

The Return of Honest (and Beautiful) Wood Furniture

By: Sarah Medford

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CURVE APPEAL
Exploring the parameters of what wood can do has led designer Aaron Poritz of Brooklyn-based Poritz & Studio to play with traditional techniques such as tambour, a favorite of French and Danish craftsmen. To make it modern, he exposes the maple veneer slats as they turn corners. "Tambour is a way to show off what nature created," says Poritz. "Nature produces the most beautiful patterns, colors and textures."
Tambour Bar, by Aaron Poritz.

DOUBLE FEATURE

The frames and wheels of Baltic birch plywood provide all the surface decoration needed in this double-cylinder chair (opposite) by Shika Okuda, the Japanese-born, Los Angeles-based founder of Waka Waka studio. A favorite material of Alvar Aalto, Marcel Breuer and other modernist masters, birch plywood is notable for its strength and pliability—qualities that are critical to Okuda's experimentations. "Once you have a functioning design, you can create iterations and stories from there," says the designer, who has tried his hand at rocking and cantilevered versions of the chair.
Double Cylinder Chair, by Waka Waka.

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DOUBLE FEATURE

The flames and whorls of Baltic birch plywood provide all the surface decoration needed in this double-cylinder chair (opposite) by Shin Okuda, the Japanese-born, Los Angeles-based founder of Waka Waka studio. A favorite material of Alvar Aalto, Marcel Breuer and other modernist masters, birch plywood is notable for its strength and pliability—qualities that are critical to Okuda’s experimentations. “Once you have a functioning design, you can create iterations and stories from there,” says the designer, who has tried his hand at rocking and cantilevered versions of the chair. Double Cylinder Chair, by Waka Waka.



INTO THE WOOD

From birch plywood to solid mahogany,
wood in all its forms is inspiring designers
to get creative with carpentry.

BY SARAH MEDFORD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUDREY CORREGAN
STYLING BY NOEMI DONAZZI



CLEAR CUT

What is a drawer, really, other than a sliding box? Such questions arise in the elemental furniture of Sarah Thompson and Stephen McCombe. Based in Long Island's dwindling farm country, they take inspiration from the local landscape— "the simplicity and reticence of it," Thompson says— and minimalist art. She edits their ideas on paper while McCombe heads into the workshop to turn out prototypes and, eventually, finished pieces— including a removable box/drawer for the table shown, *Cherry Frame Console Table and Drawer Unit*, by McCombe Thompson.



ROUND TRIP

Jeff Guze is an architectural go-to in the L.A. art world, building houses, studios, restaurants and sometimes furniture for members of the local creative community. This Douglas fir stool, designed for sculptor Thomas Houseago, was hand-carved, planed and sanded until it was "almost perfect, but full of imperfection," Guze says. He chose not to put a finish on it. "It's quite beautiful when you let it age on its own," he says. "I take that risk a lot of times. Don't touch it when you're eating pizza and you'll be fine." *Live Oak Stool, by Jeff Guze.*

ALL THE ANGLES

In 2011, after finding a knot-free pine board in a woodshop, Ben Bloomstela decided to build a chair using just the wood from that one piece for the Brooklyn art studio he shared with his friend Aaron Asja. Its rudimentary grace has set the stage for their ongoing work as Green River Project, the design practice they launched in 2012. Says Asja, "We don't use computer programs to imagine a shape—we draw by hand, then make a first version and go from there." He notes that their decision to create the piece in mahogany was less practical than metaphorical: "We wanted to find a wood that looked similar to Ben's rolling tobacco." *One African Mahogany Board Chair, Green River Project.*





HOME STRETCH

"Humans love wood—a lot of our work is trying to highlight that feeling," says designer Johannes Paawen, "trying to get the design out of the way to showcase the materials." German-born Paawen and his wife, Michaele Simmering, partners in L.A.-based Kalon, exploit the natural variations in domestic hardwoods like walnut, ash, maple and oak in search of universal, often multifunctional forms. To realize this bench with its gracefully curved legs, the couple turned to a Pennsylvania factory whose Mennonite woodworking traditions date back centuries. *Isometric Bench in White Oak, by Kalon. For details see Sources, page 130.*