

# ARTISANS OF THE VALLEY

## HAND CRAFTED CUSTOM WOODWORKING

### Green Notes



Artisans of the Valley is conscious about sustaining our environment. Our work requires a constant supply of lumber, finishing supplies, supporting materials, equipment, and obviously an operational shop environment. Survival in the new economy, and on earth, requires a new mindset that considers a variety of factors most of us are just beginning to understand let alone bear in mind when we are making business decisions.

The transition from a wasteful consumption mentality into a sustainable one is creating new opportunities, new products, new materials, and even presenting cost savings. Some things can be changed overnight, others take a few years to get a foothold and make a difference.

Artisans is actively adjusting our purchasing procedures, methods, and overall business practices towards achieving the goal of being entirely self-sufficient and environmentally sound. While we're not going to be able to go off-the-grid just yet, plans to relocate our shop to where this will be feasible are in their infancy.

In the meantime, we are actively implementing a variety of green business practices.

Artisans is currently ....

- Actively utilizing sustainable and locally harvested lumber in all possible circumstances.
- Offering our commissioned works in antique and reclaimed lumber.
- Restoring existing furniture for reuse and repurposing; this reduces landfill volume and the use of newly harvested lumber and the supporting processes.
- Using primarily VOC compliant finishing materials and supplies.
- Offering a water based "non-toxic" option for finishing on our custom commissions.
- Utilizing wood scraps for heating and cooking to reduce the use of fossil fuels.
- Composting sawdust byproducts to provide natural garden fertilizer for their properties and neighbors.
- Producing heirloom quality furniture, not the disposable stuff that's commercially available today.
- Reducing the use of paper by developing their new CD based portfolio and by publishing their quarterly newsletter as an online publication.
- Utilizing florescent high output/low wattage lighting in their shop spaces.
- Utilizing a diesel multi-purpose vehicle with a detachable cargo trailer to improve fuel economy, lower emissions, vehicle wear, and reduce maintenance when cargo space is not required.
- Utilizing our homes for our office and showroom space, we do not maintain separate single-purpose conditioned space for these purposes.
- Maintaining unconditioned storage space for non-temperature dependent supplies & materials.
- Utilizing their high efficiency rated heat and air conditioning systems upgraded in 2008.
- Using primarily solid wood products reducing the introduction of formaldehyde and other chemical contaminants into living spaces.
- Actively engaged in forestry management, wildlife habitat conservation, and open space initiatives.

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# Restoration is Green



The environment. Yeah, we had to hit this sooner or later as everyone and everything is on the green wagon. Before you flip the page and avoid yet more propaganda, take a moment as this concept really will save you money and reduce your consumer footprint. Besides, we do need clean air and water to live, so if you're thinking about sticking around a while, or leaving the planet so your children can survive, you'll have to prove your commitment by having your furniture restored!

You already know all about the millions of tons of trash, so we'll spare you the statistics. Just about every household has furniture sitting around in the basement, attic, garage, etc. that has seen better days. Many of these pieces belonged to a relative or friend and carry sentimental value, others you just found thinking someday you'd use. A decision point comes for every item: store it, restore it, or toss it? Antiques, well that's a no-brainer, they're valuable. It's the collectibles (circa 1840-1950) that fall into this situation.

Modern mass produced furniture; we'll be kind, it's disposable. Several factors raise the bar of collectables above their modern counterparts. That old piece in the garage may contain old growth hardwoods, boast superior construction, better design, and hand touched carving. Honduran mahogany, wild plank figured walnut, and European brown oak are among a few of the materials almost impossible to find in quality and quantity today, but they were common in turn of the century furniture. Putting any of these materials in a landfill or turning them to kindling is simply a sin.

Then come the financials. Shown above this secretary will run you under \$2,000 to restore. They can be found in poor-fair condition for around \$500-\$2,500 for a great starting point. Estimated restored value is \$6-8,000, or we'll gladly build you a new one for around \$15,000.

