

Driftwood Sculptures

Edited by Anne Schaffer

Photographs supplied by Tony Fredriksson



Tony Fredriksson is one of the few who celebrates the work of termites. Contrary to their bad press, they're effectively part of his creative team. Their industrious work in wood creates channels and pathways which add an entirely different dimension to this, the source material for his sculptures. So, too, beetles, dam and sea water, and other forces which alter the integrity of the wood, and create mystical shapes, lines and patterns. He's constantly on the look out for inspirational pieces changed in some form by water or carved by insects, and he stores them meticulously in his wood 'library' knowing that one day, it will form part of something greater. His wood is sorted according to types, shapes and sizes, and is able to be accessed at all times when he needs a very specific piece.

Tony creates his own sculpture as well as commissioned work. When it's his own, it usually begins with a piece of driftwood which not only inspires him, but its form and shape suggest a part of an animal, a fish, a person. From that piece, the scale of the artwork is determined, and he then sketches the entire sculpture to scale.

Fredriksson often spends an inordinate amount of time researching the piece. What is the underlying musculature of





the cat, even shapes of internal organs, what posture will it be in, what age, attitude, mood will it portray? Looking at his work, the depth of research is clear, and adds another layer to these extraordinary sculptures.

When he's working, Fredriksson uses a range of cutting devices to shape, chisel or sand a piece, so it fits securely – like an interlocking puzzle – alongside the neighbouring piece. It's critical that together, the sculpture is strong. He also wire brushes any loose wood, and sands off any splinters or sharp edges, so there's a tactile as well as visual appeal to the piece.

Zimbabwe-born Fredriksson is a fine art graduate of the Eastborne College of Art and Design in the UK. Today, he lives in South Africa, and although he's known for his other art forms, it's his sculptures which have totally captured the imagination of so many. For him, they've become an all-consuming passion, and he admits to being extremely driven while working on a piece. Every piece tells a story...which, if you enjoy story-telling, you'll be able to prize very easily out of him...as to where each piece of that sculpture originated. Was it a weathered piece of some ten years old, found underwater, and beautifully scarred by wave action...or did a friend pick it up on some beach, and what has been its journey to that point?

Common questions asked by prospective buyers are, What about bugs in the wood? Fredriksson says, "The sculptures are frozen for 3 to 5 days at -25°C to kill any bugs or eggs that



may still be in the wood (work going overseas is fumigated so as to obtain a customs certificate.) Most of the wood I collect is very old, dry and no longer of interest to the insects. The termites vacate the driftwood as soon as it is dry to seek shelter underground. Furthermore I wire brush and sand any debris off the wood.

"The sculptures are not made to withstand the outdoors, but Fredriksson says clients can order them cast in bronze or in a marble composite. Recently asked how the driftwood lasts outdoors, he replied drily: "They are valuable works of art - if you put one of my sculptures outdoors in the elements with the Mona Lisa, mine would outlast the painting." Each piece of wood is sanded and glued, screwed and in some cases wired in place. All the screws are hidden and the completed sculpture is given a wash and a matt sealer. "Indoors, the sculptures can last indefinitely."

Driftwood art began as a craft for beach houses, so there is a perception that they are decor objects. No longer. Since they entered the art market, they have been in demand by a world willing to wait up to two years for one. Fredriksson says, "My first Rhino sold for R15 000 in 2010, was resold for R24 000, and a year after that, R80 000."

Whether commissioned work, or something he feels compelled to create, Fredriksson's driftwood sculptures are exceptionally beautiful, as those fortunate to own them - from hotels to international collectors - know. ■

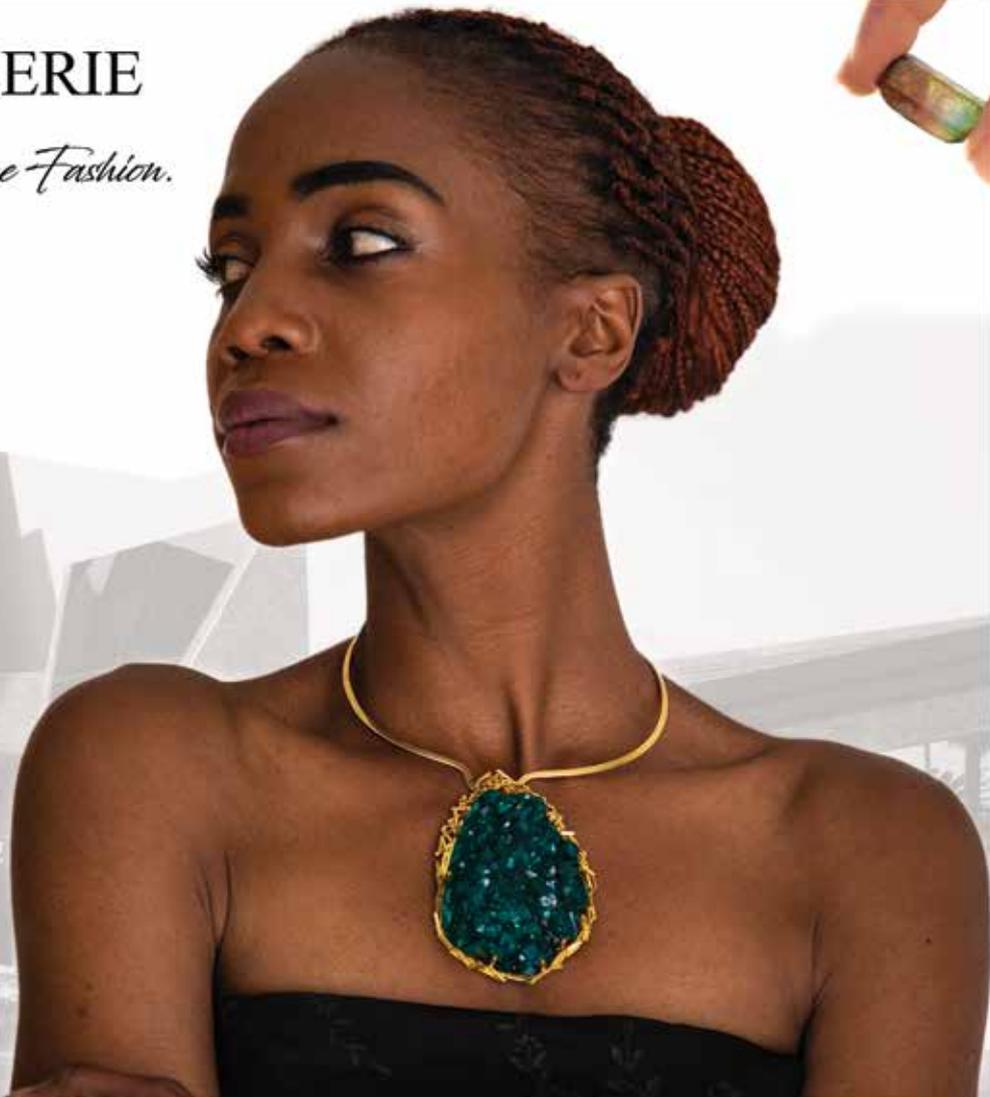


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