

The 4th collaborative piece by David Lamb and James Aponovich.



BY DAVID LAMB

# White Mountain Breakfront



David Lamb & James Aponovich:  
the White Mountain Breakfront

Lamovich IV  
PHOTO BY ELIZABETH APONOVICH

I have frequently contemplated the emotional beauty and impact that music can have on the listener. I have attempted to duplicate the same effect visually. Perhaps it's an impossible task, but the attempt should still be made. Think of this piece in terms of music. It's not just a simple tune or even complex melody. It's rather more like a concerto with separate, yet unifying movements.

Utilizing the broad reach of a collaborative made this idea easier to compose. The piece as presented can show two distinct, yet related personalities. Most often when major pieces are designed they are developed with a continuous, similar theme. Yes, frequently there are different aspects that we are presented such as with secretary-desks often showing an open, involved element, and a closed, secured element. The *White Mountain Breakfront* goes beyond this. This piece of furniture represents the most extensive, developed piece yet, personally and in the collaborative Lambovich series.

This is a composition using the textures of carvings, geometric patterns, exceptional material, and contrasting woods. Overlay this with a profusion of color and richness of detail from the paintings. All this happens while both artists develop their collaborative composition using the winter theme, New Hampshire's natural beauty and human heritage and history. All these things are special in their own right, yet have been tied together to speak of one place.

There are many aspects in the details of the carvings, the veneer work and general scope that are a direct reflection of my lifetime living and working in New Hampshire. Subjects in the paintings are also personal and reflective of James Aponovich, also a New Hampshire native. While the opportunity to receive



such a commission is a lifetime goal, the opportunity to tell the story of New Hampshire and in a deeper way, my own story was monumental.

From the beginning the general vision of this piece was clear. The idea was born while at an arts conference at the Mt. Washington Hotel in 2008. As a furniture maker, it doesn't take a long time to be inspired by the grandeur of the hotel with its high ceilings, colonnades and elegant details. One step out on the grand porch brings you face to face with Mt. Washington and the Presidential Range.

Not only is this location stunningly beautiful, it is also very rugged and extreme. It is home to the "world's worst weather" and home to the internationally known 19th century *White Mountain School of Painting*.

These elements, grandeur, elegance, ruggedness and beauty became the baseline for the breakfront. The form, breakfront, a large complex cabinet with a stepped front plane, seemed to be the best answer for a large space. It was originally intended to suggest the piece for the hotel itself, this is what drove the idea for an 8' wide, 9' tall piece. I felt for the greatest impact I wanted a form that was familiar and comfortable, yet visually challenging and innovative. That said, I felt the next major aspect of the design was to veneer the upper doors in the frost pattern. The frost idea was



PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH APONOVICH

to be a nod to the mountains and the extreme weather ever present there with its incessant winds, rime ice and snow. This design of frost using birch veneers was first conceived for this piece—the first frost experiment and exploration was written for *The Journal* in the Winter 2012 issue, *Birch Fractal-Paladian Frost Demi-lune*.

The next major visual component was to have my collaborator, James Aponovich create an exceptionally large landscape painting of the Presidential Range to be placed behind these upper doors. James also wanted small inset ovals on each of the four lower doors and one in the pediment, as in *Lambovich I*. The primary



wood was to be mahogany to present an air of formality and in combination with the birch veneer work to be an historical nod to New Hampshire's furniture making accomplishments in early 19th century Portsmouth and seacoast area.

**So the design sat in a folder until 2011.** On a bright March day, the evaporator wafting sweet steam out of the cupola, I was showing my friends, Tom Silvia and Shannon Chandley, the process of making maple syrup. They had also come to see the shop and explore the possibility of a commission. We talked, and looked through the portfolio and then the question was presented to me, *What would you like to do?* Well, that question got the whole adventure going. Soon we set up a meeting with the patrons, cabinetmaker and painter. All sorts of ideas start flying around when the three parties are present.

