



AHEC Europe
Unit 20.1,
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americanhardwood.org

PRESS RELEASE
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KOLMAN BOYE ARCHITECTS, BENCHMARK AND THE AMERICAN HARDWOOD EXPORT COUNCIL COLLABORATE TO BUILD A THREE-STOREY 'GENERAL STORE' FOR WALLPAPER* HANDMADE IN MILAN

The American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) has partnered with designers Kolman Boye and furniture-makers Benchmark to create a towering structure of food plates in a commission for Wallpaper* Handmade 2015 called the Rotunda Serotina.

The Danish/Swedish architects Kolman Boye were invited by Wallpaper* to design a candy-store concept for doling out free savoury biscuits from local bistro T'a Milano. Wallpaper* teamed up the designers with Benchmark, a company which has almost unparalleled knowledge of wood, to build the structure in collaboration with the American Hardwood Export Council. The Rotunda is constructed entirely of American cherrywood, *Prunus Serotina*.

The architects, who in this particular project found inspiration in skeletal structures, were further influenced by the old-fashioned general store. Here, they have taken apothecary shelving to extreme heights. "Something really strong was needed for the huge venue," says Victor Boye Julebæk, who leads the architecture practice with Erik Kolman Janouch. "Maybe we went a little over the top."

English furniture-makers Benchmark worked alongside the designers from day one. Sharing Kolman Boye's respect and enthusiasm for traditional Japanese joinery techniques, Benchmark has used square peg joints, cutting hundreds of square holes, not easy, but a strong component of Japanese joinery. "In total we made 3,084 separate pieces connected by 1,008 joints to make up the 'skeleton' of the Rotunda together with 528 trays for the surface layer, all assembled without the use of nails, screws or glue. It is a wonderful piece of cabinet making and a tribute to the skills of our craftsmen who have used their fine techniques on such a grand scale," explains Sean Sutcliffe, co-founder of Benchmark.

The vast columns of shelves are arranged in a cylindrical shape so that a single ladder can slide around inside the structure to scale every shelf. Each shelf in the Rotunda holds rows of cherry-wood snack trays that visitors can take home as limited-edition samples from the exhibit.

At over 3.7m in diameter and the same in height, this is not really a piece of furniture but a substantial yet lightweight structure. With this in mind, AHEC turned to engineers Arup, central to a number of previous AHEC projects, including the "Timber Wave" and "Endless Stair", to carry out a structural appraisal and prototype tests, in order to inform the construction.

For visitors not used to seeing the striking pale-pinkish red timber in their surroundings, the emergence of *Prunus serotina* will be a revelation. Gone are the traditional reddish, highly lacquered connotations of cherry. The contemporary porous appearance of the wood fits in beautifully with the current vogue for raw, rugged timber.

The architects liken the structure to a set of "bones" and the serving trays as "skin". "We liked the idea of giving away the skin so only the bone remains. It's very beautiful, almost choreographical, the way pieces of the cherry are taken away by the public so you can see the structure slowly disintegrate. Like those huge gas holders that slowly empty."

American black cherry, which grows extensively in Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia and West Virginia, is one of the world's fastest growing temperate hardwoods. It regenerates naturally and ages to a striking, rich reddish-brown colour, yet it is still being vastly underutilised. "Cherrywood, from a craftsman's point of view, works beautifully and finishes to a gorgeous silky texture. As a fruit wood, it has been prized through history and should be prized now. It has become a victim of fashion which the forestry industry can ill afford given its 100-year



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planting and cropping plan,” says Sean Sutcliffe. He adds “Rotunda Serotina continues our work on Life Cycle Assessment, which we hope will be taken on widely in the furniture making industry.”

“Given current furniture fashion, you may be forgiven for thinking our forests are all white oak and walnut,” says David Venables, European Director of the American Hardwood Export Council. “Establishing a balance between market demand and the dynamic of the forest is essential to achieve true sustainability.”

He continues: “It is also about offering the consumer the widest possible choice. So not to present to the market some of our best and most exciting species, such as cherry, because they are not deemed ‘fashionable’, is a real lost opportunity. Rotunda Serotina is one of a number of AHEC projects in 2015 that will celebrate cherry. There are already indications that furniture industries in Europe are looking at cherrywood again as a material of choice. It is our experience that wood fashion in furniture often determines a ‘look’ that then becomes architecturally trendy a few years later.”

Cherry’s sustainability means it will likely always be available to bespoke and industrial furniture makers. Designers on AHEC projects talk about its durability and pliability – it turns well on a lathe and steam-bends with ease. The focus on cherry at Milan’s Salone del Mobile may, then, mark a turning point and a fresh chapter for this important hardwood.

During the manufacturing process, the teams will record all material inputs and energy consumption allowing them to assess the environmental impact for each object, using data from AHEC’s Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) research for 19 American hardwood species. Life Cycle Assessment is a scientific tool that helps industry to establish environmental frameworks that have real meaning and assess true sustainability. The result will present the cradle-to-grave impact of creating transporting and installing the entire structure for six impact categories, including global warming potential (GWP), or carbon footprint.

Rotunda Serotina at Wallpaper* Handmade: The Arcade via San Gregorio 43 Milan
14 April 2015, 12pm – 4pm
15 – 18 April 2015, 10am – 7pm
#RotundaSerotina
www.rotundaserotina.info

-Ends-

ABOUT KOLMAN BOYE

Kolman Boye Architects was founded in 2013 by Erik Kolman Janouch and Victor Boye Julebæk after having collaborated on several projects. The practice has a research-based approach, coupling academic work with construction and material investigation. Projects are informed by a sensitivity to experience, cultural heritage and the physical qualities of architecture.
www.kolmanboye.com

ABOUT BENCHMARK

Benchmark is a leading company of craftspeople and designers, founded 30 years ago by Terence Conran and Sean Sutcliffe. One of Great Britain’s most technologically advanced workshops, the team is now 50 strong in over 40,000 sq ft of workshops for timber milling, carpentry, veneering, spraying, specialist metalworking and upholstery, as well as design studio. Their sustainable credentials are second to none. Benchmark works extensively with hotels, restaurants, public buildings, offices and private residences.
[@MadebyBenchmark](http://www.benchmarkfurniture.com)

ABOUT AHEC

For over 20 years the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) has been at the forefront of wood promotion in Europe, successfully building a distinctive and creative brand for U.S. hardwoods. AHEC’s support for creative design projects such as The Wish List for The London Design Festival, helps demonstrate the performance potential of these sustainable materials and provides valuable inspiration. This is the AHEC’s fourth and most ambitious collaboration with Wallpaper* Handmade.



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ABOUT WALLPAPER*

Truly international, consistently intelligent and hugely influential, Wallpaper* is the world's most important design and style magazine. Wallpaper* has readers in 93 countries and has unparalleled success in reaching the design elite right across the globe. With 12 themed issues a year, a limited-edition cover by a different artist or designer each month, over 1.15million Twitter followers and a monthly iPad edition, Wallpaper* has evolved from style bible to internationally recognised brand.

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