



DÉCOR | Local lumber

# CUTTING EDGE OF WOOD

**Trees from Kansas and Missouri make great floors, cabinets and furniture, craftsmen say.**

By STACY DOWNS  
The Kansas City Star

**T**here's more than a sliver of wisdom in the latest trend in wood: Buy local.

Similar to buying food from regional farmers, those who make our furniture and flooring are advocating lumber from trees in Kansas and Missouri. There's a lot to choose from: ash, elm, hickory, maple and oak — red and white. Even classic cherry. Honey locust is lauded for its rustic look. And black walnut is bountiful in southeast Kansas.

"We've got some of the greatest hardwood in the world right here," said David Polivka, who has a custom furniture and cabinetry studio in Kansas City's River Market. "Other countries buy wood from the Midwest."

The benefits of local wood are similar to local food. Fewer miles of trucking or flying the supply is better for the environment. And lower shipping costs can translate to less expensive wood products. Because of that, Polivka, whose craftsmanship recently was recognized by the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian's American Art Museum, is launching an affordable furniture line featuring local wood.

"People in their 20s and 30s can't afford fine furniture," Polivka said. "And they're the ones who are in the market to

buy furniture. They either have to inherit furniture from family or buy something that won't last."

Seating in Polivka's new collection will start at \$200. A 4-by-5-foot solid walnut dining table with simple lines will cost \$2,000.

Polivka loves the history behind local wood. Kansas City in the 1800s was a hub of furniture-making, influencing woodworking in other parts of the country, he says. Westport cabinetmakers taught those traveling west to Colorado, Santa Fe, N.M., and California. And to the east, St. Louis and Pittsburgh.

Polivka sources walnut from Wathena, Kan., about an hour

**SEE WOOD | E4**

**"We've got some of the greatest hardwood in the world right here. Other countries buy wood from the Midwest."**

WOODWORKER DAVID POLIVKA north of Kansas City near St. Joseph. Marty Hewins and sons Michael and Christopher own a logging business and sawmill. Polivka likes supporting a small, independent business and building a relationship.

"Our mission is to be men of integrity, honoring God and producing quality wood," said

28-year-old Christopher Hewins. His family's business sells about 160 logs, or 80 trees, each week.

Woodworker Bob Gillpatrick, who works in the Kansas City area, believes local wood can create regional pride.

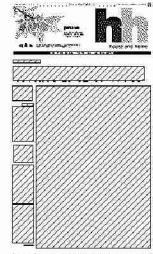
"People don't generally know it's available," said Gillpatrick, who recently started offering local wood as an option on cabinetry bids. "But once they learn about it, they're really interested."

Jordan Edemann, a salesman with Liberty Hardwoods, a hardwood and plywood supplier in Kansas City, North, says customers appreciate the backstory.

"They'll say this wood came from the tree my father planted, or we had these types of trees in our backyard growing up," Edemann said.

"Thermally modified" wood — also called "cooked" or "charred" wood — is another trend Edemann is seeing. Basically, wood is baked to remove the moisture so that it holds stain and paint longer and is more resistant to mold and rot.

The baking turns the wood a dark chocolate brown. It gives domestic lumber a more exotic look similar to ipe, a Brazilian hardwood popular among



architects.

"People are using thermally modified wood for decks, shutters and siding," said Edemann, who refers inquisitive customers to [www.cambiawood.com](http://www.cambiawood.com). "It's been around for a while, but people like that it's green, that it's not rainforest wood."

Wood in general is becoming a more popular surface material in unexpected places for the home, says Linda Jovanovich, executive vice president of the American Hardwood Information Center in Pittsburgh.

"Wood, like walnut, makes great kitchen countertops," Jovanovich said. "Sure, you just can't cut directly on the surface, but everyone typically uses a cutting board anyway. And wood is great for bathroom floors if you don't leave water standing on top of them."

Jovanovich is still seeing lots of dark wood flooring, but she's starting to see more light-colored floors. Wood furniture, too, has lightened up in recent years.

"Lighter wood is practical," she said. "It doesn't show debris or dust as much."

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## HOT

**Nakashima naturalness:** Master woodworker George Nakashima celebrates the imperfections of wood — cracks, holes and free edges. Accessories such as root bowls are Nakashima's style.

**Reclaimed:** People are wild about using wood from old barns, abandoned warehouses, storm-fallen trees and scrap material.

**Gray tinting:** Scandinavian and French gray-washed or gray-painted wood has a classic, time-worn look.

## NOT

**Golden oak:** It's sooo 1980s and 1990s. Lots of us are painting, glazing or replacing our golden-oak cabinets.

**The matching game:** Designers say it's a total bore to make your floors, cabinet and furniture the same wood tone. Enjoy the chic contrast of light and dark instead.

