



# The Regenerative Art of DeadTree Workshop

Christine Costa finds personal truth in woodcarving and the creative flow of working with her hands.

by Kristian DePue

Sometimes stillness is attained in motion. Just ask local woodworker Christine Costa, owner of DeadTree Workshop.

The woodworking endeavor originated out of a need for tangible creativity—Costa's need to work with her hands during a sabbatical from her architecture career. The results have been a refreshing, meditative wholeness, not to mention a broad collection of organically modern kitchen utensils, dishes and vases.

Before Costa and her husband moved from suburban Detroit to Manitou Springs in the summer of 2017, the couple pre-emptively and patiently saved money for two years. "I was quitting a job that I loved, but I thought it would be healthy to take a break," Costa says. "DeadTree Workshop started during this sabbatical because of restless, idle hands."

In Manitou, Costa realized the rejuvenating, calming power of carving wood. "I tried meditating and felt like I wasn't doing it right—that's my neuroticism talking," Costa says. "Whenever I work with my hands, though, I'm relaxed and in the moment. I can sit for hours, and my brain feels refreshed when done."

It's the flow state of Eastern religions and modern scientific research. "When I carve, my brain can take a rest, and my hands take over and create," Costa describes.

She fabricates utensils, dishes, trays, vases and scoops (that double as clips to seal bags of coffee beans). She begins by cutting out a basic shape with a band saw, and then hand carves. "When you start shaping it with knives, gouges and chisels, that's when you can sit there quietly, which is the part I love."

Cutting boards don't involved much carving, but they have allowed Costa to experiment with finishing techniques. "With oak, you can get ebonizing, which is a blackened look. It occurs when applied irons interact with the natural tannins in the wood," she says. "Woodworking carries you down various paths ... [and] you're never going to find the end; it has so much depth."

Costa has learned much in the labyrinth of woodworking, discovering that walnut and maple are conducive for carving while oak is better suited for cutting boards. Her knowledge of varying timber species, and their unique grain patterns, comes from both reading and experience. "Wood has an attitude," says Cos-

ta. "If you try to force it to do something it doesn't want to, it won't. If you hit the grain in the wrong direction, it will split. If you put together a design where the stress runs against the grain, it will break. You have to understand wood and respect it. The material has character, and does what it wants."

Costa and her husband recently relocated to a cabin and larger workshop in Woodland Park. There she is exploring new avenues, including chainsaw carving—with that, she wants to make stools. She keeps a sketchbook with various designs, along with scale mockups—miniatures, perfect for an action figure to take a load off. For now, she continues to make life-size spoons and other kitchen utensils.

Costa has also shaped small sculptures as Christmas gifts, but doesn't find them satisfying; she prefers to fashion objects that are useful. "I love when a usable, useful product is the result. I hope people understand the depth of what goes into a handmade work," she says. "I like to think my pieces are 'charged up' with the thought and energy that goes into making them, adding a level of meaning to whatever they're appropriated for."

Ultimately, Costa hopes to combine her



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The artist finds flow and usable art in her Woodland Park workshop.



conceptual blueprinting with her tactile woodworking. She envisions combining everything someday—architecture, design, woodworking and construction. “I’ve always been fascinated with old buildings and houses ... how they were designed and built,” she says. “Now, I’m paying attention to antique tools, furniture and household items for inspiration. I analyze old carved spoons ... and look at how the angle of the handle relates to the bowl.”

Dreaming of merging also distinctly reveals the differences. Costa talks about Ctrl+Z, the undo command for many computer systems. In an architectural design phase, the redo option is always available. “When you break off the head of a spoon, you can’t undo that,” she says. “For me though, it’s almost a habit to think, *Oh, I can just hit Control Z*. But no, you can’t; you have to start over. I think it’s good for your brain to not lean on Control Z all the time ... thinking you can simply, immediately undo something with the push of a button.”

Woodcarving is not an act of immediacy, but in its purposeful process is regeneration. “Some are just wired, by nature, to make things [with their hands], but our modern life doesn’t always make it easy to do that. You have to put effort into giving yourself the opportunity,” Costa says. “Truthfully, what DeadTree is all about—it’s me getting to the root of how I’m meant to function as a human.” 🌿

