



Cowhide Chair Maker

Joe Soileau lives in Washington, Louisiana with his wife, Mary. His main occupation is making cowhide chairs and related cowhide items. He self-identifies as Cajun, and he speaks French.

Before 1990, Joe had never made a cowhide chair. His father was the primary artist of the craft. In 1986, his father demonstrated at the Louisiana Folklife Festival in Baton Rouge. At the festival his father had so many requests to cover chairs that he decided to start a small business. Mr. Soileau found a chair maker and started making and selling chairs with cowhide seats.

Joe's father died in September of 1990. Although he had never covered a chair, he had watched his father and mentally took note of the craft. Two weeks after his father's death, Joe had to cover his first chair. He has continued to keep a part of his father alive with his art. Mr. Joe Soileau expanded his father's business by adding different merchandise to the store. They make chairs, rockers, cowhide rugs, cowhide drums, bull whips, stools, and tables.

Mr. Soileau works with cowhide everyday in the family store, and he also demonstrates at festivals. He uses water, knives, punches, and cowhide mauls to make his numerous styles of furniture and rugs.

Joe has demonstrated and exhibited at the Louisiana Folklife Festival and the New Orleans Jazz Festival each year since 1995.