

# TROPICAL HARDWOODS IN THE SPOTLIGHT AT SEWELL C. BIGGS WINTERTHUR FURNITURE FORUM

*'Exotic Woods, Masterful Makers' Explores Luxurious Furnishings  
Made From 1600 - 1850*

**WINTERTHUR, DELAWARE**—The names evoke classic style, rich colors, and distant realms: Amarillo, braziletto, calamander, ebony, mahogany, rosewood, sabicu, satinwood, and snakewood. Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library explores such hardwoods in “Exotic Woods, Masterful Makers: Tropical Hardwoods and the Luxury Furniture Trade, 1600-1850,” the Sewell C. Biggs Winterthur Furniture Forum.

The April 7-9 conference features 16 talks, with speakers from six states and two countries, and an on-stage object demonstration by a master furniture maker, assisted by Winterthur staff. Saturday’s optional events include four workshops and a field trip to one of the world’s largest specialty lumber yards.

The experts are mostly from museums and universities, and they also include a decorative arts researcher, an antiques and decorative arts consultant, a historical society president, a furniture historian, a historic upholsterer, and a cabinet maker.

The cost to participate in the forum, sponsored in part by Freeman’s, is \$435 for persons who are not Winterthur Members and \$375 for Winterthur Members and nonprofit professionals. Students and graduates of the past five years receive the discounted registration fee of \$200. The fee includes Thursday and Friday lectures, lunches, and breaks; and Thursday evening reception. Four optional workshops and a field trip on Saturday are \$75 each. All lectures will be in Winterthur’s Visitor Center.

To register, please call 800.448.3883; visit [winterthur.org/furnitureforum](http://winterthur.org/furnitureforum); fax the completed registration form to 302.888.4953; or mail the completed form, with payment, to Winterthur Information and Tours Office, 5105 Kennett Pike, Winterthur, Delaware 19735.

Tropical woods were used as dyestuffs, pharmaceuticals, and flavorants, and in shipbuilding, architecture, and luxury furniture. When England’s parliament ended import duties on lumber in 1721, merchants rushed to use tropical hardwoods, especially woods marketed as mahogany.

Consumers relished the rich colors and eye-catching figures of tropical woods, in solid work and veneers. Cabinetmakers valued their dimensional stability and workability.

In their best furniture, cabinetmakers aligned design and materials, merging art and nature to create powerful aesthetic statements. At the same time, the unregulated harvest of exotic hardwoods depended on slave labor and contributed to changes in tropical forests, a legacy that continues today.

The talks start with “Exotic Woods and the Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library Collections,” with Gregory J. Landrey, Dwight and Lorri Lanmon Director of Academic Affairs, Winterthur. Henry Francis du Pont evinced a particular fondness for 18th-century American mahogany furniture in assembling the world-class collections at Winterthur.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, High chest by Benjamin Frothingham, Jr, 1760-1785, Charlestown, MA  
Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont, 1967.1445*

## MEDIA CONTACT

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Winterthur—known worldwide for its preeminent collection of American decorative arts, naturalistic gardens, and research library for the study of American art and material culture—offers a variety of tours, exhibitions, programs, and activities throughout the year. General admission includes a tour of some of the most notable spaces in the 175-room house as well as access to the Winterthur Garden and Galleries, special exhibitions, a narrated tram tour (weather permitting), the Campbell Collection of Soup Tureens, and the Enchanted Woods children’s garden. \$20 adults; \$18 for students and seniors; \$5 for ages 2–11.

## Museum hours

10:00 am- 5:00 pm, Tuesday- Sunday.

Winterthur, located on Route 52, six miles northwest of Wilmington, Delaware, and five miles south of U.S. Route 1, is closed on Mondays (except during Yuletide), Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day.

Winterthur is committed to accessible programming for all. For information, including special services, call 800.448.3883, 302.888.4600, or TTY 302.888.4907, or visit [winterthur.org](http://winterthur.org).



