

Designer puts new spin on old growth

By Brock Weir

When a black walnut tree, which stood proudly in northwest Aurora for well over a century, was beginning to feel the weight of its age, it was deemed a safety risk and put unceremoniously on the chopping block.

A chance encounter with a local artist gave the tree, however, a new lease on its afterlife, deflecting it from landfill or other less noble destinations.

Carpenter Steve Meschino of King's Cherrywood Studios saw an opportunity with the poor old tree, hauled off its remaining trunk and transformed it into a variety of rustic but modern wooden desks, tables, benches, magazine stands, and other accessories.

Meschino has always had a love of woodworking. As a senior VP for information systems for a call centre company, it was always a hobby. He found the people he came into contact with every day through this business had a similar creative streak, whether it was through visual art, music, or the written word.

To build upon his hobby, he built himself a wood shop, working on the odd piece here and there, but about six years ago he decided to get out of the rat race and focus on his passion.

(My work and my hobby) were both strangely very creative, said Meschino.

Evidently his reputation preceded him as when he decided to shift his full focus, he had already accumulated a number of logs from people in the general vicinity.

People who knew I built stuff with wood contacted me and I had to go pick them up, he said of his raw materials. It just sort of blossomed from there. It wasn't something I set out to do, but it just happened.

Although Cherrywood has branched out, tables are his primary focus. He sees the end result both as a utilitarian piece of furniture, but also a work of art that just happens to be functional. He doesn't see a design as either aesthetic or functional, but noted the two go hand-in-hand.

With the business going full steam ahead, he has three or four arborists in the York Region area in regular contact and he's often near the top of their call list if they have a really great piece of wood to cut down. It works out well for them too, as he is willing to come and help them get the job done. He puts in the gas and the elbow grease, they get some assistance with the removal, and the prize is beautiful old growth logs.

Cherrywood Studio is a truly local and green business. They use their own milling and drying equipment, which allows them to control and monitor the process, and they source only local materials, drying the wood in outdoor drying stacks, instead of transporting it to high temperature/high carbon footprint kilns. And when the build requires craftsman partners, Cherrywood calls upon local metalsmiths to fabricate their steel bases. The process is good for the environment, the local economy, and, ultimately, the finished product.

It's a process that is more fine art than factory. Each piece has its own story.

One recent example he sites is a homeowner looking to expand their property. An old tree stands in the way of the plans, but their new course of action is to remove the tree and incorporate the lumber into the new home as well as furniture.

From a sustainability standpoint, it is all about local sourcing, he said. We had a customer last year who wanted an outdoor table and asked if we would be interested in building in team. We don't deal with foreign hardwood, but I said we do have a beautiful local hardwood that is very sustainable and an excellent outdoor wood white oak.

We built her this lovely white oak table with a steel base for her garden, so you take that idea and people have this image in their mind of what an outdoor table is. You say it doesn't have to be imported from Africa, South America, or a rainforest somewhere. It can be a sustainable wood which is grown right here in southern Ontario and the customer feels so much better about using something that is local.

Cherrywood's design philosophy is to follow the source wood's natural lines and contours, with a particular focus on revealing each piece's individual grain and edge. Using both hand tools and the highest quality joining and machining technology, Cherrywood creates tables that are works of both art and nature contemporary hardwood furniture that highlights its organic origin.

Cherrywood Studio's contemporary tables are created for discriminating consumers who seek contemporary fine furniture that is sustainable in origin, individual in personality. The growing movement toward local and sustainable products makes their tables a preferred choice for those who want unique furniture that not only achieves the balance of form and function, but does so without creating imbalance in the environ