

Maple Landmark

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Release at Will

Reinventing the Rattle

How a Vermont Company Pushed A Classic into the 21st Century

MIDDLEBURY, Vt. – Reimagining a centuries-old product takes careful consideration, especially if that product is for children. Recently, the product development team Maple Landmark felt this burden as they took on a long-untouched product line: baby rattles. The culmination was a unique collection that they later termed Cheri Rattles, and with good reason.

The Cheri Rattles' simple design belies a complex development process. The large oval shape, the size of the holes, even the direction of the wood grain has been thought out. Maple Landmark's internal product tester Scott Joyal explains, "these rattles need to meet rigorous federal safety standards, so we start with a concept, test it internally, and continue iterating until all benchmarks are achieved." Joyal acknowledges that third-party testing is expensive and can be a financial strain on a small business, such as Maple Landmark. To help control those costs, the company starts with in-house testing, one of many functions to his job. For the Cheri Rattles, this meant a series of drop tests from different heights. Anything as small as a hairline fracture was considered a failure and the lessons learned were turned into the next modification. After eight rounds, the product evolved into a design maximizing the natural wood grain characteristics for strength. "The result passed our most ridiculous internal tests, which," Joyal says, "gave us the assurance we needed to confidently pass the necessary third-party tests and safely release the product to customers."

Ultimately, the goal is to have a safe, fun product for kids. The rattles joined the Schoolhouse Naturals line, a set of products with no inks or finishes, introduced by Maple Landmark after the lead paint scares in 2007 when parents became more keenly aware of toy safety. "Though all of our finishes easily pass testing, we want to give concerned parents peace of mind that their child will be safe with our product," says Barbara Rainville, product development team member and finish room worker, "there is nothing inherently wrong with our finishes, but some parents simply prefer none and we understand that."

Oh, and the wood? It's cherry! "The type of wood was discussed at length and we eventually settled on cherry," states John Gallagher, Maple Landmark's sales manager, "it's deep wooden tones created a beautiful and attractive rattle that we thought would be fun and appealing. That, of course, is also how the Cheri Rattles were named."

The end result? A smooth hollowed wooden ellipse with two handles, one on each long side, which can be used to tether the rattle to a stroller or carrier. Parents can choose between jingle bells, a rainmaker, spinning beads, and a sliding smiley face. Each option was designed to be noisy enough to engage a newborn but subdued enough to spare the ears of their parents.

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With a thoughtful team behind the design and a rattle that is unquestionably safe for little hands, the team at Maple Landmark has brought the humble rattle into the new millennium, one piece of wood at a time.

About Maple Landmark

Maple Landmark is a wooden products manufacturer located in Middlebury, Vermont. Since 1979, the 40 woodworkers at Maple Landmark have been crafting a wide array of award-winning toys, games, and gifts from local and sustainable wood. Maple Landmark uses a variety of manufacturing systems, innovative product design, and modern technology integrated with classic woodworking to remain competitive in a crowded industry that faces significant international trade pressures. Distributing products across the United States and sometimes internationally, Maple Landmark is recognized as a standard for quality wooden products in an increasingly tech-driven world.

For more information on Maple Landmark, please visit the website at www.maplelandmark.com.

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