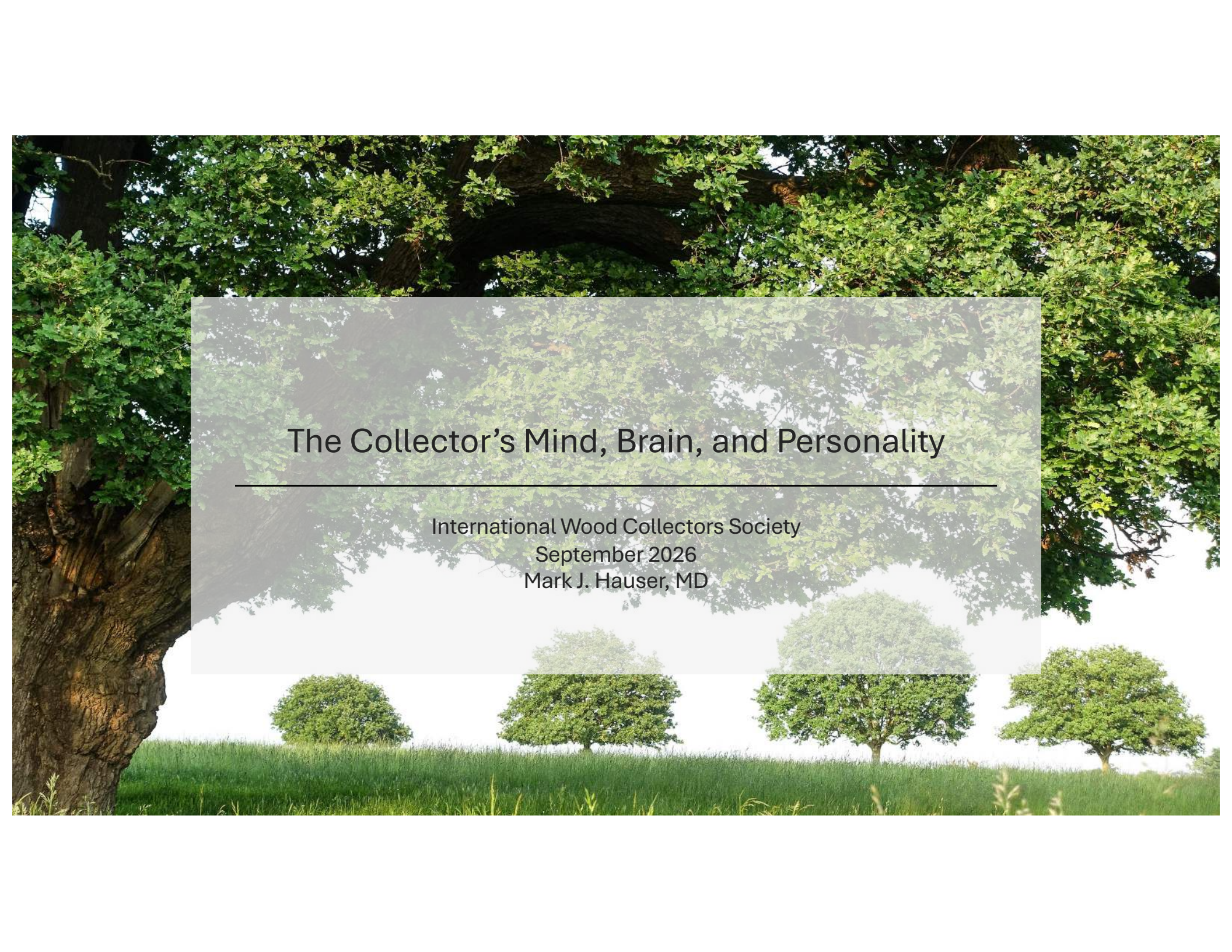


The background of the slide features a large, detailed tree on the left side with a thick, textured trunk and dense green foliage. In the background, a row of four smaller, rounded trees sits atop a grassy hill under a clear sky. A semi-transparent grey rectangle is centered over the image, containing the title and event information.

