

Buy

ASIA SUSTAINABILITY CONTEMPORARY

WOOD

DESIGN

# Whittling Their Way Out

30 JAN 13 / TEXT: [MARYRUTH BELSEY...](#) / IMAGES: COURTESY OF HEARTS.COM



**Natural Color**  
*Rediscovering Peru's Cotton*



**Inspired By All**  
*Birgitta de Vos' Collaboration with Haiti's  
Artisan Business Network*

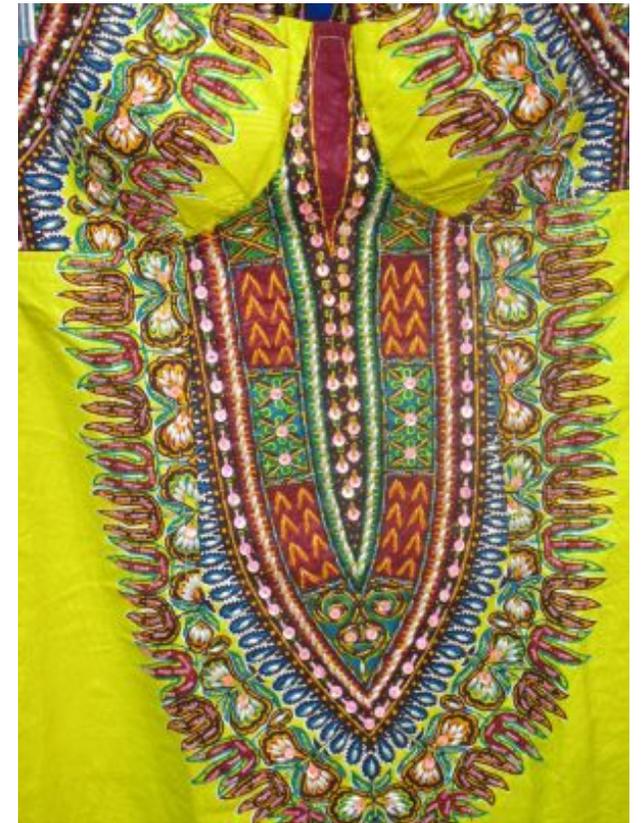


**Related**

## *Palestinian carvers turn olive wood into a way to overcome poverty*

# R

ich in symbolism, grand in stature, and deeply rooted in culinary and ecological history, few trees claim as important a place in human society as the olive tree. Today, Bethlehem artisans meticulously chisel carefully harvested wedges of wood to slowly peel back the layers of beauty and history to reveal its true personality. It is a labor of love that carries on a centuries-old tradition.



We all know and love the olive tree for the rich oil that pours forth from its fruit. Prized in ancient times as a source of wealth, olive oil has been used as a dietary staple in many societies for thousands of years. More importantly, the olive tree also figures largely in many religious and cultural traditions. It has been used in the anointing of revered kings, beloved athletes, and even the dead. As a balm of blessing, olive oil holds significant meaning as well as distinctive flavor.



 [GALLERY](#)

Today, the olive tree continues to give by providing material that is transformed into artwork to fuel an ages-old economy. Olive trees produce fantastically unique wood fiber that has been used by carvers for time untold to create handicrafts full of religious, historical, and artistic symbolism.

Given the iconic importance of these trees, harvesting the wood requires great care. This typically means using only wood collected during the course of regular pruning of the trees. In other words, no trees are sacrificed for the finished products created by these artisans.

