



Sylva Summer School 2022

Wood
School



Sylva
summer
school

Introduction

In September 2022, the third annual Sylva Wood Summer School took place in collaboration with the V&A Museum, and specifically the *Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures* programme to create 'Field Notes.'

This exciting collaboration provided an amazing opportunity for the creative participants of the 2022 Summer School, and culminated in their work being displayed at the V&A's Susan R Weber Furniture Gallery until October 2023.



Foreword

We have three major ambitions at Sylva Wood School; to bridge the gap between education and the wood industry, to get a diverse range of people to come and engage with the opportunities we have to offer, and to collaborate in creating inspiring experiences and opportunities for young people to experience making with home-grown timber.

The 2022 'Field Notes' Sylva Summer School has provided the opportunity to realise all three ambitions.

Through 'Field Notes' we have been able to provide and create a nurturing and inclusive space for a diverse range of people to come and engage with the activities we offer. We certainly know in the forestry industry and the furniture industry we tend to have a very white, male-dominated environment. Therefore we have been excited about the opportunity to be as inclusive, and reach out to as many people as possible, to enjoy the space and the work provided by our Summer School.

The collaboration with V&A Museum has been filled with highlights and I truly believe we have created an inspiring experience, not just for participants, but for everyone involved in this year's Summer School. It was amazing to see how the 12 participants engaged and worked over the two weeks - I am sure they are proud of what they have achieved during the project, and in seeing it displayed in the V&A Museum is a fitting legacy of their enthusiasm and hard work.

Joe Bray,
Head of Sylva Wood School



Project Brief

The 2022 'Field Notes' Sylva Summer School explored how diversity in all its forms is essential when searching for sustainable ways of making in wood. The brief for the Summer School participants was to explore under-utilised, home-grown timber, and looked at issues of land use and ownership; management of forests; and questions of access and inclusion. As such, each of the resulting projects was shaped by the practitioners' own experiences.

The summer school searched for prompts and questions to create a collection of 'Field Notes'. The participants explored:

- **What does it mean on both a personal and societal level to make with local, natural materials?**
- **What might sustainable systems for sourcing and making locally look like?**
- **What environmental, socio-economic and political structures need to be considered?**
- **Who are these structures useful to, who do they benefit and how can they be transformed?**
- **How can cross-disciplinary collaboration support sustainable practices?**

The outcome of the project would be an object or series of objects made from under-utilised, home-grown timber and other natural materials, sourced locally.

It was hoped that through the process of making, the participants' work would reflect some of these questions, and be further contextualised with reflections on the Summer School in the form of imagery, spoken or written word, film or performance.



Materials

All wood used during the summer school was sourced with the help of our partner, forestry charity **Grown in Britain**. The participants were offered a range of kiln-dried timbers, alder, ash, Douglas fir, elm and sweet chestnut, along with some freshly felled ash and birch from the Blenheim Estate. This provided the opportunity for students to explore the characteristics and connecting stories. All of the timber was certified as Grown in Britain, guaranteeing its provenance.





Summer School Participants

In May, 2022, the V&A and Sylva Foundation launched an open call to invite creative practitioners, with an interest in wood as a material, and forests and woodlands as a place for learning and growing, to apply. This was an opportunity suitable for students, recent graduates, or early-career practitioners, who were given additional support from mentors to help participants realise their different projects. Participants received a £1000 stipend to take part in the Summer School, and produce work for Field Notes.

We encouraged people from all sections of our community to apply however we were particularly interested in applications from disabled people and people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, and from people who identify as queer or female, as these groups are currently under-represented in the fields of forestry, design and making in wood.

We received over 100 applications, and following a selection and interview process overseen by the V&A and Sylva Foundation, with external support from designer and educator Huren Marsh, 12 practitioners were chosen.



Structure of Summer School

The Summer School was structured into two parts:

Week 1

A timetable of inspirational online talks, seminars and mentoring sessions took place in August 2022. This helped the 12 practitioners to explore the projects' key questions and align them to their own work.

Week 2

Participants came together for five days at Sylva Foundation Wood School for a very special experience for everyone involved. There were talks given by curators, makers, conservators, foresters and arborists. There were forest walks, tree pruning sessions, milling of timber, and hands-on making. All of these activities were underpinned by an open and ongoing discussion with visiting experts, and the experience of spending time together.

Each day started with the group assembling to share reflections from the previous day, and ended with a communal dinner in Sylva Foundation's Teaching Barn.





Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures

presents projects from the Field Notes
Summer School in the Dr Susan Weber
Gallery at the V&A

We welcome you to the
opening reception

Tuesday 29 November
18.30 - 20.30
Speeches at 18.45

Membership Entrance
Exhibition Road
V&A South Kensington
London
SW7 2RL

RSVP essential to m.willaerts@vam.ac.uk

The Field Notes display runs from 29 November until
autumn 2023
Presented in collaboration with Sylva Foundation as part
of the Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures, a ten-year
project supported by John Makepeace OBE. With thanks
to Grow in Britain.



© Adam Stamford



The V&A Display

Participants, family and friends were invited to the opening reception of Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures 'Field Notes' at the end of November 2022. The carefully curated display of the outcomes at the Museum act as a collection of the 'Field Notes', bringing together comments, questions and critical outputs regarding the future of forests and forestry.

Rather than complete projects, the display as a whole, and the individual projects can be seen as prompts that invite further investigation and discussion, and it will be on display until October 2023.

THOMAS

MAKE GOOD

RETHINKING MATERIAL FUTURES

Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures explores the use of renewable, natural materials and the future of sustainable forestry in connection to design and architecture. Launched in 2022 with the support of designer and furniture maker John Makepeace OBE, the programme invites people from disciplines ranging from science and design to forestry and academia to share knowledge and skills.

Through an annual display, symposium and programme of acquisitions, *Make Good* encourages ideas of stewardship of natural resources. It considers the responsibilities of designers and consumers towards the natural world in a time of climate crisis.

For more information on upcoming talks and displays visit: vsm.ac.uk/blog/projects/makegood

FIELD NOTES

For its second iteration of *Make Good*, the V&A collaborated with environmental charity Syba Foundation in Oxfordshire to create the *Field Notes* summer school. Twelve practitioners within art, design and architecture were selected to participate through an open call. Together, they spent two weeks exploring ways of caring for woodlands, questions of access and inclusion, and the use of locally sourced wood through seminars, forest walks and hands-on making.

Each of the resulting projects was shaped by the practitioners' own experiences. The outcomes act as a collection of 'field notes' that gather comments and critical outputs regarding the future of forests and forestry. They can be seen as open questions that invite further investigation and discussion.



Summer School Seminars

Gabriel Hemery on woodland management and home-grown timber

Sharon Durdant-Hollamby on what trees do and green equity

Dana Melchar on reading the use of wood as a museum conservator

Mac Collins on his making process and how to build narratives into designed objects

John Makepeace on the challenges of a local timber supply chain in the UK and how he has addressed these issues through a long career in furniture making, design and education

Sumitra Upham on exploring craft as 'critical practice' and its shifting value across social, cultural, and political contexts



Summer School Tutors

Joe Bray

Joe leads Sylva Foundation's Wood School and describes himself as a designer, maker and teacher. He is passionate about inspiring and supporting people to become skilled craftspeople and furniture makers. He is passionate about bringing education to life through industrial partnerships - leading to live projects, study trips, work experience, internships and sponsorship for students. Joe is a Churchill Fellow, in 2018/2019 he travelled to Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and the USA, to explore the future of furniture craft education.



Phil Gullam

Phil joined Sylva Foundation in 2022 to support teaching at the Sylva Wood School. Phil has been involved in the teaching and assessing qualifications for wood occupations for more than 15 years. Most recently this was as the nationwide quality assurer of furniture qualifications and as an assessor of furniture-making apprenticeships. Prior to this, he was a workshop manager for several high-profile furniture/kitchen makers, and has successfully run his own workshop.



Dr Lynn Jones

Formerly the Furniture Department Manager in a large university with a leading reputation for furniture design, craft and manufacturing, Lynn continues to be a furniture specialist External Examiner at several universities in the UK and abroad. She also offers furniture career guidance, employability talks and graduate workshops for universities, colleges, trade associations and community groups. Lynn misses the MA Furniture course she ran for nearly twenty years, but keeps her hand in by teaching occasionally at Rycotewood in Oxford.





Hattie Speed

Hattie is a designer, maker, teacher and creator of the inclusive community, 'This Girl Makes'. Whilst studying a furniture design and make degree, Hattie initiated a blog that explored the lack of diversity in craft and design education and industries. She somehow finds the time to work as an Occupational Therapy Technical Instructor for the NHS in Oxford alongside teaching a national Saturday club focusing on furniture.

Anthony Dain

Anthony is a furniture designer and maker. He launched his business in 2015 having spent several years working in a range of workshops both designing and making for private clients, architects and interior designers. His Workshop is located at Sylva Wood Centre where he also coordinates the smooth running of the community workshops. Anthony was chosen to participate in the Crafts Council's Hothouse programme in 2019, as well as being selected to become a member of Design Nation, a portfolio of acclaimed craftspeople from around the UK.