It should be clearly noted that the influence of the patrons is very significant. Honestly, the magic and license to go all out and to be as expressive as you can is a true gift. *That is what this project was.*

The conversation evolved and solidified the winter theme. James

**T**elling a story through carvings. First the drawing out of the ideas are transferred to the stock, a nice unfigured dense mahogany. The assemblage of the carvings are applied on a separate poplar frame built for the frieze just above the doors. The NH aspects are read left to right with the left end being the seacoast with references to seafood and Strawberry Banke;—The (left front) native American with tamarack, a Canterbury-found clay pot, native squash and a canoe—The central panel signifies the importance of the great forested interior focusing on the White Mts., Franconia Notch and Mt. Chocorua, and the prolific birch, pine and maple. Right front—Agriculture with maple sugaring and apple orchards—and on the right end, Industry with “wheels of progress” gears and flat belt pulley’s referencing the Amoskeag Mills and John A. White Machine Works, the oak leaves symbolize the strengths this aspect played in the states development. These carved panels are very much inspired from my personal interests.

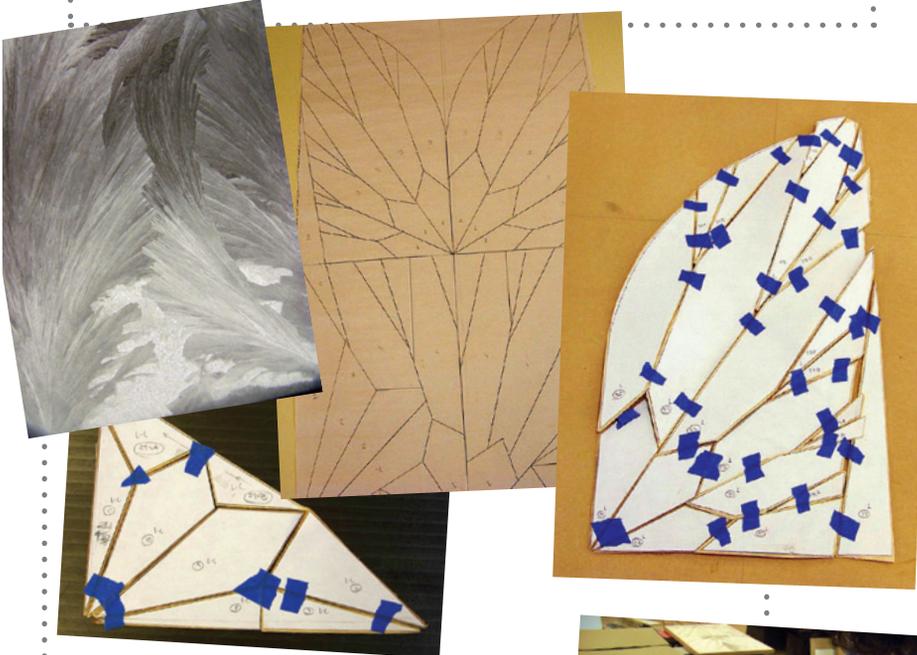




This is the life of the party. Extraordinary material—highly figured Cuban mahogany and crotch birch veneers. This grouping shows the acquisition of material from the woods at Shaker Village, just saplings when I was a kid.



Drying the veneer in a stack of single faced corrugated cardboard, blow-dried.



The inspiration of the design and its design development from photo to layout to taped-up initial cuts.

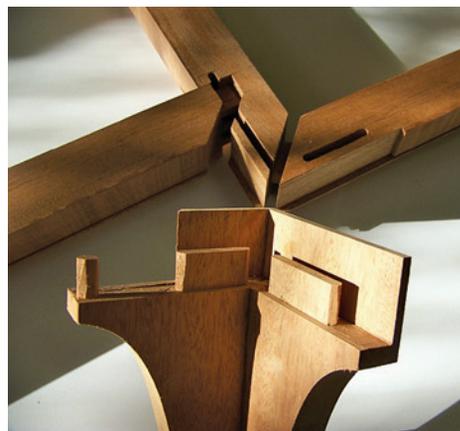
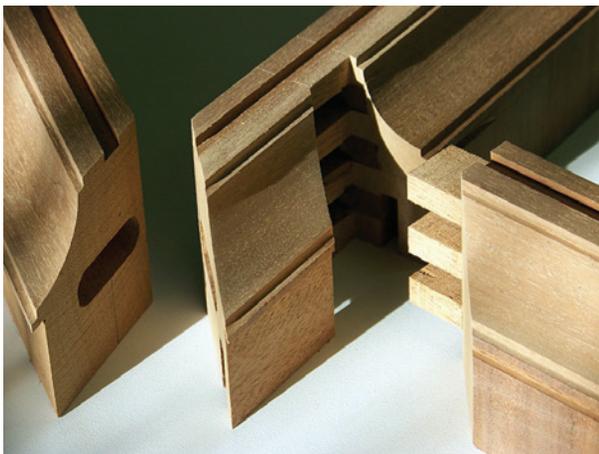


Laying out the individual patterns on the veneer, maximizing material.



