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Like a good horse trainer, David Baker takes a raw material, in his case pieces of wood from local forests and turns them into useful and pleasing works of art which maintain the unique individuality of each piece of wood. He often finds the wood himself on trips into the mountains.

Each bowl, spoon or table which comes out of his workshop on the edge of the Zuni Mountains in Ft. Wingate reflects the life and type of tree it from which it came. David uses unusually shaped wood from a variety of local trees: Aspen, Cedar, Russian Olive, Blue Spruce, Gambel Oak and Ponderosa Pine among others for his work.

The work, often on his heavy lathe, is slow but not tedious.

"You just don't know how the piece will come out," he said.

As a craftsman, he is happy to just price his bowls by the time he spends on them using his standard figure of $20 an hour.

He also adds that if a piece turns out exceptionally "beautiful, the one of a kind pieces are valued differently."

He prizes the wood of unusual shape as the grain of this wood swirls in unique patterns; the pieces which result hearken back to the simple yet elegant craftwork and furniture of an earlier time. His bowls of Russian Olive look like a design created when dark chocolate syrup is dripped into white ice cream and is stirred in circles with a spoon.

Most of his handcrafted pieces arrive as logs at his workshop months prior to his woodworking resulting in the final piece being done. Initially, he cuts the logs into slabs of one to several inches thickness. He will then cure the slab by placing it into a kiln and baking it for up to two months as in the case of Alligator Juniper.

In contrast, Baker noted, "the quickest wood I've had is Aspen. It will take two or three weeks to cure."

His knowledge of woodworking is significant enough that he also instructs others who wish to learn the craft.

Baker's most complex piece completed recently, a table, is made from a large limb of an "Alligator Juniper" tree. This type of tree is found high in the Zuni Mountains often among groves of Gambel Oak. He uses only the limbs of this tree, which grow from a base that can be immense: 8 feet wide by 4 feet deep at its base. He then attempts to reveal the wood's unique, but durable swirls of near apricot colored grain.

The table top is comprised of two slabs cut from the same limb. When the slabs are laid next to one another and joined each makes a near mirror image of the other. The table's outer edge

retains the shape of the limb's original outside curve. To match the outside curve of the table top Baker also creates the supporting legs with a similar curve.

He created this one of a kind table to be able to participate in an art show at the '1, 2, 3 Gallery' in Gallup. The table is currently at Rocky's, a gallery on old Route 66 in Grants. Rocky's focuses on locally produced art which shows the influence of our area's many cultures and fine geological landscapes on the imaginations of our artists.

Baker's art is made not only to satisfy one's artistic sense, he also plans on many of his unique bowls and utensils to be used as part of daily life. Unlike a bowl produced an ocean span away, when you fill a bowl from Baker's studio, you can be sure it is coated with four coats of food grade sealant per his standard.

From forest to workshop to one's home these pieces of wood follow a path that allows one to share the benefit of the skill of a traditional craftsman.