

Perfectly Imperfect

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Features | April 1, 2019 Perfectly Imperfect By Jamie Twitchel | Photos by Devin Ginther

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Finding new life in old trees

While alive, trees create oxygen, remove air pollutants, and provide shade and food. We extol their virtues in life, but in death, we see them as waste. They're commonly mulched, left to decay, or become firewood or smoking chips. It's a sad ending for the more than 300 million trees that succumbed to the Texas drought of 2014 and the millions more that die from age, disease, invasive insects, natural disaster, and new residential or commercial construction.

The good news is that a growing network of businesses focused on urban and rural wood utilization is changing the way people think about these trees. Dripping Springs is home to two such businesses—Refined Elements and its sister company, Texas Urban Sawmill. "We are the only business in Texas focused exclusively on offering turn-key tree-use services for residential and commercial construction projects," says Devin Ginther, owner and founder of both businesses.



Their work provides the public with lumber and handcrafted heirloom furniture, such as tables and countertops, sourced strictly from salvaged hardwood trees, such as pecan, a common storm and drought victim. "Some of the pecan trees we save are over 200 years old and have a very rich Texas history," Devin explains. "We take great pride not only in saving these trees but in turning them into products that can be seen, touched, and enjoyed by future generations here in Texas."

Refined Elements produces some of the finest live-edge furniture in the United States. Featuring the salvaged lumber in the furniture is part of Devin's vision to create a mission-driven, vertically-integrated company focused on repurposing trees and generating community awareness. To help make his vision a reality, Aaron Mitchamore and Scott Wilson joined the business in 2017. "We're blessed to have three liked-minded families involved and committed to our mission of doing what is right for the community and environment," says co-owner Scott Wilson.



It's a mission that's led to engaging in salvage projects with nonprofit organizations, such as helping a Presbyterian church in Dallas find ways to reuse wood on their property. The businesses also collaborate with the City of Austin Urban Forestry Department and with Habitat for Humanity. "We've donated lumber to the Austin Habitat for Humanity every quarter this year," Devin says. "It's amazing, because they sell it the same day, sometimes within a matter of hours. It's a great relationship."

Giving back feels good, but so does working with wood. "It's because it's tangible—you can see and touch wood, and people love the feel of it," Scott says. "Those who visit our workshop are mesmerized by the process the wood goes through and by the time investment needed to properly repurpose it. But it's worth it, because we consider fine craftsmanship one of our hallmarks."

Clients often visit the shop to select a slab and discuss design ideas. "Devin wants to know how the piece will be used and who will use it," Scott explains. "The more information he has, the more he can fit the piece to their liking."



The resulting piece is unique, can't be found in any department store, and comes with a story. That hole in the slab? It's where a branch once grew. That imperfect edge? Insects living in the wood created it. That channel coursing through the center? Water and mud carved it as the tree floated down a river. Marred by life and death, each piece will tell its tale for generations to come, if only people know how to read the story.

Refined Elements salvages Texas hardwoods wherever they're felled. If you have a tree that needs clearing or would like more information on Refined Elements fine furniture or lumber, visit refinedelements.com and txurbansawmill.com.