The final assembly with flush mullions cut in. Janet Lamb applying shellac and watching the colors pop. The finished doors show the variations of colors present from the various cuts. This all plays into the effect of polarity and density differentials in the frost. Interestingly, this also reminds me of monarch butterfly wing patterns. Nature repeats itself in myriad ways.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH APOVOVICH



Complexity for simplicity. This sampling of joinery shows what can be involved to make something look fluid and clean. Most all the joinery is blind and will never be seen beyond this documentation. The important piece of this is the presentation, not how complicated it is. You do what it takes. The base, although a smaller proportion of the whole thing, was very time consuming to produce.



presented various aspects of NH—the seacoast, interior, agriculture and industry. I was going to veneer the frieze above the doors when the patrons suggested a *New Hampshire timeline* be carved because of both the expansion of the NH theme and they wanted to see more carving. The timeline idea became my interpretation of the NH aspects, what they meant to me. I added one more, the Native American. You can't speak of NH knowing names like Pemigewasset, Amoskeag and Winnepesaukee abound in our state without thinking where these names came from.

**The biggest challenge**—the upper doors and frosted veneer work. The vision for these doors was to capture the emotional appeal of the sunrise just peaking over the mountains and illuminating the frost in a glorious golden glow with the faceted nature of the frost crystals, reflecting the light in various shades and intensities. This could easily be its own article. The complexities are obvious. The effect is mysterious, the challenges great, the solutions creative, the material rare. It allowed me to come up with a few intriguing ways to handle design problems and process challenges. Each door has over 100 pieces of crotch birch veneer, and many joints. Each door is asymmetrical in its layout pattern. There are no book-matched doors as the veneers are all sawn which unfortunately means considerable waste. Each door face has no duplicate piece, yet all four doors use the same patterns, but in mirrored fashion.

I spent considerable time developing a layout

pattern. Asymmetry was a must in order to capture the effect that natural ice crystals present when grown on glass. There also had to be a great variety of sizes for the same purpose. A fractal approach was appropriate where it appears that smaller versions of the other larger ones were emerging from the larger patterns.

Much of the feel and presentation look of the frost was developed from looking at and photographing countless frost covered windows. There were trends that seemed prominent such as the crystalline growth emerging from the corners or along side the muntins and mullions. The growth was always from the bottom and moving up and the formation always most dense at the base or the beginning edges. The other major decision was to have all

David Lamb is a founding member of the Guild of NH Woodworkers and the NH Furniture Masters Association. He is the current NH Artist Laureate. James Aponovich is a Lifetime Fellow of the State Arts Council and former NH Artist Laureate. This is their fourth collaboration together.



my angled components, cuts and joints based on 15 degrees. This was chosen mostly because of its appealing appearance. It is also a most practical choice because I also used multiples of it and it is easily divisible, so I could make variations easily. Coincidentally, a snowflake crystal has six sides, each angle being 60°, perfectly divisible by 15°.

This general pattern, once determined, was laid out full size on paper. I next photocopied, yes photocopied, samples of my actual material to accurately layout what I had to use. I also had to make sure I had enough of everything—no waste allowed.

Because this material has to be self-procured—not commercially available—thus I cannot just order more over the phone. The supply is not generous. This photocopy method I devised allowed full exploration in various combinations without sacrificing any material. I took full account of my stock and treated each piece with extreme care and utilized it fully.

Once the pattern was laid out, the procedure was color coded to assist the assembly order and subsequent cuts. Several copies of the pattern, 20"x36" were made. These were kept for visual reference and to cut and paste to the corresponding selected veneers. The veneers were rough cut to size on the bandsaw allowing for trimming.

Once pieces were paired and joined they were glued and taped edge to edge. This process continued until the entire panel was created—four times. After cross-banding the mahogany edged substrate, the entire glue-up was slid into the vacuum bag with multiple double checks for alignment. After scraping and leveling the cured door faces, the “windows” were routed and inlaid. These doors represent a large aspect of the time spent on this piece. They also represent one of the largest visual impacts.

