



JANUARY 27 — MARCH 17, 2018

SIMPLY DIFFERENT
THE FURNITURE OF **PETER VOSS**



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PETER VOSS is a native Midwesterner and furniture artist with a deep appreciation of his material and craftsmanship. The natural features of wood are a strong component in Peter's designs. He first considers the unique characteristics of a particular piece of wood and then decides how best to use that character in furniture. This is the essence of what Peter does. He searches out what he sees as beautiful in wood, often selecting

what others might consider display imperfections such as knots, mineral stains, or other natural occurrences. Instead he incorporates and highlights these features into the overall design. Peter prefers simpler lines and detailing so that the piece remains current and allows for the wood to be the focus. As a jeweler takes a naturally produced stone and creates a setting to highlight the stone, the first thing people will notice is the stone, and then

At left and right: **TREES HAVE CROTCHES TOO, 2017.** Black american walnut, white oak, poplar, beechwood pulls; lacquer finish; 48" w x 81" h x 36" d. Left and right sides of cabinet front made from 2 pieces of bookmatched crotch White Oak. Left and right side of cabinet are 2 bookmatched pieces of walnut. Notice same knots and grain on left side of cabinet and right side of cabinet. Cabinet is designed so that it can be disassembled for moving. Courtesy of the artist.



secondly how beautifully the setting compliments the stone. This is how Peter feels about wood and designing furniture. A prominent theme that has influenced Peter in both his furniture design and construction is, “keep it simple, build it to last, and let nature provide the beauty.” This exhibit displays some of his favorite pieces so that we have the opportunity to see what he sees.

The woods Peter selects and uses showcase the endless and utterly unique features formed by nature. Most of his pieces feature two or three different woods, either

complimentary or contrasting, in order to give balance, proportion and define his visual composition. He also enhances his designs by using his knowledge of age-old construction details as design elements. Each furniture piece begins with regular visits to local sawmills for exciting discoveries of wood that draw his attention. Features that he looks for are combinations of sheer size, unique graining, dominant patterns, color, or even how much of that wood is available from the same tree. The wood he selects is unique enough that it is purchased and

brought back to his studio without yet knowing what it will become. Peter will contemplate how best to showcase a particular “standout” piece of wood until the right design finally comes to him. Some wood is stored for months or years before he incorporates it into a furniture piece. Peter will use intermixed woods and sometimes aniline dyes on secondary woods to accentuate the natural grain patterns and create an overall cohesive design. The variety of woods he uses are primarily American hardwoods such as ash, white oak, mahogany, cherry, walnut and curly birch.





On the cover, at left and above:

THE CAMELEON, 2017. Cherry, spalted silver maple, ash; lacquer finish; 65" w x 18" d x 34" h. Cherry fronts are from one board. Grain at bottom of left door matches grain on top of 1st drawer; grain at bottom of bottom drawer matches grain at top of right door. Cabinet carcasse uses two boards that are continuous from left across top and down right side. Incorporated Cameleon provided by late cousin Bernhard Voss. Courtesy of Dr. Margaret Cohen.

Some people may ask, “Is furniture art?” Definitely not all furniture is art. Peter’s work is beautiful, expressive and certainly displays creative skill and imagination. His original designs are artistic both visually and technically. Every piece invites further attention, especially to appreciate the creative decisions that are incorporated. Throughout modern history there have been furniture designers who have produced pieces that are recognized as art. Peter is

especially inspired by Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, George Hepplewhite, Alvar Alto and George Nakashima, just to name a few. Some period influences can be seen in Peter’s pieces such as Federal, Sheraton, Deco and Mid Century Modern.

Peter grew up in a small South Dakota town with a simple 1950s-era Western culture and plenty of wide- open space to explore. He remembers always being interested in how things worked and would take things apart and put them

back together. Peter’s designs may also stem from the influence of artistic family members who were a large part of his life. His mother, Irmgard Voss, a retired artist in ceramics, displayed her works around the home that were lessons in contrast, shape, balance and proportion. While Peter was in South Dakota, his older cousin, Bernhard Voss, emigrated from Germany to stay with his uncle’s family and work as a cabinetmaker. One of Bernhard’s originals, made for Peter’s parents, is a postmodern



LOWRIDER, 2017. Cherry flitch; urethane finish, 72”w x 25”d x 15”h. Can be used as coffee table or bench. Note butterfly patch at one end. Base and top were made from wood of the same tree. Courtesy of the artist.