Sylva Foundation: nurturing a wood culture, growing a future

Sylva Foundation's vision is for a society that cares for nature while living in harmony with it.

We envisage a wood culture where people understand and promote the good stewardship of woodlands and are mindful of their utility, while being conscious of their fragility.

Sylva Foundation's Wood School was established to help one of our main aims, namely to deliver the training and education necessary to support the transformation of society, focussing on the stewardship of our forests and the utility of home-grown timber.



Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures at the V&A Museum

Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures is a ten-year initiative at the V&A Museum supported by the designer and furniture maker John Makepeace OBE. It invites practitioners from different disciplines ranging from science, design, forestry and academia to share research, knowledge and skills. The programme encourages ideas of stewardship of natural resources and considers the responsibilities of timber-growers, designers and consumers towards the natural world in a time of climate crisis.





Presenting the work of the 2022 Field Notes Sylva Summer School

Creating infrastructures for care

'I wanted to explore how local community spaces might create an access to care, through volunteer-based repair and coppicing woodlands.'

Georgina Bowman

By using freshly coppiced green wood to repair a broken chair, designer and maker Georgina Bowman reflects on the parallel between material degeneration and the regeneration of woodlands. *Pair Repair* suggests communities connected to repair shops also help manage small plots of forests. In return, they would be able to use the timber from the forest for repairs, creating a mutually beneficial relationship.



Pair Repair

Chair, model

Designed and made by Georgina Bowman,
2022

Green Robinia, recycled pine chair



Illustrating access and ownership

'It's unrealistic to ask people to relate to, empathise and respect woodlands and the timber they provide when they have very little access to it.'

Beatrix Bray

Referring to the meditative practice of stone balancing, maker Beatrix Bray has turned these wooden pebbles from small, knotty sections of green ash and birch that would otherwise have been discarded or burned. The heights of the two stacks highlight an imbalance within British forestry: that of access and connection. Only 28% of woodlands in the UK are publicly owned, while 72% are in private ownership.

Seeking Balance: Access and Connection

Wooden pebbles

Designed and made by Beatrix Bray, 2022

Green ash and birch

Making space for difference

'I wanted to make a piece that highlights the absurdity of how small our differences are and yet how great an animosity they can create.'

Rachel Cox

Designer and maker Rachel subtly subverts the archetypal for this ladder made of ash by replacing two of the rungs with sweet chestnut ones, which curve outside the frame. 'While initially wanting to focus on my transgender experience, I came to explore identity more broadly using craft,' says Cox. In doing so, she celebrates the power of diversity while also pointing to the similarities that unite us.



Why do we hate others' small differences?

Ladder

Designed and made by Rachel Cox, 2022

Dried sweet chestnut and ash





Learning sustainable practices

'I wanted to explore learning through making as an alternative and ecologically aligned pedagogy.'

Krupa C. Desai

To make this tray of green ash, Krupa C. Desai followed the tree from felled trunk through to milled planks. The project explores the importance of engaging with trees in their different stages of transformation to inform the use and understanding of the material. For Desai, experiencing the tree's full journey is vital when teaching sustainable practice.

Being a witness

Tray, [audio essay]
Designed and made by
Krupa C. Desai 2022
Green ash



Inventing new support systems

'I was trying to find structural uses for what would otherwise be regarded as waste timber or firewood.'

George Fereday

Designer and researcher George Fereday investigates how structural beams can be made with minimal processing. Making full use of the natural form and strength of green roundwood, he has developed a range of simple beams that are cost effective to replicate. By using a combination of multiple tree species, these promote diverse woodlands that are more resilient to environmental stress.



Beam =Tree

Waste wood beam
Designed and made by
George Fereday, 2022
Green ash, alder, sweet
chestnut

Choosing materials for healing

'The challenge of this project was to create an object that is sensorily engaging and playful, while avoiding plastic.'

Hannah-Lily Lanyon

Designed for adults healing from trauma, this swing offers a playful alternative to furniture in clinical environments. Through their experience of building playgrounds, Hannah-Lily Lanyon often works with synthetic materials, but instead used elm for this project. Historically one of Britain's most common trees, it is now rare due to the spread of Dutch elm disease: 'Breathing second life into a tree suffering disease felt apt when considering trauma rehabilitation.'



