

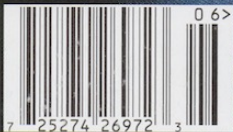
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MAN STUFF

ST. LOUIS'

MANLIEST MAN

WORDS & PHOTO: Aaron Perlut

Leonardo da Vinci once said, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." This would be an apt means of describing St. Louisan David Stine, who is *St. Louis' manliest man*, but unfortunately, his sophistication is not that simple.

Stine is not *most manly* because he owns in excess of 20 chainsaws and takes fallen trees that are 110-feet-high and more than four-feet-wide and turns them into some of the finest handcrafted furniture made in the U.S. Instead, it comes from the dichotomy of his complexities that define him and is perhaps best captured through the lens of his life.

The son of a railroad heavy equipment operator, Stine grew up on a 1,000-acre family dairy farm in Dow, Ill. He milked cows, went to school, butchered pigs, played sports, bailed hay, handcrafted small wooden boxes, milked more cows, and tried to sleep, on occasion.

After his freshman year at Jerseyville Community High School (near Grafton) his family moved to Pennsylvania where he finished high school. He then attended Penn State while working overnight shifts as a diesel mechanic. After college he ran for, and won, a county council seat in Snyder County, Pa.

He then moved to Washington, D.C., to attend law school at George Washington where at nights he not only made handcrafted wood humidors and furniture, but also baked and then delivered cheesecakes riding his pink Harley-Davidson roadster.

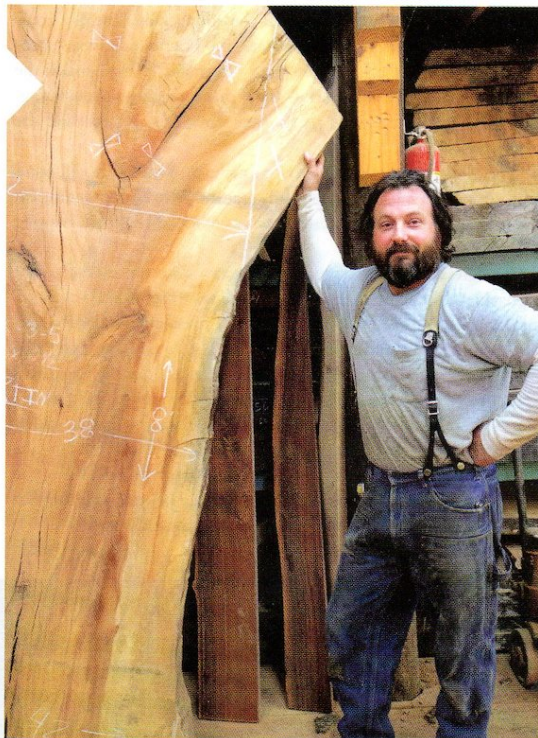
After finishing law school, within a two-month period Stine bought a home, took the bar exam, opened a restaurant, got married and started a job at the law firm of Elyse, Vinitsky—all while building and selling tables, humidors, beds and other fine furniture.

Finally, in 2002, Stine and his family returned to the St. Louis-area, purchasing a 40-acre farm next to his family's land on a handshake.

Here, however, is why Stine is *St. Louis' Manliest Man*. He simply doesn't care.

"I pretty much just do whatever I want all the time," says Stine, who begins and ends every day by chopping wood. "This (crafting furniture) is what I want to do right now. When I was going to law school, that's what I wanted to do then. And this is what I want to do now."

At the same time, Stine literally fell head over heels for his wife at first sight; while a more insecure man might care whether his wife takes his last name, he does not. And he's a devoted father of two who makes his kids chop wood every Christmas morning. "Just to keep us humble."



The more you speak with Stine about his life, family and work, you understand that he's not just a hulking, rye bourbon- and Stag beer-drinking Neanderthal. Well at least, not all the time. More so, he's an artisan and a craftsman who is committed to the quality of whatever he is doing at the time.

"What I'm doing right now is really born from a love of the wood and the raw, natural materials with which I work," he says while sitting in his workshop on his 40-acre farm in Dow. "I take my inspiration from the natural forms of the trees and try to let each slab of wood be what it wants to be rather than me imposing my will upon it. I could take a piece of wood and torture it into any shape I want, but I think it's more challenging and rewarding to let the wood be what it wants to be."

In the end, Stine's life is not about how others define him as being "manly." He's just doing what satisfies his needs.

"I'm not trying to be manly or cool or interesting," he says with great candor. "I try to do things that are of value and honest. I build things that have integrity, that I can be proud of, and I know that I can come home every night and not have to bury myself in a bottle of whiskey because I can't live with myself." ■