



waste not, want not

**A Northwest Furniture Company Turns Urban Trees into
Sophisticated Furniture for Everyday Use**

Written by Robyn Roehm Cannon
Photography by Hank Drew,
Sam Todd Dyess, John Granen



There's an old saying that "one man's trash is another man's treasure." When master craftsman Seth Meyer and furniture designer John Wells began their Seattle-based company dedicated to building heirloom-quality contemporary furniture out of fallen and reclaimed trees, they took those words to heart. Or to put their own spin on the adage: "Our highest goal is to make optimal use of local garbage." And they're doing an extraordinary job of it.

The pair launched Meyer Wells in 2006, after forming a professional friendship while working together during the early years of the rediscovered wood movement, with a goal of combining their mutual love of modern design, beautifully crafted furniture, and “an ecological ethic” for sourcing materials.

All of their wood comes from trees in the “urban forest” within a hundred-mile radius of Seattle that have been lost in a windstorm, or have to be removed because disease or size poses a hazard. Once they identify a tree that shows potential to be reborn as a lustrous live-edge dining table, console, end table, or chairs, they work with a certified arborist to carefully rescue the specimen and bring it to their log yard. There it is sawn into three-inch-thick slabs and sequentially numbered to be matched during furniture construction.

Next, the slabs are loaded onto a railroad car and travel to Tacoma, Washington, where a third generation sawyer first air-dries and then kiln-dries the timber, a process that can take months depending upon the moisture content in the wood. Finally, the stabilized wood is returned to Meyer Wells and waits its turn to be transformed into a project.

Meanwhile, their woodworking shop is stacked to the ceiling with enormous slabs from trees fifty to one hundred years old. The list of species is long and varied: cherry, alder, white oak, red oak, red elm, rock elm, Douglas fir, big leaf maple, black locust, birch, redwood, sycamore, madrona, and sequoia. On rare occasions, they will find black or English oak, which is highly prized.

Each piece of wood has its odd characteristics, and splits, knots, or irregular grain patterns are celebrated instead of being viewed as detractors. The result? No two pieces are alike: The soul and the history of the tree now become the soul and the story of the furniture.

Both partners bring diverse backgrounds to their collaboration. Wells made his first piece of traditional furniture—a mahogany Chippendale drop-front desk, with columns and beading—when he was a high school student in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. His piece was deemed so outstanding that it took top honors in a statewide competition. He later graduated from Rhode Island School of Design and went on to design furniture lines for companies including Crate and Barrel. Today, he collaborates with Northwest architects and interior designers to develop signature Meyer Wells furniture for both residential and commercial installations.

Meyer, a Seattle native, grew up with furniture design and fabrication discussions around his family’s kitchen table. His stepfather, Emmet Day, was a renowned Northwest fine-furniture craftsman and teacher who gave him a legacy of information and technique before his untimely death from cancer at forty, when Meyer was only twenty years old. “I often wonder what our relationship would be like today and if we’d be working together,” reflects Meyer, who started his career in the home-building trade. “Oddly, his passing created a space for me to pursue my path into custom furniture.”

Meyer’s role as a studio craftsman is hands-on from the start. He locates the trees and orchestrates their salvage, then directs engineering and fabrication with a team of five others, all the

way to the final coat of low-VOC finish. These super-durable stains and varnishes are made with a small fraction of the volatile organic compounds in traditional petroleum-based finishes and are in high demand by the design community and consumers.

“People often believe that they can only get something of exotic beauty from far-away lands,” says Wells. “But instead of buying wood from the rain forests, we find so much available right in our own community that can produce furniture of enduring quality and magnificent value.”

“Furniture made from urban trees celebrates our local culture,” says Meyer, adding with a grin, “and we think we’re very lucky to be making it. It’s like art class—every day!” ■



At Napa Valley’s newest destination hotel, the Bardessono, maintaining a low carbon footprint is taken very seriously. Sensitivity to the environment transcends all aspects of this \$60 million resort and spa, from its design, construction, and material selection to the organic manner in which the property is operated.

Local limestone from the 19th-century wine cellar on the original Bardessono family homestead was sliced into tile for the building’s exterior. Salvaged Monterey cypress was milled into siding, and Walnut trees at the end of their production life were milled into flooring. Redwood recycled from wine barrels was transformed into ceilings, and room dividers were created out of salvaged Eucalyptus trees.

After a luxurious in-suite massage for two and a soak in a private outdoor tub, pampered guests can nap on organic linen and terry fabrics, laundered with non-detergent cleansers.

Even the bedside tables are part of the Bardessono’s environmentally friendly interiors. Meyer Wells custom designed the Clerestory End Table of reclaimed fir, with a floating steel top, which is a great spot to put a glass of organic Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc before you turn out the lights.