Swing in Elm

Swing

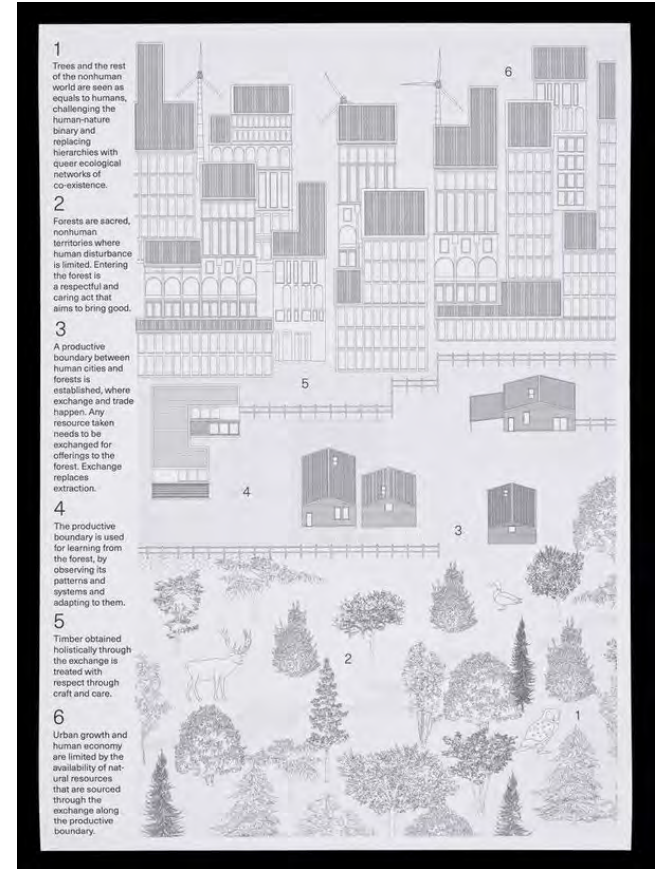
Designed and made by Hannah-Lily Lanyon,
2022

Getting to know trees

'I wanted to envision what a queer ecological balance, filled with rituals, more-than-human networks and inter-species commons can look like.'

Nia Manoylo

While forestry is a process of extracting timber from woodland, it is also a practice of caring for trees. Studying this forest/forester relationship, Nia Manoylo reflects on what an engagement with trees that is not human-centric might look like. Their illustrated poster proposes six steps where exchange replaces extraction. The trays, formed by drying thin slices of green ash, act as receptacles for offering tree-nurturing fungi and wood shavings.



The Exchange

Bowls, poster

Designed and made by Nia Manoylo, 2022

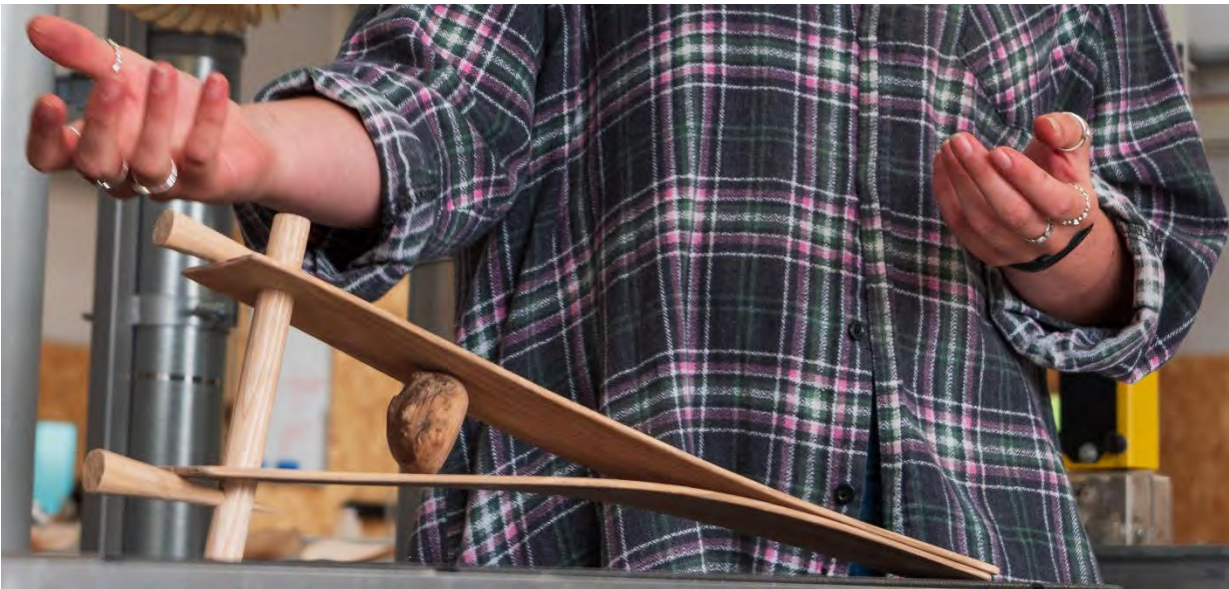
Green ash, paper

Making balance clear

'Responsible forestry management can help to stabilise an ecosystem in a woodland but pushing too hard can cause long term damage.'

