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Side Table

## The Hands that Carve BY JONATHAN E. HIMLIN

It began with a banjo; the masterful woodworking of Traverse City resident Joseph Stearns, that is. A one-time architect and Detroit city planner, he got his creative start woodworking while fresh out of college when he built his own banjo because he couldn't afford to buy one. Though, to be fair, his experience with wood began long before then.

“I learned the rudiments of my craft from my father,” he recalls.

An engineer specializing in wood technology, Stearns' father was an amateur woodworker and member of the International Wood Collector's Society (he at one time had the fourth largest wood collection in the world numbering almost 3500 different species).

After his father's death in 1981, Stearns inherited his woodworking tools and set up a crude shop in his basement. Gradually, he developed his skill until becoming a full-time professional studio furniture maker in 1999.

Stearns prides himself on continually giving the utmost attention to fine craftsmanship and the selection of the world's most beautiful woods from sustainable sources. And while his technique is rooted in the time-honored traditions of the craft he has studied diligently for more than 25 years, his designs come by another process.

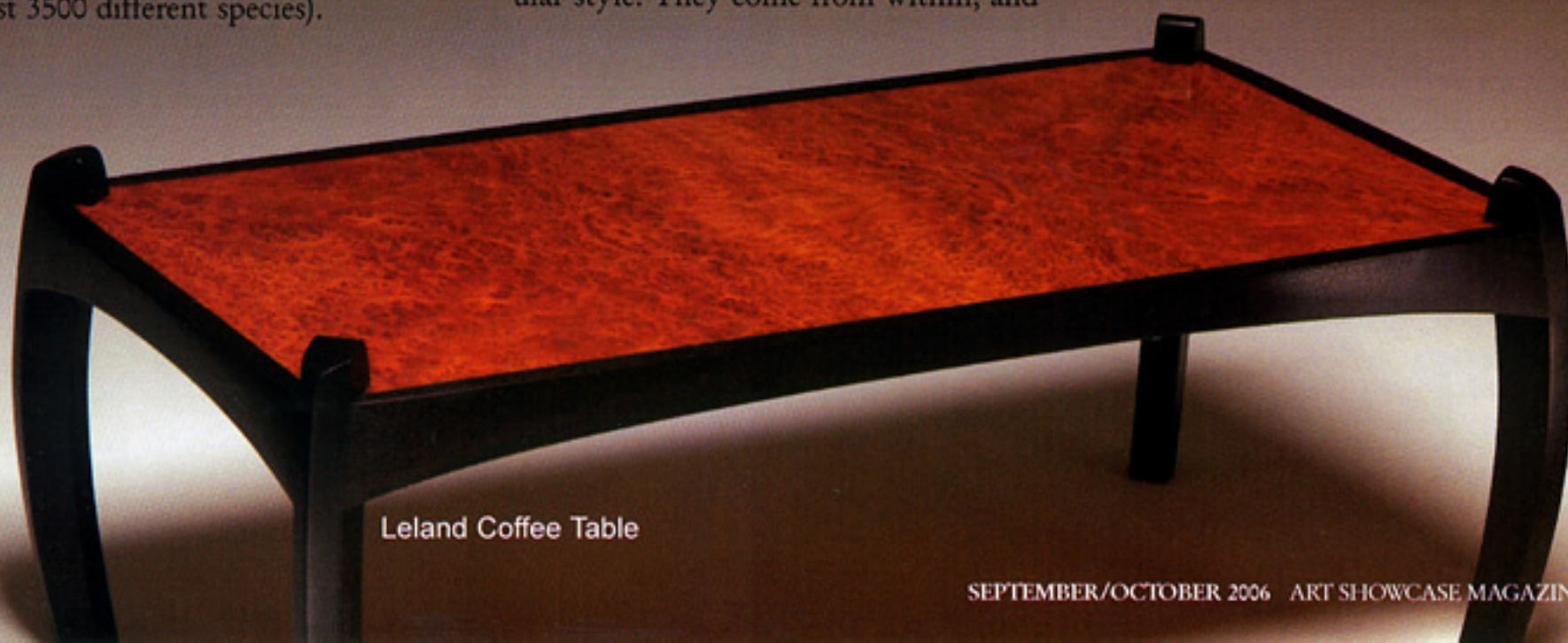
“I am always experimenting with new ways of forming and joining wood,” he says. “My designs are based on no particular style. They come from within, and

are influenced by a lifetime of study and exposure to art of all kinds.

“I think my customers appreciate that I am a free spirit when it comes to designing furniture, and they appreciate my creations as unique ideas.”

Stearns' work ranges in price from around \$500 for small occasional tables, to \$1,500 and up for coffee tables and benches, to over \$3,000 for large pieces like display cabinets.

*The woodworking of Joseph Stearns is available locally at 16 Hands Gallery in downtown Ann Arbor, 216 S. Main Street. Call for hours, 734.761.1110, or visit online at [www.16HandsGallery.com](http://www.16HandsGallery.com). ASM*



Leland Coffee Table