

“Exploding dressers,” “leather” couches that are wood —

WHAT'S NEXT?

Groundbreaking artist Judson Beaumont works outside the lines to explore all possibilities through his unique creations.

BY BRAD WALSETH



Furniture comes to life in an explosive manner with this custom piece of furniture by designer Judson Beaumont.

One never knows what Judson Beaumont will come up with next.

In his world, dressers sag as though they are melting, while others stand with hands on their hips like cartoon characters come to life.

One chest of drawers looks like a huge carrot, while others are cracked down the middle or even seem to explode into pieces. In this fantastic land of cartoon-world proportions and contortions, a child's bed could be a castle, a railroad train or even a mermaid's coral reef. In Beaumont's imagination, even the beloved family coffee table raises a leg on tradition.

Beaumont has startled and delighted the world for over twenty-five years with the furniture designs produced by his company — ironically-named Straight Line Designs Inc. The popularity of his work, especially with children, has led to several design projects for a church, two children's hospitals, a shopping center, Princeton University's Children's Library and even the Walt Disney Co.

Never content to rest on previous success, Beaumont is always looking at reinventing things. One recent project has been finding a way to utilize pine beetle wood. This wood, sometimes called denim pine for the blue stains left by the pine beetles that have infected Beaumont's native British Columbia forests, is generally considered to be valueless, but he found a way to use



Judson Beaumont's designs captivate both adults and children of all ages.



Where most people try to design good furniture, Beaumont here has designed a “bad table.”

it by “taking a bad thing and making something precious and unique out of it.”

What Beaumont did was build a rock tumbler out of a barrel lined with sandpaper in which he turns cut circles of the wood for several weeks. He then clear-coats them, making them as smooth and lined as river rocks. At a recent woodworking show, “Nobody could believe these weren’t real rocks,” he says. Plans are to use the “rocks” in wall murals, tile paneling and benches.

Nor are the river rocks the only recent brainstorm with which the artist has experimented. He recently obtained Spectratech’s colored MDF and challenged a friend with a CNC router to create 3-D patterns in the surface fabricating what appears to be a black leather, button-tufted couch. This piece of furniture looks so realistic that it caused a sensation at the recent New York woodworking show once people realized the cushion was actually wood. The whole point behind that piece, according to the artist, was to open up new possibilities. Future plans are to possibly do designs like leaves on headboards and elevator interiors.

“The fact that I went to art school and I didn’t go to woodworking school,” says Beaumont, “means I look at furniture as an avenue and a way to really push it.” His creativity often originates through sketches, and he bemoans the fact that many young people don’t even own a sketchbook. “To me, that has got to change, because the computer isn’t going to solve all your problems. Sometimes you’re going to have to get a pencil and figure things out,” he says, adding, “I’m constantly sketching.”

Beaumont has collected some of his sketches, along with stories and photos of his creations, into a newly published book called “What’s Next.” You can order a copy of Beaumont’s book and see more examples of his work at his Web site, www.straightlinedesigns.com.

So what’s next for Beaumont? Perhaps it can best be summed up by the Frank Lloyd Wright line quoted on the back cover of his book – “My favorite design is my next design.” ❀



This black “leather” bench is actually made out of colored MDF.



These “river rocks” are actually pieces of pine beetle wood that Beaumont has specially treated.