

Once pastime of royalty

Wood collector

a true hobbyist

It began as the exclusive hobby of kings and queens.

When their galleons plundered the coasts of Africa and America, the crews were instructed to search for gold, silver, spices and . . . wood.

"Only royalty could afford to collect wood back then," says Mississauga's Bill Mudry. "They had the ships and the crews to obtain different species, and they had the master craftsmen to work on it."

Today, wood collecting has become one of the fastest-growing and least-expensive hobbies in the world. The International Wood Collecting Society (ICWS) lists over 1,000 serious collectors in its latest bulletin, and Mudry tops the list of 14 Ontario enthusiasts.

PRIZE POSSESSIONS

In his Lakeshore Road apartment, Mudry has a collection of more than 800 species of wood, including his two prize possessions — an 8300-year-old chunk of aromatic cedar and a 120-million-year-old spruce chip.

"Actually, a collection of 800 samples isn't really that big when you consider there are more than 60,000 species of trees in the world," he says. "A really big collection would be 3,000 species and my goal would probably be a collection of 1,000."

How does one make room for that much wood?

The answer lies in the standard, compact sample size used by virtually all collectors. Each sample resembles an oversized playing card — 6 inches long, 3 inches wide and half an inch thick. Samples are filed side-by-side, and several hundred can be easily displayed in a book shelf.

To watch Mudry prepare a sample for display is to experience the true hobbyist. A rare sample of Pink Ivory is sanded for 15 minutes with progressively finer sandpaper until its coral pink coloring emerges to Mudry's satisfaction. He then adds a delicate dab of Dutch oil and gingerly offers a sample described by experts as "rare as diamonds".

"It's so exciting to put the oil on a piece," Mudry says. "Wood has such fantastic properties under the right light. You can actually see the wood move. It's flat, yet it has a definite depth to it. It's a joy to watch."

Mudry was born 32 years ago in Alberta and took degrees in science and education from the University of Calgary before moving to Mississauga and marrying his wife, Carol.

His father built cedar chests in the basement of his home, and Mudry "grew up ankle-deep in wood shavings". He began to research woods in his spare time, started his collection, and eventually, joined the international collectors society.

COLLECTORS

The society largely serves to facilitate a smooth exchange of samples between its members. Collectors, who would otherwise search for years for a rare sample, can simply peruse the wood listings in the society's monthly newsletter, and write to another collector

proposing a trade.

Prices of wood samples are ridiculously low when compared to other hobbies such as stamp collecting. The average wood sample is priced between 50 cents and \$1. An expensive price is \$2.50 and a truly rare piece can run \$25.

"It's a very affordable hobby," Mudry says. "And it's like anything else you start up. At first, you don't know very much. But over the years, spending hundreds of spare hours in research, you develop a pretty good knowledge."

The International Wood Collectors Society is open to anyone wishing to pursue the hobby and they can be reached by writing to 158 Van Buren Rd., Scotia, New York, 12302.



Wood is Bill Mudry's business and hobby. The Mississauga man collected over 800 samples of wood over the years, including an 8300-year-old chunk of aromatic cedar and a spruce chip that dates back 120 million years. (Photo by Mike Stuparyk)