The Collector's Mind, Brain, and Personality

International Wood Collectors Society

September 2026

Mark J. Hauser, MD

Today we explore:

- 1 Hunter gatherer roots
- 2 Our complicated brains
- 3 Personalities of wood collectors
- 4 Conclusion

Your Presenter



Mark J. Hauser, MD

Origin of wood collecting is rooted in survival skills

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

The Ancient Origins of the Wood Collector's Instinct

- Long before humans admired spalting or fiddleback figure, they **collected wood for survival**.
- Wood was our first: fuel, tool, shelter, weapon, container, building material



These **skills** weren't hobbies – *they were essential to life.*

Since the use of wood was a fundamental tool for our ancestors, they developed thorough knowledge of the properties and uses for various species and grains

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion



The Ancient Origins of the Wood Collector's Instinct

Our ancestors learned to:

- identify species at a glance
- distinguish hard from soft
- understand grain and resilience
- store and season wood
- select the right wood for the right job

“When you’re a carpenter making a beautiful chest of drawers, you’re not going to use a piece of plywood on the back...you’re going to use a beautiful piece of wood...For you to sleep well at night, the aesthetic, the quality, has to be carried all the way through.”

— **Steve Jobs**

Collection evolved from necessities to meaningful objects

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

Collections of Social Exchange

- Over time, early humans began collecting not firewood, but **attractive, rare, or symbolically meaningful objects** not for survival, but **for social exchange**.
- For example, shells, stones, and feathers are all beautiful things that could be traded, gifted, and displayed.
- These objects conveyed **status, skill, taste, and intelligence**.
- Wooden objects are just an example of the expression of ancient circuitry.



We collect not because we must, but because we **innately delight** in it.

In the world of wood collecting, collectors curated unique and rare specimens

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion



Wood collector's instinct evolved to collect:

- rare species
- beautifully colored woods
- wood with unusual figure
- pieces with historical or geographic significance
- specimens that represented craftsmanship, culture, or nature itself

These skills weren't hobbies – *they were essential to life.*

What wood collection symbolizes today

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

Thus, wood collecting became not only a practical skill, but:

- a scientific pursuit
- an aesthetic passion
- a cultural practice
- a personal identity



In many ways, IWCS members are continuing a tradition tens of thousands of years old.

Some fun definitions

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

Fogwood

Wood found on the ground with unknown origin

Many samples of wood can find the collector rather than the other way around.

SABLE

Stash acquired beyond life expectancy

What do we do when the collection outlives the collector?

Knowledge of dangerous wood

Some wood is toxic and should be handled with gloves and minimal exposure to dust.

E.g.

- Yew
- Ebony
- Walnut

The Neuroscience of Wood Collecting: Collecting wood activates the same brain systems that once drove our ancestors to gather resources

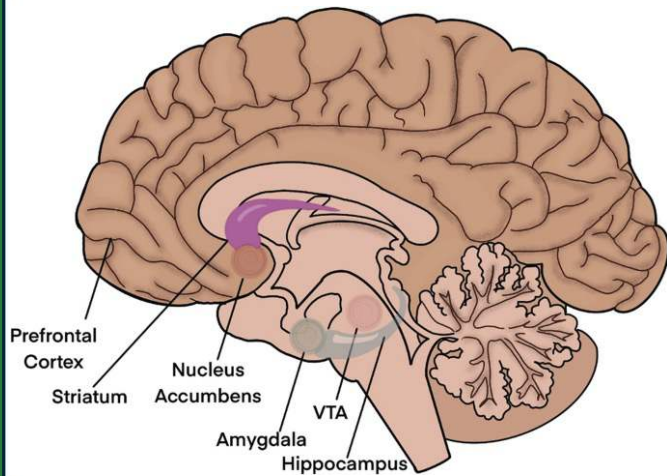
History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

Brain's reward system



The reward circuit or “Dopamine System”

1. Ventral Tegmental Area (VTA) releases dopamine, the neurotransmitter of *anticipation*.
2. Nucleus Accumbens registers *reward* and *pleasure*
3. Amygdala attaches emotional meaning and vivid memory.

When you spot a beautifully figured board, uncover a rare species, or receive a long-sought specimen from a fellow member, the brain's reward system lights up.

This pathway of dopamine generates the experience of the “collector’s high”

History

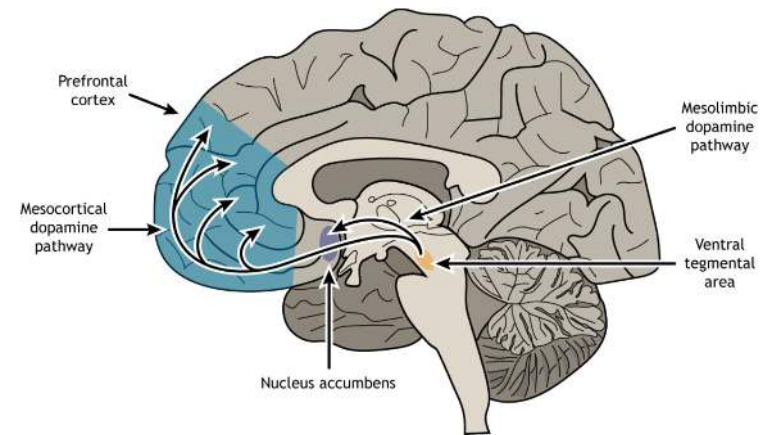
Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

Collector’s High

- This is the “collector’s high,” a dopamine-driven burst of intellectual and emotional reward.
- Wood collectors describe a “rush” when discovering a special piece, an intense joy in acquiring a new species, and a satisfaction in completing a collection series. This correlates with the brain’s reward system.



