

Artist opens door with new tree palette



Brant Ward, The Chronicle

Yorgen Kvinsland checks a redwood plank that he reclaimed from a nearby river, where it lay for decades, for a new door.

Sophia Markoulakis

If there is such a thing as a window to the soul, then what does a front door reveal? For artist Yorgen Kvinsland, owner of Mendocino's ArtStruct, a home's entryway is a focal point, an opportunity to make a memorable impression and say something about the personalities within. "It's like an underutilized blank canvas for creative expression and personal enrichment."

Appearing more like a modern-day lumberjack than an introspective artist, Kvinsland, 37, designs and constructs unusual wood and mixed-media doors on 10 acres of privately held pygmy forest alongside the Big River Estuary.

His studio, outfitted with extra-high ceilings and plenty of skylights, is nestled within the expansive property. The space allows him to work on several commissions at once, including an oversize 400-pound pivot spec door with copper rod and a three-dimensional geometric design that, when completed, will have to be removed by a crane.

Nearby is the home that he shares with his wife, Anna, and their two small children, who frequently visit and use the property as a makeshift playground where they hunt lizards among the hunks of wood and make sculptures with the scraps.

Sinker logs and fallen trees that Kvinsland has reclaimed from as far away as Louisiana are scattered and stacked throughout the grounds. He also uses fallen trees given to him by the property owner, who refers to Kvinsland as her "wood steward" for finding purpose for salvaged trees.

The Big River

Travel down a dirt path from his studio, through the stunted forest, and you'll discover a trail that leads down to Big River, which used to shepherd harvested redwoods more than a century ago.

Known as sinker logs, these highly prized specimens tell the story of their journey through their graphic striations and color variations, developed from sitting on the bottom of the river floor and absorbing minerals and silt.

"I can't remember the last time I purchased wood at a lumberyard. I prefer to use recovered logs because the wood can tell a story," says Kvinsland. "I have particular pieces of wood that are just waiting for the right client to come along."

His artistically rich doors can be made with or without client input or they can be based on one of four designs - Window Box, Puzzle, Constellation, Organic Curves - and customized with glass, ceramic, metal, and often Kvinsland's signature wooden end-grain pattern and mortise-and-tenon joinery.



Brant Ward, *The Chronicle*

Kvinsland collaborated with Oakland artist Ben Belknap on this Hexagon Hive Door, which pays tribute to the hive mentality.

A fresh perspective

Frequent collaborations with other artists bring a fresh perspective. For example, his Hexagon Hive Door was intended to pay homage to the hive mentality. With ceramic heads placed strategically within the hexagon grid pattern, highlighted with gold paint, the intention was to reference the geometric structure of the honeybee hive.

Kvinsland says, "I went to school with Oakland artist Ben Belknap and I immediately thought of him to create personalities that would occupy the hives."

A fortuitous visit to the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens' annual Art in the Garden event led Sacramento resident Roger Gilbert to Kvinsland and his new front door. "I love that every day I use the door and get to enjoy it. It has been my most rewarding art purchase," says Gilbert.

When he learned that his commissioned door for his second residence in Mendocino would be made from a fallen tulip poplar tree - salvaged by Kvinsland on the grounds of the state Capitol and the same type of tree he grew up with in his native New York - he felt a connection to the artist and his creative process. Their shared affinity for blown glass and enthusiasm for incorporating work from Mendocino glass artist Buster Dyer made the collaboration all the more special.

"Yorgen really allowed me to be a part of the design process," says Gilbert. His Orion Constellation door is a play on his fascination with astronomy, and has the added feature of a brass and glass window box, which opens from the interior side of the door so Gilbert can display the treasures he finds on trips to the beach.

Kvinsland's entrance into the world of artistic front doors came by way of other favorite media - ceramics and blown glass.



Brant Ward, The Chronicle

Yorgen Kvinsland, examining a reclaimed redwood log, says they tell a story. He has "particular pieces of wood" just waiting for the right client.

Art glass movement

Born and raised in Santa Cruz County's Boulder Creek, Kvinsland studied fine art at California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland - now the CCA.

He spent several years entrenched in Seattle's studio art glass movement before settling in Mendocino to raise a family. After contemplating how to make a living without stifling his creativity, Kvinsland realized that, "the front door could be its own art piece. It could satisfy my need to work with many media, be fully artistic, and functional to boot.

"It's an entity all its own that can be interacted with by so many people."

Artstruct, 937-6242. **www.artstruct.com**

Sophia Markoulakis is a freelance writer in Burlingame. E-mail: **home@sfchronicle.com**