Phoebe Oldfield

Carefully constructed using tension and dowels, these sculptures offer a reflection on equilibrium and the balance humans must strike when intervening in natural ecosystems. The wedge is a metaphor for forestry and human interaction, which can create both stability and imbalance. If that 'wedge' is not there, things may fall apart, but intervention can also cause damage if pushed too far.



A State of Equilibrium
Series of sculptures
Designed and made by
Phoebe Oldfield, 2022
Ash, elm, Douglas-fir, oak,
birch

Introducing absent histories

'I am interested in observing how Blackness relates to the rural landscape today, considering the barbaric distortion of African systems of knowledge.'

Henrique J. Paris

Henrique J. Paris envisions this structure as a 'multi-functional archive holder' and 'critical-altar'. It bears images, objects and documents commenting on marginalised knowledge systems, like texts by Black feminist theorist Tina Campt. Through this project, Paris reflects on how counter-colonial discourses and historical erasure can be represented in a physical work, making the immaterial material.

Tactility: (Re)thinking ethics of cultural heritage and land

Archive shelving

Designed and made by Henrique J. Paris, 2022

Douglas fir, cotton string, paper





Connecting buildings and woodlands

'Through this project I explored the relationship between architecture and woodlands and what a circular relationship between the two might look like.'

Matthew Rosier

With timber construction on the rise, artist Matthew Rosier envisions new housing developments having reciprocal woodland regrowing the materials required over the lifetime of the structure. At a scale of 1:50, the 500 sticks represent 500 trees from 20 different species growing in a 2000 square metre area. This represents the amount of timber needed to build an average apartment in the Dalston Works development in London.

The House Harvest

Walking pole, wooden sticks

Designed and made by Matthew Rosier 2022
Birch (walking pole), various woods (sticks)

Raising awareness of wood cultures

'I've developed a divination tool that helps us connect to the forest as a sentient animate ecosystem.'

Alisa Ruzavina

Treespeak creates space for dialogue between humans and woodlands through divination, the practice of seeking knowledge by means of the supernatural. By throwing the six pieces onto the gridded board representing different parts of the forest, participants access a constellation of responses, interpreted through a diviner or a book of readings. It invites people to sense the complexity of forest ecosystems and human/tree entanglements.



Treespeak

Divination Board and throwing pieces
Designed and made by Alisa Ruzavina, 2022
Ash, elm, oak, alder, sweet chestnut, Douglas-fir,
hazel, oak galls, birch bark and birch,
sweet chestnut pods

Thinking at the timescale of forests

'I'll take this to a tree in the forest to be scribed around the trunk of a tree and it'll become a forester's chair.'

Adam Stanford

This chair has only two legs as the trunk of a live tree is meant to form the back support. It is a perch from which to observe the growth of the forest. The seat pad is made from green wood, while the frame is crafted from kiln dried timber. The physical tension between the two causes the seat pad to warp and crack, while the dried wood remains more stable.



Seat for a Forester

Chair

Designed and made by Adam Stanford, 2022
Green and kiln dried ash

We would like to thank

Johanna Agerman-Ross, Maude Willaerts and Danilo Marques dos Reis from the V&A for driving the project forward and being great to work with.

Dougal Driver and Rachel Lawrence from Grown in Britain for their commitment to this project and ongoing support of our Summer Schools.

All of the contributors during the two weeks, Alicia Gonzales Lafita, Huren Marsh, Dana Melchar, Sumitra Upham, Sharon Durdant-Hollamby, Mac Collins, Hattie Speed, Lynn Jones, Anthony Dain and Rae Sellen.

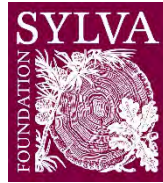
The Sylva Foundation team, Joe Bray, Gabriel Hemery, Phillip Gullam, Paul Orsi and George Dennison.

And finally, John Makepeace OBE for his support of the Make Good: Rethinking Material Futures and for sharing his knowledge and vast experience with everyone over the two incredible weeks of learning.



“Without doubt this year’s Summer School has been the most amazing experience of my teaching career. Bringing together so many brilliant young people, from diverse backgrounds and creative fields then prompting them with inspiring talks, walks and access to our workshops and experienced teachers has led to twelve very special outcomes. Anyone interested in the future of our forests and the opportunities of using homegrown timber should definitely go and see the inspiring display.”

**Joe Bray,
Head of Sylva Wood School**



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