



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

Volume 37, Issue 10

October 2017

Custom Furniture Design

This month we will catch a glimpse of what it means to be an original designer. Thomas Fetherston has operated a studio in San Francisco since 1978, providing meticulously crafted designs to architects and interior designers. Thomas began his training at the Parsons School of Design in New York, simultaneously working in a shop restoring fine period antiques, before coming to San Francisco. His vast knowledge of furniture history, and his skills in engineering and fabrication have served him well in his 39 years of serving clients. Each design is original to that client; no two are the same. He has a reputation for fine workmanship and attention to detail that keeps the clients lined up. Come and hear how he has made a love of design also succeed as a business. Guests are welcome.



- Jose Cuervo



Directions:

The October 3 meeting begins at 7pm, and will again be held at:

180 Studios, 150 Todd Road, Santa Rosa

180 Studios is located just off Highway 101 at the southwest corner of the Todd Road exit off 101.

Go west on Todd Road for a very short distance. Turn left at the open gate JUST BEFORE THE RAILROAD TRACKS. If you go over the tracks, you have gone too far.

From the west, make your way to Todd Road by going south on Stony Point Road from Hwy 12. Turn left on Todd Road. Continue for a few miles. JUST AFTER THE RAILROAD TRACKS, turn right at the open gate. If you get to Highway 101, you have gone too far. See you there!

Wood, Wire and Quill

by Joe Scannell

Lars Andersen kicked off the monthly meeting of the SCWA with the reminder that we will soon need a new webmaster, and board elections are not far off. He welcomed two visitors and a new member, then turned the floor over to Don Jereb, who spoke about the upcoming *Artistry in Wood* show. The membership meeting with the judges (aka Judgement Day) will be held on November 15, and the show will open to the public two days later. In addition to the usual awards for best of each entry category, the Krenov Foundation will again make a monetary award to the entry it deems most aligned with the ideals of James Krenov. Further, Don was able to net the donation from Lie-Nielsen Toolworks of a beautiful #4 bronze smoothing plane, to be given as a Maker's Choice Award whose winner will be determined by a vote of the membership.



Photos by Jose Cuervo

Don went on to say that the Museum has asked for members to donate some small items for sale in their Gift Shop, the proceeds to be shared fifty-fifty. They are looking for something that might sell in the \$40 to \$50 price range. To get things started, Don has suggested that several members get together at his shop and work on some items for sale. The dates he has offered are September 30 and October 7.

Paul Marini, whose wooden weaponry the reader may recall seeing in last year's *Artistry in Wood*, posed a question. He is currently working on a project that is made entirely of wood but will be completely painted, and he is concerned that the jurors, who screen the show entries, may not allow a fully painted piece to be shown. Guild Chair Mark Tindley stated that the only rule is that the object be made predominantly of wood. Others pointed out that historically many entries have been painted, as well as dyed, scorched, and so on. So rest easy, Paul.

Our new Program Chair Chuck Root introduced the evening's speaker, Kevin Fryer, a harpsichord maker whose shop is in San Francisco's Bayview District. He came to San Francisco in 1976 to attend the Conservatory of Music. Not finding employment in the music field, he began working for an antique dealer, doing restorations. In the process he discovered

he really liked working with wood. On a whim, he decided to build a harpsichord from a kit. He enjoyed the Baroque Period, and these kits were a big thing in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, so in 1980 he ordered a kit and went to work. After completing the construction, he decided he needed to learn to play it. He took lessons, and now fully hooked, built another kit. He liked the work so much he quit his day job and became a full time harpsichord maker.

Good fortune followed. In 1984 he was hired by the Philharmonic Baroque Orchestra to move, tune, maintain, stage-manage, whatever else needed to be done. He went on tour with them to New York. While back east he went to the headquarters of the company whose kits he had built, and the visit resulted in his becoming the west coast agent for the company. Being an agent meant you were a salesman, but it also meant that when you sold someone a kit you were bound to shepherd them through the build, sort of a help desk that makes housecalls. The company policy also was that if you sold three kits, you got one free, a nice bonus since kits ran about \$5000. And that basically was his apprenticeship. He built about 35 kits. As time



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went on his quality standards continued to rise, and by 1991 he decided to begin making harpsichords from scratch, using his own carefully selected materials.

