


MAY 29, 2007 SECTION 1

digs

DESIGN INTERIORS GARDENS SPACES



WOOD REVIVAL:
One-of-a-kind
furniture
sprouts from
salvaged trees

PLUS: The perils
of some plastics
Local inventors
meet "Oprah"
Growing great
edibles

The Seattle Times

THIS CORNER VIEW of a 200-year-old Madras tree reveals surprising texture and color.



Tree-dimensional furniture

URBAN HARDWOODS CREATES UNIQUE PIECES FROM LOCALLY SALVAGED TREES — AND THEIR STORIES

STORY BY NICOLE TSONG, SEATTLE TIMES STAFF REPORTER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN RUTZ, SEATTLE TIMES STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



FROM TREES THAT HAVE BEEN SALVAGED comes art in the form of furniture and other pieces, like the bowl Jim Newman holds in his hands. Newman's Urban Hardwoods salvages trees locally and beyond, and creates one-of-a-kind treasures.



JAN MURRAY sits at a table that once was an elm tree in her front yard, which she could see from this window.



A WINDOW IN MURRAY'S HOME looks toward the Murrays' elm, honoring the tree before it was cut down.

When the massive elm tree outside Joan Murray's Madison Park home came down with Dutch elm disease, Murray and husband Mark organized a walk to the neighborhood to raise money for the leafy, 100-foot giant towering 120 ft high. (They succeeded.)

But Joan Murray didn't have a plan for the tree's afterlife — not until Jim Newman showed up and proposed one.

Newman owns Urban Hardwoods, a Seattle furniture company that does custom work and builds elegant tables and other pieces using mostly locally salvaged trees. Back in 2003, when Newman explained his company to the Murrays, he asked for the win, offering to exchange a custom built table. The Murrays agreed. Their 4-foot round table now sits near a window overlooking the spot where the tree stood. The rest of the tree went to two homes on Delia Island, while some lumber is still waiting to be made into tables.

"It's like good karma," Joan Murray said. "I love that we can sit at that table and remember the tree."

TREE TABLES

Not all trees travel such a personal path, so Urban Hardwoods' showroom in north Seattle's International District, but all their trees have an extensive urban history somewhere. Hundreds of trees later, Newman can still recall where he salvaged almost every richly hued plank in his showroom.

"The local stories of where these

trees grew and why they came down are almost as valuable as the material itself," Newman said.

Newman works with tree-removal services to salvage mostly diseased or unsafe trees, which typically get cut into firewood or chipped. His business has grown so much since he stopped by the Murrays' door that some homeowners come to him. He can barely keep up with the trees, which come from as far away as Ellensburg and Tacoma.

Photo top: JIM SMITH; left

TRUNKS OF VARIOUS SIZES and origins await milling at Urban Hardwoods' storage facility.



TREES THAT HAVE BEEN SALVAGED are stacked on pallets at Urban Hardwoods, with openings to allow air to flow between the pieces and dry the wood.

