

A 30-year fascination with wood

Hammond artist JR Moyer enjoys the yin and yang of working with wood

By DAN HAAG

When a sunset or a piece of glass or a landscape calls, artists answer. Sometimes they know why, other times it's an inexorable compulsion.

In the case of Hammond's JR Moyer, it's three decades' worth of a fascination with wood, its unique characteristics and its place in history.

Moyer's Hammond location provides much of the inspiration he finds in wood: He lives in a "fine old home" built in 1889, complete with attached workshop that is filled with a collection of wood found along the North Coast.

As with any burgeoning artist, Moyer drew upon childhood inspirations to find his current path, including a book of the works of Michelangelo given to him as a gift.

"It was a no-brainer," he says.

Moyer's early attempts were a stone bust, followed by ship carving and kite construction. Through trial-and-error, he quickly realized that his hands were more comfortable with heavier tools.

"When I try to draw or paint I am distracted by how unsteady my hands can be," he says. "The weight of a hammer or chisel eliminated that issue, and it has been wood working ever since."

Moyer holds a degree in marine biology, though he can't point to a specific moment he made the leap from science to art.

"Most kids my age grew up watching and wanting to be like Jacques Cousteau," he says. "I built things and worked with wood from childhood."

While doing his graduate work at the University of Washington, Moyer spent time in the San Juan Islands. This period cemented his love of the coastal Northwest.

When the university opted to close its labs, Moyer was faced with finding a new path. "Life just moved in another direction," he says.

Now, his body of work can be seen in galleries in Maryland, Oregon and Washington. His pieces have been featured in settings from restaurant entrances in Austin, Texas, to shopping malls in southern Maryland as well as in area magazines



JR Moyer's favorite large projects are rocking chairs, which often feature found wood. The Hammond woodworker says he is encouraged, supported and inspired by his wife, Kristy.



JR Moyer's wood shop is in Hammond.

highlighting local art and artists in and around the Oregon Coast. His commissioned works hang in the city counsel chambers of Cannon Beach, as well as in private collections across the country. Some of his work can be seen at Primary Elements Gallery in Cannon Beach.

Quite a different direction, indeed.

Moyer's shop — dubbed Hammerhead Woodworking — allows him to freely investigate his fascination with the many grains and textures of wood. He also enjoys the evolution of his style, an exploration of yin and yang.

"I hate to use a word as overworked as 'fusion,' but I really enjoy the accuracy you can achieve with modern tools," he



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Inspired by wood found on nearby beaches, JR Moyer often incorporates these highly figured pieces into new designs, such as this table.

says. "It requires you to be hyper focused, very alert. It is loud and dusty — 'yang' in a way. I spend almost an equal amount of time with chisel, spoke shave, hand rasp and sand paper. It is visceral and meditative, the 'yin' side."

Moyer began making reproductions of Victorian or Craftsman styles, and he learned a lot of joinery techniques from Stickley and Greene styles.

As he became more fascinated with the wood he found on nearby beaches, he began to incorporate these highly figured pieces into new designs, or create artwork with the figured wood alone.

As Moyer prepares to work on a piece, he usually heads to his shop with a rough idea and an even rougher sketch.

"To me, each piece in progress represents a free-flowing incarnation of the design process," Moyer says.

Moyer's favorite projects are both small and large.

When he needs "closure," he enjoys turning bowls on a lathe or making a lamp.

But nothing compares to the creation of rocking chairs.

"My new 'large' project favorite by a mile is making rocking chairs. It is pretty close to having everything," Moyer says. "You get to stand back and admire the beauty of the wood or design as in other wood art, but it is next level in that you move with it and so closely interact with it in ways other furniture cannot approach — very tactile."

Moyer also enjoys a multitude of local projects, from small homeowner redesigns and repairs to the Craftsman renovation in the Coast Guard area, which brought him back to the Stickley style. He was also part of the team that restored the Astoria Riverfront Trolley.

Now, as Moyer spends time in his shop, perched on the topmost corner of the coast, he reflects on what shaping wood has taught him. "The joys of a moment are balanced by more than a moment of humility as the limitations of technique or ability are revealed," he says.

For more information on JR Moyer's Hammerhead Woodworking, visit www.hammerheadwoodworking.com