

THE WOOD WHISPERER

Sculptor William Daggett's connection to nature comes through in his art

BY BECKY ANTIOCO



Artistic inspiration comes in many forms. For William Daggett, it's his connection to nature, a childhood love of woodworking, and an open and creative spirit.

As a boy growing up in the Old Town Scottsdale area, Daggett would pass by the woodcarving studio of Dee Flagg. Every day, on the way to and from school, he would stop into the studio to watch Flagg create his intricate, life-sized carvings of Old West characters. Daggett worked with wood for school projects and pursued creative endeavors as he grew into adulthood. He worked as a developer, designing and building custom homes. He's built furniture, created custom stained-glass windows and even used a chainsaw to carve a 6-foot-tall bear. He also did some cottonwood bark carvings.

But it wasn't until about 12 years ago when Daggett was drawn to a twisted piece of juniper that he became serious about his craft. Where some saw a broken, dying branch, he saw a work of art waiting to be revealed. "With that first piece, I could see a bird inside of the wood," he says. "So I carved until I created what I saw."

Daggett's ability to see what's within a snag of juniper comes from an instinct, a feeling, and an ability to draw out what's inside. He uses hand tools to chisel, grind, sand, polish, and oil the piece until its true form and essence are revealed. "When I'm out looking for a limb, I can identify immediately when I find the right one. I see what's hiding inside, sometimes right away and sometimes after sitting with it for a while," he says. "When I start a new sculpture, I spend time with the piece of wood. I try to open up to its essence until I get a sense of what it's saying, or how it wants to express itself."

For the past seven years, Daggett has had a residency with the Arizona Fine Art Expo. His favorite part of the artistic process is seeing the emotional response that people have to his work.

While woodcarving has been highly rewarding for Daggett, a recent diagnosis of Parkinson's disease has necessitated a pivot in his artistic endeavors. Some special pieces have been cast in bronze, and his newest collection will be set in 18-karat gold. This new work is literally setting a gold standard, taking his wood sculptures to the highest level and imbuing them with new energy.

Using his imagination and instinct, Daggett is able to draw new life from weathered, twisted wood. Likewise, his creative spirit has been a salve of sorts, keeping his symptoms at bay, and turning the hardship and devastation of a diagnosis into an evolution of his artistic process.

From raw wood to hand-tooled works of art to gold-cast sculptures, the one-of-a-kind pieces create an emotional connection to nature, manifested from the spirit of the artist himself.

Learn more at www.woodwhisperings.com.