Kevin told us the harpsichord was the dominant keyboard instrument from about 1500 to 1800. It is a plucked string instrument, as opposed to the piano, whose strings are struck with hammers linked to the keys.



Events in history eventually led to the decline in popularity of the harpsichord, and by the late 1800's it was replaced by the piano. However, some enthusiasts wanted to bring it back, and thus a new, improved 20th century harpsichord was designed and built by the piano builders of the day. Not quite fulfilling the promise, these new instruments, according to the famous English conductor Thomas Beecham, sounded

like “two skeletons copulating on a tin roof in a thunderstorm.” This harsh sound led in the 1950s to a reexamination of the earlier instruments, to see where things went wrong. By the early ‘70s the trend had returned to the building principles of the instrument’s heyday. This was when Kevin arrived on the scene. Kevin pointed out that the most important wood used in a harpsichord is the tone wood, which is



Kevin Fryer

used for the sound board. He has used Engelmann spruce, but in 2000 he traveled to the Milan, Italy area and purchased wood from a woodseller who caters to the violin trade. They were cutting from the same alpine forests that provided wood to Stradivarius and Guarneri. Kevin bought in log form, and they sawed it to his specs and kept the flitches for six months to start

the drying process. It was then shipped stateside, and he distributed it to several colleagues who had joined in the venture with him. As he puts it, he now has enough wood to last him the rest of his life.

He likes sitka spruce for the framing, and poplar for the case. He brought two sawed-off versions of a case with soundboard for our examination. One was used for some trial painting. The other Kevin used to provide a very convincing demonstration of the

way that a soundboard amplifies sound. He has a small music box mechanism, which he played for



the audience. Virtually no one could hear it, until he laid it against the soundboard. Suddenly it could be heard in the back of the room. Amazing!

Photos by Jose Cuervo

He also brought a large full-size museum drawing of a harpsichord printed on Mylar. These drawings are in the public domain, and are often generated when an old instrument is being refurbished. Not only are they a record of where all the parts go, but they can be used by a builder to produce a new instrument.



One side of the instrument is a long curve, called the bent side. It is made from poplar, which Kevin wraps in two large wet towels and soaks overnight. He then places it on a large bending iron that he inherited from a colleague, and bends it freehand over the iron. It is then clamped between cauls to minimize warping, and left to dry for a few days.



One of the more difficult parts of construction is the installation of the soundboard. The case sides have already been assembled, and interior framing is in place. The framing includes a ledger around the interior perimeter called the liner, and a cutoff bar



glue, and the open time is 90 seconds, so many helpers are needed. After getting the sound board in position, they use a go-bar deck to do the clamping.

Kevin is very fussy about the wire he uses for his instruments. He said the modern wire being used in

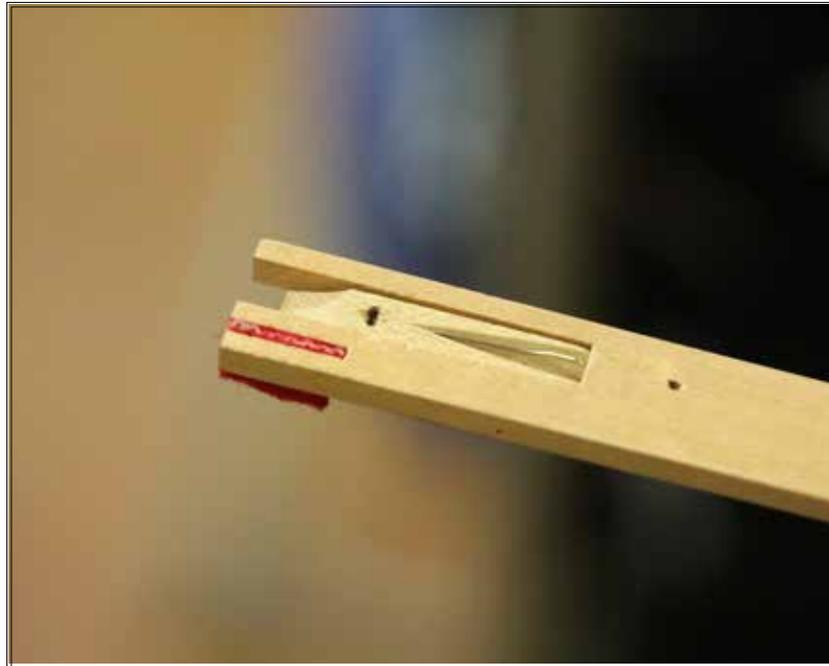
the '50s contributed to the harsh sound of those instruments. Wire was made differently in previous centuries, and of course metallurgy was less refined. It was found that the flaws actually gave the wire a richer sound, so now