Now that the budget details are posted; back to saving the environment ...

- 1) Wood, as we all know comes from trees. Recycling furniture avoids cutting down more trees.
- 2) Glass and Hardware; The original knobs, pulls, hinges, door panels, and other components are usually in good shape requiring a simple cleaning to restore them. There is no need to toss out good hardware!
- 3) Production and transportation costs; New furniture requires production and drying of new lumber, new hardware, new glass, new finishes, etc. By restoring an existing piece you are saving the environmental impact and costs of producing and shipping new materials.

[Check out our Restoration Gallery!](#)



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What's the environmental impact of restoration? Skipping the fluff, let's get right to the chemicals. How will this toxic cocktail blend into the environment and trigger catastrophic loss of wildlife, a fish kill, and another huge chunk of the ice caps to melt? Well, it's really not that bad. Most of the products used in restoration today are VOC compliant, many are even biodegradable.

Our goal is to avoid the use of products that are toxic to us and to our surroundings. We are, when possible, using water based or aniline stains which avoid the volatile organic compounds famous for destroying ozone. We're a big proponent of shellac, which requires only denatured alcohol, not the drinking kind unfortunately. Our adhesives are all VOC compliant, either polyurethane or water based. Even some of the new tung oil blends are becoming more environmentally friendly.

That said, we're not going to apply acrylics to your precious antiques, it simply ruins them. We do have an array of oil based stains and finishes that adhere to NJ's VOC requirements. These are appropriate for antique restoration, and we'll stubbornly utilize these products to ensure the integrity of valuable pieces.

Removing the old finish (stripping) is handled using methylene chloride. This potent solvent does not "bioaccumulate." Within 130 days it breaks down through natural processes into carbon monoxide. It also boasts no acute toxicity to aquatic life, no known impact to land creatures, and given it's molecular characteristics, it never reaches the ozone layer.

Stop and think before you cast aside your family's estates. Consider shopping for bargains at yard sales & reclamation shops. Furnishing your home with restored furniture can provide a cost effective and environmentally sound decorating plan, not to mention satisfaction and sentimental value. The moral of this story is not only that Eric learned to change colors in Photoshop, that furniture restoration really is green!

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### Green-sawing



When we start discussions about the environment the topics often include wildlife habitat, hunting, fishing, and preservation of open space. Everyone is always quick to have an opinion, but most people unfortunately end their efforts with the exercise of their vocal cords. What we'd really like to know is ... "How are you part of the solution?"

Anyone can raise their hand and say they care, but you need to actually be part of the solution, actually implement conservation and preservation efforts instead of just supporting them as abstract concepts. [Eric Saperstein, Artisans' Master Craftsman](#) (shown left) is a member of [Clover Rod & Gun Club](#) of Hunterdon County, NJ. Clover is actively engaged in a variety of state and federal programs including forestry management, wildlife habitat preservation, and grasslands preservation.

The club owns approximately 250 acres, and leases about another 200, carrying the responsibility for maintaining most of the state and federal requirements placed on these properties to sustain them as wildlife habitats. Every year our forestry specialists visit the property and provide recommendations for management. These plans often include selective cutting, a process that requires removal of overgrowth. Mature trees reaching the end of their lifespan, in turn, are harvested releasing resources such as sunlight and soil nutrients to younger trees. We also remove select trees concentrated in close proximity with each other, leaving the healthiest intact, to increase the chances of younger trees reaching maturity.

The wood harvest is taken for firewood, lumber, and rustic cedar fence posts. The treetops and braches are placed in brush piles to create habitat for birds, rabbits, and a host of other creatures. Areas that are reclaimed from first growth forest and returned to farmland are planted with a variety of grasses and clover that provide for wildlife food and habitat. We maintain our ponds to provide a year round water source for all the wildlife on the property, as well as for fishing & recreation areas.

