

# Rotten wood to bronze

## Dan West's Hunkered Heron

Unlike any other sculpture I have created, this heron began with an idea—a vision—that I had firmly in mind for several years: I imagined a disheveled great blue heron such as I have observed in nature with ruffled, bedraggled feathers, looking like the bird had just awakened from a stormy night. I carried this image around in the back of my mind with only a vague sense of how to go about achieving such an abstract work.



For years my wife and I have visited a beach on the Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia, which due to a confluence of currents accumulates several miles of driftwood. That silver-hued, weathered wood has been the raw material for my wooden sculptures for 20 years.



Climbing among tangled piles of wood in 2015 I discovered a massive, totally rotten log which had lain undisturbed for many years; I could pull it apart with my bare hands. Examining it I realized I was looking at layers of wooden bird feathers! Excited, I opened up the log and spread great hunks in an open area of the beach. Then I lugged the best pieces to my pickup on an access road behind the beach.

I had the source for my disheveled heron, but I still had no idea how to make anything out of this wet, rotten wood that fell apart when I handled it. I managed to get a good pile of it home to Maine. First step was to allow it to dry which meant placing it outside on sunny days, then returning it to my barn the rest of the time. I knew from my previous life as a fiberglass boat builder that soft wood could be saturated with resins when they are thinned to the consistency of water. I soaked the wood with polyester resin thinned 100% with acetone; after curing it was solid and could be handled without falling apart.



After shaping a foam lobster buoy which I thought could be a core surrounded with wood, and then rejecting that idea, I realized that the only option was to cut the wood into formed pieces, gluing them together with epoxy resin. That was the solution: I was able to put the bird together out of about 20 pieces. The final challenge was to fill the deepest cavities in the surface so that a mold could be formed around the bird and then the bird removed. The entire, very exacting process of creating the mold and then pouring the bronze parts was accomplished with amazing skill by the artist craftsmen at the Somerset Foundry in Bath, Maine.