

Your Home

Aberrations create unique furniture

Designer makes wood pieces from variety of burls

Those salvaged from ground are ‘more interesting’

Eight years ago John Koletic changed his life when he parlayed his love of working with wood and his skill as a precision instrument technician into a new career.

The result: a thriving furniture business.

At his Campbellville studio, Koletic specializes in custom-made furniture featuring a variety of wood burls – maple, redwood, walnut, rosewood

Koletic both designs and makes each piece of furniture himself. The majority of his orders are for tables.

After each burl tabletop is treated with tung oil and finished with lacquer, wax or oil, Koletic marries it to a decorative frame made of hand-forged wrought iron or hand-cut steel.

Because burls are the creation of Mother Nature, each piece of wood that Koletic handles is unique.

A burl is an aberration that grows like a tumour on a tree or its root. No one really knows what stimulates its production. It may be the result of a tree healing an old scar, or stress, or insect damage.

What is known is that, for centuries, burl wood has been prized by makers of fine furniture because of its unique and often fanciful grains. In the Canadian context, burls are most commonly seen in pioneer butter bowls or as veneer on the dashboards of luxury cars.

“Burls salvaged from the ground are harder and more interesting,” Koletic says. “Burls come in all shapes, from a ball to elongated like a cigar and they can be as big as a car or as small as a fist.”

Koletic always has extensive stock of salvaged burl that’s air-dried and ready to be fashioned into furniture. Some 90 percent of his burls are Canadian, but he does keep an eye on the international market, hoping for unique pieces. Currently, he has a single bubinga burl (an African hardwood) big enough for a 14-foot conference table.

Buckeye, a Californian wood in the chestnut family, is particularly popular with customers, Koletic finds.

“The buckeye produces a root burl that is multi-coloured and resembles marble,” he says.

A key word when discussing burls is “salvaged,” Koletic says.

Most of Koletic's burls are salvaged from underground, often from the sites of old forest fires. He also buys vintage wood from estate sales and auctions.

Koletic is currently excited about a piece of 1,100-year-old redwood, cut in the 1930's that he acquired from an estate sale in British Columbia. He is busily turning this find into a mantel for a client.

While Koletic is a self-taught wood-worker, he learned metal-work from his father, a sheet-metal worker. He later honed his metalworking skills when he trained as an instrument maker. Koletic worked at Nortel for several years in his trade, but was laid off in the early '90s. This spurred him on to try his luck at making his living as a woodworker.

Koletic started with giftware – clocks, boxes, bowls, candleholders and vases – before branching out into building furniture.

“I started eight years ago with \$30 clocks. Now I'm making \$30,000 (dining) tables.”

Koletic believes one reason for the success of burl furniture is the “resurgence in an interest in natural materials.” He also finds people are drawn to the contemporary, yet warm, look created by combining wood and metal.