



FOLLOW THE CURVE

Woodworker Victor DiNovi doesn't think in straight lines; people and nature are curvy, he says

By Steven Mark
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Mae West once said the loveliest distance between two points is a curved line. Victor DiNovi would agree.

DiNovi is a woodworker who specializes in furniture shaped in graceful, curved lines, a style known as "functional art."

"I'm a student of art in general, and life is curvy," said DiNovi, 69, who will be featuring some of his work at the Haleiwa Arts Festival on Saturday and July 20. "People are curvy. The only straight lines you see in nature are crystal structures."

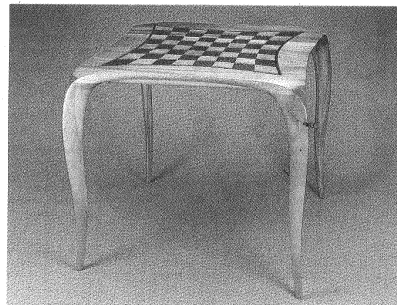
"Everything else is very curved, and long ago I picked animal and vegetative metaphors for a lot of my work. Basically what I'm making is sculpture; it just has a utilitarian use, too. I like the curves of nature, and I mimic that."

Although he is based on the mainland — Santa Barbara, Calif., to be exact — he has long specialized in koa, a focus that began in the 1970s, when the state was trying to create an overseas market for koa and made it widely available.

"I recognized its beauty a long time ago when I first came across it, and I used it in almost everything," he said. "I was building boats and entries of houses. At that time it was really inexpensive."

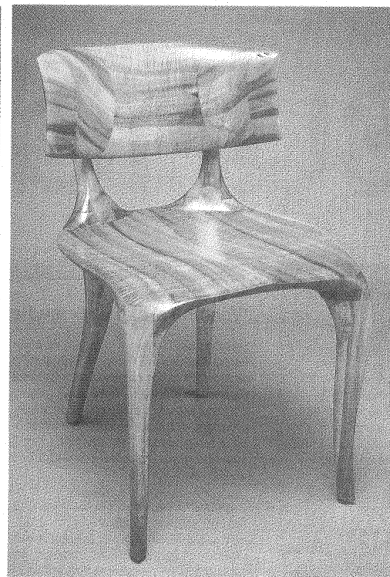
He first visited Hawaii in 1975 and stopped at a mill, sitting under the structure where a lot of the sawdust collected. With the views of the mountains, ocean and forest around him, the experience was intoxicating.

"To this day, every time I cut a piece of koa and I get that whiff of that pungent, unique smell, I get stoned," he said. "That's why it's my favorite wood to work with, besides the fact that it's beautiful and there are distinct grain patterns that have different characters. It



PHOTOS COURTESY VICTOR DINOVI

Woodworker Victor DiNovi created a chess table, above, out of koa and mango. His dining chair, right, shows the curved lines for which he has become known.



talks back to me somewhat. I like the fact that it's revered."

Restrictions on koa logging, enacted after that initial marketing effort proved to be too effective for its own good, have not deterred DiNovi from continuing to work with koa. He managed to acquire the last of the koa from that timber mill and uses his contacts in the islands to replenish his supply.

"I'm using koa that I got in the '80s," he said. "Just last week I got some koa from someone who's been hoarding it for years and years."

Visitors to the Haleiwa Arts Festival might get a chance at some of that koa themselves.

DiNovi will bring scrap pieces from his workshop, which he will make available to the public. "The scale of my work is large, so the small pieces aren't useful to me," he said.

Koa is a tough wood that can be hard on tools. DiNovi shapes the wood using advanced carbide-edged power tools that "mimic hand action, only with a lot of power."

He works as a sculptor

would, chiseling down a "blank" piece of wood as he creates a design. If he comes up with one he likes, he'll make it in koa if he can find a piece with the right grain pattern and of the right size.

"Some people see the wood and see something in the wood," he said. "I look at the character of the wood and see how I can best use that, rather than see some image in the wood."

Among the pieces he's bringing for this show will be a loveseat, a chair and a chess table made of koa and mango. They all feature the uniquely curved lines that have earned him mention in woodworking journals and places in exhibits.

"My tables look like they're going to walk away, and I try to (create) legs (that) look like human legs or animal legs," he said.

Trained as an engineer, DiNovi considers his work now as part art and part science. "I push the envelope of artistic design to the edge, and that takes an understanding of engineer-

HALEIWA ARTS FESTIVAL 17TH ANNUAL SUMMER ARTFEST

>> Where: Haleiwa Beach Park

>> When: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. July 20

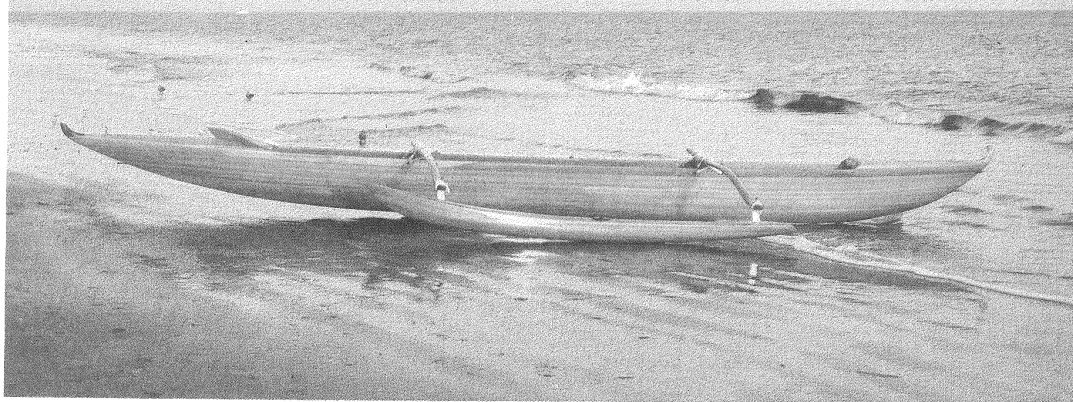
>> Info: haleiwaarts-festival.org

"By the time I was 14, I was going on my uncles' work sites — a lot of my family were in construction — and I would hang out with the carpenters and work with them," he said. "I put myself through engineering school working as a finish carpenter."

He is also an avid paddler who goes out on the water three or four times a week. He's paddled all over the South Pacific, including the Molokai Channel.

"I can't run anymore but I can still paddle," he said. "I'm an island boy myself — Brooklyn."

Victor DiNovi's work is also on display at Nohea Gallery in Ward Centre and Simply Wood Studios, 932 Kapahulu Ave.



DiNovi's outrigger canoe, Keleka, is a 28-footer made of Philippine mahogany with koa accents. DiNovi rides it off the coast of Santa Barbara.