



## Focus / the art

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*Kazuo Kadonaga poses with his large, sawn cedar logs in the Contemporary Arts Center.*

*Advertiser photos by T. Umeda*

# 木 wood

By Ronn Ronck  
Advertiser Arts Writer

For over 80 years now the Kadonaga family has operated a large sawmill in Japan. While still a youngster Kazuo Kadonaga, born at Ishikawa-ken, Japan, in 1946, displayed a particular fondness for wood. It was assumed by all that he would grow up and become a

lumber man like his father and brothers. He didn't.

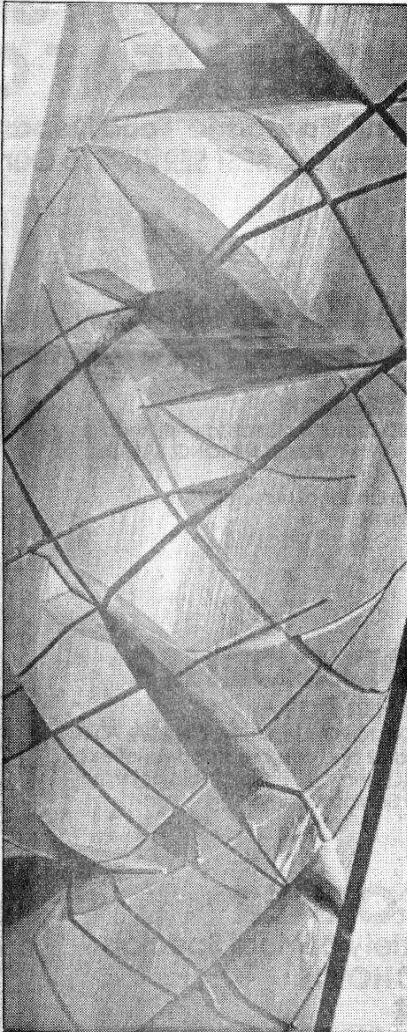
"I became an artist instead," Kadonaga explains with a grin. "But I couldn't run completely out of the forest. So, I became an artist with wood." Since his first exhibitions in the early 1970s, Kadonaga's wood, bamboo, and hand-made paper pieces have been shown

throughout Japan, in Europe and on the U.S. Mainland. Beginning with a reception tonight from 7 to 9 p.m., the artist's work will be shown for the first time in Hawaii at the Contemporary Arts Center in the News Building. A dozen examples, including six large cedar log pieces, will be on display through Jan. 2. The gallery is located on the first floor of the News Building, 605 Kapiolani Blvd. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"Some of these large logs," he says, "are about 80 years old. That means they started growing about the same time that my family went into the lumber business. They have witnessed much history." Speaking through an interpreter, Kadonaga explains that he



started out in the



*Detail of sawn cedar log. "My art," says Kadonaga, "is revealing the soul of the tree."*

more traditional art forms. He originally wanted to be a painter but discovered that "others painted better."

"About the same time, he was home visiting the sawmill and realized that his medium had been chosen for him. He brought a log back to his studio and began experimenting with it. "What I found," he says, "was that the wood brought out my true artist's personality. Nobody else was doing the same thing that I wanted to do and I was happy doing it."

The pieces in the Contemporary Arts Center exhibit are stripped of their bark, polished, chopped and sawed. Some are cut with designs around the middle while others are sliced lengthwise. One log in the current show is cut from top to bottom in 1/32-of-an-inch veneer layers and glued completely back together again.

"What I look for in my work," Kadonaga says, "is the definition of a particular tree. What does this tree share in common with the others? What makes it different? Every living thing, plant or animal, has a soul; and my art is revealing the soul of the tree through my art."

Kadonaga picks out the trees himself, but never picks logs that are already cut at the factory. Instead, he bundles up in warm clothing and goes into the mountainous Japanese forests

just before the winter snow hits the ground. The trees are cut down and hauled back to his studio, where he and a half-dozen part-time assistants strip off the bark with bamboo scrapers.

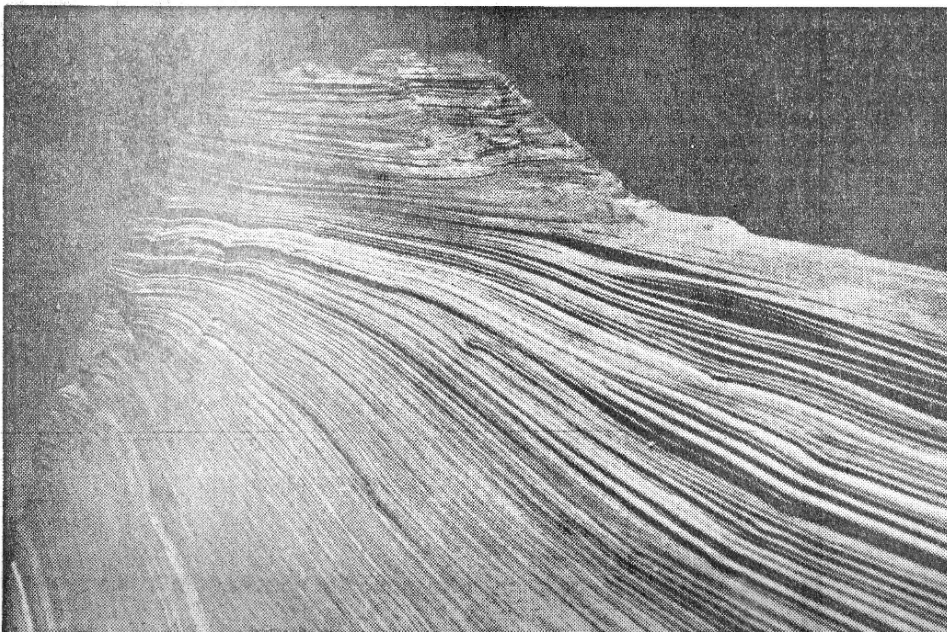
"At this time of year," he says "the surface of the wood is also very hard because of the tree's natural protection against the cold weather. We strip the bark off fast before the wood has a chance to dry."

The actual carving, too, must be done fast. Otherwise, he says, the wood will start to crack.

Sometimes these cracks add to his art, but more often the piece is ruined.

"Viewers usually get excited by the larger logs," Kadonaga says. "But to me they're all difficult to do. Every piece, big or small, has its own individual problems."

Kadonaga has been showing his art for over a decade but explains that his family still doesn't understand what he's doing. "My father," he says, "would be much more proud of me if I used my talent to sit around and carve little wooden buddhas."



*Looking like a striated desert landscape, this cedar log has been sliced vertically into 1/32-of-an-inch veneer layers. Photo looks along trunk toward bottom.*



*Straight splits started on the other side of this cedar cross-section became jagged by the time they reached this side.*