



MIKEY FRANCO

A snowboarder-turned-craftsman breathes new life into felled trees.

IF A TREE FALLS in the forest, does it make a good snowboard? Mikey Franco of Franco Snowshapes thinks so. When the Wyoming-based artisan learned about a nearby stand of beetle-killed whitebark pine trees, he headed right for the woods. “We harvested beautifully straight trees from an area where it would be catastrophic if a fire broke out,” he says. Franco builds his snowboards with a hardwood core, blending materials to match his clients’ unique needs. He shapes the whitebark into a top sheet, a .6-millimeter veneer that absorbs vibration—and creates a gorgeous finish. “When whitebark pines die, a fungus puts insane streaks of color into the wood,” Franco says. “They also get beat up by some pretty wild weather, which adds twisting designs.” Each whitebark board is imprinted with the GPS coordinates of the tree’s origin. “Of all the woods I use, whitebark is the most popular,” he says. “The big thing for customers is, ‘Hey, I know where this came from.’” - **GINA DECAPRIO VERCESI**



▶ **In ancient times**, pine boughs were hung indoors during the winter solstice to honor the eventual return of the sun.

▶ **Maine** is known as the Pine Tree State. Its official tree is the white pine, its flower the white pine cone and tassel.

▶ **During 16th-century** naval expeditions, pine needles—an excellent source of vitamin C—were brewed into a tea and used to cure scurvy.

PINE TIME

Unique takes on the popular tree in Vatican City, Austria and New York.



1 In Vatican City, an almost 4-meter-high bronze pinecone cast by the ancient Romans sits in the **Cor-tile della Pigna**, a public courtyard.



2 Zirbenz's **Stone Pine Liqueur of the Alps** has been distilled in Austria since 1797 and adds a dash of fir to cold-weather cocktails.



3 Every year on July 4, hundreds of drag queens board a ferry to celebrate **The Invasion of the Pines** on New York's Fire Island.