

WESTERN ART & Architecture

From Cowboy to Contemporary

Joel Ostlind: When 'Less is More' Goes Big
Guided by Nature: the Sculpture of Pati Stajcar
Linda Lillegraven on Capturing Timeless Beauty
Architecture in the West: Responding to Nature with Personal Design



plus:

Perspective: Susie Barstow [1836-1923]

In the Studio with Roseta Santiago

Rendering: Fergus Garber Architects

Western Landmark: Aspen Meadows Embraces Its Bauhaus Roots





Mike Roths instills every piece of fine furniture he crafts with the spirit of Western history and tradition. Consider his recent *Pursuit of the Spirit Buffalo Console Table*, which sold this past September at the Buffalo Bill Art Auction in Cody, Wyoming. He made the piece from both exotic and familiar materials: auburn-hued bloodwood framed in dark wenge from Africa and wire-brushed walnut legs, inset at their top corners with buffalo-head nickels minted in 1917, the year Buffalo Bill Cody died. Across its front apron, he inlaid deep-chocolate Central American cocobolo

and a tableau of running buffalo silhouettes, including, fashioned from maple, a rare white “spirit buffalo” in the lead, eluding an arrow.

“I like all those stories of Native Americans and buffalo, cowboys, and gunfighters,” says Roths (pronounced “Roats”). “I’m a Western history guy who was born 100 years too late.” On the farm where he was born and raised in central Iowa, he always felt the pull of the West, and its allure grew even stronger when he was 15 and began



Pursuit of the Spirit Buffalo Console Table
Bloodwood, Wenge, Walnut, Cocobolo, and Maple
38 x 40 x 16 inches



making summer vacation visits to his brother, 10 years older, who had moved to Montana. “It always felt like home to me,” he says, explaining why, after he and his high school sweetheart, Jo, married, they moved to Western Montana’s Bitterroot Valley and started a family, raising two daughters and now, very soon, welcoming a sixth grandchild.

Along the way, he launched Bear Paw Designs, a business that grew out of his longtime love of furniture-making and Western history. The

name comes from a prank he played during high school when he carved wooden bear paws that he and Jo used to leave prints in a nearby fishing area, setting the media abuzz in a part of Iowa where those animals weren’t known to live.

In a similarly lighthearted but wholly committed spirit, he came to specialize in imaginative, meticulously detailed, exceptionally well-crafted custom furniture that celebrates the West, gaining early renown for *End of the Line*, a scaled-down rendition of a 1920s caboose on the Great Northern Railway, kitted out as a wet bar complete with icemaker and copper sink. The piece won the Exhibitors’ Choice and Best Artist, Historical Craftsmanship awards at the 2005 Western Design Conference in Cody, Wyoming. “That’s my all-time favorite,” he says.

Yet, he’s resisted requests to recreate the piece. “Repetition doesn’t interest me,” he says. “There’s a lot of money to be made in it, but I like to do different things. And every time you do something new, it’s back to the drawing board.”



End of the Line Wet Bar
Reclaimed Barnwood, Forged Iron, Cherrywood Wheels, Walnut Rails
53 x 94 x 30 inches

Mike Roths’ custom furniture is available through Bear Paw Designs in Stevensville, Montana, and By Western Hands in Cody, Wyoming. ■

Based in Marin County, California, **Norman Kolpas** is the author of more than 40 books and hundreds of articles. He also teaches nonfiction writing in The Writers’ Program at UCLA Extension.



How the West Was Fun Sideboard
Reclaimed Barnwood, Walnut, Vintage Winchester Ammo Boxes, and Brass Bullet Casing Pulls | 38 x 40 x 17 inches