TABLE A GLO GLO, 2017. Walnut, reclaimed long leaf yellow pine, LED lights; lacquer finish; 60" w x 14" d x 30" h. Pegged mortise and tenon construction, which one can see if you look closely where legs join sides and cross supports, you will see black pegs that join the pieces. With lights on, table emits a beautiful glow through the pine. Courtesy of the artist.

table that still inspires Peter to this day. It is included in the show as an example of how simplicity of design with the correct proportions and lines can be dramatic and impactful.

Peter found his calling in college, not in class as expected,

but rather through a side job at the Artichoke Table, a small woodshop in Webster Groves that made butcher-block tables and carts back in the 1970s. It was here that he crossed paths with William Tombrink III, a master woodworker who had a woodshop

nearby. Bill restored antique furniture by repairing centuries-old joinery, matching select woods and restoring finishes. Peter spent a lot of time with Bill, asking his advice and absorbing everything he could. As a result, Peter became very familiar with these techniques



WHY?, 2016. Ash, oak, braided thread; 36" w x 6.5" d x 16" h. The artist likes to include a large piece of paper and a marker with this piece to encourage people to write down their response to the title. Courtesy of the artist.

which compensate for how wood continues to move and how finishes hold up over time.

Later, after finishing at St. Louis University, Peter joined his family to form “Good Stuff”, a contemporary furniture retailer in the heart of Webster Groves. For ten years he worked in the custom woodshop

and was able to travel to furniture shows and factories from North Carolina to Copenhagen, Denmark that provided him further exposure to international contemporary design. Good Stuff was the IKEA of St. Louis, before IKEA was here, directly importing “assemble yourself” furniture from Germany,

Denmark, and Finland. It was here that Peter was able to experiment and begin his furniture-design career. Afterwards, he worked for Peterson Group selling the latest, high-design commercial furniture for healthcare and government uses. This furniture was designed to last not only in the way it was built



CAN-CAN, 2017. Cherry, figured silver maple; lacquer finish; 53”w x 17”d. This wall mounted table features beautiful “fiddle back” maple top and inlay. Support legs remind one of can can dancers. Courtesy of the artist.

but also in its usefulness. It was made of components that could be moved around and added onto as needs changed. Peter is convinced that well-made, real wood furniture is truly sustainable in that it is intended to last for generations and can always be repaired. He strives for designs that are timeless in their

simplicity and can be appreciated on many levels.

Peter and his wife Patty moved from the suburbs of St. Louis to South St. Louis four years ago after Peter retired from commercial sales. He is now able to design and build his furniture full-time at his shop near his home. When

he is not cutting, joining, planing, sanding and admiring wood, he enjoys his time with Patty, their children Eric and Katie, and dogs Gus and Rosie.

—LAURA JOHNSON, R.A.
Johnson Architectural Services
November 2017



MARTINI TIME, 2015. Figured cherry, curly birch, ash; lacquer finish; 70" w x 15" d x 31" h. Entire front of cabinet is from one piece of figured cherry, sides and top are another board. One can follow the grain up the side across the top and down the other side. Courtesy of the artist.



SLEIGH RIDE, 2017. American black walnut frame, birdseye maple veneer head and foot board, maple slats. Note the pins that hold the bed side rails to the legs. Designed so that it can be disassembled. Courtesy of Eric Voss.

Acknowledgments

On behalf of Gallery 210, I want to thank Peter Voss for allowing Gallery 210 the opportunity to show his wonderful furniture designs. In Peter's work, art and life in fact do become one. It has been a pleasure to work with him. I also want to thank Laura Johnson, R.A., of Johnson Architectural Services for the outstanding essay she wrote for this publication. She is uniquely positioned to write about Peter's work. I also want to thank Sarah Weinman whose article in "All the Art" brought Peter's furniture design to my attention.

I want to express my appreciation to Cindy LaBrecht for another beautifully designed exhibition catalog. As always, I want to thank the Gallery 210 assistants for their work on this project. It is their dedication, creativity, and good humor that made this exhibition possible.

I want to acknowledge the support of Dr. Teresa Thiel, Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Karen Lucas of the Center for the Humanities;

the Gallery 210 Advisory Committee; Dr. Maureen Quigley, Chair for the Department of Art and Design; and my colleagues in the Department of Art and Design for their support of the gallery's programs.

This exhibition is supported in part by the College of Arts and Sciences, the Center for the Humanities, and the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency.

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BROCHURE DESIGN: Cindy LaBrecht

COPYEDITING: Sarah Weinman

PRINTING: University of Missouri-St. Louis Printing Services

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