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Goldsworthy plots the curves of his linking logs

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By Sam Whiting



Andy Goldsworthy (center) works with Jacob Ehrinberg (left) and Sam Clayton to select and organize the eucalyptus logs. One curve can be a two-day project. Photo: Skyler Reid / Special to the Chronicle

In a thoroughly Scottish-style morning mist, Andy Goldsworthy is deep in the Presidio doing what he does, which is to look.

The famous sculptor is just in from his hometown of Dumfriesshire to inspect a pile of downed eucalyptus trunks and limbs, looking for the right curvature to fit "Wood Line," the linked logs he is placing on a slope at the southeast corner of the park. When asked if this artwork will be permanent or temporary, Goldsworthy, 55, gives one of the answers that made "Rivers and Tides," the 2001 documentary film about him, such a cult classic.

"It may not last, but it's one of my more permanent installations," he says, smiling at the thought of man and nature slowly destroying what he is here to build. "This is not a manufactured material I'm working with. People will walk on it and then the line, over time, will start to decay. As it decays it will become more subtle and disappear into the ground."



"Wood Line," which Andy Goldsworthy calls a "drawing," links stripped eucalyptus logs that snake down a slope at the southeast corner of the Presidio. Photo: Skyler Reid / Special to the Chronicle

The snaking pattern of stripped eucalyptus starts at an embankment below the roadway of West Pacific Avenue and runs 400 yards down the hill, making elegant S-turns between Lovers' Lane and Presidio Boulevard.

Though "Wood Line" is within sight of "Spire" - the 100-foot tepee of cypress logs that Goldsworthy erected near the golf course in 2008 - this is a separate project commissioned for the Presidio Trust and For-Site Foundation, the nonprofit run by gallerist Cheryl Haines, who has represented Goldsworthy for 20 years.

The middle segment was done last fall; now Goldsworthy has returned to add the top and tail. When finished, maybe today, the log rounds will taper from a diameter of 2 feet down to 8 inches at both ends, slowly vanishing into the road embankment. In this sense, it will be akin to "Stone River," the twisting spine of sandstone sunk into the grass outside the Cantor Art Center at Stanford University.

The raw materials for "Wood Line" are in a log dump across the Presidio from the installation. Goldsworthy is there separating keepers from rejects. He's wearing a hard hat, work boots and two T-shirts against the chill, but he doesn't touch anything. That corrupts the process. "Sometimes when you work hands-on, you can be too hands-on," he says, "because you forget how to see."



Andy Goldsworthy considers which logs to use for his current project. Goldsworthy is approaching completion of "Wood Line", a landscape sculpture of eucalyptus logs that snakes around the Presidio. The project, which Goldsworthy considers a "drawing" using the logs, is planned out as an outline before the logs are chosen and fitted at the wood dump. Once fitted, the logs are brought and, individually placed, and made flush at the Presidio site. Photo: Skyler Reid / Special to the Chronicle

His task is to "hunt for the logs" and stand back while the crew roughs out the pattern in a yard across the Presidio from the "Wood Line" itself. There are eight men who do the lifting and chain sawing and scraping the bark with a tool called a Kant.

It can take two days for Goldsworthy to plot one curve. Then he has the crew disassemble it and truck the logs over to "Wood Line" to be reassembled. This takes a full day, during which Goldsworthy stays away from the project, clearing his mind.

Last week, he sat in the bleachers for a Giants-Dodgers game and visited Alcatraz, and he's not lacking for company because he has his partner, Tina, and five kids, ranging in age from 1 to 23, with him.

After a day as a tourist, Goldsworthy returns to his project with fresh eyes in the soft gray light of morning. He stands on the road overlook and studies the avenue of logs, trusting his

immediate and visceral reaction. If he likes the way it looks, the logs are screwed together. If he doesn't, they go back to the woodpile.

"I'm aiming for a perfection that I will never achieve," he says. "The important thing is to aim for that, and it needs all my concentration."

The inspiration for "Wood Line" came while he was working on "Spire." He kept seeing trucks go by hauling away eucalyptus during reforestation.

"I saw huge areas of cut trees that were just taken away," he says, "and I thought, 'Oh ... wait. The things I could do with that.' "

Before "Spire" was even finished, he had his next Presidio idea in mind. Members of the Presidio Trust recommended the location. At first he wasn't sure.

"I didn't know whether I could actually make the work," he says. "Sure, I can join logs together, but am I going to get a line that's going to *move* through the site? The whole purpose is a line that moves through the place. The form has to rise up out of the logs and be greater than the individual components of the logs."

Only over time has that question been answered. He has been absorbed by the location, and he can see the living trees and the bones on the ground, even the artist and crew and the gawkers who come by to watch them assemble the line, as one.

"The site has overtaken the idea of the work," he says, "and the work is now very firmly that site."

Once it is finished, he will be able to stand on the promontory at the top of "Wood Line," and look to the west, where "Spire" can barely be seen backdropped by a grove of cypress. It will be one of the few places on Earth where you can see two separate Goldsworthys at once.

"I do enjoy that sort of dialogue over space, between two works," he says.

And there may be a third. The eucalyptus branches that have been judged too twisty for this project might be perfect for another.

"I do like going back to the same places time and time again. I think I can get more from that than from going to different places. I'm standing here on the line of reject logs that are actually, in my mind, opening up the possibility for another work."

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