◁ ○ ◻ ◼ ◽ ◾ ◿ ◾ ◽ ◼ ◻ ○ ▷

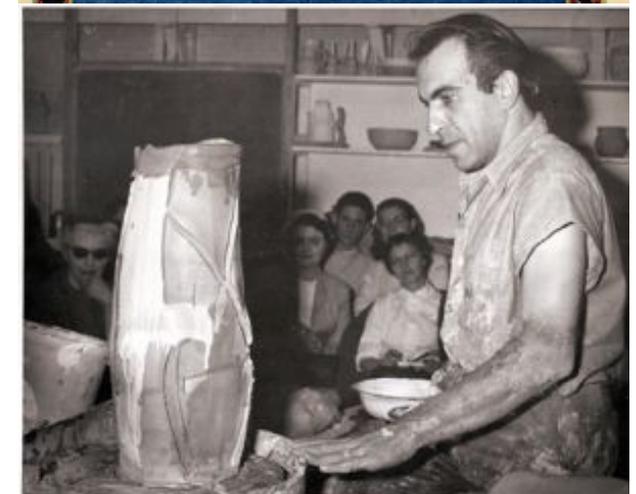
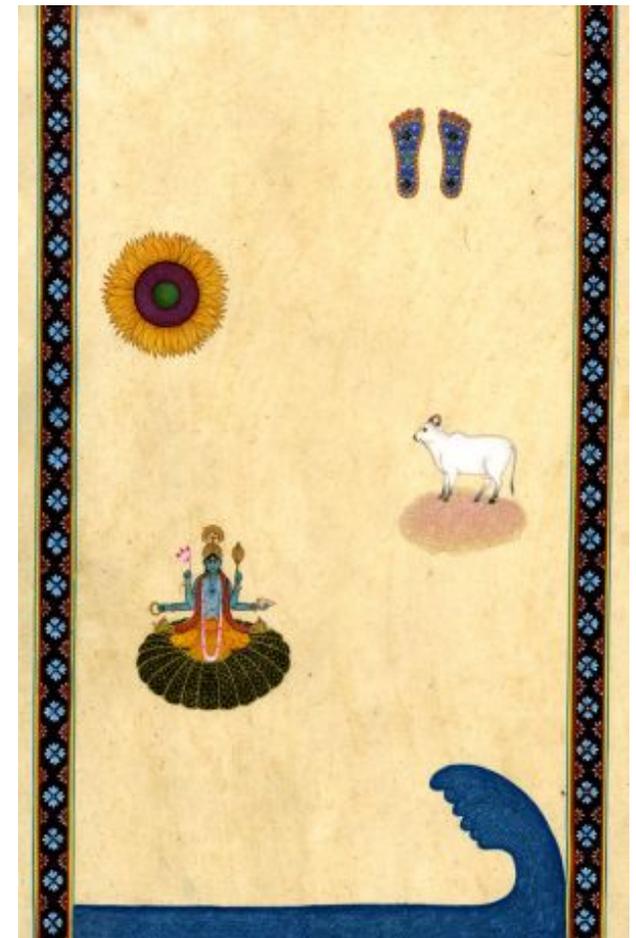


Once the wood has been harvested, the wood workers begin the painstaking labor of bringing each piece to life. Though large electrical machines are occasionally used to initially obtain the rough shape of a piece, the crafters reject machines for the actual carving process. They prefer hand tools for their ability to provide precise, intricate details. Each block's unique inner beauty is hidden from view until it is exposed by the carver, revealing the distinctive red pigment that swirls and loops in fanciful patterns. No two pieces are alike.

This unique inner beauty of olive wood is what makes each whimsical pair of fish earrings and each chunky set of stacker rings created by these Bethlehem artisans so magical. Once carved, each piece is hand-embellished and prepared for packaging. In many cases, this finishing work is performed by people with special needs to provide quality employment for an often-neglected segment of society.

Olive wood art is also incredibly durable, which is no surprise given that it's one of the hardest and heaviest woods on the planet. Perhaps that is why it has been the wood of choice for Palestinian families for centuries. In fact, the tradition of olive wood carving was originally introduced by monks and priests over 700 years ago. Today it is passed down from parent to child, first by observation, then by hands-on instruction as they get older.

*Hearts is proud to partner with these traditional artisans to ensure their olive wood traditions are preserved for many generations. To review all the jewelry pieces, go to [Hearts.com](https://www.hearts.com) and visit the "Explorer" style collection.*



0

COMMENTS

PLEASE [SIGNUP](#) OR [LOGIN](#) TO COMMENT





**HANDEYE** 

*World Craft  
Culture*



MASTHEAD

OUR MISSION >

SUBMIT >

SUPPORT >

SECTIONS

TEXTILE >

ARTIFACT >

PLACE >

CULTURE >

FEATURED

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT >

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT >

CULTURAL PRESERVATION >

DESIGN & INNOVATION >

CONTACT

*HAND/EYE Fund*

*P.O. Box 921*

*Shelter Island, NY 11964*

*info@handeyemagazine.com*