



# Coastal chic FURNITURE

**Michael Fleming** crafts bespoke furniture using driftwood, the wood aged and coloured by the coastal weather

FEATURE: MATTHEW HAMILTON. PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF DESIGNS ADRIFT.

**D**riftwood is the wood that washes ashore, weathered, aged and coloured by ocean waters and weather, and for those living along coasts, driftwood is an ordinary sight. Yet artist and designer Michael Fleming saw in driftwood a new concept for furniture design: creating stylish pieces using this material.

After years of informally working with the material and experimenting with designs, he formally launched Michael Fleming Designs Adrift in 2009, uniting his love for driftwood's colour and texture with a love for natural, organically sourced materials. "Using this found wood as opposed to traditional wood has more meaning to me, and the aesthetics of driftwood also have great appeal," says the long-time collector of driftwood.

In just over two years of operations, Fleming's Designs Adrift has developed a solid collection of furniture and accessories, including the Linekin lamp, Rogue bed, Club chair and the Arey mirror. Each piece is crafted with driftwood in a process that is intensive at every step. "It can take years," says Fleming on the length of time each

piece requires to construct. "Most pieces take a minimum of a full year to weather to the desired finish and colour, and from there, I dry the wood in my solar kiln," he adds. "I cannot simply drive to the lumber yard," says Fleming, who is as much an artist as a designer in the process of perfecting his materials before assembling them, by hand, into the final product.

As well, Fleming notes that he tries not to carve the wood, instead "utilises its organic form." "Each piece retains its uniqueness simply through the innate qualities of each piece of driftwood, thus no two are the same," he says. For example, the Linekin lamp is a light fixture mounted onto a large, sprawling piece of driftwood resembling Medusa's head. To produce en masse, Fleming searches for similar pieces of driftwood to match the general form, but variance across the multiple iterations of a design is part of the appeal. "I simply see the potential of a piece of wood and work with it in its natural state."



*Kennebec chair*



*Club chair*



*Linekin lamp*

To find the wood, Fleming explores the shores of Maine in the United States, and occasionally searches the many lakes in the state's borders. "The wood [in Maine] has a very specific silver finish that is unmatched," he explains, and the unique lustre, coupled with his visionary designs, has helped Fleming gain a loyal following among design enthusiasts across the United States. He's hoping that the success of his early pieces will enable him to develop a wider collection of driftwood designs. "I like the idea of doing an in-house installation, such as an entire wall covered in a beautiful pattern, or embarking on built-in furniture," he says when discussing future plans.

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An art collection centred on driftwood has also earned Designs Adrift a reputation for experimenting with materials, and Fleming is also hard at work expanding the range of the art. “I have begun a new sculpture: driftwood intertwined with mussel shells, because I love the shiny surface of the opalescent interior and the way it reflects light reminds me of the late afternoon sunlight dancing on the surface of the sea.”

Perhaps a key factor to the success of Fleming’s business is the collaboration with his wife, Jennifer. “Jennifer is responsible for the business end of things,” he explains, and “I collect and haul the wood, design then build each piece of furniture.” For the couple, ecology, aesthetics and a proper scale of the business stem from one basic mission, summarised in a mindfulness of choices. “Jennifer and I have always been conscious of our choices, and how those choices affect not only ourselves but the world around us – being aware is a way of life for us, and for our business.” In other words, being ‘green’ is not so much a trend for Michael Fleming Designs Adrift; it is a way of life, humbly – and beautifully – executed.

**Michael Fleming Designs Adrift accepts orders through its website, [www.designsadrift.com](http://www.designsadrift.com), and ships internationally.**



*Casco mirror*



*Arey mirror*



*Rogue bed*