

Master carver Lynn Dunn has always followed his heart. When advised, age 13, to give up his dream of working with wood because 'before long we'll be buying everything from Bali', he knew even then that cheap wooden imports could never take the place of the master craftsman. And he has the utmost respect for carvers from countries such as Bali, China and Thailand.

After finishing school in the South Waikato town of Putaruru, Lynn spent a few years making bone carvings and wooden boxes for the tourist trade, until, as a 21-year-old, he packed up his tools and disappeared into the sunset, crewing on a yacht sailing the Pacific.

But when he jumped ship in Hawaii, water became driftwood as fate steered him in the direction of master sculptor and driftwood carver Bruce Turnbull; they developed a great respect and longterm friendship in the years they spent working together on Maui.

While Maori master carvers of Rotorua influenced his early years, Lynn credits Bruce for teaching him how to break the mould, extend his creative boundaries and find his own direction.

Lynn immerses his whole being into each piece of work he creates, pouring his soul into the wood, which then infuses its own spirit into the form it eventually takes.

His latest work, a massive 2.4m piece called *Dragon Master*, began the day Lynn found a huge chunk of discarded Taraire "It's an orphan, someone threw it away on a hot pavement, it was cooking away and no one cared," he says.

This new 'labour of love' is spectacular and different from anything he has done before.

"I'm proud of this piece of work. It has been a major investment in time."

On the day I visited his Whangarei studio, Lynn was applying the finishing touches. Being the perfectionist he is, he often finds it hard to stop chipping away and admits he's his own biggest critic.

"If I don't, no one will," he says. "I could keep this for another six weeks, but I've got to say no. I'm trying to do the best that I can for the carving," he says, adding that bigger carvings he's done have taken much less time.

Lynn is understandably proud of *Dragon Master*. As I ran my hands over the carving, tracing the shape of his face and of the dragon as it entwined itself around the staff that runs through its centre, I can almost feel the energy transferring from wood to flesh.

As with each work he creates, Lynn says *Dragon Master* dictated its own direction.

"I designed a piece of work around the wood. It's like magic. The walking stick came out of a piece of hardwood in the centre."

Master carver Lynn Dunn is nearing completion of a major new work.

By JOANN CROWLEY.

A crack in the back of the carving then laid the design for the *Dragon Master's* nose and mouth.

"And now the crack belongs to it, it's part of it, but when I take photos of it, it vanishes."

Dragon Master draws its energy from the earth, with the staff heading into the ground drawing power, or energy, from the Earth Mother. Five Chinese symbols etched into its side represent earth, water, fire, metal and wood.

When Lynn is not "chipping away", he loves nothing better than to write songs and play music.

When he moved to Whangarei in 2001 to care for his Mum and her partner, he brought with him a stockpile of songs and proceeded to find some musicians "who knew what they were doing" to record an album with.

Top Northland musicians Jim Wallace snr, Alex Wallace, Taffy Jones, Rene Burkhard and Juanita Bassett, alongside Aucklander Chet O'Connell, have contributed to the resulting album, *Under the Island Moon*.

The track 'Fast Cars, Red Guitars' was named strongest track on the Northland compilation album, *Fritter 2*.

While he doesn't rule out performing again, for now the curtain is falling on perhaps his most meaningful project so far.

"I don't create things to put on the wall and stare at for 20 years. I believe they have a bigger purpose, they belong to someone else, and I have so many examples of that in my life.

"I love it, but I hate it, because it keeps me grinding away."

Many of Lynn's sculptures can be viewed on his website, www.lynndunn.co.nz

