

# Practical beauty



Roy Jewett injects a note of humor—ironwood burl at right is Sputnik with a hat and on the left he has a watchbird watching for the beep

**S**EARING sun and blighting drought . . . out of these fierce elements in the far-flung deserts of California and Arizona a new form of creative art has been perfected.

It happened because the right man at the right time saw the possibilities in long-dead pieces of desert driftwood.

Now, after 10 years, Roy Jewett of Yucca Valley has won recognition for his inventiveness and originality in fashioning lamps, clocks, wall decorations, table arrangements and many other appealing objects from the heartwood or burl of many trees. He is known as "The Desert Lampmaker."

His creations have won increasingly wide favor and use among decorators and homeowners. Assisting him in design and production is his wife, Margaret, to whom, in fact, Jewett insists upon giving all the credit for the delightful verve of the objects they turn out.

Strangely, Jewett is an electrical engineer who actually was fleeing from work and responsibility when he began the craft with woods as a hobby. Now his chief fear is that the whole thing is going to turn into too big a business project and cease being fun.

Part of the fun consists in the wide-ranging expeditions Jewett makes in the deserts and mountains of California and Arizona for the raw materials of his art.

These trips sometimes produce adventures.

One hot day, in Arizona, Jewett spied a particularly handsome piece of ironwood burl far back in a tangle of brush at the base of a tree. He got down on his hands and knees and crawled into the thicket after the prize.

Just as he put out his hand to grasp the ironwood, he

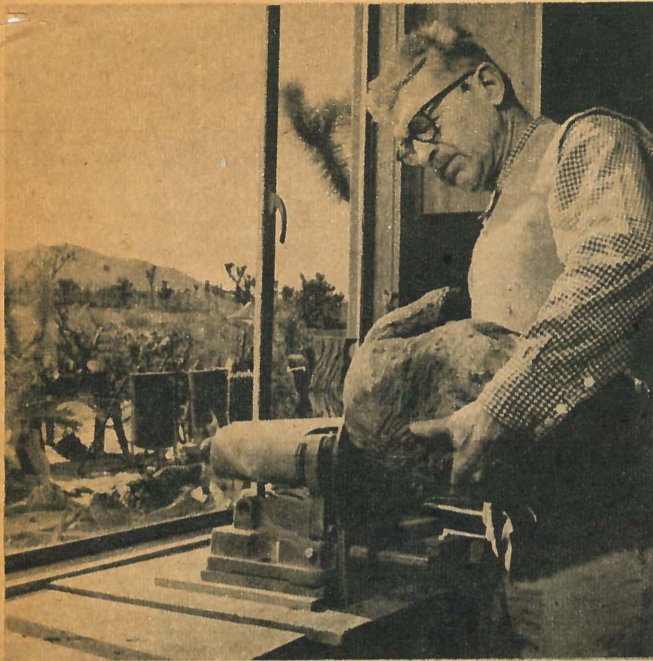


Richard Fish photographs

Left, Joshua tree wood is decorated with piece of ironwood to create an attractive lamp and right, the raw material from which he works—ironwood, red shank, desert apricot, honey mesquite and turbinella oak are some he chooses

by Ed Ainsworth

# from desert waste



Jewett polishes an ironwood burl preparatory to fashioning some desert-flavored creation. His work is sought by decorators, homeowners

suddenly saw the unmistakably wicked pattern of a giant rattlesnake.

His reaction was so quick that he propelled himself backward with terrific force and almost knocked himself out on a projecting limb, as well as spraining his elbow.

"Then," he recounts, "as I tried to get calmed down and take care of my head and elbow, I took another look under the tree. The rattler was not moving. Actually, it was only the skin of a rattler — but it was so fresh I'll swear he hadn't shed it and been out of it five minutes when I started under the tree. Yes, I finally got ironwood but my elbow didn't heal up for a month."

The heavy-duty military truck which Jewett uses for his wood-gathering expeditions is equipped with 250 feet of heavy cable on a winch attached in front. With this equipment he can hitch onto a tree or big boulder and literally pull himself out of almost any kind of trouble if he gets stuck; but the truck is so powerful there isn't much danger of that anyway.

Often, he makes his trips alone. Sometimes he permits one companion to go along — Capt. Claude Conlin of Twenty-nine Palms, retired Los Angeles Fire Department officer. They take along blankets and cots and food and water.

"When it's 123 in the shade in the daytime the nights don't always cool off too much and you can really be just a one-blanket prospector," Jewett says.