The Neuroscience of Wood Collecting: wood collectors interact with multiple senses

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

The Sensory Brain: Touch, Color, Figure

- touch (texture, density, smoothness)
- visual complexity (spalting, curl, ray fleck, chatoyance)
- smell (cedar, rosewoods, camphor)
- even sound (when cutting or turning)



The brain's somatosensory and visual cortices respond strongly to wood's richness. Few materials stimulate so many senses simultaneously.

The Neuroscience of Wood Collecting: prefrontal cortex judgement, limiting principles, and curation

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion



This part of the brain keeps collecting healthy and meaningful by guiding:

- which specimens to keep
- how to organize and label
- when to collect and when not to
- how to budget and prioritize
- how to curate a thoughtful, representative collection

The Prefrontal Cortex elevates “accumulating wood” into collecting wood

While the ancient reward system drives our desire to acquire, a different part of the brain keeps collecting healthy and purposeful

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion



The Prefrontal Cortex is responsible for judgment, prioritization, planning, impulse control, and differentiating value. Collectors use this region every time they

- Decide **what to collect** and **what *not* to collect**
- How to organize albums and catalogues
- How to budget for the hobby
- When to upgrade or refine a collection

While the ancient reward system drives our desire to acquire, a different part of the brain keeps collecting healthy and purposeful

History

Neurological Process

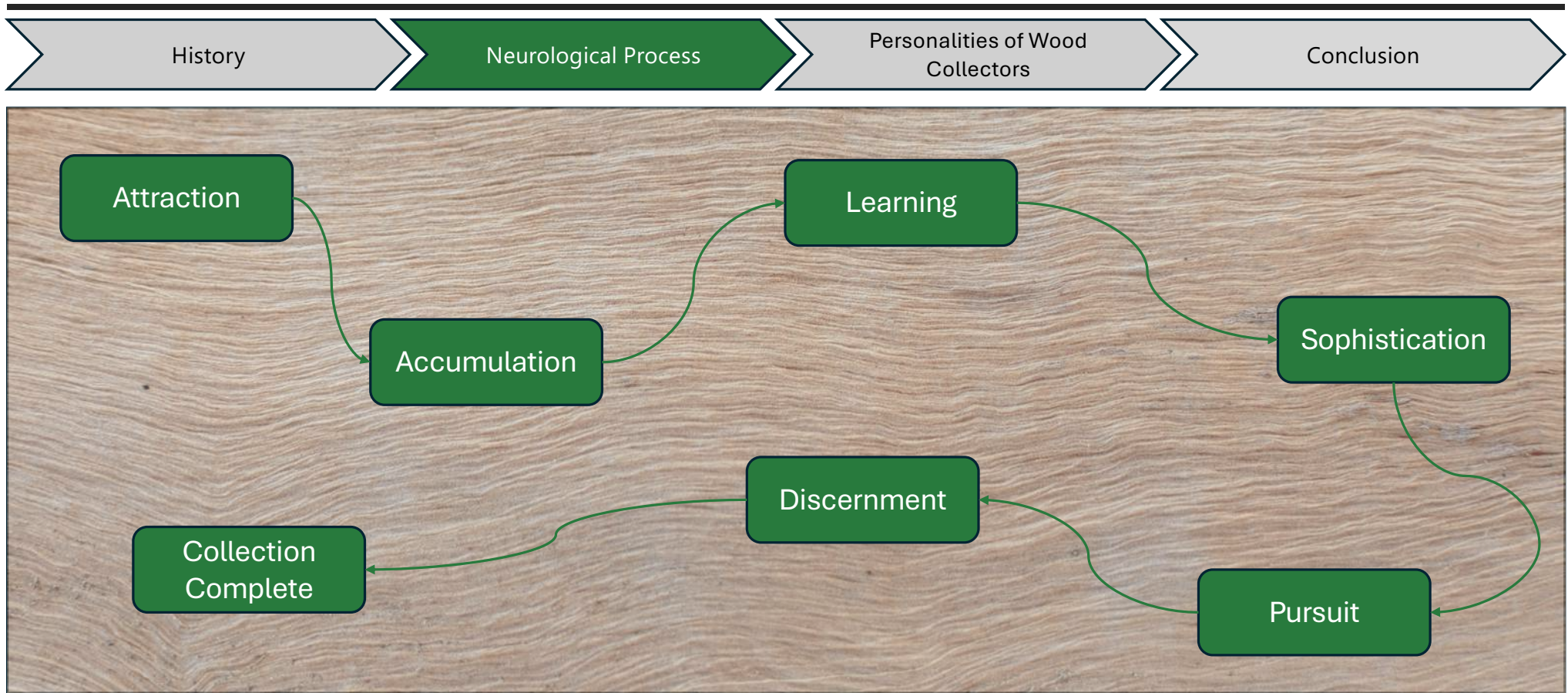
Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

