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# Sunday THE CALL

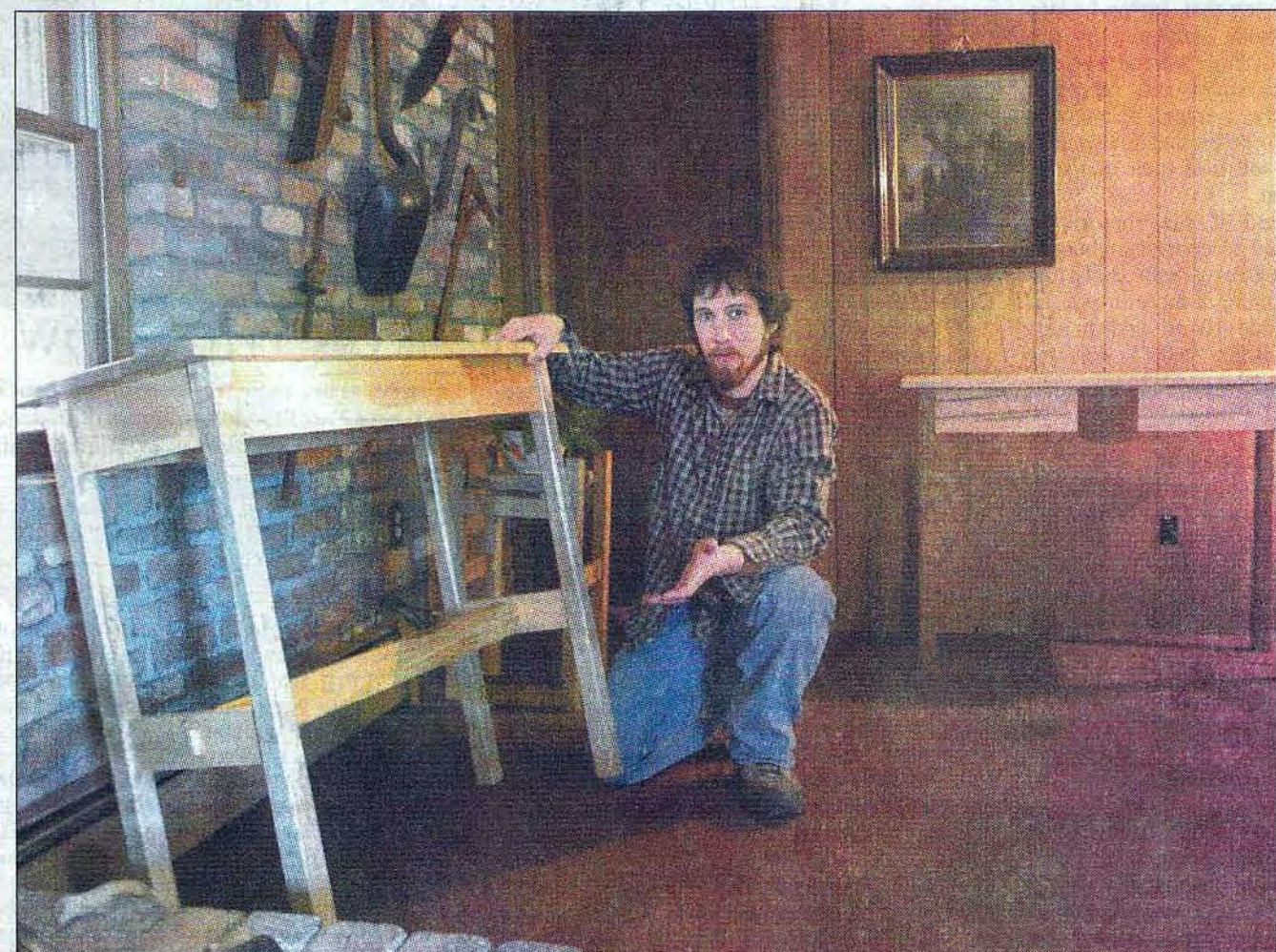
The Blackstone Valley's Neighborhood Newspaper

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Photo/Ernst A. Brown

Cumberland furniture maker Michael Amaral shows a table he created out of red maple. He uses a variety of exotic wood, including mulberry, black locust, sassafras, black walnut, and ash in his designs. Turn to C-1 for more photos.

## Woodworker carves own niche Amaral uses only locally harvested trees

By JOSEPH FITZGERALD

CUMBERLAND - Michael Amaral loves trees - and his originally designed furniture proves it.

Unlike woodworkers who go to a lumber yard for the typical commercially-graded planks, Amaral uses only local species harvested in and around his native Rhode Island, preferably salvaged trees or sustainable sources.

Not only is his approach more environmentally-conscious, but it allows the natural beauty of trees - the unusual grains, growths and patterns that are normally cut from commercial grades - to become an artistic element in his furniture design. See [www.michael-amaral.com](http://www.michael-amaral.com)

"This type of native wood has such distinctive characteristics, it's impossible to disassociate the furniture from the tree," says Amaral, who sees the craft as a continuous process of appreciation and respect.

