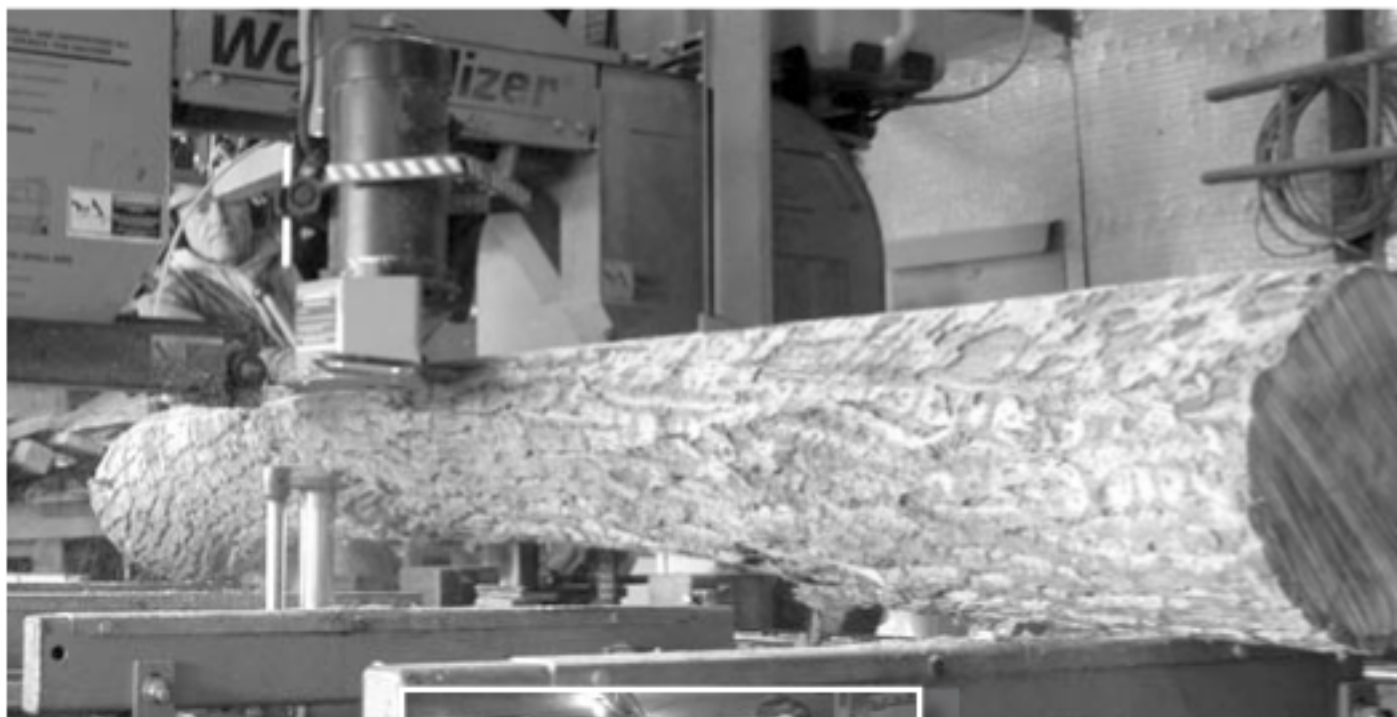


Steen Sawmill Harvests Value in Old Trees



Back in pioneering times, most of America east of the Mississippi was covered with a dense forest of deciduous hardwood trees – oak, hickory, walnut, black cherry, chestnut, ash...

As land was cleared for farming, most of those forest giants were simply felled and burned – a loss that makes today's woodworker wince with pain and regret.

Today, ironically, many of our finest, largest hardwood trees are found in cities where they were planted more than a century ago when towns were smaller and residential neighborhoods were close to today's city-centers.

When those old homes are razed for new construction, the trees surrounding them are often uprooted and hauled to the nearest landfill. Again, woodworkers wince.

There's a move afoot, however, to harvest these fine old trees, and sawmill operators like Erwin Bonestroo of rural Steen, MN are helping it grow.

Bonestroo's FBT Sawmill & Lumber gets large trees from developers that would otherwise go to waste. He hauls



Erwin Bonestroo of Steen, MN owns and operates FBT Sawmill & Lumber which specializes in harvesting useful wood from trees that might otherwise wind-up in landfills. At left, Bonestroo sits on stools he's made and holds a hand-made ash "Walking Tall" bat. Above, he cuts boards from the trunk of a cottonwood tree.

are discovering him, too, as a source of the often-gnarled wood that makes their visions come alive.

Bonestroo says there's nothing wasted from his operation. Even the sawdust is harvested, mixed with straw for livestock bedding. Scraps of ash become wedges used in leveling mobile homes on their foundations; chunks of bark and bits of branches wind-up as fuel to heat the shop and dryers.

Bonestroo is also a furniture-builder. He shows his rustic benches, tables and chairs at large "art-in-the-park" shows in Brookings and Sioux Falls. He also builds an occasional walnut table or cedar chest on a custom basis or for sale to drop-in customers.

Information about services and products available from FBT Sawmill & Lumber, including custom milling and hardwoods, is available by calling 507-920-9933.

them to his mill about a mile southeast of Steen where he cuts them to dimensions that suit their ultimate purpose. Rough-sawn boards from cottonwood trees, some of them enormous, usually wind up as pallets. Hardwoods, including walnut, maple and ash, are cut to thicknesses used in building furniture and dried in one of Bonestroo's home-built, wood-fired dryers where they stay for about five weeks. By then, their moisture content has been reduced to about six-percent and they're ready to use.

Bonestroo has been in the sawmill business for only about three years, but already word has gotten around that he'll take large tree trunks off a developer's hands. Makers of "rustic" furniture