



Icon Modern is making its mark using urban wood. Tables have also been branded with wood species and the city where the tree was removed



This book matched hackberry table with walnut dovetail inlay . Was once a Tree Standing in Chicago.

Design Businesses focus on urban wood

West coast

[Urban Hardwoods](#)

[Meyer /Wells](#)

East coast

[Hudson Furniture](#)

[Uhuru Design](#)

[Citilog](#)

Midwest

[Icon Modern](#)



Buckthorn and brush end tables. Material sourced in Wisconsin. Can we help to make this "Illinois Buckthorn?"

Illinois Urban Wood News

Selling More than Just Furniture— Icon Modern

Local designer Rocky Levy of Icon Modern sells well-designed, durable, long-lasting products. But what makes him unique from many other furniture designers is that his products come with a story—they are made from urban wood—local trees that live in our neighborhoods. Levy’s business focuses on producing tables and architectural pieces from urban wood and re-claimed timbers and steel. The pieces showcase the beauty of the materials and tell their story through thoughtful design. Rocky started developing his business in 2006 and is based out of Chicago.

“What sets us apart is that our tables are designed around the wood itself, which has a compelling story.” said Levy.

One of these stories is the plight of the ash tree, which makes up to 20 percent of our trees in Illinois. “Most people don’t know or pay attention to news about the Emerald Ash Borer,” said Levy. “But the story of the wood reminds them about what’s going on, and they become tied to the story of the piece.” His clients embrace the use of EAB ash and understand why it’s a good thing to use the material.

Because urban ash wood is becoming more readily available, Levy has made it the standard in most of his designed pieces. Clients may specify other species of wood, but Levy focuses on using ash. Ash is fairly easy to work with, and the wood can be processed in a number of ways to achieve the colors and finishes desired. So, why not?

“Ash is everything I need it to be, solid, durable, and it has a great story,” said Levy. Icon Modern’s client base is in the commercial and hospitality sectors. They have pieces in hotels, casinos, corporate offices, restaurants and cafés. Occasionally, they produce products for residential clients.

He shares most of his product information in face-to-face conversations. His clients want to hear the story and see the “character” in the wood that would traditionally be seen as a defect. Levy regularly carries around pieces of character wood, including spalted maple (which occurs when maples are affected by a fungus) and blue stained oak (the result of a bullet once lodged in the tree). He also shares binders of cut sheets depicting the furniture pieces.

Icon Modern also has a growing Facebook following, a new website, and will be launching a web-based catalog that will allow interior designers and architects to download AutoCad files of the furniture so they can easily place the pieces into designs. “The easier I make it for them to sell to their clients, the more pieces I sell,” said Levy.

Rocky’s advice for others interested in entering the market: Identify potential customers, and build relationships before you build furniture. “It is better to identify your strengths and develop furniture that meets people’s needs,” he said.

He advises creating a few professional pieces that showcase your work and then adapting them as client’s request. He notes that there are a huge number of residential designers that work in the Chicagoland area that “have no idea that people will make things like this”. He suggests that local woodworkers using urban wood should open the phone book and call the first five interior designers in their area. They are always looking for just the right piece and don’t know that there are people who can make it for them.

Using urban trees for designed furniture is a growing trend especially on the West coast. Rocky equates the market in the Midwest to that of the East coast where urban wood has also been very successful. “If it can succeed in Manhattan it can succeed here. There is no reason why its popularity won’t grow.” Rocky said.