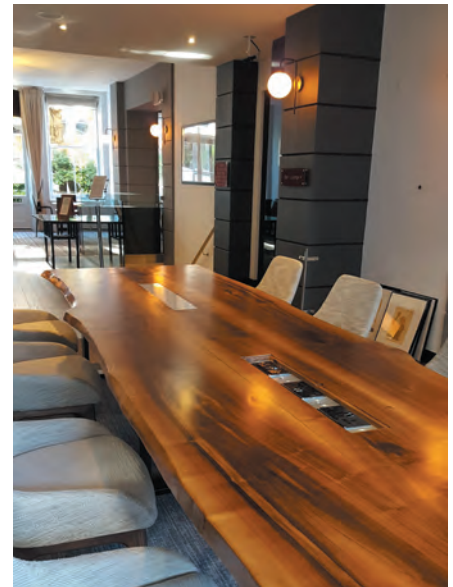


NATURAL BEAUTY

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Artisan designer-makers Handmade in Brighton are award-winning creators of stunning live-edge tables. These bespoke statement pieces are hand-crafted using traditional techniques, beautiful hardwoods and unique resin-embedded items such as large ammonite fossils or antique keys to reflect each client’s story.

Handmade in Brighton is a designer-maker partnership launched in 2015, producing uniquely crafted tables to a beautifully high standard with particular attention paid to the nuances and character of the natural timber being used. Always prototyping new ideas, the creative partnership of Jude Payne (Royal College of Art trained artist-designer) and Jonathan Vigour (dye-in-the-wool artisan-craftsman) has gone from strength to strength over the last few years, bagging no less than three Best of Houzz awards and increasing its market profile significantly.

Jude said: “We started off producing one-of-a-kind coffee and console tables, but were soon swamped by requests for much larger bespoke dining and conference tables which we now specialise in.

“Our largest table to date was made for Wilderness Reserve, a stunning country estate in Suffolk. It’s a massive 8.9m long made in four sections of the most amazing American Walnut. Last time we visited, the estates manager told us that fashion designer Alexa Chung had her birthday bash there, which apparently involved a certain amount of dancing on the tables.”

The design process is totally client-focused, starting off with a discussion of the basic requirements in terms of size and preferred timbers. As an essential part of the (sometimes lengthy) design discussions with customers about their bespoke

tables, Handmade in Brighton provide detailed drawings showing dimensions, timber choices, photos of finishes, possible resin-embedded items and so on. Other bespoke options are wood or metal bowkeys, built in power and USB capability, wood-branding, extending tables and custom metal fabricated legs with a huge range of possible finishes.

Jude said: “We love making tables that really reflect our clients’ own stories – they are totally involved in the design and timber selection, and it’s great to know that we are making a centrepiece of home life that will stay with their families for many years.”

Once the live-edge slabs have been individually selected for each customer, the making process can begin. Because the design of each table is different and of course every live-edge slab is totally unique, this process varies every time.

Tables are generally between 75cm to 135cm wide and anywhere from 1m to 3.5m long and are usually made from 2-3 joined slabs of 40-60mm thickness. Occasionally the workshop is able to obtain rare single slabs that are wide enough to make a table out of.

“Currently we’re waiting for some huge 1.4m wide by 3m long English Walnut slabs to dry and be ready to use – there’s no rushing though – these won’t be air-dried and then kiln-dried for another year or so,” Jonathan confided.

Jude chipped in: “We often send our clients photos of the tables while they’re being made, which they love and we do try to personally deliver as many of our tables as we can as it is always a treat to meet the clients and have a chat in person – quite often this will be the first time we’ve met them



as communication up to that point is usually by phone and email.”

As an artisan workshop they use hand tools not large industrial machinery in order to really bring out the beauty and personality of the natural slabs – this produces an artisan surface finish which is smooth but has undulations and occasional tool marks, giving the tables their character. These natural slabs often have slight bends, twists and cracks which are all part of their beautiful “treeness”. Any cracks and knots are filled with tinted epoxy resin so the surface is smooth with no holes that would collect crumbs and detritus.

There is an amazing variation in wood grain between the timbers that Handmade in Brighton use – from the cool, light-coloured ripples of Olive Ash to the dark swirling grain of English Walnut and everything in between. They also use Serbian, French and American walnut, elm, chestnut and London plane, as well as all types of oak – starburst, tiger, burr and straight-grained.

Jonathan said: “The effect that our live-edge tables have on people is always an inspiration. Because we try not to suppress the individuality of the slabs but instead coax out their natural beauty this results in a far more tactile feel than anything made in a factory.”

Jude took up the story: “Combining these amazing hardwoods with the very strong shapes of the steel legs that we use gives a great modern industrial-rustic look. Add into this equation the 120-million-year-old ammonite fossils and wood or metal bowkeys we often embed in the tables and you have a completely unique piece. Literally no-one else in the world will ever have a table like this.

“We recently found out that the name for our ‘in-tune-with-nature’ approach to making is called ‘Biophilic design’, a term coined by Edward O. Wilson, a Harvard University entomologist, referring to humans’ love of living things – our inherent human connection to the natural world.”

As they are a bespoke artisan workshop, Handmade in Brighton don’t have their own showroom per se, but do have a few tables on show in London which prospective customers can visit:

- Olive Ash table with embedded English Ammonite fossils and self-colour bow-keys at Holloways of Ludlow kitchen design showroom on Richmond Hill (36 Friar’s Stile Road, Richmond, TW10 6NQ).
- French Walnut table in the meeting room at Hotel Indigo, Kensington (34-44 Barkston Gardens, Kensington, SW5 0EW).
- Serbian Walnut 3.6m conference table in the lobby at K+K Hotel George, Kensington (1-15 Templeton Place, Kensington, SW5 9NB).

However, plans are afoot to move into a new, larger workshop where clients will be able to come and chat about their requirements, look at timber samples and see projects currently being worked on.

Jude told us: “The new workshop is in the middle of the countryside with beautiful views of the South Downs, so will be an inspirational place to work. We’re really looking forward to it.”

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