Clover is part of NJ's "Switch grass" program, which is investigating the growth of this sugar rich grass as an alternative raw material for the production of ethanol. Grass, unlike corn, continues to grow after each cutting and the entire harvested section of the plant contains the raw sugars required for the fermentation of ethanol. Unlike corn ethanol, the production of alcohol from switch grass does not disrupt our food supply.

Clover provides habitat for rabbits, deer, fox, coyotes, raccoons, squirrels, pheasants, turkeys, wood ducks, and many others species of migratory birds. The management and carefully planned harvest of wildlife and plant life leads to a healthy balanced population of all species. We work closely with the [NJ Division of Fish & Game](#), [NJ Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs](#), foresters, biologists, and others specialists as required to develop and implement our land and wildlife management plans.

If you hug a tree in the woods does it (do you) feel any better? It takes more than just believing in something to make it a reality. So don't freak out when you see a chainsaw, because hugging a tree isn't always the best thing for the environment! Even if you don't know how to run a chainsaw, you don't own a tractor, and farming isn't your best skill, there are plenty of things you can do to give a hand to projects in your area. Check with your local parks service and state wildlife resources to find out what you can do!



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### SUSTAINABLE FURNITURE REQUIRES SUSTAINABLE LUMBER

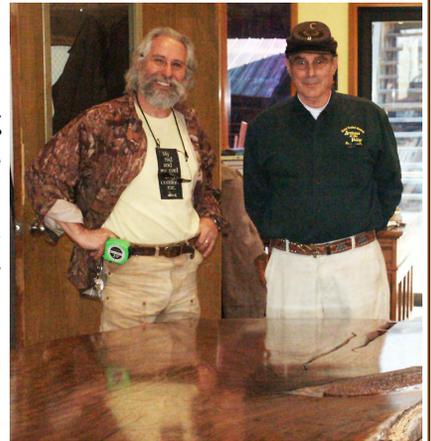
Green is still the in-thing, even after a whole three months since our last issue. All kidding aside, our global natural resources are stretched beyond their limits. In our last issue we discussed furniture restoration as a green alternative to replacing your existing furniture. We discussed restoration procedures using VOC compliant chemicals while reducing reusable materials venturing off to the landfill. We also commented on restoration reducing the need for new raw materials and all the associated production and transportation resources involved.

So what happens when there's nothing to restore? This time we're going with the assumption that restoration is not an option, a new piece of furniture is required. Well, there is absolutely no need to feel bad! Just because you commission something is made new doesn't mean you're suddenly an environmental terrorist! There are a variety of options that allow us to provide our clients with new environmentally sound furniture and artistic carvings.

From our perspective, sustainable forestry practices ensure that our business has a future. It is our responsibility as craftsmen to not only pass on our skills but leave behind a planet where our apprentices can sustain their. Artisans is striving to ensure that all our lumber suppliers purchase from sustainable sources. Our goal is that the tree supplies the materials for your project is replaced with a new tree through select cutting and replanting under the close supervision of forestry management specialists or the tree comes from a local harvest where the cutting was necessary and imminent.

Custom commissions and antique restorations require specialized materials. Our search efforts are mitigated by our relationships with an assortment of contacts who can assist in ensuring we get what our clients need. With over 30 years in the lumber business, [Talarico Hardwoods](#) is among our armada. Talarico is known for milling the highest quality, and best selection of Old-Growth Quartered White Oak you can find. They boast a consistent inventory of English and Scottish brown oak, curly walnut, and burl sycamore. Based in rural Mohnton, PA the Talarico family's appreciation for natural beauty and mission-style furniture drives their acquisition of these hard-to-find, big, old-growth logs while inspiring their mill to produce the highest quality lumber.

Sam Talarico is passing the business to his son Clint, along with an appreciation for our environment and a real world knowledge of conservation and sustainable forestry practices. Their inventory is purchased from reputable loggers and log merchants including FSC & PEFC certified lumber, and Pfalz Forest Oak logs which originate out of Enduring/Protected forest culture areas. They have a knack for finding select cuts from private lands, estates, and urban locations for both domestic and European logs.



