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FEATURED

Old Gruene Market Days feature one-of-a-kind finds

By Jordan Gass-Poore New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung
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Eric Dorn's birdhouses for sale at Old Gruene Market Days on Saturday afternoon.

L. Alex Frank

Mesquite wood has served as inspiration for Bulverde artist Eric Dorn, whose wooden birdhouses are featured at Old Gruene Market Days on the third Saturday and Sunday of the month in the historic village.

The smooth curves and textured roofs of Dorn's birdhouses might reflect Gruene's slogan, as they too gently resist change from their natural state.

The natural shape of a tree limb inspired him to "turn" his first birdhouse, after being fascinated with nature and its "unique beauty and natural flow."

The craftsman became interested in turning wood while stationed in Fort Carson, Colo., as part of the Army's Fourth Infantry Division in 1996. He visited a wood shop there with the idea of a making a coffee table for the woman he was dating, who became his wife.

"I needed a past time," Dorn said. "I was in the military, so I needed something to do."

The craftsman said he asked a representative of the woodshop on base to show him how to "work the wood," which eventually led to the creation of his first wooden creation, the coffee table — and a hobby that may last a lifetime.

Dorn is one of about 100 vendors at Old Gruene Market Days who attract the eyes of passersby with their handmade goods.

Something for everyone

From canvas artists to jewelry makers, as well as packaged foods made in Texas, Old Gruene Market Days has showcased local vendors every month except January for more than 30 years.

Eligible vendors must complete and submit an application that can be found on the event's website. Rules specify that all work must be "original and personally made by hand by the artist/exhibitor."

From coffee tables to small urns, vessels and bowls, the Kansas native Dorn began experimenting with different types of woods until finding mesquite in 1999, when he and his wife moved to Texas for work.

"In 2008 (work) hours got cut and that's when we started thinking about maybe making extra money, because of the downturn in the economy."

Mesquite is one of the hardest and heaviest woods, with a natural pattern in its grain and a deep dark finish Dorn found fascinating.

He has been showcasing woodwork at Old Gruene Market Days for about four years, the initial reason being to sell an excess of the works he creates in an old barn using scrap found at a local brush recycling center.

"You make so much dust and stuff that you don't have a nice workshop or anything," he said. "Ya, I make due with what I have. ... It's all recycled. I don't cut anything down."

Converging on Gruene

Like Dorn, who is an aircraft technician, many of the vendors consider their artisan work a hobby.

Helotes resident George Pease began selling his woodwork, which also incorporates mesquite, at Old Gruene Market Days in 2002 after hearing about the event from a friend following his retirement from the Air Force a year prior.

"After I retired I said, 'I'm just going to build furniture,'" Pease said. "So, that's what I started doing and I found Gruene to be a great marketplace for my stuff."

He now sells his wooden cutting boards, chests and planters that incorporate various stones almost exclusively at the event.

Despite not getting a return on his investment during his first event display, Pease said he continues to come back because of the people he has encountered, including Dorn, whose booth is close to his.

"I love coming out here and talking to people," Pease said. "You'll find that crafters are an interesting bunch. You'll find some that are close to homeless, and you'll find some that have more money than they'd ever know what to do with.

"But all-in-all, they're good people. And I've enjoyed my relationship over the years with so many of these people."

Today's market hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., in Gruene Historic District across from Adobe Verde.