

The Art of Wood

By Christina Crook

British Columbia is home to forty different species of native trees. Softwood trees are the predominant species in the forests of British Columbia, making this province the world's leading softwood producer, growing 34 per cent of the world's softwoods.

Western hemlock, western red cedar and Douglas fir come from the temperate rainforests along the Pacific Coast. Many pines and spruces come from the dry and cooler forests of the interior of British Columbia. A variety of construction and appearance grade wood products come from these productive and abundant forests. BC also has four predominant hardwood species: red alder, bigleaf maple, western white birch and trembling aspen, which are used for appearance and millworking applications.

Wood is a versatile medium which can be used to create everything from furniture to jewelry, sculpture to home décor, and everything in between: boxes, vases, clocks, toys and games. Wood is also a primary medium for First Nations artisans creating traditional masks, talking sticks, totem poles, and decoratively laden canoes.

The history of wood

Wood has been used for millennia for many purposes. One of its primary uses is as fuel. It is also used as for making artworks, furniture, tools, weapons, and as a construction material.

Wood has been an important construction material since humans began building shelters, houses and boats. Nearly all boats were made out of wood till the late 1800s, and wood remains in common use today in boat construction. New domestic housing in many parts of the world today is commonly of timber-framed construction. In buildings made of other materials, wood will still be found as a supporting material, especially in roof construction and interior doors and their frames and exterior cladding.

The appeal of wood

Simplicity, sustainability and natural beauty.

Purveyors of wood are drawn to the blend of natural ruggedness and contemporary style, and most artists create from sustainably harvested or recycled wood.

More artists are discovering the versatility of wood, enabling the creation of fine furniture, musical instruments, turnings, cabinetry, trim and finish carpentry, and decorative art.

The language of wood

With all forms of art there comes a new language and wood is no different:

A turning: A turning refers to a wooden object made on a lathe. The lathe spins the piece of wood while the artist cuts away excess wood with a series of tools. It is a precise art that can take many forms: bowls, vessels, or other sculptural forms.

Burls: Burls are the knotted pieces of wood, a particular type of imperfection which reduces the wood's strength. Burls are generally considered waste in the forest industry, but sought after by wood turners who can exploit the burl for artistic effect.

Lumber: Wood to be used for construction work is commonly known as *lumber* in North America. Elsewhere, *lumber* will usually refer to felled trees, and the word for sawn planks ready for use is *timber*.

Sustainability: Perhaps one of the greatest appeals of wood creations is their sustainability. Wood artisans often create from wood no one else wants, giving these gorgeous pieces new life.

Where to find it

BC's premier wood studio is located on Granville Island. **The Wood Co-op** boasts Canada's premiere selection of quality handcrafted contemporary design works in wood. The Gallery opened in 2000, showing the work of just 34 artisans. Today the Gallery features the work of over 150 of British Columbia's best woodworkers, earning a reputation as the definitive venue for heirloom quality wooden objects.

Other BC wood artists include the whimsical furniture of Judson Beaumont, the globe-trotting designs of Brent Comber, and Kay Miller's distinctive decorative works of art, and many more.