Sam Talarico & Stan Saperstein

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### DOWN WITH PLYWOOD!



Artisans craftsmen are artists, using the medium of wood to produce functional heirloom furniture. Going forward we plan to work in solid wood as much as possible. Unless it's absolutely necessary and assuming we can find laminates that meet our quality requirements, we'll be avoiding plywood.

I'm sure you've all heard the propaganda about plywood being the environmentally sound way of the future. Ultimately, this is true in many circumstances. We won't argue the merits of flake board for siding and roofing substrates. We're all for MDF, high density foam, even recycled plastic composites for commercial signs and outdoor furniture.

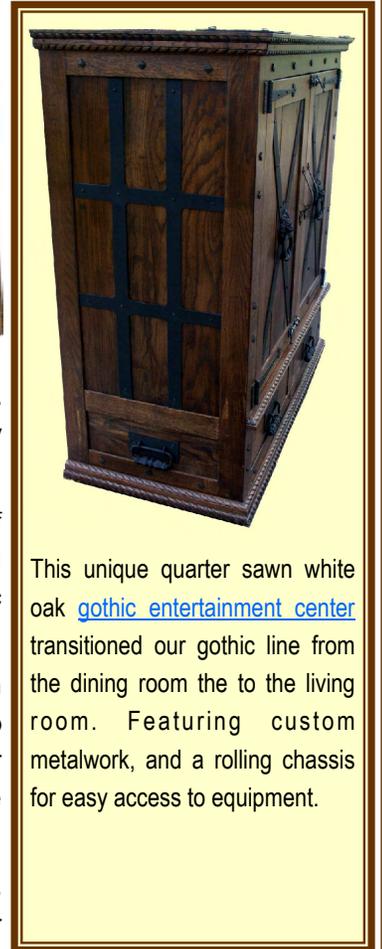
We've built countless projects using furniture grade plywood over the years, always seeking high quality hardwood veneers. Our preference is the old fashioned stuff, ranging from an 1/16th to 1/8th inch thick layer of solid wood over a laminated substrate or lumber core. This allows for proper finish preparation, and the material accepts a penetrating stain with little variation from the solid wood frames and moldings.

Our plywood gripes originate with the veneer thickness decreasing as cutting technology advances. This industry has 2,000 years of experience. Now, with computer aided rotary cutters, veneer thicknesses range between 1/40th and 1/90th of an inch. In addition, the interiors degraded from fifteen dense layers of densely compressed opposing grain materials to seven low density layers. All this "advancement" results in lower overall quality.

We're not going to pull any punches; modern plywood is just plain garbage. We will not produce any pieces using this truly inferior product. Regardless of whatever benefits may be found in extending the use of trees into more sheets, these materials splinter, split, and delaminate in a light breeze. Veneer this thin dilutes the raw material resulting in disposable furniture and negating any environmental benefit of overextending the wood.

Further points against modern plywood are qualities that result in over penetration and "blotching" when traditional finishing methods are applied. Not to mention there's little to no chance of sanding without burning through the decorative veneer and exposing the substrate. Our requirements are materials that will sustain generations of use and abuse for heirloom quality furniture, so ... starting in 2009 we'll be turning down commissions that specify the use of modern inferior plywood.

Whenever large visible surfaces are required for armories, entertainment centers, or other applications we will employ 1/2" solid materials as panels and limit the use of plywood to internal components only. One of our 2005 Portfolio pieces is a perfect illustration of this technique. This is primarily a solid wood piece, including the frames, moldings, and panels. Oak plywood is strategically employed only for the internal shelves, top, drawer bottoms, and the base of the unit. These are areas not on open display. We will only use plywood meeting our veneer thickness requirements; assuming we can find adequate supplies.



