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Burlwood Industries Inc.

In Our Midst

by Lynne Tungett

If you are looking for a unique place to take your kids or out-of-town visitors, be sure to stop in at Burlwood Industries Inc. They are located right near NPS at the intersection of Del Monte and Sloat Avenues. You can't miss it; when you see the wooden Santa or the 8-foot Indian you know you are there. The parking lot is like being in a still-life zoo. The inhabitants include eagles, bears, frogs, and lions.

A typical six-foot statue begins as a raw wood block in the morning and by early afternoon has been sculpted into rough form. Eusebio Dally, one of the expert carvers, does not even use a blueprint for his work. As Joe Vallaire, Vice-President of Burlwood, put it, "It's all in his head." The main tool used for this art form is a chain saw! Eighty-five percent of the carving is done with a chain saw and the other fifteen percent is done with chisels. The chain saw buzzes steadily all day to rough out one of the six-foot statues, while another two or three days is spent chiseling details. The next step is for the piece to be sanded. Finally, the surface is rubbed with oil for protection and if the statue will be indoors it is also waxed.

The idea for Burlwood Industries was conceived fourteen years ago by landscape artist George Buck. Mr. Buck, who worked mostly in the Pebble Beach and Carmel area, expanded the wooden art form business into what it is today. Burlwood has been at its present location for the last eight years. The "lot" on Del Monte Avenue is only a small part of the business, explained Joe. The main shipping and outlet store is located in Arcata, California near Eureka. Most of Burlwood's furniture products are exported overseas.



(Photo by Donna Randall)

Artist Eusebio Dally, originally from the Phillipines, emigrated to the U.S. almost three years ago. Dally, who is 66 years old, has been carving for almost 50 years!

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The furniture pieces are carved from burls, or tumorous growths that grow on trees. Their intricate lines provide for unique patterns on the table tops or the arms of chairs. Burlwood supplies furniture to stores in Germany, Switzerland, and even Saudi Arabia. A large amount of raw redwood is also exported to Japan and Italy. Mr. Vallaire elaborated on the shipping end of their business to say that the majority of the statue carvings stay in the United States. Restaurants and "drinking establishments" are their primary buyers for these items.

Joe said one of the hardest parts of the business has been acquiring logging permits to get the redwood out of the forests. They try to use redwood logs with 8-19 foot diameters. The logs are then quartered or cut in thirds to be used for carving. The large logs are cut like this so a statue carved from it will not split when the log dries out. Carving is done when the wood is wet. A wet statue 6 ft. x 2 ft. weighs between 400 and 500 pounds, when the wood dries out it only weighs about half that much.

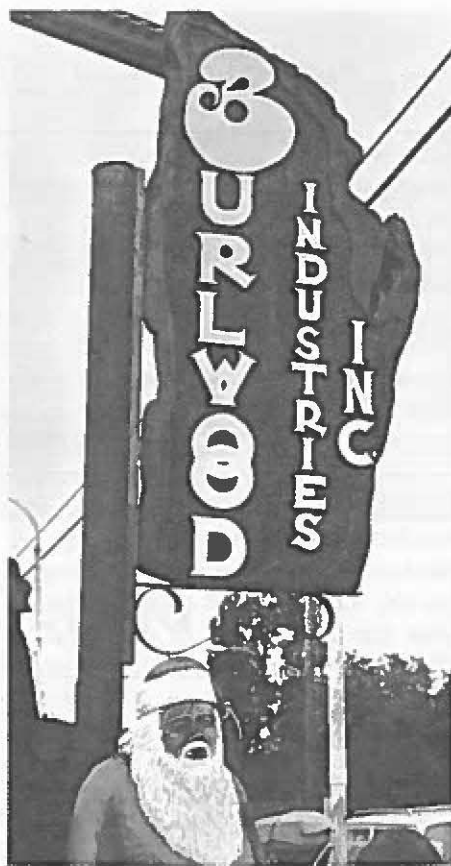


Photo by Donna Randall

Burlwood will custom design anything you would like. While I was on the lot for this interview one of the carvers was chiseling details on a life-size figure of a man holding a briefcase. Joe said this was ordered by a lawyer who is going to use the statue to hold his business cards in his office. Being so close to the Postgraduate School, he said they receive a lot of custom orders for pilots and other military logos.

Burlwood's largest statue is a 22-foot tall cowboy outside of a Pismo Beach restaurant. The wooden cowboy was sculpted from a 60 ft. Monterey Pine. Besides the height of the cowboy, this statue is also unique because it is the only sculpture carved from a tree that is still standing upright in the ground. At the lot in Monterey there is nothing as spectacular as the 22-foot landmark cowboy but Joe welcomes anyone to come in and browse, take pictures, and watch the wood chips fly. □

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