



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

www.sonomawoodworkers.com

Volume 30 Number 08

August 2010

July Meeting: A Visit to Berkeley Mills



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From the Chairman

August Meeting Notice

Where: Larry Stroud's workshop
3290 Mariola Rd., Sebastopol

When: August 10th, 7:00 PM

Details:

This meeting will be a presentation by members of the SCWA Guild. John de Marchi will be talking about files, David Hirsch will be offering a presentation of spoon making, and, if the cards fall in place, James Stadig will be talking about making doors, both interior and exterior. So this should be an interesting evening and generate much discussion. Before these presentations, and as an intro to his shop, Larry will probably have a quick demo of the lathe that he built to fabricate the kimono stand that he made for last year's show.

Directions:

From Petaluma:

1. Drive North on US-101 to the Highway 116 exit (Rohnert Park/Sebastopol)
2. Turn left onto Highway 116, heading West 6.5 mi to Bloomfield Rd. (Stoplight)
3. Turn left onto Bloomfield Rd., continue for 1.8 mi to Stop sign.
4. Turn left at stop sign and then an immediate right onto Kennedy Road.
5. At about .4 mi you will come to a stop sign; turn left onto Mariola Road, and continue until you see a riding arena on the right side (.2 mi). The driveway to our house is just past the arena. The driveway to the shop is the next driveway off of Mariola.

From Santa Rosa:

1. Drive West on Highway 12 to downtown Sebastopol
2. Turn left onto Main Street, heading South on 116 for a mile or so until the first stoplight (Bloomfield Rd.)
3. Turn right onto Bloomfield Rd., continue for 1.8 mi to Stop sign.
4. Turn left at stop sign and then an immediate right onto Kennedy Road.
5. At about .4 mi you will come to a stop sign; turn left onto Mariola Road, and continue until you see a riding arena on the right side (.2 mi). The driveway to our house is just past the arena. The driveway to the shop is the next driveway off of Mariola.

Contact: Larry Stroud (707) 823-1775

Artistry in Wood 2010 Show Notice

September 10th marks the opening of the 22nd annual Artistry in Wood show at the Sonoma County Museum. For those entering work in the show, entry forms are included in this issue of the Wood Forum. Entry forms can also be found on the SCWA website, www.sonomawoodworkers.com. For anyone entering for the first time, just bring your work and your paperwork to the museum on Friday, September 3rd, and we will take care of getting it submitted. Any questions that you may have will be answered at that time.

2010 Show Schedule

Entry Day is Friday, September 3rd, 9 AM to 4 PM. If you wish to enter the Show and cannot deliver your entry on entry day, please contact Bill Taft at wghtaft@aol.com or call Bill at (707) 794-8025 to make other arrangements.

Wednesday, September 8th, 7 PM: judging and annual show meeting.

This is the premier meeting of the year with the judges, who will be announcing the awards and giving us their comments on our work.

Friday, September 10th, 5 PM to 7 PM: show opening reception.

The show opening reception is sponsored by the Sonoma County Museum. All museum members are invited. It is free for museum members and show participants. This is an event that the museum is having for supporting members. The museum has asked that member artists showing work attend to discuss their work with the group. Show contributing members and their families are invited.

Saturday, October 9th, 1 PM to 4 PM: free Family Day.

This is a museum event for which we provide woodworking for children, demonstrations & more.

Sunday, October 17th: show closing.

Pick-up day for all entries is Monday, October 18th, between 9 AM and 4 PM

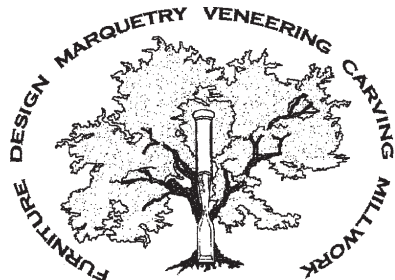
MEMBER BONUS!!

The Sonoma County Museum is offering a special discount **only** to Sonoma County Woodworkers' Association members, to celebrate the Museum's 25th Anniversary.

Normally an individual membership is \$35, for a limited time, until August 21, this is discounted to \$25.

This is a great discount. As you know, we have a strong relationship with the museum and by joining their membership, you are showing how important that relationship is to our group. Call 579-1500 x13 for more information or email:

swiseman@sonomacountymuseum.org



ARTISTRY IN WOOD 2010

Sonoma County Museum

September 10 - October 17, 2010

Official Entry Form

Contact Information

Name*: _____ Company* (if any): _____

Street: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone # Days: _____ Eves: _____ Email: _____

Submission Description (Use page 2 of this form for additional entries)

Title of Piece*: _____ Division*: ☐ Amateur ☐ Open ☐ Display

Category*: ☐ Furniture ☐ Turning ☐ Architectural ☐ Art ☐ Tools of the trade ☐ Miscellany

Insurance value: \$ _____ Approximate Size of Piece: _____

Materials and finishes used*: _____

Artist's statement*: _____

* These items may appear on the label accompanying your entry. Additional information about your piece may be submitted on this form but may be subject to editing by the museum staff.