## WOOD CARE

**Floors:** Use one part white vinegar to nine

## RESOURCES

**I Elmwood Reclaimed Timber:** 1405 N.W. 134th St., Smithville, 816-532-0300 [www.elmwoodreclaimedtimber.com](http://www.elmwoodreclaimedtimber.com)

**I Fleming Hardwoods (sawmill; can turn fallen trees into boards):** Pomona, Kan., 785-242-7507

**I Hardwood Information Center (tips and guides):** [www.hardwoodinfo.com](http://www.hardwoodinfo.com)

**I Hewins Sawmill (sawmill; can turn fallen trees into boards):** Wathena, Kan., 816-262-1110

**I Metro Hardwoods (new retail shop of Liberty Hardwoods):** 4243 S. Nojand Road, Independence, 816-373-1710, [www.metrohardwoods.com](http://www.metrohardwoods.com)

**I Frank Paxton Lumber:** 6311 St. John Ave., 816-483-7000, [www.paxtonwood.com](http://www.paxtonwood.com)

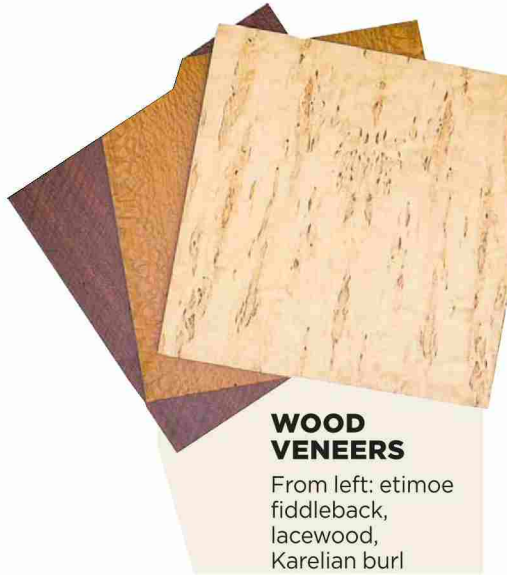
**I Polivka Studio (custom furniture and cabinets):** 258 W. Third St., 816-221-2027, [www.dpolivka.com](http://www.dpolivka.com)

parts water to clean and create a pleasant shine.

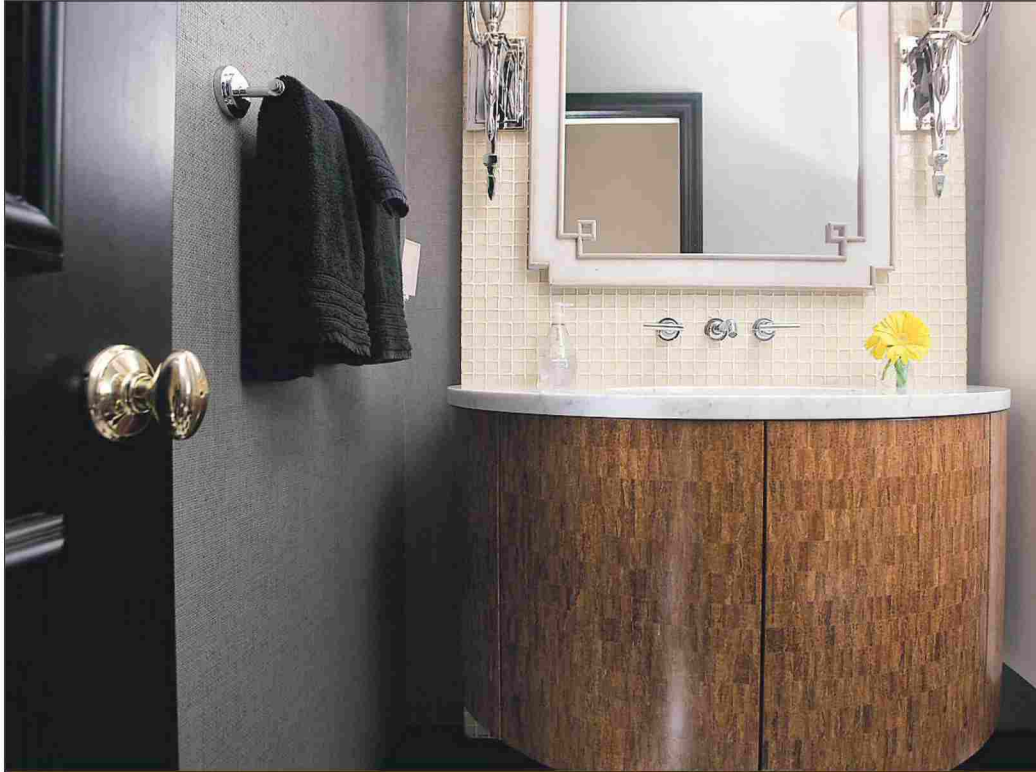
**Furniture:** Guardsman is a wax-free polish good for newer pieces. Paste waxes require elbow grease but add a nice glow to antique pieces.

**Fixing blemishes:** R. Richardson's White Ring Remover (\$18.95, [www.thefurnitureconnoisseur.com](http://www.thefurnitureconnoisseur.com)) does the trick.

Source: [www.housebeautiful.com](http://www.housebeautiful.com)







TAMMY LJUNGBLAD | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

## PLYBOO

Gillpatrick Woodworks (see E2) made this bamboo plywood vanity for author Julie Garwood of Leawood. Plyboo ([www.plyboo.com](http://www.plyboo.com)), made from rapidly renewable bamboo, also is used for countertops, flooring and accessories. Plyboo is among the green materials that have become popular in woodworking.



## DO-IT-YOURSELF WOODWORKING

"When the economy gets tough, people start paying more attention to quality," says woodworker Tommy MacDonald of Canton, Mass., host of a new 13-episode series "Rough Cut — Woodworking With Tommy Mac." "And sometimes they're taking that into their own hands." The public television show debuts on Saturdays in November on KCPT-2 (channels 241 Comcast, 602 SureWest, 1402 Time Warner). Viewers can learn from the national show about weekend or two-weekend projects, including a wall cabinet, lazy Susan and bread box.



## LOCAL WOOD

David Polivka, who started as a painter before becoming a woodworker, designed this side table made of Kansas walnut. Similar designs will be part of Polivka's new affordable local wood furniture line.