

Designer grows furniture from the ground

Eco-friendly furniture designer-makers Full Grown look to forego the conventional production process and grow chair- and table-shaped trees straight from the ground.

By **Sarah Dawood** on March 31, 2015

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Gavin Munro and a grown pendant lamp

A furniture designer has created a “forest factory”, persuading trees to grow into the shape of chairs, desks and lamps. Gavin Munro is the founder of eco-friendly furniture manufacturer Full Grown, and has been growing furniture in a field in Wirksworth, Derbyshire for nine years.





The designer has previously worked in historical reconstruction, as a gardener, and as a “botanical craftsman” creating furniture from driftwood, which inspired him to undertake the project.

Trees - willow, ash, sycamore, hazel, crab apple and red oak - are grown for a few years, setting the roots. They are then cut down, or coppiced, encouraging new shoots to grow back. Plastic moulds are placed over them, training them to grow into shape. Once grown, they are cut down, seasoned, dried out, finished and varnished with hard wax oil.

“It’s a renewable thing,” Munro says. “It keeps the trees alive and healthy for longer. I’m doing this because I want to - very slowly of course - make manufacturing objects greener and more beautiful.”

The mould shapes are based on mid-century Scandinavian design and 18th century “Shaker” furniture Munro says, which centres around the idea that every household object should have a function.





The process from planting to finished piece takes between five and eight years depending on the tree species.

“There’s a quiet beauty about it,” Munro says. “It’s the antithesis of everything going on today - everyone wants everything now. But this is actually more efficient.”

Despite the length of time, Munro says that the process, which is “a bit like shepherding”, uses less resources and less energy than “growing a tree for 50 years, cutting it down and moving it around”.

Munro says: “When I was a design student, we looked at a ‘cradle to the grave’ analysis of production. I’m really interested in the processes we use to make things. It’s bonkers that we do things in such convoluted ways.

“In a year, our production process uses the same amount of energy as eight 60W light bulbs in an office,” he says. “And most of that is from our lawnmower. The production barely needs mains water or electricity.”

Additional benefits for the environment include increased carbon dioxide absorption from the furniture/tree as it grows, and increased biodiversity in the area, Munro says.

Current designs available are chairs, desks and lamps. “I’m a furniture designer,” he says. “You’ve got to start with what you know.” The company hopes to “perfect the technique” and produce an extended range including jewellery and art installations in the future.





Artistic projections of the furniture

Full Grown is currently selling pre-orders to customers, due to arrive in 2016-2017, and are looking to sell “limited edition” furniture to art galleries.

“We thought people waiting would be a problem, but everyone seems to be quite pleased that they’ve got a chair growing for them in rural Derbyshire,” Munro says. “Each one is unique aesthetically, and when someone sits on it, they’ll be sitting on five years of patience, and cooperation between craftsman and nature - you don’t get that with your average chair.”

Mirror frames and pendant lamps will be the first to be harvested, ready for sale in Spring 2016, and are available for pre-order at prices ranging from £450 - £900. Chairs will be available in 2017, at a pre-order price of £2,500 and a release price of £5,000.