



You Are What You Eat On - Tables

By Tracy Hanes

Until her mid-40s, Patti Petticrew was all for formality. Her dining set was antique, complete with Heppelwhite chairs.

But when she turned 46, her love affair with that measured and mannered lifestyle ended. While the furniture had fit the stately Toronto century home she and husband Shawn had been renting when they acquired the dining set, it no longer suited their family or the house they were living in.

"I'd done all the fussy

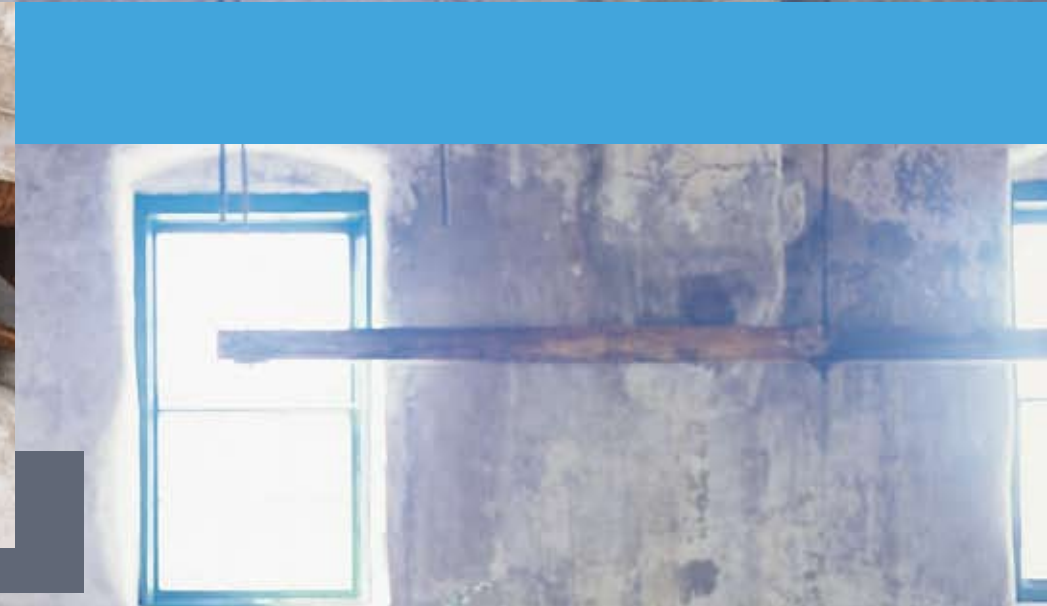
stuff with the furniture and good china and wanted something low maintenance," she recalls. "My lifestyle was too complicated and I wanted to simplify."

So, the fussy antiques went, and Patti and Shawn came across the perfect replacement for their dining room at a small antique dealer in the Brighton area five years ago. It was a sturdy wooden work bench that had originally come from the de Havilland aircraft factory in Malton, where the famous Avro Arrow had been manufactured. And the price was right, at \$900. It was too tall for sit-down meals, so the Petticrews had it cut down to table height and now the "six-foot-and-a-bit" long table which is 29 inches wide, is a centre of activity in the Petticrew's long, narrow brownstone in the Beach in Toronto.

"We eat on it, my daughter does her homework on it. We love that thing," says Patti. "I had it hand-waxed and it still has original chunks of paint in it. It looks like it came from a big French country chateau."

To complement it, Patti hung a wire chandelier over it and added eight leather chairs for seating, that she says guests can lean back in and curl their feet under.

Toronto interior designer Dan Menchions, a partner in II by IV Design, creates some of the coolest condo suites in the city. Although he custom designs many tables for clients, such as the metal and glass tables in Etobicoke's new South Beach Condo model suite, the centre-piece of his own dining room is an



old door he found on a lawn on Palmerston Ave. His neighbours were renovating their house and were going to trash the door.

"It's a pocket door and was one of two," recalls Menchions of the find 16 years ago. Now the 1892 four-and-a-half by nine-foot solid mahogany pocket door with coffered panels and brass hardware is topped with glass and serves as the dining room table at Menchions' downtown loft. It weighs a "few hundred pounds" and is supported by a series of multiple legs made from black metal tubing.

Before it's incarnation as a table, Menchions also used the door as art on the wall and as a headboard.

"It's very beautiful and a great focal point," says Menchions. "People comment on it all the time."

Eight to 10 people can sit around it on custom chairs which are the same as ones Menchions had

designed for a job for the Hilton hotel. The espresso-stained chairs, in solid maple with cream chenille upholstery, have asymmetrical arms – one chair has a left arm, another a right arm, so they can be paired up as small benches.

Interior designer Viki King of Willow Hill Designs in Oshawa, says Menchions' and Petticrew's dining rooms exemplify a current trend – using objects which originally had other purposes as tables.

"I'm seeing a lot of unique objects used as dining room tables," she says. "I've seen beautiful old barn boards made into picnic style tables, people making tables from doors and iron gates."

