

Manna Passion



Vince Manna, award winning cabinetmaker, is a driven man. While many struggle to make a living from woodworking in one form or another, Vince's acknowledged skill as a maker has given him the financial wherewithal to pursue his other passions. Story by **Linda Nathan**.

By day Vince Manna is a cabinetmaker of the highest order, completing joinery and fitouts for high profile architects and, international shopfitters with clients such as Tiffany & Co, jewellers of world renown. Twenty-five years of commercial, domestic and church work, skillfully translating drawings and plans into work which has featured

in numerous glossy magazines has left Vince, 44, with a prestigious clientele, an extremely well equipped workshop and a well stocked timber rack.

Vince, aided by a select number of staff, makes furniture, cabinets, giant turned timber urns, columns, architectural mouldings and shopfittings to order. Occasionally there are gaps between orders, but these are welcome oppor-

tunities for other activities or time to create the odd spec piece. Work comes eventually though by fax or by phone, mostly from existing clients or from those recommended.

Vince's factory has more machines than you can count on your hands and feet. With names like Altendorf, Wadkin and Robinson amongst them, they are usually single purpose, and always solid and



One of Vince Manna's giant vases turned from a two tonne log of Huon pine salvaged from the Teepookana Forest Reserve, Queenstown, Tasmania.





Above: Snaps from some of Vince Manna's rainforest expeditions along with some of the wildlife he has encountered, handled and photographed.

seriously sized machines. Power tools are not so relied on here as there are machines that rout, shape, drill, bore and sand. Computerised machines have no place because they're 'more trouble to set up when you do an individual crafted piece', says Vince. 'Accuracy is a necessity for the type of work I do, so why waste your time with machines that won't deliver', Vince says. Some

machines were bought for a specific job but then paid their way to become a bonus the next time they were needed. 'I'm the type that when I need something for a job I just go and get it. It saves time—why waste time waiting for an auction to happen.'

A wall of plain MDF faced doors and drawers hide hand tools and hardware—no dovetailed show-off tool

A member of the International Wood Collector's Society, Vince now has over 6,000 samples which are the standard IWCS 6 x 3 x 1/2" size. He has collected many of the samples during his overseas trips, either from limbs or from the forest floor ('I don't cut down trees just to get a sample!') or from local sawmills and timberyards. Some of his samples were obtained by swapping with other IWCS members. All are botanically named.

