

A visit to Bell Forest Products Inc. – Figured and Exotic Woods by Dan Brandner

On our way to a wedding in Lower Michigan last month, I decided to stop at Bell Forest Products in Ishpeming, Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The president, Boone Bell, gave me a quick tour of what they offer and permission to write about my visit, including using copy from their website page <https://www.bellforestproducts.com>.

Bell Forest Products was started in 2001 by Dennis Bell and his son Boone. Being an avid woodworker, Dennis was frustrated with the lack of locally available kiln dried hardwoods. This was compounded by the fact that he lived in Michigan's Upper Peninsula surrounded by forests and was unable to obtain lumber for his projects.

After purchasing a portable sawmill and dehumidification kiln, Dennis and Boone began buying logs, sawing them, and drying the lumber. They began selling some of the extra lumber locally and then realized there was great demand for figured wood. Some of the world's best Birdseye maple comes from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, so Dennis and Boone began purchasing these highly sought after logs from local loggers. Early customers couldn't get enough of this high quality figured wood and the business grew steadily.

In 2003, Bell Forest expanded from Dennis' workshop into a vacant warehouse in downtown Ishpeming, MI. The 37,000 sq/ft building was formerly a train depot and produce warehouse. The old insulated coolers became useful once again – one of them became a dry kiln, another one became a wood shop, and yet another serves as our photo studio.



Figure 1 Boone Bell, President



Figure 2 Retail Space in Ishpeming

The business continued to grow and in 2005-2006 Bell Forest went through major changes. We put in a brand new sawmill and started dealing in exotic woods.



Figure 3 The New Sawmill

Since 2006, Bell Forest has been one of the leading online wood suppliers. We have expanded our selection of figured, domestic, and exotic woods to over 100 species. Bell Forest offers thousands of hand-picked boards, stock sizes, and other products to numerous markets throughout the USA and around the world. We are still a family business and pride ourselves on great customer service, high quality wood, and fair prices. Give us a try and you will not be disappointed.

Behind Boone Bell, in his picture above, are 3 rooms. The one on the left is full of exotic pen blanks and knife scales. The center room is full of exotic bowl blanks. They all felt really heavy and he told me they are cut green/wet and fully waxed so take that into account working with them. The third room was full of exotic spindle blanks and boards in varying sizes.

One of the coolest features is the “Hand-pick Your Board” area. While you would expect that if visiting the store in person (5 hours away from Eau Claire), on their website they measure, photograph and number individual exotic boards they believe would interest wood workers. And on their website, you can look through the boards individually, and select the ones you want sent to you. Now that is a nice feature.



Figure 4 Bowl Blank Room



Besides exotics, you can also get maple, cherry and walnut lumber but I presume that would mostly be picked up by locals.

Although our vehicle was loaded for our trip, I had to get at least one bowl blank and selected a 4” x 4” x 2” Goncalo Alves, along with some cutoffs from the Exotic Woods bin and the Birdseye/Curly Maple bin.

Read a few of the customer testimonials to get a feel for their business.

Their website also has some YouTube links that are quite informative.

Bell Forest Products Story by Corey Soumis https://youtu.be/66dQ0rMpH_Y 10.31 min

An Excerpt from the Wood Whisperer <https://youtu.be/c9FEMauDOWI> 2.41 min

Hand Pick Your Board <https://youtu.be/pHrwb4mUVGg> 4.45 min

Contact information for Bell Forest Products:

Their normal business hours are Monday thru Friday, 8am to 5pm, Eastern Standard Time. During those hours you can call or email to discuss your needs. Outside of normal hours, you can email them or leave a voicemail.

Boone's Email: boone@bellforestproducts.com

Eric's Email: eric@bellforestproducts.com

Toll-Free: (877) 770-9663

Local: (906) 486-4769

Fax: (906) 486-4211



If you have questions about or problems with an order, please don't hesitate to let them know. They are a small company, and customer satisfaction is of the utmost importance. They will value your feedback!

Their Address is

Bell Forest Products, Inc.

200 E. Hematite

Ishpeming, MI 49849