

Coyote Woodshop: Harvesting Renewable Beauty from the Urban Edge

By Eric Kuhner

When David Kotz began selling firewood after high school in the early '80s, he would often find himself captivated by the beauty of the grain in a freshly split log and wonder how he might capture that beauty to share. His love affair with wood in all its varieties eventually led him to begin milling logs, first with a chainsaw mill and then with his first band sawmill which began operation in 1991 and led him to open Coyote Woodshop on his family's land on Bainbridge Island. "Because trees are such a blessing in my life I revere them. One form that reverence takes is to honor their life and contribution to making the planet a great place to live by exposing their inner beauty. That is the essence of my work," Kotz shares.

From tree removal and on-site milling to production of slabs and rustic furniture, Kotz's love affair has taken him in many directions. For milling, Coyote Woodshop operates two different sawmills. Their Woodmizer band sawmill is ideal for cutting 24 inch diameter and smaller logs into dimensional lumber. Its narrow kerf conserves wood, while hydraulic controls simplify handling the log, making it fast and efficient. A Lucas mill dedicated slabber is used to cut larger logs with up to 76 inch diameters. Slabs are usually cut 2 to 3 inches thick, with the log edges left intact. These are used in table top and counter or kitchen island-type pieces.

"I've taken my mill onsite for months at a time for some jobs," Kotz relates. "Or I might mill one log for a customer in half an hour. Recently we sawed cedar for a boy scout who is doing a community service project building a kiosk for a local park."

All the wood harvested by Coyote Woodshop is locally gathered from the urban and suburban regions around Bainbridge Island and Kitsap County. Special equipment allows them to move logs over distance with minimal disturbance to the ground, so they can operate in a forest setting without roads or in a back yard with limited access while keeping impact at a minimum. A knuckle boom truck with 8000 lb lift capacity, 20,000 lb load capacity, and a 20 ft bed allows logs to be loaded at or near a roadway and hauled to the mill site, and is also used to deliver finished loads.

"We are committed to utilizing all parts of the tree," says Kotz. This approach allows architects, interior designers, furniture builders, and home contractors to find unique and interesting naturally shaped pieces, from vertical grain to crotches, knees, curves, and knots. Coyote Woodshop's regular stock includes Alder, Cherry, Maple, Fir, Cedar, and Madrone, and other species such as Apple, Yew, Elm, Cascara, Pine, Juniper, Pear, Birch, Dogwood, Locust, Walnut and Redwood are also often available.

In addition to custom milling and hauling, Coyote Woodshop also offers kiln drying and surfacing. Drying is done in a dehumidification kiln that holds up to 3000 board feet of lumber, and drying takes about four to six weeks. Their 20 inch planer, 24 inch wide belt sander, and 6x10 foot computer numerical controlled router table can surface almost any size slab or board.

Kotz estimates that about half of his work is custom ordered. The other half involves harvesting and production of boards and slabs for sale in his lumber showroom as well as building rustic furniture. "Most of our furniture is made to order, but we also build pieces for sale locally," he says. He has taken pieces for show and sale at farmer's markets, local festivals, and participated in studio tours of artists on Bainbridge.

Coyote Woodshop also contributes to the community through education and outreach. Through the local parks district, they have offered an in-depth tour to demonstrate the latest in renewable wood resource recovery and techniques, and they recently helped to host an eco-tour put on by the B. I. Chamber of Commerce. Kotz adds that he loves being involved with his community. Since his first



Fully loaded kiln

workshop with the [Northwest Natural Resource Group](#) a few years ago, he is continually appreciative of the organization and all they do to help grow the community of small forest industry businesses.

Kotz is currently facing the challenge of how best to grow and manage his business in an economic climate that has been hard on architects, builders, and many of his other customers. He is also considering how to take advantage of his capacity and knowledge to begin producing environmentally certified products. “One of the issues I face,” say Kotz, “is that no one knows how to classify many of the logs I harvest in a residential setting. If I keep a log from going to the chipper, or being burned for firewood, am I helping the environment? Can urban harvesting be considered sustainable?”



David cutting maple

Coyote Woodshop can currently take logs from a certified forest, mill them, and return them to the grower as certified lumber under the Forest Stewardship Council standards. Kotz is considering adding the ability to offer certified lumber and wood products for sale from his shop, but has so far been stymied by the inventory tracking requirements. “For a small operation like us, the requirements are demanding. So far, I haven’t been able to justify the investment, but I would like to be able to get certified in the future,” said Kotz.

Kotz continues to grow his business slowly, and says that he is still learning to manage the many demands of running a small business. “I’m no longer a one-man operation. I have employees and payroll and bookkeeping and other tasks that take me away from my work with wood,” Kotz says. “My greatest need right now is marketing. I’m sitting on hundreds of thousands of dollars in inventory that I’m still learning to sell.” He hopes eventually to find someone who can help him connect with a broader customer base. “I’m ready to be a source for wholesalers creating high-end furniture, but a lot of people don’t know that I exist. I really need to develop some steady revenue streams.”

Coyote Woodshop offers a unique resource as a small, integrated harvesting, milling, and wood products manufacturing company. Kotz has also begun learning to manage woodlots and hopes to help more small landowners with ecological forest management. He sees a real need and desire among small landowners to learn how to nurture healthy forests in a suburban and semi-rural setting. “I’ve always wanted to make the best use of trees that I see being taken down all around me. But sometimes, the best use of a down tree is to leave it in the forest. There’s nothing as beautiful as a nurse log on the forest floor. The forest needs those trees, too.”

To find out more about Coyote Woodshop or contact David, please visit their [website](#).