

Artists take wood to creative extremes at the New Hope Arts Center's annual "Works in Wood" exhibit.

LIFE

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Infinite variety

By GWEN SHRIFT
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From the silkiest grain to the toughest bark, wood lends itself to a range of visual effects both monumental and delicate. The New Hope Arts Center's annual "Works in Wood" exhibit illustrates what artists make of these extremes, as well as the nuances between the poles.

If you go

"Works in Wood" is on view through Dec. 8 at the New Hope Arts Center, 2 Stockton Ave.

Gallery hours are noon to 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday.

Information: 215-862-9606; newhopearts.org.

Birdie Miller contributed the most-imposing piece in the exhibit — a dining table in reverse book-matched walnut planks. Miller's relevant, organic composition retains the knotholes and crevices on the tabletop, which is made of two roughly Y-shaped planks joined and set on



Dining table, walnut and tree branches, by Birdie Miller

smoothed, pegged tree branches.

Among the neater techniques on view belongs to Geoffrey Noden's folded plank coffee table, in which he joins boards at a 90-degree angle without sacrificing the flow of the grain. The joints of contrasting wood are a pleasing puzzle; you can't see how they are holding anything together, yet clearly they do.

One of the younger woodworkers, Owen Moon, devised "Table Two," a walnut board balanced between contrasting supports, a narrow sleeve of concrete on the one side and an airy modern metal leg on the other.

These large and heavy pieces contrast with a field of delicate compositions ruled by Michael Kehs, whose three works are small masterpieces of the carver's art.

Kehs is fascinated by living forms, especially bats, lizards and, as shown in one stunning work, extinct sea creatures.

The artist's "Thunder Moon 2" is quite unlike any table yet seen, composed as it is of baroque quilted maple inset with tiny black bats and a gleaming copper lunar disc. The effect is of a night sky overlaid with translucent clouds, mysterious and fluttering with movement.



"Thunder Moon 2," quilted maple, marado, red oak and copper, by Michael Kehs

Kehs also offers a relief sculpture, "Heat of the Sunset," depicting southwestern vessels surrounded by a frame across which small lizards scurry. "Trilobite Traces" goes in other directions, deep into time and the sea, and into the surface of a small, blue-green orb covered with the graceful, incised forms of antediluvian creatures — a marvel of technique, composition and insight.

Small scale defines the work of Miriam Carpenter, whose oak feathers seem to be carved with a chisel the size of an embroidery needle; and Konrad M. Richter's "Parasphere," which packs a world of minute wooden shapes into an orb the size of a softball, pinwheels at the poles and contrasting squares at the equator.



"Parasphere," holly and Philippine mahogany, by Konrad M. Richter

Andy DiPietro, whose turned vessels are perennial at this exhibit, brings a painterly quality to "Blue Planet," emphasizing the resemblance of wood grain to the currents and cloud streams of planet Earth.

Closer to ground surface, Bryan Richardson rims an applewood plate with sticks of yew, a smooth and rustic, rhythmic composition. Sinikka Laukkanen called upon a tree of mystical significance for her sculpture "Oak Man," though the material is basswood wrought into draping leaves and a stern face under a coronet of acorns.

"Works in Wood" is rooted in furniture, exhibiting fine designs, as well as pieces that could re-christen the show "Whimsies in Wood."

Among the former is Breahn Riley's golden bird's-eye maple jewelry hutch, a subtle construction that sets a small chest with doors on a table with drawers. The scale is refreshingly intimate, down to the gleaming black knobs on the doors and the ranks of tiny pegs for storing necklaces inside.

Who are you calling old? It's only a state of mind

— MYTHS OF — AGING

Sarah H. Kagan
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"I'm too old for that."

How many times do you think or hear this from others? We've all got ideas about what is appropriate as we get older. Everything from what to wear to health care seems fair game for the "I'm too old" judgment.

But stop before you think "I'm too old." Definitely stop before you say it. Lots of research tells us thinking "too old" and definitely talking about yourself as old is a bad idea. Believing you are too old for something actually may risk your health and your ability to do the things you want to do.

Meet my friend Judy. I am not going to tell you how old she is because age is relative. It doesn't matter how old you are — it's how old you THINK you are.

More and more, Judy talks about herself as "old" — "I'm so old" or "I am too old for..."

Fill in the blank and Judy thinks she is too old for it. Judy is worried her age means all sorts of things are not for her. She thinks she shouldn't or can't do so many things. I've lost count of what Judy has crossed off her list.

I am telling you now, Judy's at the wrong end of the stick. In fact, when she talks about herself as old, she may be creating more problems.

Age is a relative idea. Remember when you were in grade school and the kids in middle school seemed so old? When it comes to old age, that relative sense of young and old remains true. What is old in one situation is young in another.

For example, think about how long you can expect to live in different countries. In America, we don't have the longest average life expectancy in the world but we do pretty well. Our life expectancy is now almost 79 years. As a result, what is old in America is sort of young in places like Macau in China where average life expectancy is quite a bit longer at 84.5 years and older than in some Eastern European countries where life expectancy is only 75 years or so.

Myth: We know what old is.

Because your age by birthday doesn't have much to do with your health or well-being, trying to label what is old is not useful. Your health is much more about how your body and mind work and whether you have chronic problems like arthritis or cancer. But still we hear people talk about "old" all the time. People start calling themselves old pretty regularly when they think they've hit middle age. Might be 40, might be 50, but they say it all the same.

The use of the word "old" usually means something other than old. It is code for feelings, worries, fears about who we are and what we can do. Sometimes, it's a joke, too. But I find most people who say they are joking are at least half-serious when they say "too old."

Sometimes, saying "I'm so old" is a way of saying I'm tired, worn out, ready for a break. It's better and more straightforward to admit to being tired or in need of a rest. Old is not tired.

Making old code for tired builds that tiredness into something it is not. There's pressure these days to be busy and productive all the time. We miss the chance to realize the good that comes from taking care of ourselves and finding time for rest and for a change of pace — no matter what our age.

"Guardian Chair," oak, maple, lacewood, purple heart and mahogany, by Charles J. Adams