



THE SLEEPING DRAGON

A moment of contemplation in Bedfordshire

A sinuously sculptured garden seat inspired by its private setting and the sentiments of a 30th wedding anniversary was judged best furniture piece in the 2008 UK Wood Awards.





“We move through space and time, dynamic and fluid. Occasionally, we may rest or pause, and perhaps sit down for a while ...”



The ‘sleeping dragon’ was crafted by specialist chair designer and maker Alun Heslop of Chaircreative from solid European oak – creating a feeling of fluid solidity along its 8.5 m to fit the watery ripple element of a pond setting and fill the landscape of a private home in Bedfordshire.

Heslop told *timberDESIGN* that oak is his wood of choice for exterior projects. “The simple reason is the natural weather resistance and durability of the timber in our temperate climate. Oak has a very high tannin content, which preserves the structure of the wood. Of course all timber left outside to its own devices will also weather to a beautiful silvery grey, and oak is no exception.”

The only protective treatment was an initial air-drying to stabilise the wood’s surface during its first year outside. “Essentially, this treatment acts to dissipate the initial effect of the UV and moisture to limit the amount of micro surface checking that can occur in new wood when first placed out in the elements.”

The use of prime quarter sawn 68 mm oak boards add to the character and look of the piece – allowing the faces to show the ribbons of medullary rays and Heslop believes quarter-sawn boards are also far more stable within seasonal humidity fluctuations.

Such prime oak cuts (no knots), in combination with stainless steel fixings and a 4 mm gap between boards to prevent pooling, should result in a 35-year-plus lifespan for the ‘dragon’ according to Heslop.

The dragon’s accompanying block-laminated spheres were created from turned hemispheres. “The base element blocks of the seating are set on York stone slab footings. Although oak is extremely hardy and naturally weather resistant, it lasts far longer when not earthed.”

Heslop captures the essence of the work, thus: “We move through space and time, dynamic and fluid. Occasionally, we may rest or pause, and perhaps sit down for a while. And there is the moment of contemplation. A moment to deliver a truly unique experience, to sit and feel welcomed, comfortable, elevated and perhaps even astounded.”

OPPOSITE TOP A mythical beast in oak lurks in a peaceful English garden

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Segmented board design allows for a small amount of give and flex

LEFT For the 3-m-long backrest, 50-mm-thick oak was steam-bent

LOCATION Bedfordshire, UK

DESIGNER/MAKER Alun Heslop, Chaircreative, UK

WOOD European oak

PHOTOGRAPHY Anja Ropt