

A marriage of art, utility and surprising finds

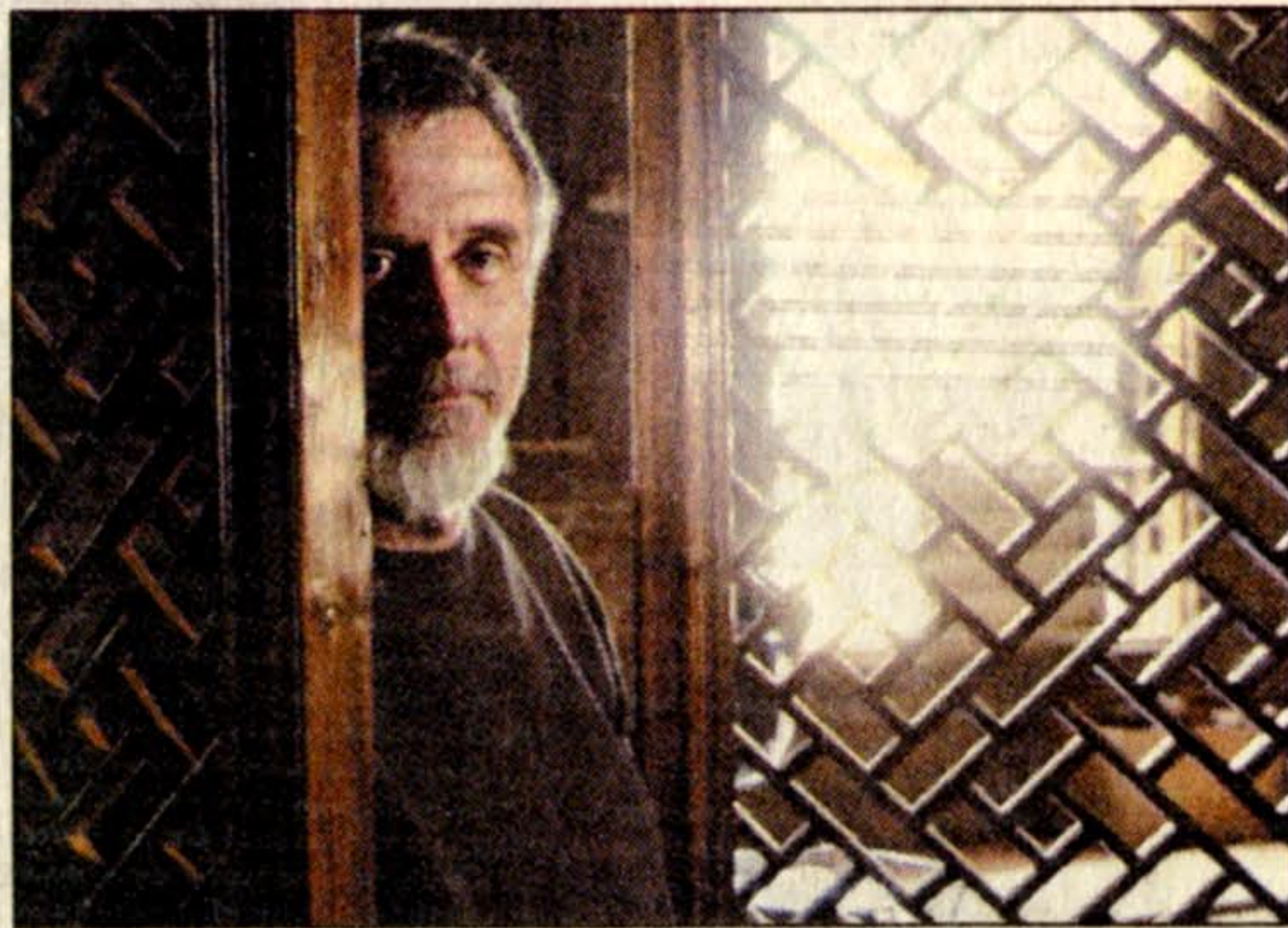
By Mary Daniels

Tribune staff reporter

Scott Chambers is a former New England carpenter who moved to Chicago in 1976 and started making his one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture one at a time for a select group of designers and private clients. He is different from other furniture-makers for finding unique elements in odd places, then incorporating them into a piece so that no other can be made to match.

While the end product is studied and elegant, his inspiration is spontaneous.

