

Life and Limbs

RICHARD REAMES ARRIVES on stage with pruners, a knife, stretch tape and a few long pieces of 2 x 2. Huge, plastic pots are already center stage, under the lights. Inside the pots are several tree saplings, about 6 feet tall. Reames bends, stretches and weaves the saplings around a simple frame. He uses the knife to make tongued notches that slide together where some of the branches cross. He binds those tiny wounds with the stretch tape to secure the intersections that will grow into grafts.

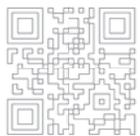
The title of his lecture draws your eye: “How To Grow a Chair.” This skill, which Reames teaches at garden shows, fairs and folk art festivals around the country, is so unique, he had to create a word to describe it: “arborsculpture.” This isn’t clipping a hedge into shapes or trimming tiny, delicate branches for display. This is manipulating the living trees themselves—the trunks, the branches, everything—and training them to grow into something beautiful, functional, or both.

Reames also does installations, where he shows up at a client’s property and starts an arborsculpture project, then trains the new owner in its care. Past the irrigation ditches on his land, which is tucked between

the tiny town of Williams, Ore., and the border of Klamath National Forest, is a vast stand with hundreds of saplings—diminutive birches, alders, poplars. They’re cultivated as stock for lectures, Reames’ private projects and client installations. If it’s a living chair you’re after, a visit from Reames will run about \$1,500, plus travel expenses for Reames and a maintenance investment the client will pay out in years.

A living chair is one thing, but Reames has crafted many other living designs. Some look tortured; some look downright bizarre. All of them look like products of

a wild imagination. “Only God can make a tree,” the poet said. Well, Mr. Joyce should have met Mr. Reames, who can make something *out of* a tree—and he doesn’t even have to cut it down first. —*Jamie Cole*



TWISTED TREES.

See living designs from Reames and others, along with the complete story on arborsculpting and its history, at myFarmLife.com/limbs, or scan the code for an arborsculpture gallery.

