

## Local FlavorArtist

*“The sensibility that goes into crafting a piece of furniture by hand is what makes it different, more unique.”*



# Zen and the art of Woodworking

John Lesch fuses the modern with the natural for a distinctive take on wooden furniture.

In today's culture of fast food, mass production and multimedia cell phones, John Lesch is quite a naturalist. He designs and builds custom wood furniture in his workshop at the Soulard Fine Arts Building, a space he shares with a variety of artists – a metalsmith, ceramicist, framers, painters and photographers. But in this hub of creativity and man-made art, he thrives on the organic.

Growing up in a family of nine children, John admits that he wasn't pushed to creative endeavors until much later than most. While studying anthropology in college, he found himself drawn to the country surrounding the university more than the books. "I wasn't in the library five hours a day. I was out camping and hiking, enjoying nature," he says. After graduating, he found himself working as an instructor at a vocational rehabilitation facility where one of the skills he taught was woodworking. It was there that he found his niche.

"Most people learn through doing things," John says. He does not count himself as an exception. He and his wife, who is a painter, moved to a farmhouse in Bloomington, Indiana, where a wood craftsman had previously resided. There he set up a woodworking shop, learning through his artistry. However, John never forgot the natural origin of the materials he works with. "Wood is becoming a precious commodity," he says. "If it is available, I prefer to work with natural materials in their original form." It is the raw element of his designs that sets them apart from the work of his peers.

John's earlier work tended more toward the art deco period of furniture design. He cites designer George Nakashima as a favorite artist, and that influence has become clear in his more recent work. His furniture does not mimic the famous designer's, rather it uses the same combination of solid planks that highlight the contours of the tree joined with streamlined, clean sections of veneered wood. The look is one-half cozy log cabin, one-half chic urban loft – and overall, magnificent.

BY CORIE DUGAS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLIN  
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### united artists

John Lesch joins artists skilled in metal work to create some of the elements he incorporates into his designs. A painting, "Botanical Tulip Tree" by his wife, Betsy Morris, is displayed on a stand made by John.