manufacturers are attempting to reproduce this effect. The wire used is of iron, yellow brass, and red brass. Modern piano wire is made from carbon steel, not iron, and has a much higher tensile strength. But a harpsichord is tensioned much less compared to a piano, so iron and brass work quite well.

which somewhat bisects the soundboard area. The sound board is glued to these members using hot hide

The plucking mechanism is rather ingenious and quite delicate looking. Each key is linked to its associated string through a wood post called a “jack.” The jack sits vertically in guides, and when a key is pressed, its jack is propelled upward. The jack has a small sliver of bird quill projecting from its upper face, and this quill plucks the string as it travel upward. Gravity causes it to fall back into place, but when it does, the



quill pivots on a tiny hinge so that it doesn't contact the string a second time. In addition, the jack also has a small felt damper built into it, and this stops the string from vibrating.

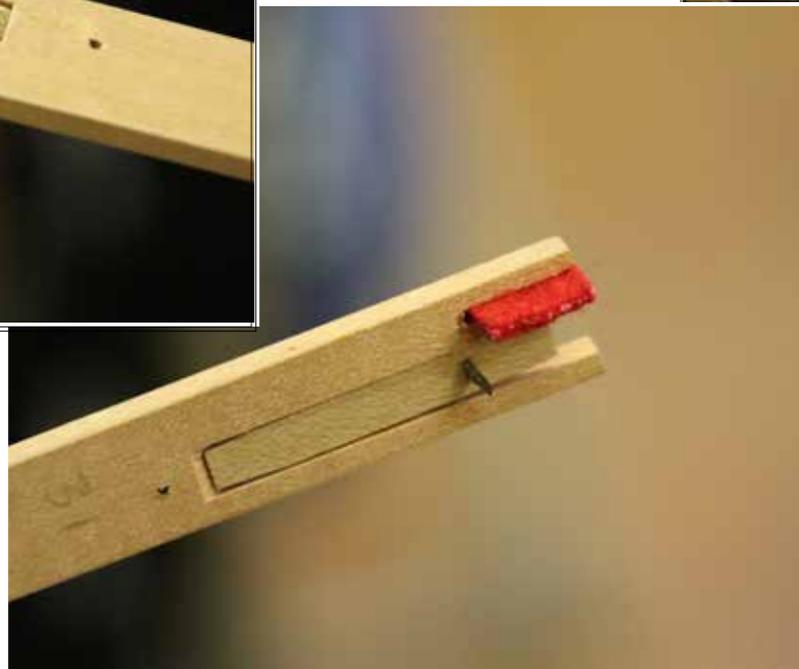
Kevin said that in Europe the most common source of quill was crows. In the U.S., it is Canadian goose, and he collects his annual supply in June at Lake Merritt when they're molting. This year he collected 500 feathers.



Photos by Jose Cuervo

There are 180 jacks in a harpsichord. Kevin does not make the jacks, preferring to outsource them from a jack-maker in Mississippi whose work is the best around. He sells them for \$8 apiece, which seems like a bargain when you take a close look at one. This is very precise woodworking. Asked about his feather collection, Kevin said he uses them to refurbish the jacks; there is normally no reason to replace them.