Eligibility:

- Artist must be a SCWA member (Non-members must join SCWA at annual rate of \$25)
- All pieces submitted for judging must bear the name or names of persons involved in their fabrication
- All pieces will be reviewed by Guild Members for minimum standards
- Display only pieces are ineligible for awards
- Drop off Date & Time: Friday, September 3, between 9am & 4pm
- Pick up Date & Time: Monday, October 18, between 9 am and 4 pm
- Mail this form and payment to: SCWA, PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402 (or bring this form with your piece at drop off)

Entry Fees

Large pieces: \$20 for the first piece, \$15 each additional piece
 Small pieces (<18"): \$15 for the first piece, \$10 each additional piece
 Display pieces: \$10 for up to five pieces

Quantity	Amount
Total	\$

I hereby loan the aforementioned piece(s) to the Sonoma County Museum for the exhibit, "Artistry in Wood 2010" from September 10– Oct 17, 2010 . All pieces in the show are insured for fire, theft, negligence and intentional misuse. Sonoma County Woodworkers Association and Sonoma County Museum will take all reasonable precautions to safeguard the work on display

Signature: _____ Date _____

Submission Description

Title of Piece*: _____ Division*: ☐ Amateur ☐ Open ☐ Display

Category*: ☐ Furniture ☐ Turning ☐ Architectural ☐ Art ☐ Tools of the trade ☐ Miscellany

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Materials and finishes used*: _____

Artist's statement*: _____

Care, Handling and Insurance

All entries are covered by the insurance policy of the Sonoma County Museum, whose policies are stated in full on the next page. For its part, the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association will make every effort to ensure that entries are handled with appropriate care so that they are returned in the same condition that they were received. In the event of damage, a committee consisting of the Show Chair and leading Guild Members will inspect the piece with the intent of forming a recommendation to remedy the situation. This may lead to a repair or referral to the insurance carrier. If makers are particularly concerned about the fragility of their work, it is their responsibility to state this at the time of delivery, so that the pieces can be treated accordingly.

* These items may appear on the label accompanying your entry. Additional information about your piece may be submitted on this form but may be subject to editing by the museum staff.

July Meeting Report - Michael Venables

It was slightly overcast coming over the Richmond Bridge, but bright enough to hold the promise of a beautiful day. The meeting was scheduled earlier than usual because Berkeley Mills is open for business on Saturday, and its president, Dave Kent didn't want to rush the tour before having to break off for client meetings.



Dave Kent, President of Berkeley Mills

Berkeley Mills' ~18,000 square foot headquarters on 7th Street includes office and engineering space, a showroom with two fully functional kitchens and numerous pieces of bedroom, dining room, and living room furniture, as well as a spacious workshop. All of the finishing is handled in-house, but at a separate location: a similarly sized facility off West Grand Avenue in nearby Oakland.

Because of the stability of their customer base, their position in the marketplace, and the efficiency of the operation, the company has weathered the stormy economy much better than some. Presently, there are 30 people in the company: 12 furniture makers, 6-7 finishers and assembly people, and the rest in the front office – sales people, designers, and administration personnel.

When the company was founded in 1987, the design portfolio began as pieces that they could afford to make. Machinery being expensive and labor being expensive, Kent and his partner Gene Agress concentrated on using beautiful woods to build well-proportioned pieces that minimized the amount of handwork required. Kent joked that he sometimes thinks they should have named the outfit "S4S Furniture Company": "The human touch is the selection of the wood, the customer relation, the fabrication. There's still a lot of handwork that goes into a simple piece, and a lot of people don't understand that. All the detailing and the matching of the wood – that's the human part."

While Berkeley Mills has its roots in semi-custom furniture, the market for this kind of quality product has taken a severe hit from the catalogue furniture industry that began ramping up aggressively in the '90's. With inexpensive offshore labor and manufacturing, and the downturn in the economy, the company looked to broaden its scope from its focus on furniture: "We looked around at where people were still spending money on wood products, and it was the kitchen. So in the last four years, we've made 110 kitchens. And we've got five in the hopper right now."



This shift in focus of work has been anything but disappointing. "Our business has always changed and been responsive," Kent says. The tansu aesthetic for which Berkeley Mills initially became famous was inspired by the late-'80's vogue for importing antiques and cutting holes in them so that they could serve as stereo cabinets and TV consoles. Instead of butchering classic pieces of furniture, it made more sense to re-envision a classic form and to adapt the design to the requirements of modern society, rather than to impose the modern impulse onto a less than suitable platform.

Their Arts and Crafts work evolved in much the same way. "My dad, who was a professor up at Cal, wanted a reading chair. So we went up to the campus, to the faculty club, and looked at all the chairs – which were all these heavy Morris chairs – so we came back and made our own version. Like I always say: the best ideas walk in through the door."

