

From the Forests of Fallen Trees

Creating exotic, sustainably repurposed and functional works of wooden art here in Naples

by Kathy Grey

There's a lovely showroom in the heart of Naples' 5th Avenue South called Cocoon. The shop features exotic wood furniture and objects of art crafted by Naples artisans employed by the company.

Their artistic medium? Fallen trees from Southeast Asia.

Mitchell Siegel founded Cocoon in Greenwich, Connecticut in 2009. In February 2022, Siegel permanently moved the entire woodworking operation to Naples, employing Southwest Florida residents.

Born into a textile family ("I was brought up in a fabric store in Westchester," he jokes), Siegel's first trips to Southeast Asia were for the garment industry. On his extended stays, he wandered around the Asian subregion, intrigued by its natural beauty.

"I'd see these huge cuts of trees," he says, adding that he was further intrigued by the possibility of taking pieces of nature and being able to reuse them to make functional pieces of art.

He had no interest in making a business of it, but his ambitious nature took hold.

"I started to think of what was next: What can we do with all these things from nature? There's knocked-down wood rotting."

He started "messing around" with the idea, and in 2009, Siegel founded Cocoon.

The Creation Process

One would think that Siegel's clients not only want to own the product, but they want to *know* them, just like a collector knows every detail of his or her collection of fine art. But Siegel disagrees.



Wood slab in Cocoon Woodshop Naples



Mitchell Siegel relaxes in the Naples Cocoon gallery

"I don't consider us to be in the art-collector realm. I don't consider a \$6,000 sustainable piece of furniture that way. It's sustainable, and you can use it. That's what's important."

Bending to the heirloom-quality question about Cocoon's creations, he relents, "They are one-of-a-kind pieces, but we're a whole lot different. These come from a raw slab of wood. We're making something out of it."

He's more comfortable with the notion that Cocoon could be considered a gallery of fine furniture, but his heart is in his commitment to being a fully licensed importer of exotic wood from Southeast Asia, where a tree must be planted for anything he takes away.

"A serious buyer can select a piece of wood to create what they want. They will know what it's made of," Siegel says.

Siegel cannot and does not down live trees. He has a subject-to-law, 25-year license that prohibits it. He respects that, knowing a tree will be planted in Southeast Asia for every fallen one Siegel exports.

"Most people recycle. We recycle dead wood. We're not killing trees," Siegel says. "We're taking downed trees and putting them back into people's homes. We take wood that is damaged and make something beautiful from it: something that will last."