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### Other lectures:

- “From Rainforest to Parlor: Mahogany in Early America,” with Jennifer Anderson, Associate Professor of History, Stony Brook University, University of New York.
- “Cómodas Cubanas: Sacristy Chests and the Mahogany Trade on the Island of Cuba,” with Dennis Carr, the Carolyn and Peter Lynch Curator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- “Ingrained: Nathaniel Gould and the Mahogany Trades in 18th-Century Salem,” with Kem Widmer, researcher, North Shore Decorative Arts Research, Cornish Flat, New Hampshire.
- “‘We Hear the Sound of Hammers and the Grating of Saws’: Chinese Export Furniture,” with Karina Corrigan, the H. A. Crosby Forbes Curator of Asian Export Art, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.
- “Sylva’s Exquisite Corpse: Exotic Woods, Exotic Applications of Local Woods, and the Tree Origin/Wood Identification/Lumber Trade/Furniture Origin Equation,” with Alan Miller, antiques and decorative arts consultant, Quakertown, Pennsylvania.
- “The Most Fashionable Assortment: Woods in Philadelphia Furniture, 1700-1820,” with Alexandra Kirtley, the Montgomery-Garvan Curator of American Decorative Arts, Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- “What’s In a Name? That Which We Call a Rose(wood) by Any Other Name Would Smell As Sweet,” with Page Talbott, President and CEO, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- “Tropical Woods in British and North American Furniture, 1600-1800: A Political and Economic History,” the Wendy A. Cooper Furniture Forum Lecture with Dr. Adam Bowett, furniture historian, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- “Jamaica; the Land of Wood and Water,” with Dr. John Cross, Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies at the Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design, London Metropolitan University
- “Exotic Woods and Veneer in Pre-1730 New England,” with Robert F. Trent, consultant and historic upholsterer, Wilmington, Delaware.
- “The Red and the Black: Snakewood and Other Tropical Hardwoods in Early New England Furniture,” with Gerald W. R. Ward, the Katharine Lane Weems Senior Curator of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture Emeritus, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- “Carving a Piecrust Table Top,” the Robert Francis Fileti Endowed Lecture/Video Assist Demonstration with Gregory J. Landrey, Dwight and Lorri Lanmon Director of Academic Affairs, Winterthur, and Alan Breed, cabinet maker, Rollinsford, New Hampshire.
- “Harvesting Honduras Mahogany: The Dominy Connection,” a Research Discovery, with Charles Hummel, Curator Emeritus, Winterthur.
- “Plain, Branch, Mottle & Curl: Circular-Sawing of Mahogany Veneers in Boston by Baldwin Mills, 1825-1859,” with Robert D. Mussey, Jr., Milton, Massachusetts.
- “Mahogany and the Making of the Central American Landscape,” with Craig S. Revels, Associate Professor of Geography, Central Washington University, Washington.

The object presentations are by Amy Griffin, Lois F. McNeil Fellow, Winterthur Program in American Material Culture; Rosalie Hooper, Lois F. McNeil Fellow, Winterthur Program in American Material Culture; and Catharine Dann Roeber, Assistant Professor of Decorative Arts and Material Culture, Winterthur.

Four workshops and a field trip are offered on April 9:

-“Mahogany/Braziletto/Cedrella/Sabicu and Beyond: Object-Based Macroscopic Study of Tropical Hardwoods” is with Gregory J. Landrey, Dwight and Lorri Lanmon, Director of Academic Affairs, Winterthur, and Joshua W. Lane, Lois F. and Henry S. McNeil Curator of Furniture, Winterthur.

-Participants will learn to recognize features of wood by eye to help identify wood types and distinguish temperate and tropical hardwoods. Insight into the working characteristics of tropical hardwoods will be gained through close study of tool marks and other clues on furniture in Winterthur’s collection.

- “Bermuda Cedar Furniture: The Development of an Island Aesthetic, 1680-1780” is with Keith Adams, private collector, New Castle, Delaware. Objects from the presenter’s collection, supplemented by examples from Winterthur, will ground the study of forms, materials, construction, and decoration unique to Bermuda furniture, with emphasis on developing connoisseurship skills and gaining perspective on the marketplace.

- “Secondary Woods in British Furniture” is with Dr. Adam Bowett, independent furniture historian. Drawing on examples from the presenter’s foundational 2003 reference book, *Woods in British Furniture-Making, 1400–1900*, supplemented by examples from Winterthur, participants will gain insight into secondary woods used in British furniture, complicating received wisdom about the availability and use of temperate and tropical forest species in England and America.

-“Tropical Hardwood Identification: 50 Shades of Brown” is with Dr. Harry Alden, Alden Identification Service. Participants will hone skills at identifying major tropical hardwood genera and species used in historic furniture. Examples from Winterthur will provide opportunity for close study.

The field trip, guided by Mark Anderson, Senior Furniture Conservator, Winterthur, is to Hearne Hardwoods, one of the largest specialty lumber yards worldwide, stocking more than 140 species of domestic and exotic hardwood lumber. The two-hour tour covers how logs are turned into lumber and then into products. Proprietor Rick Hearne and staff also will cover managing forests, machining for musical instruments, milling, and drying.

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