

Behind the Scenes

with Kurt Hertzog



Bad Dogs Burl Source

The story of Bad Dogs Burl Source is an interesting tale of circumstances that may seem unlikely, but did happen. Imagine if you will, a couple who took an interest in woodturning and were on their way to Craft Supplies in Provo, Utah, to take a woodturning class. On the way from Burns, Oregon, to Provo, Rob and Donna Doyle stopped off at Skip Bellock's Australian burl business in Sandy, Utah. They loved the burls, bought some, and proceeded to their class. After becoming totally enthralled with woodturning during the class, they later heard that Skip's business was for sale and considered buying it. And, after some thought, they did.

Buying an Australian burl import business near Salt Lake City, Utah, and moving it to Burns, Oregon, is no small feat. Imagine then when a change in Donna's job two months later required her (and the newly acquired burl business) to move across country from Oregon to Massachusetts. All moved well, considering that Rob rented UPS tractor trailers to move everything.

The Bad Dogs Burl Source is located in the huge barn behind Rob and Donna Doyle's home in Belchertown, Massachusetts. They still specialize in Australian burl caps and now have started supplying North American burl. They don't consider themselves lumber dealers; instead, they are burl dealers. The company itself consists solely of the two Doyles. Donna works the behind the scenes, except when working trade shows. She is the one who does the computer work, updates the website, and sees to other business needs. Rob is the "wood guy"—the one who mans chain saws, drives forklifts, and handles all the band-saw tasks. This division of chores works nicely, though it keeps the two of them very busy. They've been at their new site in Massachusetts for about three years now.

Starting with only burl caps, Bad Dogs Burl Source has moved into offering a variety of turning blanks and slabs for just about every type of project. They stock burl materials cut for table slabs, table bases, reel seat blanks, knife handles, pen blanks, duck and goose calls, bottle stoppers, and more. The company is somewhat of a one-stop-shopping source for turners looking for extremely pretty woods. They offer stabilized wood as well.

Though Rob and Donna previously traveled extensively to buy stock, time and travel costs have changed that.

They now buy from their network based on photos and the trust built from past dealings. On occasion, they will consider buying something from outside their network, but only with caution and lots of photos. Some people's concept of burl is one bump on the side of a tree, which doesn't really produce a lot of saleable material from a commercial aspect. They are, however, always willing to consider that special piece of wood.

The business does accept walk-ins, but that is usually limited to the serious buyer or various turning clubs, because their location and setup isn't quite the retail store arrangement most are used to. The business is more than 80% Internet-based, so their customers are rarely standing in the barn—although they do get special shoppers who come in just to visit the dogs. Folks have made a special trip to meet the two "bad dogs," and bring Kuma and Kriscoe (both female yellow labs) dog biscuits and treats.

Bad Dogs Burl Source continues to grow in spite of the recent economic downturn. From their perspective, they are busier than ever and have added nonwood promotional offerings, such as T-shirts and coffee mugs. Rob has been pleased with the acceptance of these products (having sold thousands of them), and their plans are to continue in the same vein. They want to keep the staff small and be the personal service kind of company, as opposed to a larger operation.

Next time you are on the Massachusetts Turnpike and have a bit of extra time, consider making a turnoff to Belchertown to look in on the "bad dogs" and friendly Rob and Donna at Bad Dogs Burl Source.



Fig. 1. If you are looking for Bad Dogs Burl Source, you really need to look carefully as you travel down a beautiful wooded road in Belchertown, Massachusetts.



Fig. 2. You will see a wonderful log cabin at the end of a long, treed driveway.



Fig. 3. Even farther back in the woods behind the log cabin is the home of Bad Dogs Burl Source.



Fig. 4. Rob and Donna Doyle are not only the owners, but the entire staff of the company.



Fig. 5. Originally, Bad Dogs Burl Source sold Australian burls exclusively.



Fig. 6. The far end of the shop is set aside for the processing equipment to prep burls and other materials for sale.



Fig. 7. Originally dedicated to Australian burls, Rob and Donna have branched out into burls from the U.S. and around the world. Burls are available in their entirety or processed into smaller pieces.



Fig. 10. A look around the shop shows shipping containers filled with burl from which to choose.



Fig. 8. The "store" is functional, yet Spartan, as the walk-in trade is restricted to the true aficionado or the occasional club visit.



Fig. 11. If you are in to banksia pods, Bad Dogs Burl Source has not only a selection of huge pods, but plenty of them.



Fig. 9. Bad Dogs sells whole burls, processed pieces, bowl rounds, bottle stopper blanks, pen blanks, and other specialty cuts.



Fig. 12. Make sure you look up the folks at Bad Dogs Burl Source (www.burlsource.com) if you are in the market for turning stock with some pizzazz.