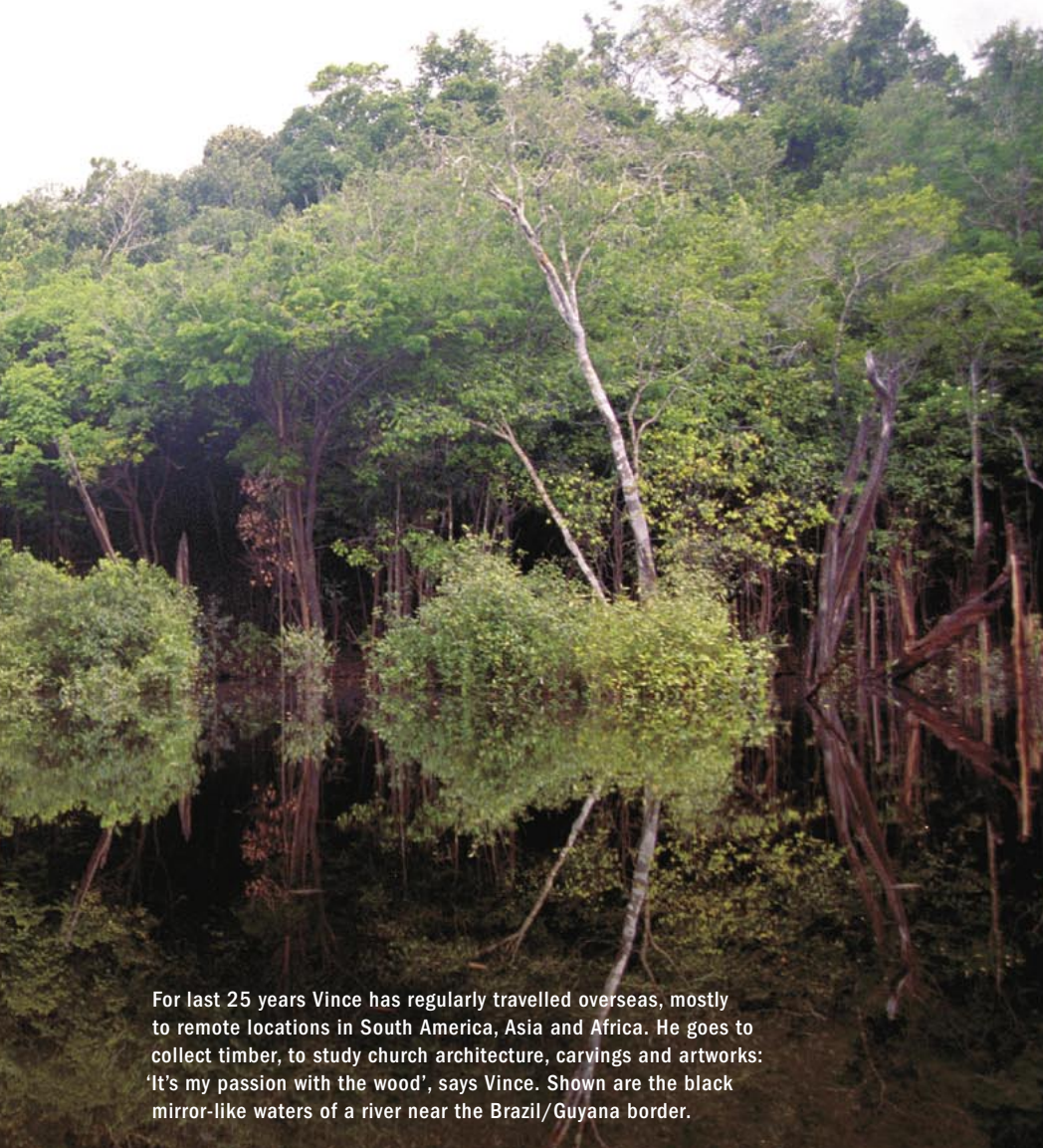
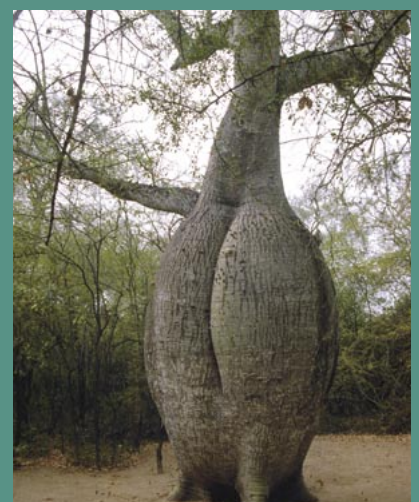
Below: Purpleheart in Brazil.



Below: Rare bloodwood found on the forest floor near the Brazil/Guyana border.



Below: Samuhu tree, Chaco area, northern Paraguay, South America.



For last 25 years Vince has regularly travelled overseas, mostly to remote locations in South America, Asia and Africa. He goes to collect timber, to study church architecture, carvings and artworks: 'It's my passion with the wood', says Vince. Shown are the black mirror-like waters of a river near the Brazil/Guyana border.



Commenting on the high machine to man ratio in his factory Vince says: 'This is nothing, I had heaps more machines but I could not move so I had to part with them.' Vince uses a patternmakers lathe to turn his giant vases.

chests here. Neat, stacked to the roof shelves of timber belie the amount of wood they contain. Most woodworkers hoard some special treasures and Vince is no exception. Nearby, standing on end, chest-high tree trunks and a gallows-like frame and pulley arrangement pose a question, until the super-sized lathe nearby gives a clue to their purpose. 'I would like to be tidier but you've got to work', Vince explains while side-stepping machines and benches. A mezzanine floor stores more timber and components, doubling as a roof for Vince's showroom and cubicle sized office.

One wall of the factory features a three stage dust extraction system which Vince designed and 'it works great'. There are safety signs everywhere warning against loose clothing, noise and dust which act as constant reminders.

