

Wood + pulp = Tucson's newest gallery

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Long-time friends Ben Schmitt and David Olsen have pooled their interests and talents to create Wood and Pulp, Tucson's newest gallery. By Gillian Drummond. *Photos by David Olsen*

Inside Wood and Pulp, Tucson's newest gallery.

On the walls is the pulp - the exhibitions of limited edition art prints. On the floors is the wood, or the furniture. Both the art on the walls and on the floor are by local Tucson artists.

Together they make up [Wood and Pulp](#), Tucson's newest art gallery and the creation of long-time friends Ben Schmitt and David Olsen.

Ben Schmitt (left) and David Olsen, owners of Wood and Pulp.

Ben is the 'wood' in the equation, a designer of furniture and custom cabinetry and owner of [Davinci Designs](#). David is the 'pulp', a photographer, publisher of arts magazine [Zocalo](#), and promoter of the arts in Tucson.

Wood and Pulp is the latest journey for two friends who have traveled both figuratively and literally. They met as students at the University of Arizona (David graduated in media arts and anthropology, Ben in humanities). Ben wanted a place to showcase his furniture, David wanted a gallery to showcase the talent of local artists he loves, and an office for *Zocalo Magazine*. David points out that furniture and art go together; you have one, you need the other. "If you have art, what do you do with the floor space?" he points out.

The woodblock used by artist Joe Marshall for Wood and Pulp's current art exhibition.

Tucson artist Danny Martin signs copies of screen prints exhibited recently at Wood and Pulp.

David's involvement in the project is double-edged. He knows Wood and Pulp (and marketing it) is important if he is to continue advocating the arts in Tucson. He also knows that if he gave too much coverage of the gallery in his magazine, there may be raised eyebrows. He prefers to tread on the safe side of that fine line and take a backseat when it comes to public relations. Ben is modest too, for other reasons. "I don't aspire to be a great well-known designer, I aspire to build pieces that are well crafted and are going to last a lifetime," he says.

Wood and Pulp is in the Firestone Building in central Tucson.

They considered other spaces but when this one came up in the historic Firestone Building - a hub of art galleries, offices and studios and formerly a storage goods facility, a tire store and, latterly, Crystal Rhinestone Boutique - they didn't hesitate. "This is really the new arts district in Tucson so for us it was a natural fit. And we would get two-thirds of the space on Congress Street [for the same price]," says David of a location that's a hop and a skip from downtown and also Tucson's [4th Avenue](#).

A lamp by Ben Schmitt, on display at Wood and Pulp.

They painted the concrete floors grey and built a pony wall in the middle of the gallery, something that would provide a separate space for the furniture and also control flow at parties and openings. The art on the walls - rotated every month - is displayed on boards rather than framed. "I like the idea of them popping," says David.

Davinci Designs carries the tag 'the science of art'. It sums up Ben's interest and training in drafting and architecture. He studied both subjects in high school, and did a year at the University of Arizona's College of Architecture. Originally from Westport, Connecticut, he returned there after college to spend a year working in construction, on high-end custom homes. He spent a year apprenticing for Russian cabinetry maker Seva Gamba and two years as an apprentice with Bob Mick of Astro Fab furniture makers. Through Davinci Designs, he has worked with a regular roster of Tucson architects and designers, including [HK Associates](#) and [Kevin Osborn Design](#).

Ben's work mixes materials and plays with different angles. You'll find him using African hardwood together with powder-coated steel. One of his signature marks is designing furniture pieces that include a 15 degree angle somewhere, usually on the base. Among the furniture Ben has on display at the gallery are creations by the likes of Scott Baker of [Baker + Hesseldenz](#) and Jake Scott of [Black Hill Design](#).

A jewelry cabinet and (background) dining table and bench by Ben.

A night stand designed and crafted by Ben Schmitt.

One of Ben's dining tables on display at the gallery.

David grew up in Pasadena, California. At high school he became interested in filmmaking and photography and worked in Hollywood for a time. After attending the University of Arizona, he returned to working in Hollywood before settling in Tucson. "The friends I made here are from everywhere else. Tucson is a melting pot of geographically misplaced individuals. I felt like it was a place you could kind of do anything you want. It was easier to pursue passions and dreams," he says.

His own passion, apart from Wood and Pulp, is running *Zocalo Magazine* (he was formerly with *Tucson Weekly* and founded *Downtown Tucsonan* magazine for the Downtown Tucson Partnership). "Ever since I was little I felt an entrepreneurial spirit in me. I wanted to run my own business," he says.

There is one caveat, however. "It's been a lot of fun," says David of setting up Wood and Pulp. "That's the key. I don't want to do it if it's not fun."

* **Find Wood and Pulp at 439 North 6th Avenue or at woodandpulp.com**

* **Wood and Pulp's current print release is Joe Marshall's "Paw Paw's F-100", a 5-color reduction woodblock print on birch plywood, hand printed on natural kozo by the artist.**

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