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exclusive interview





Live Edge

A stylish way to save trees from the chipper

story Laurie Wallace-Lynch

photography Steve Uhraney

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You may have seen table tops cut from hulking, Paul Bunyan-sized trees with unfinished edges or exposed bark. It's called "live edge" and the trend in home decor not only makes a design statement, it makes an environmental statement as well.

"The living edge trend is so popular, because you are buying a unique piece that only *you* have. You won't walk down the street and see it at a neighbour's house. That's impossible as each piece is one-of-a-kind," says Wayne Datema, owner of the new *Country Charm Mennonite Furniture* store in Streetsville. "Each piece is unique in its natural shape, edge and colouration and tells a unique story. This is the reason live edge furniture will continue to stay popular. It's very organic. People love the outdoors and want to feel the

outdoors in their home. Live edge pieces achieve this."

Live edge furniture options include dining tables, coffee and end tables, desks, console tables, shelving, headboards and even charcuterie boards. Wayne estimates he has about 50 unique live edge pieces at any one time in his stores and showrooms in Streetsville and Owen Sound and available through his website. He has shipped live edge pieces as far away as Australia.

"Every piece of furniture is unique and handcrafted to the highest quality standards with solid wood by Mennonite and Amish craftsmen," explains Wayne. "In the early days I used oak and pine, but now we use more maple, walnut, elm and ash. We marry the pieces with the bases so customers can choose different bases, legs, colours and finishes."



above Spanish River Dining Table (spalted maple) from the Country Charm Mennonite Furniture Store



above Portable saw milling by Sawmill Sid. They perform wood repurposing at the tree and wood recovery centre in partnership with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. They are based in Mississauga.

You treat live edge pieces as you would any other piece of furniture according to Wayne. “We add a sealer coat to protect the piece from moisture and then add a very durable lacquer coat which is temperature protected to 220 degrees (fahrenheit) and water-resistant for up to 24 hours of sitting a glass on the surface. Our furniture is built to last a lifetime and we offer a warranty as long as you own the piece.”

Interior designer Francy Kralik, owner of *House Candy* in Mississauga, regularly gets requests from clients to incorporate live edge furniture pieces in their homes. “The beauty of live edge is that it enhances the natural lines of the wood and it is environmentally friendly, because it’s often

made from salvaged wood,” says Francy.

“The piece can be manipulated and depending on the colour and type of wood, the live edge trend can work with any decor from traditional, contemporary to cottage country. Chairs direct the look. You can add acrylic chairs or PVC or go with upholstered chairs depending on your decor. If you have wood on the chairs it should tie in with the wood on the table.”

Francy uses live edge pieces in both home and commercial settings. “I have used live edge dining tables many times in homes and recently did a large table for an office,” she states. “I’ve also done open shelving with live edges in a

living room and incorporated a coffee table in which the whole circumference of the tree was used. I often use maple, which is very hard, birch, walnut or ash. I have used *Exotic Woods* in Burlington and *Oliver Lumber* in Campbellville.”

Exotic Woods in Burlington specialize in unique wood pieces. They stock an inventory of different types of wood including Bocote, Bubinga, Cherry, Chechen, Olivewood, Padauk, Pine, Walnut, Yew and more.

Natalia Wilner, owner/designer of *Beautifully Done Interiors* in Mississauga says live edge furniture adds warmth and texture in a contemporary space. “Wood warms up a space and a live edge piece adds a natural, organic feel. The live edge or exposed bark adds warm sensation, texture and interest,” says Natalia. “I am currently doing a live edge walnut desk in an office building which will be quite a showpiece. I love to use walnut as the beauty of natural walnut is a combination of blond and dark wood, so when left natural, the veining shows through. It is spectacular and dramatic.”

A great source for unfinished live edge round slabs or slices (called hardwood cookies) is *Sawmill Sid* in Mississauga. Owners Sid Gendron and his wife Sheila Story save or repurpose trees from all over Ontario including trees that need to be cut down for any reason or have fallen after a storm.

“We save trees from the wood chipper,” says Sid with pride. He mills the wood for building supplies, flooring and furniture. “We sell unfinished live edge slabs that are about two inches thick, 60 inches wide and six or seven feet long, but we can make table tops any size. Many people come in asking to see a piece of walnut, but then they see a piece of maple that speaks to them and they purchase that one instead.”

“People want to know about the wood and where it came from and like that it has been repurposed.” Sid tells a story of a giant tree that had to be cut down in Mississauga that he repurposed and now the tree lives on in another form. “A developer had to take down a huge tree to make room for a senior’s retirement home that was being built,” he says. “The tree was five feet in diameter, so we repurposed the wood and turned part of it into a huge live edge table that is going to be put in the lobby of that senior’s home.”



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