The presentation moved



into a Q and A session. One question involved the traditional painting usually seen on a harpsichord. Kevin does the exterior case painting in oil, but he does not paint soundboards, which are painted using only gouache. He has a friend, Millicent Tomkins, who is now 88 years old and no longer paints, but she used to paint the inside of case lids for

him. Traditionally, this area was decorated with fine art paintings, pastoral scenes, etc., and she was very adept at interpreting and adapting such paintings. A lid painting adds about \$9000 to the cost of an instrument, so it is not a commonly chosen option.



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A discussion ensued regarding the making of the keyboard. This represents about 30% of the total time spent in making a harpsichord. Kevin uses ebony and bone for the keys.

Responding to a question, Kevin said a harpsichord sells for between \$40-60,000. He makes one a year.

The questions continued to flow from a very enthusiastic audience, until the evening ended with a well deserved applause. Thanks, Kevin.

(Kevin has several interesting videos on YouTube. The links are available on the SCWA website).

2017 Artistry in Wood

As September winds to a close and trees prepare for winter, the members of the SCWA can be seen applying the finishing touches on their entries for this year's *Artistry in Wood Show*. Whether you are one such entrant, or someone who just likes to stand back and admire good craftsmanship, there is a great deal of work coming up to pull it all together. Here are some of the important dates to put on your calendar. Also be sure to check the website for any last minute changes.

Thursday, November 9, between 9am and 5pm - Drop off entries
Wednesday, November 15, 7pm - monthly Membership Meeting, held at the Museum, with judges in attendance
Friday, November 17, 6pm - Exhibit opens to the public
Sunday, January 7, 2018 - Exhibit closes
Monday January 8, 9am to 4pm - Entry pick-up



Torii 2 by Larry Stroud *Best Piece - Furniture*



Sensei by David J. Marks *Best of Show*



Local Motif (Coffee Table) by Derek Taylor *Krenov Award*

Every member is encouraged to enter something in the Show. The entry forms are available on the SCWA website, along with entry guidelines. There are four categories to choose from: Furniture, Turning, Art, and Miscellany. The choice is yours, as appropriate. Awards are given for Best of each category, as well as Best of Show. In addition, this year we again have the Krenov Foundation Award, a cash prize, as well as the People's Choice Award, also with a cash award.



Whittled Water Dippers by Victor Larson
Best Piece - Miscellaneous

You must be a member of SCWA to enter a piece in the Show. Membership information is also available on the website.

Entrants are encouraged to complete and submit the Entry Application Form and membership application (if needed) prior to Entry Day (November 9th). However, if desired, both can be done on Entry Day when you submit your creation for the show. In any event, it is a good idea to at least fill out the application form in advance, to avoid delays on Entry Day.

Towards the end of October we'll be sending out an email to the membership asking for volunteers to assist with the gallery preparation, setup, and receiving of pieces on entry day. There is plenty of opportunity to help, so don't be shy. Those who assist always have lots of fun.



