work in this country, but he had never taken the U.S. licensing exam. He may have lacked the “architect” title, but his expertise and experience earned him leadership roles as project manager-senior designer for several educational building projects around Maine. He calls himself an “Archi-Technical Artist.”

Meanwhile, his EKLIPSE idea was simmering in the background.

About a year ago, facing artistic and philosophical differences in his workplace, Charley and his firm parted ways. In the poor economic climate of the time, Charley was concerned about finding work without a license.

His worries were unfounded — a Bucksport firm soon welcomed him to their team. Even better, during his period of transition Charley found time to finish the development of EKLIPSE.

“I’ve never been an entrepreneur,” Charley said, but he has become one for the first time, inspired by his revolutionary invention and some wonderful mentors. Professional engineer John Belding and the Advanced

Manufacturing Center at the University of Maine helped with computer modeling, prototypes, raw material testing and more. Hal Meyers of Versatile Visions in Bangor helped with imaging and packaging.

Charley is thrilled to see EKLIPSE — U.S. and foreign patents pending — become a reality. This modern, “smart” clothespin, made in the U.S., is one-piece, rot-proof, rust-proof and never has to be squeezed. Its functionality also goes beyond the clothesline: chip clip, photo stand, card holder... it will surely find many more as-yet-undiscovered uses (“and they make great stocking stuffers!” said Charley).

Charley has poured his heart and soul into this entrepreneurial venture. He hopes to see it start slowly and grow, but his sense of fulfillment in this project is not dependent on EKLIPSE’s financial success. Charley respects spreadsheets, but he is fundamentally a man of ideas and principles.

“My father used to say to me, ‘Go where you want to go, work hard, and let the rest come to you.’ I am confident that my design career and EKLIPSE both represent that philosophy.”

EKLIPSE is now available in assorted colors, by the baker’s dozen, for under \$10 plus tax/shipping. Bulk wholesale preparations are under way. To learn more about EKLIPSE or place an order, contact Charley at info@eklipsellc.com. Check it out at eklipsellc.com.

Robin Clifford Wood welcomes feedback and suggestions at robin.everyday@gmail.com.

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