Mark Rose of Porcupine Wood Design Inc. in Burlington recently used pine boards from a dismantled chicken barn he got from Timeless Lumber Company to create a seven-foot long rectangular dining room table for a client's Horse-shoe Valley ski chalet.

While the client wanted a traditional looking table, he didn't want the standard division of boards in the middle. Instead, Rose installed a rather elaborate mechanism under the table which allows the ends to extend when there's plenty of company for dinner. The system is concealed behind a false drawer front.

When Rose, who does mainly custom work in hardwood, maple, cherry and quarter-sawn oak and teaches at Sheridan College, sits down to dinner, it's at an old large teak table in the house he shares with his glass artist wife, Alison.

"The house needs lots of work," says Rose, and until that's finished, he won't start designing a table for himself.

Propped up against the green board and batten workshop next to his house in Campbellville, a village just west of Milton, John Koletic has an unusual array of wooden pieces, boards, roots and stumps out drying in the sun.

Inside the shop, he runs a hand over





the smooth surface of a table top made from a single board of bubinga, a beautifully patterned, rich red wood from Africa. The 10-foot table is for a Toronto client's new house and will have a decidedly modern look, with wooden legs that look like abstract Xs. Before touching saw to wood, Koletic has tweaked the leg design on his computer, and created a model of Styrofoam pieces to ensure that the legs' multiple components will fit perfectly.

"Quality is job one here," he says. "There is no reason these tables shouldn't last 500 or 600 years."

Koletic has placed other bubinga table tops on bases, such as a huge buckeye root burl and another on steel icicle legs he fashioned.

Koletic, a former instrument technician who once worked on the Canadarm, the remotely operated appendage used on

the space shuttle to perform unique and difficult missions, turned his passion for woodworking into a full-time job after being downsized from the Nortel Corporation in 1993.

Koletic specializes in burl wood, which is an unusual lump or growth on a tree's roots, trunk or branches, which can range from the size of a fist to the size of a small car. He uses a variety of salvaged burl, including black poplar, buckeye, walnut, redwood, maple and exotic woods like sapele, rosewood, mahogany and bubinga and leaves edges natural.

While his business initially specialized in giftware clocks, custom dining room tables have become a main focus for Koletic Designs. Each table Koletic creates is one of a kind.

While the root bases make for some of the most dramatic tables, "they are

difficult to get, difficult to work with," says Koletic.

His tables command \$15,000 to \$30,000 and he is often booked six to eight months in advance.

"The look we're doing now is a trend, but we haven't changed our philosophy since we started," says Koletic. "It's timeless design. Even with the root bases, I wouldn't go as far as to call it rustic, as everything is finished and smooth. I call it elegantly organic."

"There's no particular period I do," he adds. "Nature's a big inspiration for me, as well as historical architecture, though arts and crafts style probably has the most similarity to what I do, though I'm using some Oriental influences, like curving legs."

His tables are equally at home in country, traditional or modern settings; and the warmth of the wood can temper





the often cold and austere lines of contemporary design.

Koletic recently made 10 modern dining chairs in walnut and sapele for a client, which sold for \$2,000 each. He says the project was one of the most challenging he's ever done, as he spent two months researching chair design to determine stress points, lumbar support, etc. before starting his own design.

In his own casual country home, Koletic, wife Nancy and their two young daughters sit down around a rectangular birch table handcrafted by Nancy's father on benches made by Koletic.

While his business comes mainly from word of mouth referrals, Koletic will have a booth at the One of a Kind Show in Toronto in November.

For those who can't afford to spend \$15,000 or more for a custom table, designer Viki King says often a table homeowners already own can fit the bill.

"You can modernize an existing table by pairing it with new chairs," she says. "Antique tables, for instance, always look great and mix with modern chairs."

Mixing and matching pieces is perfectly acceptable, especially since the eclectic look is in.

She says contemporary Barbara Barry chairs with their curving lines and sleek silhouette are an excellent choice for tables of various styles and this design is being copied by a lot of manufacturers due to its wide appeal.

"Parsons chairs are another great style that suit classic or modern décor," says King.

But she cautions, that doesn't mean all chairs work with all tables, so make sure to take measurements before making any purchases.

"It could get scary," she says. "If you have a table with a deep apron, the chairs might not fit. A seat should be eight to 10 inches from the apron, and the seat should be at least 18 inches high."

King also cites another trend – using benches around a table or combining chairs and benches. In small dining rooms, backless benches can expand the space visually.

King says while formal living rooms seem to have disappeared in newer houses, people are not giving up the dining room, which may be open to the kitchen or incorporated into it.

"These areas can be quite large and for these types of spaces, which are



used both for family dinners and entertaining company, a harvest table or French country style table works beautifully," says King, "and square tables are a big trend. They can sit eight comfortably and fit most dining rooms."

For the more confined spaces of condos, Menchions uses a lot of glass and metal tables, which are great for contemporary design schemes. He says most ironwork or metal shops and glass contractors will create pieces to customers' specifications.