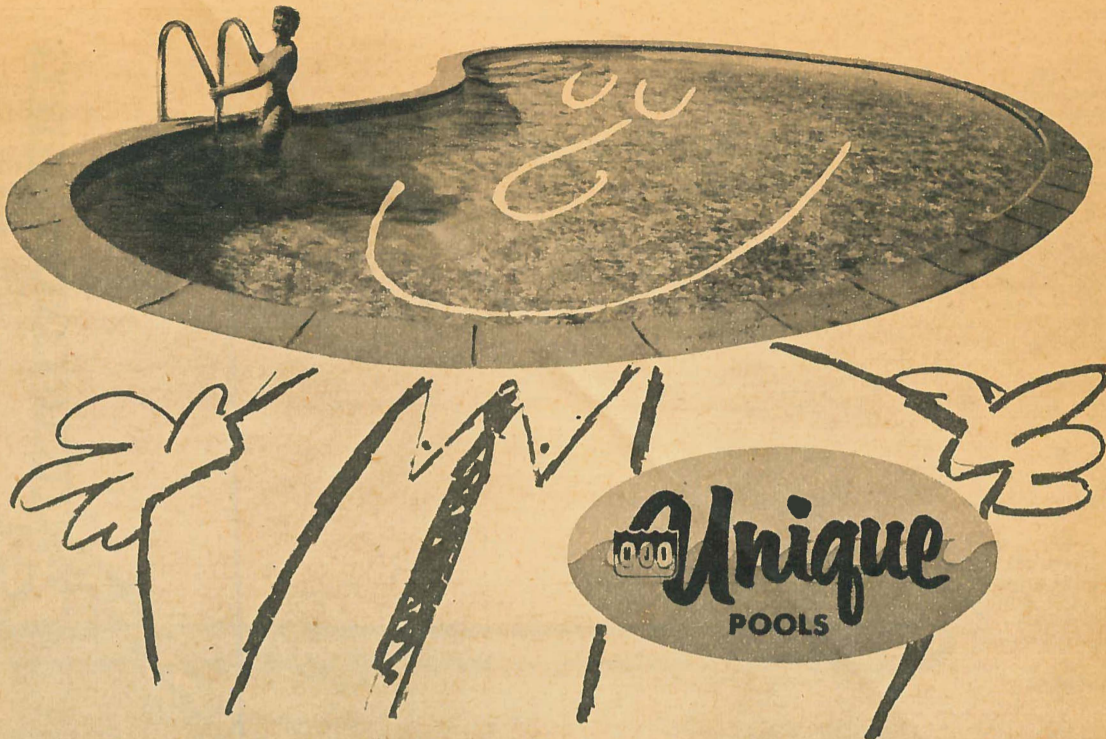
He dismisses such trivialities as sidewinders and Gila monsters with a wave of his hand.

"Sure, I run into them," he remarks, "but they are just a natural part of the desert."

*Continued on Page Sixty-seven*



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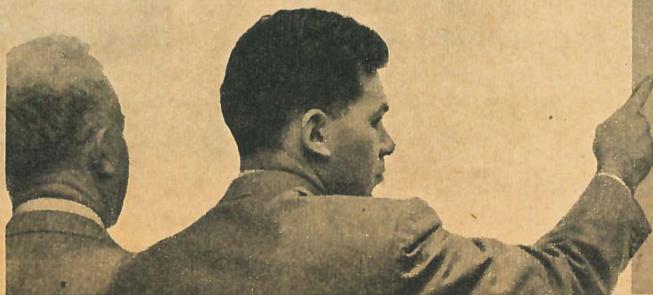
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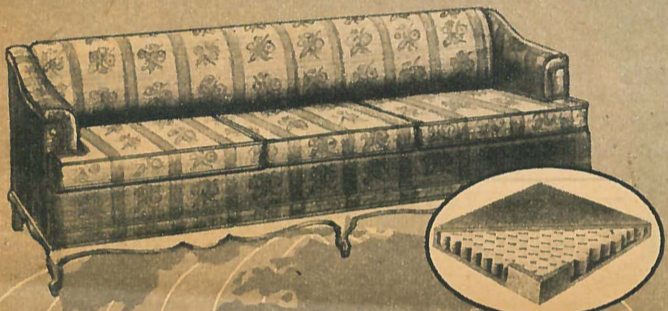
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**Desert**

Continued from Page Sixty-five



Richard Fish

The desert lampmaker has used an ironwood burl as a base for this creation

A little more disturbing was the occasion when he encountered a lot of tank traps left over from the days of desert troop training by Gen. George S. Patton Jr.

"It's the little things, though, that bother you sometimes on collecting trips," Jewett admits. "Once I got all chewed up by mosquitoes or gnats or something but I made a wonderful discovery — by rubbing beer on the welts I got relief right away. Now I always carry beer as a lotion."

In his studies of wood, Jewett has added much to the rather scanty available information on some of them.

He works chiefly with ironwood, red shank, desert apricot, honey mesquite, turbinella oak, evergreen buckthorn and manzanita. In addition, when various creations are put together, Mrs. Jewett utilizes 25 or 30 different kinds of "weeds" — the word used for leaves, bark, flowers and seed pods of desert plants.

