



Oak wine barrels are made, sold, repaired and reconditioned by Cal and Trish Craik of Okanagan Barrel Works in Oliver, British Columbia.

## Barrel Makers Keep Ancient Art Alive

Cal and Trish Craik of Okanagan Barrel Works in Oliver, B.C. make, sell, repair and recondition oak wine barrels.

They also make "slack barrels", which are not water-tight, from birch or aspen for dry goods storage or for decorative use. Theirs is a trade that goes back well over 2,000 or 3,000 years and not a lot has changed over that time, according to the couple.

The barrels are made with lengths of tapered stave wood, bent and held together with steel hoops.

"Our American oak barrels are made of stave wood mainly from Pennsylvania," Cal says. "The oak is naturally air-dried for a minimum of 24 months, before being shaped into staves and raised into barrels. Then we toast (heat) the inside of the barrels over a fire to bring out the natural components of the wood."

The Craiks also import some finished barrels from France, which they sell to commercial winemakers.

They produce barrels in the following sizes: 6, 12, 29, 59.4 and 60 gal.

A 6-gal. American oak wine barrel, which is ideal for the home wine making market, sells for \$195 (Can.) plus S&H. Birch or aspen display barrels (16 to 30-in. dia.) are priced from \$40 to \$70 (Can.) plus S&H.



Barrels are made with lengths of tapered stave wood, bent and held together with steel hoops.

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## Easy Way To Measure A Christmas Tree

As a Christmas tree grower who sells his own trees, Tom Dull needed a fast, efficient, and accurate way to measure the height of Christmas trees on his retail lot.

"We felt we could maximize the income per tree by selling them in 6-in. increments," says the Thorntown, Ind., man. "We weren't satisfied with the accuracy of other methods of measuring that we had seen."

It's made from metal rod and has a series of spiraling crossbars spaced 6 in. apart. To use, Dull places the butt of the tree in a metal container and stands the tree straight up so the tip of the tree is in line with the outer perimeter of the measurer. Then he grasps the handle of the measurer and rotates it until one of the crossbars hits the top of the tree. The height is marked for each crossbar on the center pole.

"By using this device, the tree height is measured exactly, the customer can visually see the height, and we get the most out of the tree," says Dull. "The customer is happy because he perceives extra value, in that the tree is priced at the height of the first crossbar it comes in contact with, not the one that's closest to the tip of the tree."

"In other words, a tree that measures 6 ft. 5 in. is sold at the 6-ft. price because it didn't touch the 6-ft. 6-in. crossbar. The even-foot crossbars are painted red, and the half-foot crossbars are painted green to speed up the process," says Dull.

The measuring device's center pole is a solid rod with a dimple in the top where a single greased ball bearing sits. A pipe with the top end welded closed slips down over



Metal rod measuring device uses a series of spiraling crossbars spaced 6 in. apart.

the rod and rests on the ball bearing, making it easy to pivot. All the crossbars and supporting rods are welded to the pipe. Crossbars are welded on every 6 in. from 4 to 10 ft., and the ends of the crossbars are supported by another bent rod to stabilize them. The lower end of the inner rod is triangulated with two supports to take the flex out of the rod.

"This measuring device is simple enough that any of our helpers can use it. It's quick and accurate and helps us to be as efficient as possible," notes Dull.

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Curtis Hart turned his Oklahoma dairy farm into an "event" ranch on which he holds concerts, car meets, tractor pulls, and so forth.

## Event Ranch Harvests Good Times

When Curtis Hart hired a band for a party in 1977 with his muscle car buddies and friends, little did he know what it would turn into. The annual party kept getting bigger. Finally Hart decided to turn the Oklahoma dairy farm where he lived into an "event" ranch.

"By 1989 we were using up to 25 acres to park cars for the party, so I decided to make it a commercial event in 1990," explains Hart. "Each year since it has grown, with nationally known headliners like this year's country star Stoney LaRue."

Thousands will pay \$20 to \$25 to attend the concert. In addition to the main event, Hart also holds numerous car meets each year, but never charges admission. Last year he decided to branch out with a nationally sponsored tractor pull. When word about the event got out locally, Hart was told by zoning officials he couldn't host it.

"I was told the 'Swap Meet' had been grandfathered in when zoning was introduced," he says.

Hart had to get his property rezoned. The tractor pull was cancelled, but now he is gearing up for four additional events each year, including a vintage truck meet. Like the muscle car event, it will include entertainment.

"The entertainment helps attract radio and TV coverage," he says. "That helps drive attendance."

Hart also relies on attention-getting fliers and posters, as well as unique signboard trailers with information. In the two months prior to the meet, he will put on nearly 19,000 miles, shuffling them from spot to spot within a 300-mile radius of the ranch.

Hart emphasizes quality in every aspect of the ranch and the meet. Even the 20,000 fliers he is putting out this year are printed on heavy card stock with the expectation that they will become collectors' items like those of previous years.

"I can stop at a place and see fliers still up

from previous years," says Hart. "Graphics and quality are important. We run a low budget outfit, but we set standards and stick to them."

The same holds true of T-shirts sold at the event. While he could make more money with low quality material, he recognizes that they are promotional tools as well. The longer they last, the more value they have to building interest in the coming year's event.

With 50 acres in parking and thousands of people in attendance, Hart rents plenty of portable toilets. He also has open-air restrooms and shower units for use by attendees and campers.

"We built the restrooms with cobblestone walls and porcelain block walls for the showers," he says. "The open top units are easy to keep clean and that's important."

Throughout the past 17 years, Hart has learned to work with local officials. Keeping a clean record helps. In all 17 years, there has been only one incident when the police had to intervene, and it was a domestic dispute. Attitude also is important, he says.

"When I got the letter about zoning, I went in to see the official who sent it. I stuck out my hand, introduced myself and said, 'what can we do,'" recalls Hart. "He realized I was easy to work with. I've learned to bend when I need to bend and go with the flow."

Hart does caution that event sponsorship has its risks. In 11 out of the past 15 years, there has been concern over bad weather. In 2006, he lost \$22,000 on entertainment due to rain. It's a risk he's willing to take.

"It's not about the money," he says. "Bringing people together was what got me started and keeps me doing it. Besides, it's been a great way to go without getting a 'real' job."

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## How To Reach Us

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