Alchemist's Vessel by David J. Marks *Best Woodturning*



Jewelry - Lingerie Cabinet by Joe Von Ark *People's Choice*



Kellan's Stool by Joseph Scannell

Best Piece - Art



This is a Stick-Up

by Jose Cuervo

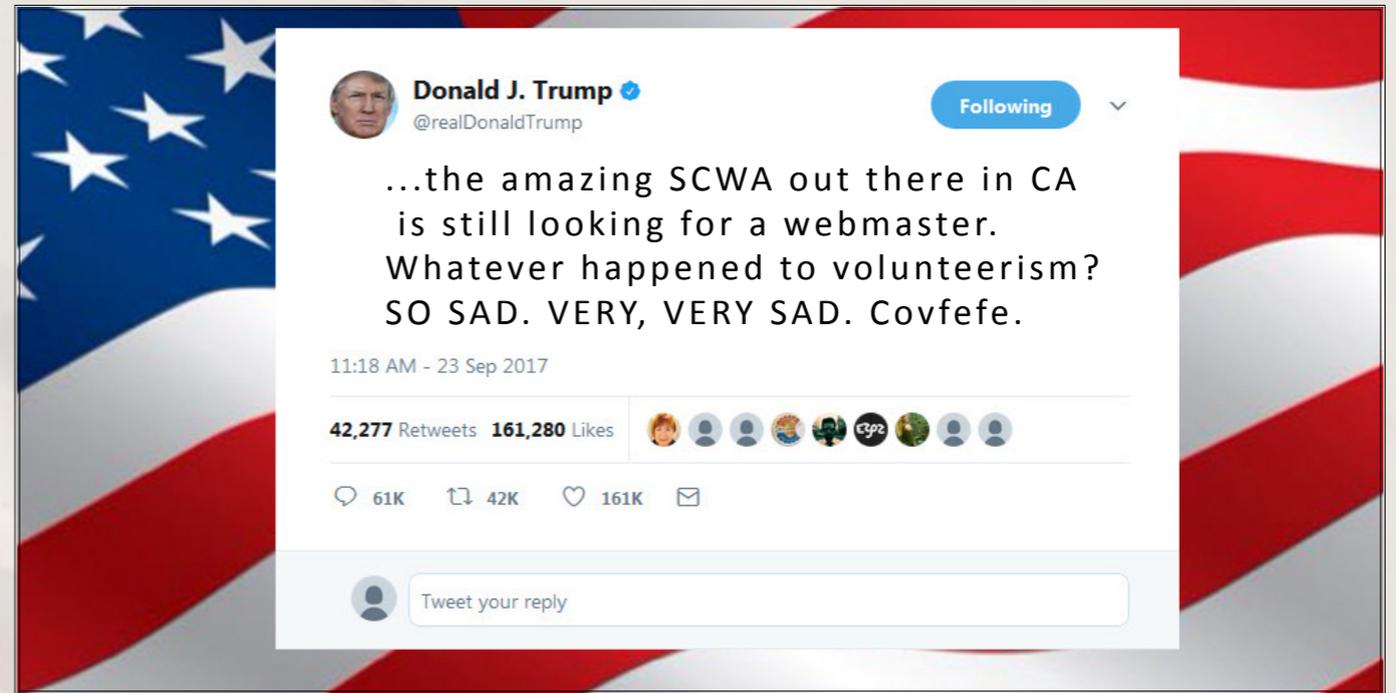
A few years ago Art Hofmann tipped me off to a YouTube video about attaching router templates with double-stick tape, or rather, not using double-stick tape. Those readers who have used this tape will know how difficult it can be to clean up the workpiece after the job is done. The better tapes leave quite a bit of residue, which then must be removed with solvent. Too much work!

Art's idea, or rather a British luthier's idea, can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ub6PsY4cgwg>

It's a very good idea, and I recommend it. But it can be difficult with some templates to get the masking tapes aligned, and a few times I have had the misfortune to have some of the Superglue seep out from the masking tape, bonding the template to the work. So now I have switched to a hybrid method. I put masking tape on the workpiece, then put double-stick tape on that (I get mine from Woodshop Mercantile), burnishing it all down. Then I peel off the protective film and apply the template to the work. A two second squeeze with a clamp across the tape joint(s) and I'm ready to rout. That extra bit of clamp pressure really increases the bond.

The advantages are two: the workpiece stays clean, and there are no accidental glue-ups.



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Wood Forum is the monthly newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association. Please feel free to submit articles and photographs for inclusion in the publication. You can send your submissions to the Wood Forum Editor at SCWAEditor@gmail.com. Advertisements are also accepted with a nominal cost for paid members.

Membership Application

I would like to join the SCWA to meet other people interested in the craft, the art and the business of fine wood-working. Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$35 for the annual dues. I understand that this fee entitles me to attend monthly meetings and to receive the Wood Forum newsletter by email or via the SCWA's website.

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____ Home Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

What can you do to help further the organizational goals of our volunteer-run association? Please tell us how you would like to help:

Please send check and completed application to:

Sonoma County Woodworkers Association, PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402