Creative recycling: Referring to inserts in a storage unit he is working on, Chambers, 56, says they



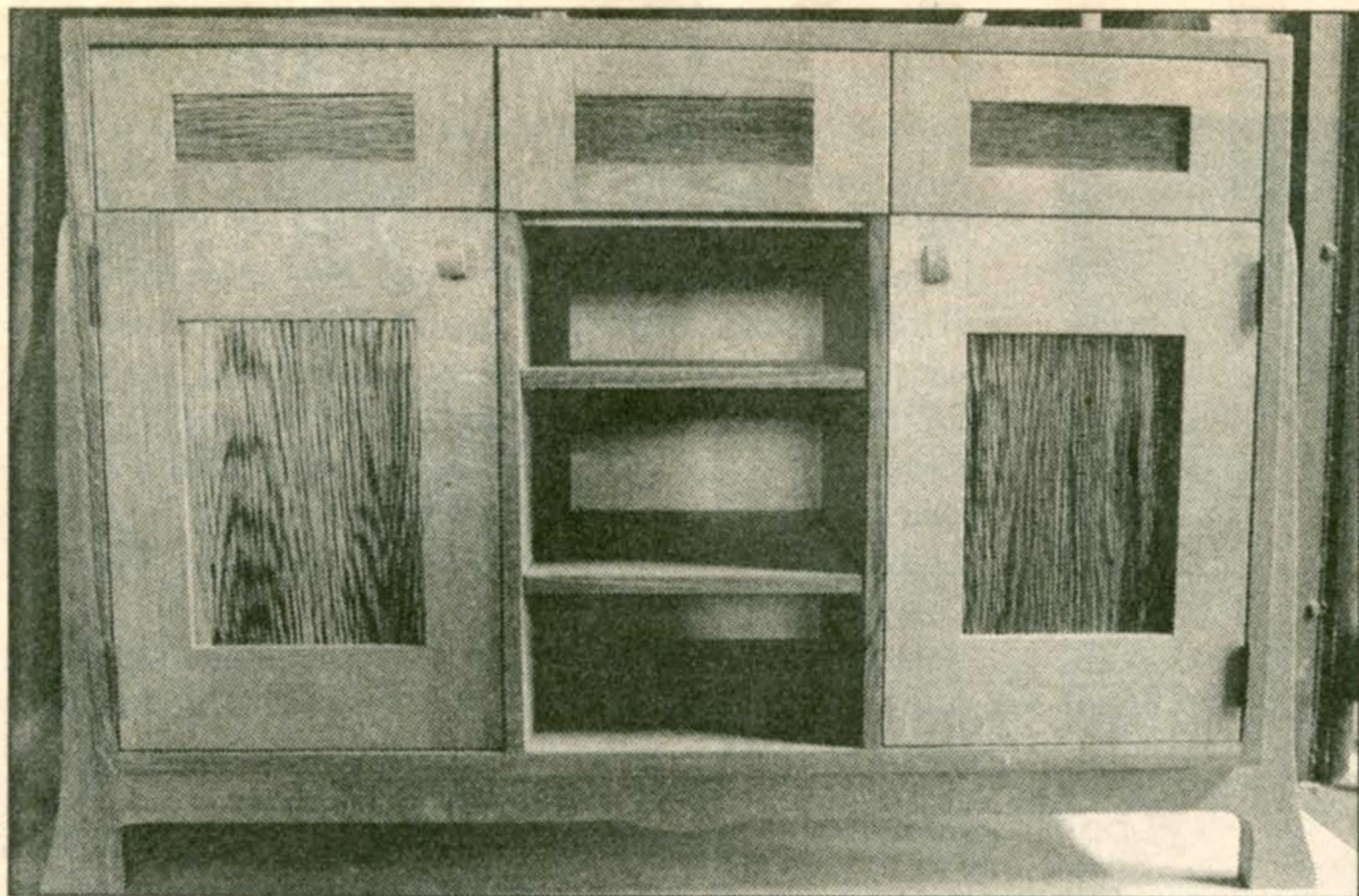
Tribune photo by Bill Hogan

Scott Chambers, Chicago furniture-maker

are African place mats made of twigs. "My wife bought them at an auction at Susanin's in The Merchandise Mart," he says. "The rest of the wood is chestnut and the knobs are wenge, an African wood."

Getting started: Chambers worked in New England for small businesses that repaired Colonial antiques, then as a carpenter in Brattleboro, Vt. When he moved to Chicago in 1976, he freelanced for a while doing interior carpentry like molding and trim for a number of woodworking places. "One of them was Quercus, where there was a great collection of woodworkers, and Chicago furniture designers such as Lee Weitzman. I started

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Tribune photos by Bill Hogan

Scott Chambers uses African place mats as ornament to the simple design of his storage unit.

CHAMBERS

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working for myself 18 years ago."

The poetry of wood: "I like looking at Japanese architecture and furniture design — the shapes and the forms, the methods of joinery and the tools have always impressed me." He also likes to look at the work of master American craftsmen, such as Wharton Esherick and Wendell Castle, for inspiration.

Design goals: "It is to keep ornamentation down to a minimum. As in the storage unit with the African place mats — the place mats are an ornament in themselves. That stems from my liking Shaker design. The Shakers seem to have really hit a note in terms of having things exude beauty without any splashy aspects to their pieces. . . I want a piece to serve a purpose too. I strike a balance between art and utilitarian."

Furniture to meditate on: "You need a place to calm your



This found piece of carved wood is destined to become a door in a cabinet Scott Chambers plans to make.

mind," he says. "If people get that looking at my pieces, that is certainly value enough."

Scott Chambers' furniture can be ordered from Fine Woodworks, Inc., 5915 N. Ravenswood Ave., 773-334-6050.