



Huey Dupont

Furniture Maker

Calling himself a "simple" person who comes "from the woods at Big Bend and that's behind Simmesport," St. Landry Parish's furniture maker Huey Dupont seems to embody the Cajun culture itself. It takes only one visit with this talented craftsman and his family to make the visitor recognize the strength, common sense, practical wisdom, and the need to offer advice which are all part of Dupont's culture and his product.

Huey Dupont, who is a self-taught furniture maker, fashions love seats, flower pot stands, chairs, doll furniture, beds, swings, sofas, baskets, and other items from willow, ash, cypress, and scrap lumber (what the ordinary person would throw away). Building either from his original design or from a rough sketch provided by a customer, Dupont constructs with ease. He makes each stress point work with the other and he makes the braces do their job. Quality is guaranteed with this kind of planning and care. Strength and durability are the end results of Mr. Dupont's work.

Using simple tools: a blade made into a machete for cutting wood, a pruning tool for snipping wood into shape, a kitchen knife for whittling ends and stripping bark, a hammer, and galvanized and waxed nails-Dupont works willow which comes from the sand bar islands on the Mississippi River to fashion furniture of intricate design. He forms ash or willow into loops and curves which resemble rattan but are much more durable.

If Dupont is making an item intended for outdoor use, he will use the natural wood. If the product is intended for indoors, he will use an immature stripped willow or ash from which all bark has been removed. Dupont notes that he uses immature ash or willow which he bends with the bark shortly before using. If bent too long before using or if tree is too mature, the bark is harder to strip and, "It won't bend for me," says Dupont.

Conservation seems to be a part of Dupont's philosophy. He stresses that he cuts only what he can use up in a very short period of time-he doesn't want to "waste" his wood! Although Dupont is self-taught, he and his twelve siblings were always encouraged to work with their hands. He is passing this on to his teenage son, Mark, who has already begun to construct bent willow baskets and simple items of furniture. Lucille, Huey's wife, is also learning her husband's craft. She has become quite adept at fashioning wood creations and flower arrangements made from wood.

All of Dupont's wood products come with two things: his brand -HD- and advice on how to care for them. He suggests spraying this hand-crafted furniture with a mixture of linseed oil and turpentine every few years to provide a rich, glossy finish and longevity. Although Huey Dupont has only been practicing his craft for a couple of years, he has already been discovered by New Orleans and by Paul Prudhomme who owns a Dupont original and who plans to feature Dupont's work in his catalogue of Cajun items. Be on the lookout for this newcomer into the state's artistic circles!

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