

In wood we trust

In the South of a Burgundy forest, the collaborative carpentry "Les Gueules de Bois" allows everyone who wants to build its own wooden furnitures.

This is THE Christmas present dilemma: to buy a frame or a candle? Wouldn't it be nice, and more responsible, to make your own frame? In this cold barn, lit by some lamps, and where it reigns a fresh smell of cut wood, everybody does it.

"We can make furnitures all together. There is no resale. It is a frequently asked question but we prefer make a personal use of what we build here, rather than an industrial use". Adèle Seyrig Thevenet has been a member of Les Gueules de Bois from the very beginning of this association, whose name is a pun. In French, it literally means "wood's mouths", an expression used to say "hangover".

The collaborative carpentry's concept is the idea of Egnart, who is an ex-member of Saint Laurent's collective farm, located in Château, in the West of Cluny, a French city in Burgundy. The aim of this association: to make everyone able to build his own customized wood furnitures.



Theo is a member of Les Gueules de Bois. He was a carpenter who is easily using the workshop machinery. Photo Aileen Valentin-Morin

Here, it is like home: the place is warm and very pleasant, despite the cold that passes through gloves and caps. Les Gueules de Bois do not use any kind of advertising to promote their activities. They rely on word of mouth. This allows every member to know each other, and makes the association all the more friendly.

The barn is filled with machines that are all weirder than each other : circular saw, band saw, thicknesser, jointer... Theo, a former carpenter who works in the farm, knows perfectly how to handle them. But most of the other members of the association are not professionals. Here, everybody helps each other. Nevertheless, most of the amateur carpenters are craftsmen, or people familiar with manual work.

Looking for a responsible consumption mode and a sustainable forest management

Les Gueules de bois' members above all look for other ways of consuming. Indeed, according to the French agency of ecological transition, the Ademe, "the annual volume of consumption per person nowadays is three times higher than it was in 1960. Moreover, the mass consumption's generalization generated environmental impacts which are more and more worrying." Among these impacts, the Ademe mentions greenhouse gas emissions generated by the "manufacturing, the transportation, the use and the end of life" of products of any kind. In order to reduce these impacts, Les Gueules de Bois keep in mind the idea of not over-consuming and to "value the old". According to them, the only way to do this is to help each other, first in using the machines by learning from each other, but also by training with the help of professionals.

This association also adopts a real reflection on sustainable forest wood. The members have chosen a better and greener way to use wood; they find their raw material in the very close Saint-Laurent's forest. So they favour short circuits. A local cooperative company, D'Arbazed, manages this forest in a sustainable approach: "By selecting the trees and cutting just a reasonable number of them, we preserve the forest cover, the ecosystems, the grounds and the forest's future", François Bonneville, a member of D'Arbazed, justifies on the company's website. This management aims to reduce the negative impact of many years of deforestation, in France and in many other countries. In Amazonia, for example, humans did not regulate CO2 excess emitted by the cut trees. As a result, carbon dioxide has been stored in the soil and in the atmosphere. This still generates a huge pollution.



Les Gueules de bois is surrounded by forests, where the wood used to build the furniture is cut. Photo Aileen Valentin-Morin

A too restricted public ?

This workshop remains on a human scale. Les Gueules de Bois enjoy conviviality between people and do not want to change it. However, they want to improve on some points: they plan to modify the room's layout, because "when you have big pieces of wood, it is a real problem if machines are too close from each other or if there is not enough space", says Adèle. They also want to develop their incomes, by welcoming groups, even if it is not possible to target the schools, because of the dangerousness of the equipment and tools.

Handmade is a life choice, which is often limited to a specific type of persons: the ones who care about the planet and have experiences in this domain. Although it seems possible to learn how to handle a wood lathe or a band saw, these machines may frighten people who do not feel like handymen. And the illimited access to all these equipments has a cost: 150 euros a year. Furthermore, adopting a "do it yourself" way of life means having time to dedicate to these type of activities. That may be a luxury. Because making furniture by yourself requires meticulous attention and patience. "Making your own item is longer than buying it in a large store, but the feeling at the end is different. We have created it, it is unique" Adèle assures, with a large smile.



Les Gueules de Bois' workshop is filled with machinery which everyone can learn to use with other members of the association. Photo Aileen Valentin-Morin

After all, the humanism and warmth emanating from this association made us want to make frames for Christmas. And, why not, become carpenters at the same time.

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