

PLUS AN ARTIST'S GARDEN & A CENTURY-OLD KIRKWOOD HOUSE

# AT HOME StLouis



JUL/AUG 2010 \$4.99  
DISPLAY UNTIL AUG 31, 2010





# Forest for the Trees

FINE WOODWORKER DAVID STINE RECYCLES DEAD AND DYING TREES INTO ASTONISHING FURNITURE.

The emerald ash borer's as pretty as it sounds—it looks like it rolled in peacock glitter for a night out at the insect disco—but its larvae burrow under bark, eating phloem and cutting the tree off from water and nutrients. This glittering insect killed every ash tree on David Stine's family property in Dow, Ill., where he harvests his wood.

"It goes in and leaves little D-shaped holes," he says, "which are kind of cool, but then these other bugs get under the bark and tunnel there, and they make these unbelievably complex patterns. If you peel the bark off, it looks like hieroglyphics, or Braille. I always hide it, but when people find it, they really respond to it. It's like a special present for people who take the time to inspect the piece."

Though he was surely sad to see those ash trees perish, Mr. Stine has been making good use of them; as a full-time woodworker, he never cuts down a healthy tree. Instead, he makes use of what presents itself, in order to have the lightest environmental impact possible.

"My main focus is passing on the woods to my son—and his generation—in as good

or better shape than when I got them," he says. "So I take the big, dead stuff, the trees that have been blown over by storms, dead and dying trees, and invasive species."

That doesn't always look like what you'd expect. Though the Jackson table's surface is clearly identifiable as "tree" (it's a cross-section of polished sycamore), the base, made from black walnut, is a cube. The Amagansett Slab coffee table's top is organically curvy, with knotholes and wood grain, but the sled base is pure Modernism.

"My wife and I went down to the [Kemper Art] Museum to see the Eero Saarinen retrospective," Mr. Stine says, of the table's base. "He built a hockey arena for the Olympics, and he had these huge hockey sticks up in the air, with suspending cables, and the room was suspended from that. I thought that was really cool. And you can see the hockey-stick influence in that base."

Combining high design with rough-hewn slabs and rounds that retain a whiff of the forest has earned Mr. Stine some impressive



fans, including Gordon and Carole Segal, owners of Crate & Barrel, and architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen. Recently, Robert and Mary Richardson Kennedy integrated Mr. Stine's sustainable furniture into their 1920s Colonial farmhouse, which they rebuilt to LEED Gold standards after it was nearly destroyed by flooding and black mold. Though the Kennedys chose the easy-to-replicate Wave Bench, which is made of small, interlocking pieces of black walnut and white oak, most of Mr. Stine's work is one-of-a-kind, since he has no control over what he'll find in the forest.

"That presents a lot of challenges, but I'm not bounded by standard designs and templates," Mr. Stine says. "So I go wherever the tree takes me." —STEFENE RUSSELL



DAVID STINE'S WORK IS AVAILABLE LOCALLY AT OPEN DOOR GALLERY, 3100 SUTTON, 314-315-1986, OPENDOORSTL.COM, OR THROUGH STINEWOODWORKING.COM, 618-954-8636.



Charles Smith and Annie Brahler were unaware of their home's illustrious origins when they first came across a photo advertising its sale as a possible teardown. Moved by its Midcentury Modern design and its location on three wooded acres, the couple decided to purchase the house soon thereafter.

"We didn't know it was designed by a famous architect," says Smith, an entrepreneur with several businesses, including No Coast Originals, Road Rage Fuel Booster, and Hatfield & McCoy Family Brand Whiskey. "We just knew we wanted it."

Brahler echoes his sentiments. She's the founder of Euro Trash, an international interiors and design firm based in St. Louis. "I don't care about labels or where something comes from, as long as it has quality and style," she says.

The house, which features many of the hallmarks of Midcentury architecture—glass-enclosed spaces, the interplay of indoor and outdoor spaces, a mix of building materials—stands out among the many newly built homes that surround it in Ballwin. It is the former dwelling of prominent area architect Robert Elkington and his wife, Maxine, who built the house in 1949. According to the Preservation Research Office website, over the course of his career, Elkington designed homes that attracted plenty of national attention, including write-ups in *82 Distinctive Houses From Architectural Record*, a 1952 volume that also included the work of St. Louis architect Frederick Dunn; and in the 1954 volume *Quality Budget Houses: A Treasury of 100 Architect-Designed House from \$5,000 to \$20,000*, by Katherine Morrow Ford and Thomas H. Creighton. Though both Robert's and Maxine's names appear as "architects" in the title block on the blueprints unearthed by Brahler, the design is credited to Robert alone.

As she is known to be, Brahler was tenacious in tracking down as much information as she could about the couple and the house. She even bought back as many of the furnishings, accessories, and artwork (which had been sold at auction after Maxine's death) in 2011, as she could.

"I've done historic renovations. I do the digging," says Brahler, who compiled a thick archive of photos, news clippings, and documents. "I fight for the history of houses and of the people who lived in them."