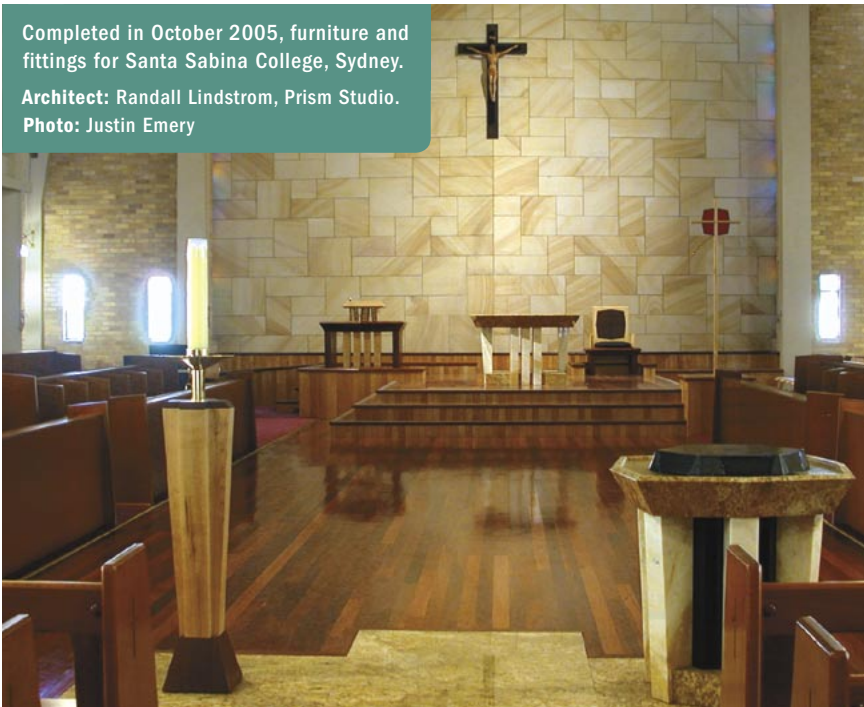
By day and many nights Vince might work 'full-on' on the commissions which provide him with a good income. But

in-between times Vince has other consuming passions. For 25 years wood has been and still is his love but not just as a raw material to work. With over 6,000 samples of different timber species Vince is obviously a collector, but what sets him apart is the fact that he has personally obtained the samples himself.

At least once a year Vince goes to the wild and far-flung forests of the world, to South America, Borneo, Africa, India and Asia, where, guided by locals, he can boat and trek through jungles to places where no tour-operators or multi-nationals find profit to go. Most of Vince's timber samples come direct from the source, albeit the forest or its local timber harvesters and merchants. Minus the TV crew, Vince is the David Attenborough of the wood world with the drive to live rough and survive on even a diet of piranha whilst fending off mosquitoes and fire ants, not to mention the odd dodgy forest guide.

Equal to his passion for collecting and creating from wood is his interest in photography and capturing images of wildlife. Now his forest trips are planned to locate the rarest and most private animals, birds, insects and arachnids. Like Steve Irwin of crocodile wrestling fame, Vince is fearless in the face of jaguars, gorillas, pythons and giant spiders (the latter he has photographed nestling in his hand). A paparazzi of the natural world, Vince cares nought for the private lives of animals. A zoom lens helps, but for a shot that looks deep into the eyes of a gorilla or a monkey Vince's technique is simple: 'Go on your own, no other tourists laughing or giggling, and then it's simple—I just walk right up and take the picture.' On his last trip Vince took around 12,000 pictures and is in the process of setting up an online image library, offering not just images of wildlife, but also shots of stunning landscapes, forest scenes and the people he has encountered in his travels.

Completed in October 2005, furniture and fittings for Santa Sabina College, Sydney.
 Architect: Randall Lindstrom, Prism Studio.
 Photo: Justin Emery



Boardroom table for the Tiffany Company made by Vince Manna.
 Photo: Tony Miller



Furniture and fittings made by Vince Manna in the Sydney Tiffany store.



In the showroom more of Vince's passions emerge. Old tools, machines, Warner Bros memorabilia, piles of National Geographic magazines and five small but weighty pedestal tables made of snakewood, waddywood, pink ivorywood, Qld ebony and Sri Lankan ebony ('one of my very early jungle pieces'), made to the design for which he won a prize at high school.

Besides a collection of finely made furniture (credenzas, coffee tables and a redgum dining setting for 18) the showroom also houses some of Vince's tall turnings—vases created from tree trunks like the ones in the factory. These are a body of work in the making which Vince will eventually exhibit. Turning on this scale is dangerous and difficult, however Vince designed and had made a tool which can achieve the deep hollowing he requires. Getting the shapes, sometimes compound curves and often 3mm wall thicknesses is, he says, a 'humungous' task which tests the limitations of both material and maker.

Skill, speed and accuracy combined with an inherent gift for creating 3D objects have rewarded Vince Manna with the sort of well-paid success many cabinetmakers would only dream of. Personal attributes of courage and determination have seen him develop his various passions and interests to extraordinary levels.

When not roaming the world Vince Manna lives and works in Melbourne and can be contacted via his website at: www.timberlinedesigns.com.au

You can view more of Vince's photography at diverseimpressions.com