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Mother Nature's touch

Tree sculptures bring a touch of natural beauty
to store interiors By Julie Clark, Senior Editor

Even Mother Nature herself might be fooled by the beauty and intricacy of decorative tree sculptures popping up in commercial interiors across the country.

Carlsbad, Calif.-based Naturemaker Inc. has a long history of creating museum-quality tree sculptures that can be found around the world inside such diverse locations as libraries, casinos, hotels, restaurants, colleges and of course retail stores. "We have been focusing on nature as an art form for more than 20 years," says Gary Hanick, president of Naturemaker Inc.


The company, which was co-founded by Hanick and CEO Bennett Abrams, naturalist and ecological artist, takes great care in producing three-dimensional tree replicas that can stand the test of time as well as add beauty to any store interior.

In the beginning, each tree is a steel structure until the artisans of Naturemaker bring it to life with a collaboration of 50 skilled designers, draftsmen, engineers, welders, sculptors, painters and scenic artists. Naturemaker has a proprietary composite material that is applied and bonds to the steel sculpture, which is later handcarved to create a life-like texture and look of wood bark. "The bark material was developed in the late '80s, and is almost like a mud. It's very organic," says Hanick. Then the tree is

handpainted and aged to resemble a live tree. The leaves are primarily made up of a fire-retardant polyester material, but on occasion have been created with a lightweight copper.

The company has worked extensively in the retail design industry and has installations in the Scheels All Sport stores in the central United States. "I believe we have worked on seven or eight of Scheels All Sport stores, and each one of the trees are over six-stories tall," says Hanick. "The trees have become part of their identity. The store is supposed to be a fun place to shop, and the tree is simply part of the awe."

The trees are very durable and require little maintenance once installed. "Some of the trees we are designing now will be here a few hundred years after we are gone," he says. The main maintenance concern is removing surface dust from foliage, which is accomplished with a simple air compressor.

The beauty of these trees is that each can be customized to the retailer's needs and designed straight from their imaginations. One of the company's largest installations include 80-ft. palm trees, and the smallest include 3-ft. Bonsai trees. The cost of the tree sculptures varies with each installation but ranges from \$20,000 to more than \$1 million. 



The decorative trees in the Scheels All Sport stores are more than six-stories tall and create a sense of awe within the store environment.