By all odds, ironwood is the favorite wood of Jewett.

He becomes almost poetic about it.

It is incredibly tough and durable. It fights back at the special saws used to cut it. It is almost alive in its vitality.

So says Jewett.

He figures some pieces of ironwood he gathers may be 500 or 1000 years old.

After cutting it he polishes by hand, never using any artificial coloring. This holds true for all his products. The woods range in color from blond to almost black, many of them combining beautiful combinations in concentric rings.

The burls used by Jewett usually are caused by some injury to the tree, the burls

Continued on Page Sixty-nine

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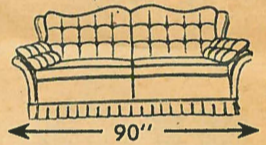
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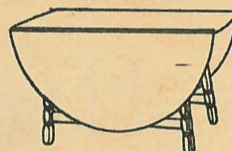
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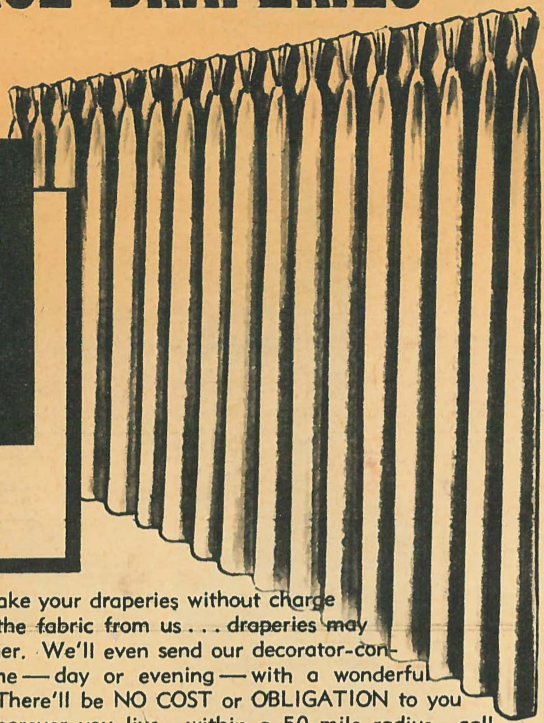
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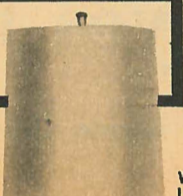
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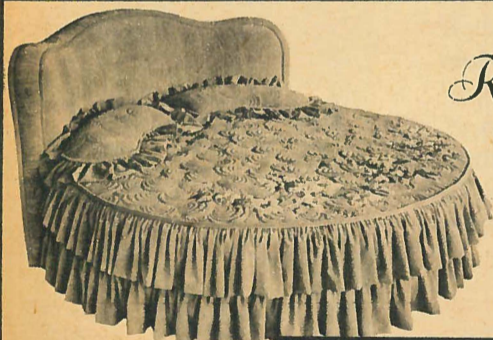
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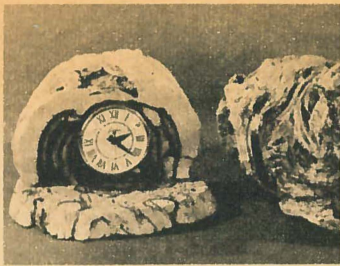
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## Desert

Continued from Page Sixty-seven



Richard Fish

Practical as well as decorative is the desert wood base for a clock

being the "scar tissue" around the wound. Mistletoe in ironwood trees sometimes cause the burls, which may weight up to 800 pounds. The ironwood is known as Olneya tesota after Thayer Olney, naturalist who studied it early in the last century. The "tesota" comes from the Spanish "tiesa," meaning stiff or firm. The ironwood seeds were eaten by Indians.

Birds, strangely, do not like ironwood trees, Jewett says, and rarely nest in them.

Jewett himself likes the pungent smell of the ironwood oil, which remains in the burl even after many years of drying out.

In his back yard, Jewett has huge piles of his raw material on which to work—woods of every kind.

An oddity in the whole matter is that Jewett is a New Englander born in Maine and now transplanted to the heart of the American desert after a distinguished career in electrical engineering in China, Alaska and many other places.

He admits he is compiling his observations on desert woods for the benefit of future generations, but modestly disclaims being any kind of an expert. He cooperates closely with the research laboratory of the National Forest Service in Racine, Wis.

Jewett and his wife work in close harmony on figuring designs and special uses for oddly shaped pieces of wood.

Picture frames are made of Joshua tree wood, but it is too soft for most uses. One frame was made recently by Jewett for Dr. George M. Hollenback of Encino for a desert painting by John W. Hilton of Twenty-nine Palms.

"Such uses of wood are in keeping with the spirit of the paintings," Jewett explains.

He has enough wood for years ahead, and he's busy every day turning out some new art object.

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