



FOUR-WHEELING THROUGH EASTERN EUROPE, HE CHANCED
UPON 100-YEAR-OLD RECLAIMED RUSSIAN OAK - AND DECIDED
IT WAS TIME TO PUT HIS HEART ON THE TABLE.

THEO EICHHOLTZ

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

STORY BY KEVIN HAYNES / PORTRAIT BY MARC HOM

“IT’S AGED BY RAIN, WIND AND THE ELEMENTS – EVERYTHING THAT GIVES IT A RICH AND AUTHENTIC LOOK.”



Clockwise, above left: A truck hauling reclaimed Russian white oak to the factory in northern Romania. Above: A barn’s wooden joinery. Right: Parsons Reclaimed Russian Oak Dining Table. Left: planks of reclaimed Russian white oak in storage.



Left: Theo Eichholtz. Above: A building in Romania built of Russian white oak. Below left: a lodge stripped of its oak planks.



It was supposed to be just another buying trip through Eastern Europe, one of several Theo Eichholtz had taken before. But this one would prove different. The designer from Amsterdam, touring the mountains of northern Romania in his Range Rover, was taken aback by the 100-year-old vintage barns and houses that dominate the landscape. Their weathered wood reminded him of old oak dining tables he had seen in Paris a short time earlier.

“Those tables had a nice feeling, a nice touch, a sense of history about them, but their price was high,” says Eichholtz, a lifelong resident of Holland.

Not far from the Russian border, the Dutch entrepreneur knew he had found the perfect wood for a timeless tabletop, one that combines contemporary style with old-world craftsmanship. Eichholtz was drawn to the timeworn, grayish color of the barn planks, the character of the open grain, and the distressed appearance of the century-old white oak.

“It’s aged by rain, wind and the elements – everything that gives it a rich and authentic look,” he says of the reclaimed wood he now uses to build the Parsons Reclaimed Russian Oak Dining Table.

The son of an avowed Francophile – “My father liked the finer things in life: good food, good wine” – Eichholtz is an unabashed aesthete with similar tastes. But instead of pursuing food, he turned his passions toward furniture and design. Eichholtz got his first taste of the business during a trip to Asia shortly after high school. Accompanied by childhood friend and current business partner Auke Wichers, he traveled throughout Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, a trip that launched his career.

By 1992 he had established his own company, Eichholtz B.V., dedicated to discovering distinctive furniture, lighting and accessories through his daily contact with antique fairs, auction houses and art dealers in London, Paris and Rome.

Fast forward 20 years to Eastern Europe, where Eichholtz’s love of discovery propelled him. Seeing the possibilities in the Russian white oak, he was determined to bring the beauty of the past into the present. And so, his team negotiated with the owners and set about collecting the rough-hewn timber from old houses, hay barns, stables and hunting lodges, and then shipped the planks back to a factory in northern Romania. There, the reclaimed wood is examined and sorted based on factors ranging from thickness and length to color and what the designer calls “an acceptable level of roughness.” The premier pieces are reserved for the tabletops.

Once the oak is kiln-dried to eliminate any moisture, the intricate handwork begins. Eichholtz recruits local village craftsmen who still use traditional woodworking tools, not modern machinery. Together, they developed the exacting process that transforms reclaimed wood into a one-of-a-kind masterpiece. The tables are “beautifully simple, beautifully ‘non-manufactured.’” He notes, “In the end it has to look like a table that’s more than 100 years old, not like an old barn.”

Assembling the table is a hands-on experience, with each one planed, sanded and carefully bleached by dedicated artisans. Once sealed, the hand-finished product is finally ready to be evaluated by Eichholtz’s team from the Netherlands. “This is the antithesis of a mass-produced table. Each is handcrafted and one of a kind. It’s quite timeless.”