

Information for Sales People at Artisans on fifth Featured Artist: Raymond Mellott

Materials:

The Bowls and Art Pieces:

- Generally, except for accents (and the clappers –see below), all the wood used is locally harvested. Pecan, Laurel and Live Oak, Sycamore, and citrus wood are most often used. Walnut Cherry, and small amounts of exotics such as Ebony or Padauk may be used as accents on complex pieces.
- Ray welcomes wild grain, crotches, voids, splits, bark and other inclusions, stains, spalting (fungus) and wormholes that give the wood a unique character.
- Small finger bowls, ring bowls salt cellars and the like are made from handy pieces left over from larger works. Local woods are used, but also cherry, walnut and others may be had.
- Except for those obviously made with lids of different woods, the lids of lidded bowls are cut from the same block of wood as the body; thus ensuring that the grain of the lid matches the body. Because it's so difficult to get a block of wood tall enough to be cut in that way, it isn't common; and lidded bowls of this nature are relatively rare.
- Coming soon: Pieces augmented with crushed Lapis Lazuli (royal blue), Apatite (lighter blue and light green), and jasper (red); as well as oxidized copper in various colors.

Finish:

- Sometimes colored wax will be used to accentuate defects or grain. Occasionally garnet shellac might be used to highlight the reds in a piece. Blond shellac may be used to protect colored wax.
- Ray generally finishes his work with food safe oils, rub on finishes, and occasionally, waxes. Sometimes voids and cracks are filled; often not. The finishing of the piece can easily take longer than the cutting.
- Salt cellars and other small bowls may be finished with just food safe oil; and nothing else. They can be re-oiled at any time with any edible oil (olive oil, for example).

Care:

- NEVER wash a bowl in water. Never use one of Ray's bowls for liquids or wet things. To clean, just wipe with a dry or slightly damp towel.

The Kitchen Utensils:

- The kitchen utensils are made from the harder woods. Pecan and Live Oak spatulas are currently being sold.
- The concept of a 'right' or 'left' hand utensil has to do with the twist incorporated into the handle; how the end of the utensil lays in the hand, and how comfortable it is in the preferred hand.
- 'Spatulas' are generally the normal shape one might expect. An 'omelet turner' is longer than it is wide. The blade of a 'wok stirrer' is more heavily curved.

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Finish:

- Spatulas are finished with just food safe oil; and nothing else. They can be re-oiled at any time with any edible oil (olive oil, for example).

Care:

- Wash them in water; with dishwashing detergent. Re-oil with a food safe oil if you need to; but it most likely won't be necessary, given that spats are used in oil rich foods.
- If the edge of the spatula gets dull, you can use sandpaper to make the edge crisp again.

The Clappers:

- Made with Poplar, a close grained white, tannin-free hardwood, augmented with contrasting inlays of Cherry, Padauk, Walnut, or other tannin free contrasting hardwood.
- The large sized clapper is about 9.5" x 3"; and is a standard, classical size. The smaller one is about 8" x 2.5".
- It's an old-time tool, used by people who sew and iron seams to keep the seams completely flat after ironing. It works and works very well.
- You wouldn't use an open grained wood like oak because of the likelihood of the open grain catching fabric threads. You also wouldn't use Oak because it has tannin in the wood; and might stain the fabric. Same with dark exotics.

Finish:

- NO finish is used on Clappers, as you need to keep the wood porous so it absorbs water vapor from the ironed cloth.

Care:

- No special care is necessary nor is any particularly desirable. If the Clapper gets too dirty, you might use some sandpaper to clean it up; but it ought not to be necessary. Ray's wife, an avid quilter and dedicated clapper defender has never ever done this.

The Main Woods Defined and Explained:

- **Spalting** describes how fungus has invaded and colored the wood. Spalted wood can be very pretty and is generally desirable in art pieces; almost never desirable in furniture grade wood. Almost all woods can be spalted. All that is necessary is ensuring that the wood you are interested in was cut fresh and then left on the ground, in the weather to do its thing. But not too long, because if that happened, the wood would be rotted.
- Some **oak may be fumed**... A process where the piece is exposed to ammonia fumes in an enclosed space; turning the tannin in the wood dark gray/brown.
- **Sycamore** is a light colored wood; and can often be seen with 'lacing'. It's the only North American hardwood with that characteristic. Many of Ray's Sycamore pieces show this lacing.

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- The color of **Laurel Oak**, a close relative of Water Oak, ranges from light to relatively dark brown; and is often water stained with black streaks; and spalted. Since Laurel Oak is a fast growing tree; and is very wet when harvested, shrinkage as it dries can be severe; and the wood is very likely to crack. Laurel Oak pieces greater than 2" thick or so, without radial shrink crack lines are, thus, rare.
- **Live Oak** is dense, often has interlocked grain, and very hard to machine. Color ranges from almost blond (sapwood) to dark brown (heartwood).
- **Pecan** is related to Hickory; both Pecan and Hickory being the two hardest north American hardwoods, and for that reason, is virtually impossible to carve by hand. It's susceptible to borers; that if unchecked can kill a tree. It easily spalts. Frequently has voids and bark inclusions; and wild grain. Color ranges from white to dark brown.

The Accent Woods:

- **Padauk** is a tropical hardwood that when freshly cut is an intense dark red. With time the wood changes and takes on some brown. Nonetheless, the color can be quite pleasing.
- **Walnut heartwood** is a dark brown color. It darkens even more with age, and given enough time, can appear to be almost black.
- **Cherry heartwood** is a reddish brown hardwood that is about as hard as Walnut. It also, darkens with age but won't get as dark as walnut.

Helpful Information for the Customer:

- With exceptions, the wood Ray uses comes from locally felled trees, is roughed 'wet', set aside to dry for as much as two years or more; and only then, shaped and finished. Hours can easily go into the wet work. Days can go into the shaping and finishing of a large, complicated piece. It can't be rushed.
- The twisted spatulas are; as far as Ray knows, unique; as is the idea that one can fit one hand better than the other. The 'fishtail' on the end of most of the pieces is intentional; giving a better ability to balance the tool in the hand (depending on which hand is being used) than just a blunt end. Besides, it looks really, really different. And, Ray thinks, cool.

Packaging Instructions:

- Use plain newsprint and/or bubble wrap for the bowls and delicate pieces. For clappers, kitchen utensils and the like, no special packaging is necessary.