Working with this kind of wood is an art form in itself.

"It takes a special mindset to design

furniture with character as well as functionality," Amaral explains, "to know how to combine the boards with the right harmony and balance, so the details of the wood shine through without being distracting to the overall piece."

It also takes special craftsmanship to understand how to transform this wild wood into a piece of fine furniture. "It's not easy going against the grain," Amaral puns.

Mike Hendershot of the Woodcrafters Guild says, "I really like Michael Amaral's approach to building furniture as it is a blend of classic woodworking process with modern function and design. He uses hand tools where possible and practical, defying notions that modern furniture can only be built efficiently with loud power tools."

"It is refreshing that he utilizes locally harvested woods in his projects. It demonstrates ecological awareness coupled with artistic practicality, and this behavior is something that the entire furniture building community needs to take a hard look at," he adds.

Amaral turns to people like Hendershot for wood that can't be found in commercial locations. He also relies on Forest Stewardship Council-certified mills that monitor all phases of the process - from harvesting to cutting to replanting.

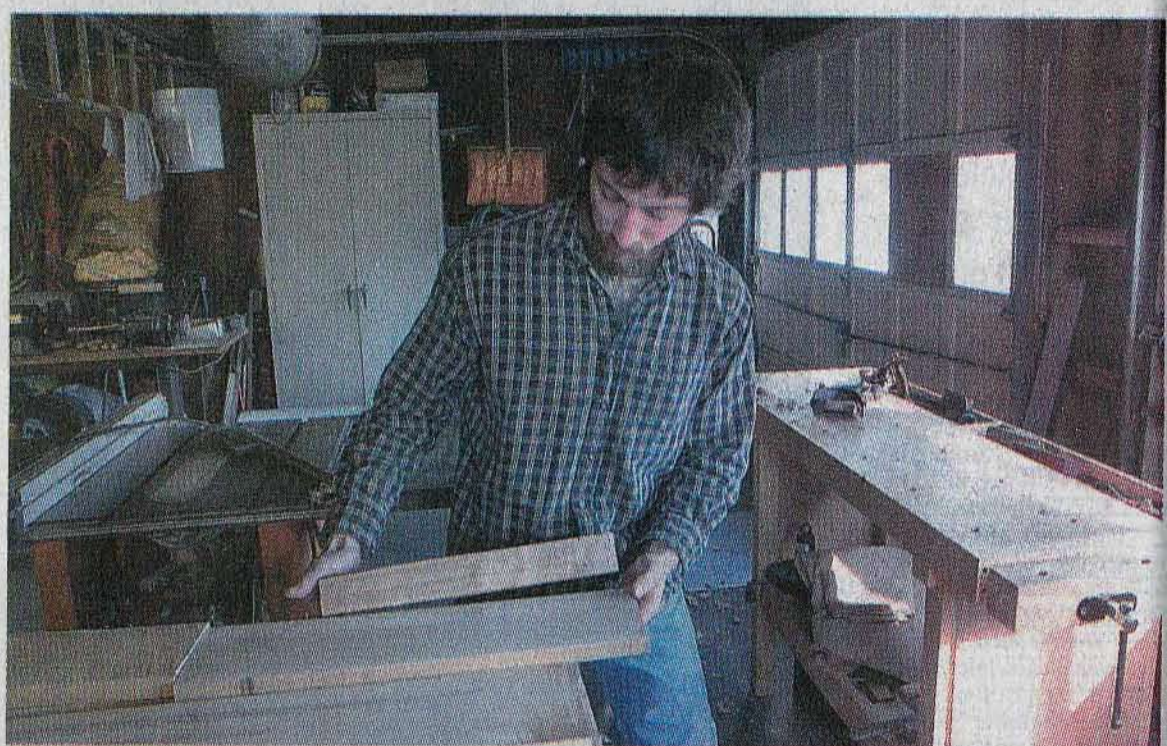
Amaral has been designing and building custom furniture for eight years, but only recently has become serious about selling it. Prior to starting his own business, he was employed by various building and furniture-making enterprises.

"I'd feel extremely uncomfortable when wood was mishandled," he admits. "For wood to be harshly sanded or stained seems incredibly wrong. I don't use paint. I don't use stain. I handcraft each piece of furniture, creating a smooth, fine surface with hand planes and other tools and finally, a hand-rubbed finish."

When asked about the first thing he built, Amaral chuckles and clarifies, "You mean other than bird feeders and

See WOODWORK, Page A-2

# The Woodsman



Furniture designer Michael Amaral, who does all of his woodworking in his Cumberland woodshop, uses a variety of stock, including red maple, mulberry, ash, black locust, sassafras, and black walnut. He starts out by selecting a piece of locally harvested lumber (shown above) and uses hand tools to carve, smooth and finish the pieces of wood (shown at right, at top, and below). More specifically, the photo at right shows Amaral using a spoke shave to smooth the corners. See story on Page A-1.

Photos by

**E** rnest A. **B** rown