This “higher cortical oversight” is what separates collecting (structured, meaningful, thoughtful) from hoarding (disorganized, excessive, driven by emotional distress rather than joy). Collectors take pleasure in curation, not just accumulation.



Maturation journey of a collector



While no two wood collectors are the same, many share common traits

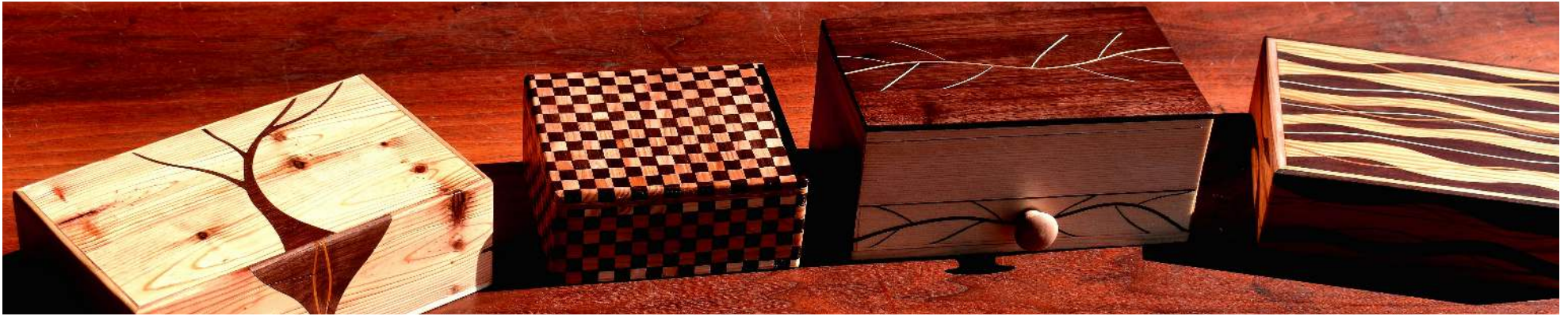
History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

- Curiosity. A desire to understand species, trees, structure, and the natural world.
- Aesthetic Sensitivity. Wood collectors perceive beauty in grain, color, figure, and complexity that others might not notice.
- Craftsmanship (or Appreciation of It). Even collectors who do not turn wood often have deep respect for the potential of a block.



While no two wood collectors are the same, many share common traits...continued

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion



- Desire for Completion or Representation. Many strive to collect species across continents, families, colors, or figure types.
- Love of Nature. Wood collecting connects us to forests, ecosystems, and global biodiversity.
- Pride of Ownership. Caring for, displaying, and protecting specimens is central to the hobby.
- Community and Sharing. The IWCS is built on friendship, knowledge exchange, and mutual passion.

Each wood collector has their own unique characteristics

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

Why each wood collector is different:

One collector may

- Love end-grain structure under magnification
- Prefer richly colored exotics
- Prefers figuring such as bird's eye, burl, or curly maple
- Collect wood with cultural or historical provenance
- Collect wood from trees they personally felled or milled



There is no “one” reason people collect wood. There are many. Understanding your own motivations brings depth and richness to the hobby.

We do not merely collect wood. We collect stories, textures, histories, and relationships with the natural world

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion

Why each wood collector enjoys a different intersection of wood collecting:



- biology
- craftsmanship
- aesthetics
- natural history
- memory
- personality

Our brains evolved to notice, appreciate, and preserve the meaningful and the beautiful. Wood, in all its diversity, complexity, and wonder, is one of nature's greatest canvases.

A few highlights of my collection

History

Neurological Process

Personalities of Wood
Collectors

Conclusion



Thank you for your attention!



Questions & Discussion