My unplanned woodworking career began in 1981 when I landed a job at George Nakashima Woodworkers, the same year that George published his book, *The Soul of a Tree*. Under George’s tutelage, I spent a year smoothing, polishing and finishing cabinets, tables, desks, chairs, and benches before heading off on my own, armed with nothing more than a favorite finish and a keen eye for beautiful wood. I was hooked.

Today, the name Nakashima is synonymous with huge, natural-edged tabletops; casework with exposed dovetails; lots of solid wood; and wooden keys, called butterflies by George. The Conoid chair is perhaps the most iconic of all Nakashima designs. Those produced in the Nakashima workshop today differ little from the first version George built in 1971. A study in minimalist elegance, the design features two legs that extend from sled-type feet, serving as uprights that support a cantilevered seat and a crest rail with cantilevered ends. These major parts are typically made from black walnut. Spindles are made from hickory, shaved
Three Tables for Peace

On New Year’s Eve, 1986, a table of American walnut measuring 10½ by 10½ feet by almost three inches thick was dedicated in the nave of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City. Constructed from two enormous, book-matched slabs, the Peace Altar was the first of three tables conceived by George Nakashima to promote unity and world peace. Across the globe, two similarly-sized altars were dedicated, the second in the Russian Academy of Art in Moscow (1995); the third in Auroville, India (1996). To embrace all the continents, there are plans for four more altars.

The first Peace Altar in the Nakashima workshop, bound for New York City.

The second Peace Altar, Moscow, Russia.

The third Peace Altar, Auroville, India.

Drawn in detail. Drawing grain patterns from actual slabs of wood was a typical Nakashima approach, including the precise placement of wood butterflies.

and faceted by hand with a block plane.

George passed in 1990, but the workshop is still going strong today under the direction of his daughter, Mira Nakashima-Yarnall. In her 2003 biographical work, Nature Form & Spirit: The Life and Legacy of George Nakashima, Mira recounts her dad’s life and work, with colorful photos of the furniture this small company has been producing over the past 70-plus years. Located in New Hope, Pennsylvania, the showroom and museum are open to the public on Saturdays only, from 1 to 4:30 p.m. ■

Architectural seat. George Nakashima enjoys his famous chair outside the Minguren Museum that he designed and built on his property in eastern Pennsylvania.
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