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Leaning Curve

Every piece of Ted Boerner's furniture tells a story.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1996, while volunteering on the restoration of 12th- and 13th-century stone buildings in a French village, Ted Boerner ended each day seated at a long, narrow picnic table, breaking bread with his coworkers. While everyone else focused on the fresh-baked baguettes and bottles of Côtes du Rhône, Boerner was preoccupied with the table and the sturdy wooden benches on which he and the others sat.

"I asked myself, 'Why were the conversations and the dining experience always so great at that table?'" recalls Boerner, now a custom furniture maker in San Francisco. "Then I realized it was because we were sitting on benches and had to lean toward the people in front of us rather than back, like you would in a chair." Boerner's insight later evolved into the blueprint for one of his own refined tables, called Harvest, and its coordinating geometrically contoured benches. "My designs often come from my personal experiences, especially those that create the most richness in life," he says, sharing a philosophy that has guided the 47-year-old, Wisconsin-born designer's work since launching his eponymous company 16 years ago.

Boerner attributes the design of his new four-poster Totem bed to the view from his family's summer mountain cabin, which is surrounded by redwood trees. "Seeing these long, tall vertical trees standing like sentries outside the bedroom windows gives me a sense of safety, which is the same feeling I get from the four-poster," he says.



Ted Boerner's four-poster Totem bed was inspired by a stand of redwood trees outside his family's summer cabin.

Boerner's experiences also include a career as a set designer, which, he says, leads him to approach all of his pieces as if they were integral parts of a play. "Furniture tells a story, too," he says. "And, like set design, it has to be probable or it won't work."

Two new additions to his signature 45-piece collection, the Totem bed (\$8,375 in walnut) and his Reunion dining table (\$12,000 in ash), represent a departure from the smooth veneers that characterize the rest of Boerner's furniture. "The bedposts are cut in sections—some scored like screws, some smooth—that can look very tribal, like

totem poles," he says. The Reunion table has tapered pedestal legs with deeply gouged rings at the bottom. These newer pieces are more primitive than Boerner's earlier work, which includes scooped, high-back sofas, leather club chairs, and low book tables that reflect a variety of influences, from midcentury modern architecture to pop art from the 1970s.

"I try not to create pieces that are extreme or too much of a presence on their own, because I want them to allow a more personal touch," says Boerner. "If it is too idiosyncratic, it becomes an art piece, which is fine, but that's not what I do." Whether it is a bed or a table, he says, "ultimately it's not about the designs as much as the sleeping or dining experience you take away from them."

—WILLIAM KISSEL

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