



# A Wood River Runs Through It

I love the wild edge, the natural shape, the curve of a tree. To contain it within the very manipulated man-made substance of concrete, creates a tension that is always interesting to me.

- Keelin Kennedy, Barefoot Design



***We have much to learn from a tree, a river, an ocean, a mountain, . . .***

Keelin Kennedy's above design philosophy is perfectly personified by her award-winning carder table. The Barefoot Design artist combined wood, concrete, and steel to create a piece that is organic, moving, living, breathing, and functional.

Although the concrete structurally contains the sassafras, it visually allows the wood to flow freely, much like the relationship of shore to river.

***Taking the 'sass' out of the sassafras . . .***

Creating the table was no easy task as it involved the taming of live elements, particularly the wood. Kennedy noted, "The thing had a life of its own. It cupped, bowed, twisted, and laughed at me."



The Australian Black Heart Sassafras was chosen by the client who found it online. Traditionally used for items such as handles, bobbins, and clothes pins, sometimes the grain reveals a 'black-heart,' which until recently would have been unappreciated and discarded at the mill.



The butterfly joints were made of lpe, an incredibly dense and strong hardwood, to withstand movement between the concrete and wood.



Steel was used for the base to relate it to some other furnishings in the house as well as support the weight of the concrete surface.



# Designer Notes

*Keelin Kennedy  
Barefoot Design*

## **Specifications** **Concrete + Sassafras** **Dining Table**

**Total Retail Price:** \$11,050

**Weight:** 550 lbs

**Concrete Mix:** CHENG Pro-Formula  
Charcoal and Stone

**Other Materials:**

Australian Black Heart Sassafras

Blackened Steel

Ipe Wood (Butterfly Joints)

### **Why concrete?**

I couldn't have used any other materials to achieve the vibe of this table. I often combine live-edge wood and concrete to create pieces that are organic, moving, living, breathing, and functional. The design and the materials are integral to one another.

### **Client Desire**

My client asked me to design a dining room table for ten people. She had seen some previous work of mine and wanted something similar in feel. This piece had to be able to withstand large family dinners, and also be unique and sculptural, something that would play off the clean, simple lines she was trying to create in a rather traditional split-level suburban home. There were some asian influences in other furnishings in the adjacent room to the dining room. I didn't want to design something that felt contrived with Asian influence. But instead, I look to the Japanese aesthetic of simplicity, integrity, exposed joinery, and clean lines. Using this as inspiration, as well as my love of all things natural, of all things "tree," I decided to incorporate a piece of live-edge wood that would be embraced by concrete. It is a juxtaposition that I love to play with: instead of milling wood down to a straight piece obviously manipulated by humans, I love the wild edge, the natural shape and curve of a tree. Then to contain it within a very manipulated man-made substance, concrete, creates a tension that is always interesting to me. The same idea is incorporated into the base, even though the base is made of blackened steel. The live-edge trestle is contained within a very manmade steel. Using butterfly joints to join the two materials is a sort of twisted wink to George Nakashima.

### **Client Reaction**

My client loves the table. It is a very unique piece and I have a feeling she was questioning her decision to go along with my design until we installed it. She just told me she had a dinner party and all of her guests were blown away by it.

### **Timing + Expertise**

The project took a little less than a month once we nailed down the design. The biggest obstacle I encountered was working with a 10 foot plank of live edge wood: "live" being the operative word here. The thing had a life of its own. It cupped, bowed, twisted, and laughed at me. I had to decide how I was going to pour around it. Would I seal the edge and pour right up to it so the table top would be one continuous piece, basically like having a huge inlay? Or would I use form tape on the edges of the wood and pour around it so that the concrete could be pulled away and the table top would be in three pieces that would need to be joined together on top of the base? I knew that the wood would expand and shrink with the climatic changes here in Chicago, so I didn't think inlaying this huge piece would work. I've inlaid live edge wood before, but the pieces were smaller, thicker, and less volatile than this one. I decided to do the latter, using form tape and make it so it would come apart. This would give the sassafras plank some room to breath and fidget and it wouldn't crack the concrete come humid summer. Also, marrying 3 different materials, concrete, wood and steel proved to be a challenge during installation. Lots of shimming, drilling, and a little gluing going on that day.



**Best of Show**

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