

Teak Magic: Caribbean Connections

You don't have to be a boater to know that one of the wonders of the world is teak.

In the Phillippines, pilings made of teak wood have endured 1,000 years. In Asia, they're making boards out of teak logs that laid on the bottom of the Burma River for 100 years.

So it comes as no surprise that when Bruce Bachenheimer was looking for something special in life, something satisfying yet saner than life as a bond trader in New York, he turned to teak.

Bachenheimer is the founder of Annapolis Maritime Corp., which has begun importing teak to the Chesapeake Bay. From his shop on Lincoln Drive in Annapolis, Bachenheimer has begun selling his wood at a price he says is lower than what boaters usually see.

There are stories in Bachenheimer's arrival and his wood's. Bachenheimer, 32, a New York native, grew up in the high-finance world of bond-trading and foreign exchange with a specialty in Japanese curenry. On an average day, he might handle \$2 billion in yen.

But like many people these days, he longed for a different life. So with the economy going south, so did Bachenheimer — first on a 22-foot sailboat and then on a Pearson 36 Cutter. He stayed two years in the Caribbean and South American ports before arriving in Annapolis last July 4. Why here?

"Annapolis seemed like a good fit, a good place in the middle," he says.

But how to make a living? Bachenheimer had grown enamored with teak and he had wood skills to boot. With so many boats on the Bay, his plan started taking shape.

Getting rare teak is another story. Malaysia, Burma (now Myanmar) and traditional teak-growing lands have largely been plundered. Bachenheimer worried, too, about the notion that teak clearcutting has sped the destruction of rain forests, a hazardous reputation for a retailer to carry in these times.

He has overcome problems by finding his sources on controlled plantations in Costa Rica and on Caribbean islands that he prefers not to name. In these latitudes, governments have learned that they can sustain a valuable commodity by regulating cuts and overseeing planting.

Locating the wood and shipping it poses more than a few headaches but Bachenheimer's business is up and running. Besides selling teak for boats, Bachenheimer is crafting tables from his precious raw material and promoting sales of it for the home.

Bachenheimer, who lives on his boat at the Liberty Marina, doesn't sound like he misses the hustle of New York.

"I wanted to make something," he observes. "Before, it was just working with numbers."