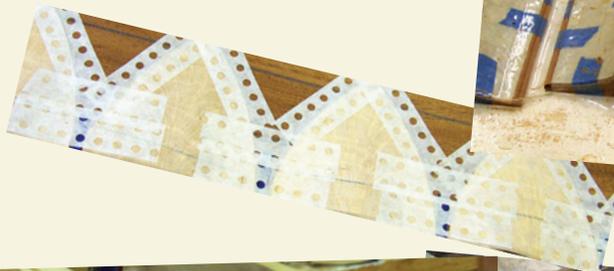
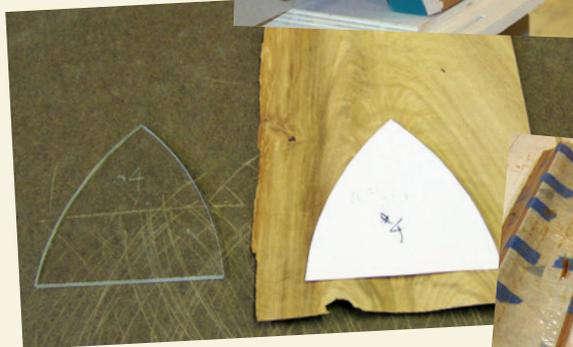
The birch was found at Canterbury Shaker Village. After my brother Steve and I cut the trees down, we realized they were saplings when we arrived in Canterbury in 1972. They became 18" trees in that time. My friend Jack Evans cut each crotch open on his band saw mill and then made 4" thick billets from the keepers. After trimming as much waste as possible, the billets were resawn and sanded to 1/16" veneers. I had hundreds of sheets that then had to be dried with a stack system I devised using corrugated cardboard with a fan blowing air through the stack. Moisture was monitored frequently.

**The lower cabinet** presented the opportunity to utilize the space for another purpose. Behind the central doors is a full chest of drawers flanked by carvings of milkweed stocks with dried pods and emerging seeds. This is what you would find in early winter.

The upper cabinet has adjustable shelves behind the doors. The central pair of doors are actually hinged to

**T**he crown piece. Lots of time here. This part also utilized a separate frame work that coordinates with the frieze frame just below it.

The large double coved molding was challenging and required special jiggging to hold the stock while machining on the shaper. Each piece of mahogany was about 6" high and required quite a knife for the shaper just for the lower cove. Once milled, birch and the Cuban was laid out in a very balanced way (visually) and each piece was cut and fit to form a sequence. The mahogany was uninterrupted from end to end to show this continuity. Also critical is the exact spacing needed with the veneer work for the planned mitering. There was one shot to do it, otherwise you must start over. After pieced, the veneers are taped then glued in the vacuum bag, carefully monitored while the bag settled onto the stock, no slipping allowed.



the large painted central panel which is also a door itself. This allows the space to be accessible.

Structurally it is more than meets the eye, complexity lurks behind the veneers and details. My interest was not to show how clever my joinery skills are, but rather to use those skills to present a seemingly straightforward yet sophisticated design, where the proportions, line and pattern of veneers and materials are the priority.

**The carved flourish** above the pediment was also part of the original intent. While somewhat vague in my mind, I decided to attain elegance through simplicity. Each cluster of leaves is a carving in a single piece of wood. The top cluster has three flowers—morning glories (or native woodbine). The flowers represent the patrons, painter and cabinetmaker. The top central painted inset accomplishes the same goal yet has a maple leaf for each of the patrons and makers. The four upward sweeping members are laminations that are shaped to minimize their rigidity and emphasize grace and lightness.

There is much more that could be said of this piece of furniture as it was well over a year's work for me and similar for James. When standing back, looking at the finished product when on display at the Currier Museum, a great sense of accomplishment was felt.

My wife, Janet, played a huge role in this project. All design ideas were passed-by her for reactions. She frequently had great suggestions for the many challenges presented. Also, the visual-effect of the colors and surface refinement, all the shellac work, rubbing, and waxing was done by her capable hands. This contribution was huge. ■

**T**he carved flourish adorning the top of the breakfront is a cluster of woodbine (morning glory) leaves and flowers. Woodbine is chosen partly to represent the tenacity and perseverance a project like this takes. The three flowers represent the three parties responsible for creating this work—the patrons, the painter and the cabinetmaker. This grouping is carved from a single block of mahogany.



PHOTO BY JIM SEROSKIE



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