This unique quarter sawn white oak [gothic entertainment center](#) transitioned our gothic line from the dining room the to the living room. Featuring custom metalwork, and a rolling chassis for easy access to equipment.

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### Reducing your Trash Output – Recycling & Reduced Consumption

- Stop using disposable cups – carry a refillable mug or cup to use in your home, car, and office.
- Bulk purchasing reduces packaging requirements, trips to the store, and saves money!
- Buy products that will last; make durability, not price, your primary decision-making factor.
- Instead of buying new toys or tools, try sharing with friends and family. Kids outgrow toys quickly!
- Re-upholster worn out furniture instead of buying new - often the frame will far outlast the upholstery.
- Buy products made from recycled materials whenever possible. Paper products, plastics, glass, and metal products can all be recycled; products made from recycled resources often cost less!
- Support manufacturers that are reducing their packaging materials.
- Look into repairing before you throw it away and buy something new. Minor repairs to furniture, electronics, and other household goods can be completed for less money than you think.
- Look for a good quality item to reuse instead of always buying new; quality furniture is a great example that can be found at estate sales, garage sales, and flea markets at a bargain price and then refinished to be like new.
- Try giving an item “new life” by using it in an innovative way such as peanut butter jars for storing nuts and bolts or comic strips or colorful paper for gift wrap.
- Send e-cards not paper cards. The thought is what's important, not the material. If you add up the cost over a year's celebrations it really does make a difference.
- Use rechargeable batteries instead of disposables.
- Reuse plastic bags; they are useful for lunches, general storage, & trash.
- Buy your fruit and vegetables from local markets or grocers. Support your local Farmer's Market if you have one – you'll be amazed how good the fresh food is!
- Think before you print! How many times have you printed something and not referred to it again? If you do print, use both sides of the paper;
- Refill your ink and toner cartridges. We'll be slightly blunt here toner cartridges “claim” they run out long before they actually do. We often print 1,000 (YES one-thousand) pages past the printer's out of toner indicator.
- Use your local library rather than buying books.
- Instead of disposable goods, give movie or concert tickets as presents.
- Pack a litterless lunch, by using reusable containers and real silverware instead of disposable.
- Donate unused clothes or outgrown clothing instead of throwing it out; if it's too far gone turn it into rags for other uses around the house. Cloth rags reduce the use of paper.
- Convert your paper materials into electronic media; if you're going to put out marketing materials or publications distribute them online or on CD-ROM. This gives far more content space, provides for interaction, and drastically reduces the use of paper, printing costs, and shipping costs.

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[Artisans of the Valley](#) offers museum quality period reproductions, original designs by commission, and antique restoration/conservation services, hand carving, modern furniture refinishing, onsite furniture repair, hand made walking sticks, and educational programs. Our website is now over 250 pages, including galleries, feature articles, and educational sections, company background, and our new adventure album section. We extend an open invitation to explore our site, and contact us directly with any inquiries or questions you may have.

Eric M. Saperstein is Master of Artisans, Owner, Webmaster, Editor, Bookkeeper, Buyer, Office Manager, Legal Pit-bull, and he's in charge of vacuuming the shop: [eric@artisansofthevalley.com](mailto:eric@artisansofthevalley.com)



Theresa Tonte is the Owner of Smooth Finish by Artisans of the Valley. Teri provides onsite touchup & repair services for residential, corporate, and institutional clients as well as serving to fill a variety of roles in the shop including referee: [terri@artisansofthevalley.com](mailto:terri@artisansofthevalley.com)

Stanley D. Saperstein, Master Craftsmen, Author, & Historian founded Artisans of the Valley in 1973. Stanley offers historic presentations, impressions, and various lecture series ranging from Civil and Revolutionary War, American Folk Art, and Interactive Role Play of Characters ... sometimes trying to reenact American Chopper episodes in the shop: [woodcarver@artisansofthevalley.com](mailto:woodcarver@artisansofthevalley.com)



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