

***The Witness Tree Project FURN 2451  
[in conjunction with Co-Requisite HPSS S732]***

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**Class:** Monday 01:10pm – 06:10pm @ Furniture Dept. Wood shop Metcalf 1<sup>st</sup> FL.

***BACKGROUND***

The genesis of this class stems from a BROWN/RISD collaboration offered over the course of 2 years. Titled the “Elm Tree Project,” faculty from the RISD Dept. of Furniture and Brown University taught classes centered on material from an American Elm (from the Brown campus) that succumbed to Dutch Elm disease. This material was the basis for research, investigation and object creation.

Two years ago, during a visit to Gettysburg National Military Park, I was made aware that the National Park Service (NPS) cataloged historic trees under the designation of “Witness Trees”. NPS defines a Witness Tree as: “landscape architectural elements that have witnessed significant events in the history of America”.

According to National Park Service policy, when a Witness Tree comes down the material from the tree is typically destroyed. I discussed with my colleagues the possibility of using this historic material in object creation and was able to get support from the Dept. of Furniture Design. I then approached the NPS with a proposal for an educational collaboration between the two institutions. The focus of this collaboration is to use the material from Witness Trees as a means of teaching history and cultural studies through object creation.

***Class Description***

As designers/makers we understand that research provides the maker with a deeper understanding of where ideas come from, and how to utilize them in our design process. This research-based studio class, in conjunction with its Liberal Arts component [HPSS S732], will use the readings, discussions, and research from the seminar to build a fully informed design vocabulary from which you will create objects. The primary material that will be used in this class will be from a Pecan Witness Tree that grew at a former plantation, now Hampton National Historic Site (HNHS) in Towson, Maryland.

This tree was taken down by the National Park Service because it was failing and presented serious safety concerns. The wood was converted to lumber stock by the NPS, dried by RISD, and is ready for use in this class. Since the quantity of wood is limited, instructor approval is required for use of the Pecan wood in the given assignments. There will be 3 studio assignments over the course of this class.

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

As in all studio courses you are expected to attend all classes. If you miss a studio class you are expected to make up the work and have it ready for the follow week. Missing 3 classes means an automatic F (as per college rules). Studio hours are limited and there will be demand for machines and tools, which means effective use of your time in the studio (earlier than later) will serve you well.

Students are expected to keep a sketch book/journal and bring it to each class. This book should contain all handouts, careful notes from the demos and be a register of your thoughts and ideas from both the seminar component of this collaborative class and place to develop your ideas. This sketch book will be referred to frequently and is considered part of your body of work. Always bring it to class.

Your grade will depend on your attendance, class participation, demonstration of technical knowledge and completion of the 3 studio assignments. Please understand that a “C” grade is given for average work, “B” for above average, and an “A” for excelling in all areas of demand in the studio class.

## CLASS MEETING SCHEDULE

- 9/21** Intro to Studio, Dept. rules & regs. Safety talk, Wood Technology talk, Demo of Basic hand tools and power tools. Sketch book and design development talk.
- 9/28** Hand and Power Tool demos, Student check off on skills. Methods and means of attachment, gluing, and shaping talk. Give 1<sup>st</sup> assignment.
- 10/5** Review of 1<sup>st</sup> assignment and Field Trip, go over design ideas. Carving/shaping Demo. Design reviews.
- 10/12** **Crit of 1<sup>st</sup> assignment.** Demo lathe. Give 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment.
- 10/19** Design development review, group and individual. Finishing demo.
- 10/26** Work on 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment.
- 11/2** **Crit of 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment.** Give 3<sup>rd</sup> assignment.plmk0
- 11/9** Design development review. Class pin-up and critique.
- 11/16** Final design reviews. Work on Project.
- 11/23** Work on assignment.
- 11/30** Work on assignment.
- 12/7** Work on Assignment, (you should be almost done!).
- 12/9** **Final Critique location TBA.**

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### **1<sup>st</sup> ASSIGNMENT**

When at Hampton National Historic Site (HAMP) document as much as possible in your sketch book. Draw, photograph, paint, audio record, etc to build a personal data bank of reference. This information/material combined with the work in the HPSS seminar is the foundation for your designs in this class.

Make an implement of some sorts that you could image being useful to someone at HAMP. Develop a story line to support the actual object, (max 1 page).

**Class Critique: 10/12**

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### **2<sup>nd</sup> Assignment**

Lifestyles of the occupants of Hampton over the centuries have ranged from the most opulent of the wealthy plantation owners and their guests to the poorest conditions of the slaves or indentured servants. A person's standing or status within society is easily discerned by ownership of material objects. For the owners, some examples include silver place settings, fine decorative furniture, and imported china. Conversely the slaves and indentured servants (and later sharecroppers) had few if any possessions: perhaps a simple wooden bowl and spoon for eating or a change of clothing.

Drawing on the work you are doing in seminar and your own research regarding Hampton, design and build a small vessel or container that "holds" a particular meaning reflecting material culture at Hampton.

**Class Critique: 11/2**

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### **3<sup>rd</sup> Assignment**

This final project is meant to be a reflection of the work/research you have done in this collaborative class. The object you shall be making is of your own choosing, be it furniture based, sculptural, etc. Whatever direction you decide upon is fine. What is important is that the design reflects the research, readings, seminar discussions that you have participated in throughout this class. In addition to your object, you are required to write a statement about the object: how you came to design it and what issues, ideas or material objects helped shape and form your design.