

Wood carving part of a chain reaction



Brad Hunt, of Warrnambool, was a wooden boat builder before turning his hand to chainsaw sculpture. He now transforms pieces like these oak stumps into smooth works of art.

Words and photos by Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] T
[/dropcap]here is something incongruous about a big Stihl chainsaw being able to transform a slab of wood into a delicate work of art, but this is exactly what **Brad Hunt** is perfecting.

The former wooden boat builder – he served his apprenticeship with Port Fairy master craftsman **Garry Stewart** – has taken his love of timber and a strong creative streak to start his own small business, the wonderfully named Pull Start Art.

Working from his father's shed on Hopkins Point Road, Warrnambool, Brad creates smooth sculptures from a whole range of timbers, including cypress pine, redgum, black wattle and eucalypts or whatever offcuts have come his way.

"These are from 100-year-old oak trees," he says, slapping the rough bark on a pile of stumps, some of which are almost as tall as he is.

The leftover oak was donated by a farmer who was going to push the tree stumps into a pile for later burning, "and I said, ahhh, 'no you're not!'" Brad laughs.

He has similarly come by bits of timber from the original Hopkins River bridge, lumps of cypress pine found by the roadside in Melbourne and other workable logs that were destined for the scrapheap until either Brad, or his friends, intervened.



A whale figure carved from redgum. Marine creatures feature prominently in Brad's work.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] U
[/dropcap]sing one of three Stihl chainsaws, including a dime-

tipped bar designed specifically for carving, Brad turns a piece of non-descript raw timber into something quite different. Sometimes it will be a whale, a dolphin or perhaps a pelican, and another it could be a chicken, horse's head or dragonfly.

It all depends on either what he has been commissioned to make, or what he "sees" in the wood.

"Certain logs lend themselves to certain things," Brad says, "and I can just see what I want to make from it".

Brad can spend a week "looking" at a log, waiting for its character and shape to settle in his mind, before he starts work with the chainsaw: after all, it is not like you can start again.

"If a design doesn't work out, and that can happen, then I will often make a smaller carving from what is left," he says.



Sanding and polishing is where the most time-consuming work takes place.

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After the initial, relatively energetic chainsaw work on a piece, Brad settles into the more refined and much quieter stage of sanding and polishing, which is when the timber really comes to life.

“It really puts a smile on your face when the timber reveals itself to you through its different grains and colours,” he says.

“That is the part that I really enjoy.”

Chainsaw art is not quite where Brad, 33, imagined he would be when he first left school and enrolled in a commerce degree before realising he was not someone “to sit behind a desk” but needed to work with his hands.

The boatbuilding apprenticeship was advertised in the paper, and Brad secured an opportunity that would see him not only learn a traditional craft, but take him to the tiny Pacific island of Kiribati as a volunteer helping locals to build various watercraft.



We've heard of a wooden duck, but a wooden chook?
Why not?

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] A
[/dropcap]fter experiences like that, it is almost impossible to settle into a regular 9-5 job, so Brad decided to create his own.

Supported by the New Enterprise Initiative Scheme (NEIS) and part-time work at Deakin University, Brad launched Pull Start Art in June – and is slowly building a name for himself.

When we meet, he tells me about a major in situ commission where he will transform a 2.1m cypress pine stump on a property into a majestic horse's head.

And while commissions are an important part of his work, he would ultimately like to see his work in local galleries.

“That’s the artistic process for me – using my own ideas and my own creativity.”



One of the first – and largest – pieces Brad has done to date is the whale at the front of his parent’s property in Warrnambool.

[box]The Pull Start Art studio and workshop is at 29 Hopkins

Point Rd, Warrnambool (look for the whale). Ph: 0438 517 200.
You can also find it on [Facebook here](#). Brad will give a demonstration of his work at the Koroit Truck Show on the Australia Day long weekend, 2015.[/box]