

# DOT to use St. Croix's rich history to attract tourist

ST. CROIX — The 26th annual meeting of the Society of Virgin Islands Historians presented topics of relevance to our current

Woodworkers shared their knowledge of local furniture during Society of Virgin Islands Historians meeting

to crafts that were once widely practiced on island and now exists only in the hands of a small group of makers.

**DOT:**

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Many of St. Croix's most celebrate woodworkers partook in a roundtable discussion centered on the historical significance of woodwork in the territory and their own personal experience after years of dedication to the craft. The panelists represented nearly 200 years of combined knowledge and shared their philosophies willingly.

The Virgin Islands has a rich history of artisans who were celebrated locally for their mastery of woodworking and excellent construction of furniture. Factors like population growth and the proliferation of ocean liners that could carry cheaply constructed furniture from the mainland have led to a steep decline number of artisans who have mastered this discipline.

"I feel very privileged to come back home and work with this wood [local mahogany]." Vegan Ellis, a master craftsman, said. Ellis said that he gained an appreciation for mahogany furniture as a child when he would be tasked with polishing the family's collection. He spent long hours gazing into the grain of the wood and marveled at how seamlessly the different pieces would fit together.

After Hurricane Hugo in 1989, Ellis returned to St. Croix to take care of his aging parents' and

eventually decided that he was going to commit to staying in the territory and making a living for himself as a joiner. Over the years, Ellis has become well known for his trademark hand made mahogany kerosene lamps and elegant furnishings, examples of which can be seen at the Top Hat Gallery in Christiansted.

Mark Krangel has been working with wood since the age of 12 and has channeled his passion for the craft into attaining the skills of a master furniture restorer. Since settling in St. Thomas and founding Perseverance Woodworks, Krangel has gained a deep appreciation for mastery of woodworking that is represented in the antique mahogany furniture that has survived down through the ages, many examples of which predate the existence of American rule in the territory.

"It is absolutely elegant, it is absolutely timeless," Krangel said. Krangel's love of his craft comes to the fore when he speaks about the life that the artists impart into his craft and how that that life is nurtured by the families who make use of it. In Krangel's worldview, a treasured furnishing is enriched by the care that is put into it, and the appreciation that it evokes from an admirer.

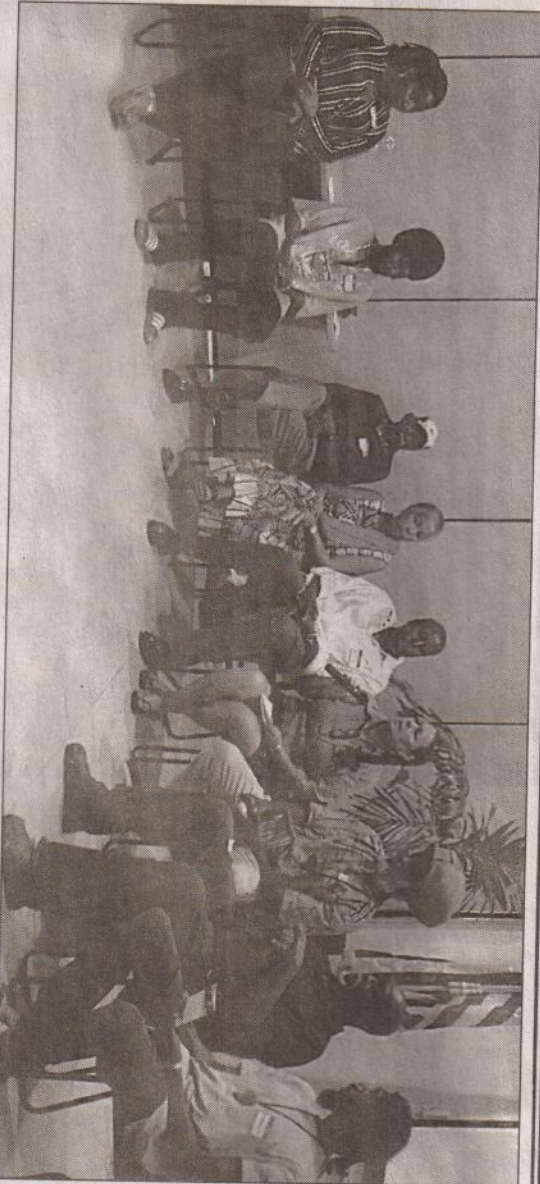
"These are families from the Virgin Islands whose stories are carried in the furniture," Krangel

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The presentations ranged from eclectic assortment of back grounds.

historical figures of great renown

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An expert panel of woodworkers and antique collectors shared their knowledge on local furniture practices at Society of Virgin Islands Historians annual meeting on Saturday.

Lasiba Knight

said.

One woman in attendance shared with the crowd that she was still in possession of the bed that her mother was born on in 1902. She expressed that this heirloom was of great significance to her family and that she planned to follow in her mother's footsteps and pass it on to her daughter one day as well.

The panelists all agreed that one thing that helped to make St. Croix's woodworking tradition so rich was the availability of the mahogany tree as a resource. St. Croix is home to two varieties of mahogany, the small leaf, and

the big leaf. Though other regions have these same species of trees the wood produced on St. Croix is considered to be of particularly fine quality because our seasonal rain patterns allow for the slow growth of the trees, resulting in finer grains.

Joseph Boschulte, commissioner of the Department of Tourism, said that his agency had plans to market St. Croix that are reliant on leveraging its rich history and culture as a draw for tourism. He pointed to the historical trends of tourism in the territory that have seen the majority of that industry centered in

St. Thomas as the reason why DOT will be making a push to market St. Croix solely in this winter season's marketing campaign.

St. Croix has under 1,000 bookable hotel rooms, a significant shrinkage from pre Hurricane Hugo levels of around 4,000.

"The Airbnb market has been a savior for our islands post hurricanes [Irma and Maria]," Boschulte said.

He pointed to new Spotify and Pandora ads the department planned to run, as well as a people centric focus in their upcoming ad campaign.