

Masterful Marquetry

Inspired by observing nature, a California craftsman uses furniture surfaces to inlay images captured in rare and exotic woods and semi-precious stones.

Finding images is only half the battle for artist and furniture designer Paul Schurch. Making the right piece of furniture to properly frame each picture becomes the real challenge for this highly skilled craftsman.

"The marquetry and furniture framework must complement each other," Schurch says.

To find the right balance, Schurch starts every project with full-scale drawings. Sometimes spending months at the drafting table, he finalizes every detail down to the exact effect of light and shadows.

After transferring an image onto the backside of the veneers, Schurch cuts the background and the individual pieces together. Then these pieces are assembled like a giant jigsaw puzzle to create a single veneer "skin." Finally, the skin is glued onto a piece of furniture all at once. Any stone — like the marble bird at left — is inlaid after the marquetry is glued down.

To provide depth to the satinwood ribbons in the mahogany chest shown below, Schurch scorched the veneers by dipping

the edges in hot silver sand. This technique, known as "sand shading," makes the ribbons stand out against the Swiss steamed pear background and walnut burl borders. The banding on the chest is tulipwood, maple and black pear.

Schurch spends from three months to a year on most projects. Prices typically start around \$3,000. He once spent years on a 14-ft. dining table inlaid with exotic wood and semi-precious stones — final price \$80,000. But then Schurch isn't just building furniture. He's creating masterpieces in wood — literally piece by piece by piece.

Paul Schurch owns Schurch Woodwork in Santa Barbara, CA.