In the showroom, we paused beside a 7' 4" long "Mesa" table, crafted from solid Cherry, and learned about the source of this magnificent wood that is featured so prominently in much of Berkeley Mills' work: Kane Hardwoods manages 124,000 acres in northwest Pennsylvania on the Allegheny Plateau. This family-owned business dates back to 1855 when the Collins family made it their goal to earn a living for themselves and their descendants from the forest. They have practiced sustained yield, selective harvest and managed forestry techniques since the 1940's, and were one of the first companies to be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

It took a number of years for Berkeley Mills to convince Kane to add them to their client roster, because European manufacturers bought most of the product, and at far higher prices than US companies were willing to spend. Dave Kent describes the process as a long conversation: “We told them, ‘We believe in the value of the wood, we’ll pay the same price.’ But there was still a lot of getting to know each other, and we had to commit to buying so many containers per year.”

Because of the location of the forest and the quality of the land, the resulting lumber is virtually free of mineral streaking. The grain and color is so consistent that to the untrained eye, it looks almost bookmatched. And because the lumber is shipped kiln dried directly from the forester, the shop has a consistent supply of live edge Cherry to utilize for their designs. As Kent put it, “That’s good, because it’s really hard to sell stuff when you don’t have it.” And a number of Berkeley Mills’ designs utilize the live edge.

On the way to the workshop, we caught a passing glimpse of the engineering “department”: a row of back-to-back desks festooned with computer equipment where the four designers, all of whom are woodworkers, work their magic using a palette of software tools that include AutoCAD, Solidworks, and Vectorworks to create construction plans and 3D images.



Once the designers have completed their work, the plans can be exported to the 3-axis CNC panel router. All of the kitchen cabinet parts – frequently veneered Baltic Birch plywood or bamboo panels – are cut out by CNC; all of the mounting holes for drawer slides and the pilot holes for the Conformat screws that hold the cases together – everything is precisely placed.

The integration of CNC into the shop has not been without a learning curve. It’s taken five years to reach a level of proficiency where the company feels comfortable with the process. The combination of CNC router, line boring machine and edge bander allow the production of custom kitchens to proceed much more quickly than less automated production practices.

As Dave Kent put it, “Cabinet making is all about boxes and it’s really nice when you have a box that’s just right on.”

Using Hafele’s Zentrix Drilling System for Conformat screws, the furniture makers at Berkeley Mills are able to avoid the time consuming process of gluing up their kitchen cabinets. “The screws have the sheer strength of a lag bolt and really make bombproof boxes. I tell people they re-enforce the house. I don’t know why people get so hung up on foundations – all they have to do is put a cabinet in.” A current customer is designing a kitchen which he plans to install 4” thick granite countertops, and the cabinet box design is strong enough that the only additional measure of re-enforcement needed was the doubling up of the case sides.

After all the various components are created – whether they’re veneered up in-house (by vacuum- or hot-press), or milled from woods selected from their stores of FSC certified lumber – they’re built into sub-assemblies. At this point they’re shipped to the finishing department in Oakland where they are sprayed and assembled into final form. This routine insures that a piece is only ever assembled once, as opposed to doing a final fitting then taking a piece back apart in order to apply the finish to it.

Berkeley Mills’ finish and finishing schedule is the same for both kitchens and fine furniture. The pieces are sanded to 150 (though it’s not really necessary to go beyond 120), and then sprayed with a Swedish conversion varnish which is impervious to water and alcohol. The same finish is used for both the base and top coats, and is shot directly onto the wood with no intermediate finishing products to raise the grain or artificially enhance the color of the wood.

Through years of testing and refinement, they’ve dialed in their technique and their formulation to produce a “shiny but dull” effect where the finish is not so shiny that it magnifies natural defects, and still lets your hand slide off the surface.



Once a kitchen is finished and assembled, the cabinets are positioned as if they were installed in the client’s house. Local customers can visit the shop to give their final approval; those who are farther flung are sent a suite of photos of the result. Once approved, the display is dismantled for shipment and delivered along with Berkeley Mills’ team of expert installers.

One hundred and fifteen kitchens and thousands of pieces of furniture later, the company is not merely sustaining, but expanding as well. Just last year they opened a showroom in Santa Monica, an achievement which was only possible because of the downturn in the economy – and the 50% break on the lease that came with it.

While all the building is currently done in Berkeley, the eventual business model is to have local shops serving local areas. The once industrial neighborhood of the Berkeley headquarters has been overrun by biotech companies, yoga studios, and restaurants – all of which make relocation inevitable. Dave Kent summed it up like this: “Growth is a positive thing – trees grow, so business can grow, too... What we do is to make everything by people, here, directly. That gives things a different feeling of value. When you actually have human input in creating an object, then – for people that care – that creates value. I’m not sure I’ve got it right, but I wonder...”

Berkeley Mills has been getting it right for 23 years.

Bonus Meeting Report

Because Berkeley Mills is so close to her studio, Merryl Saylan invited us over for a short visit. She was a very gracious hostess. Merryl has a two story studio behind her house and she did a lot of careful planning to fit everything in precisely. She has two lathes, a table saw, a band saw and dust collection in a compact area on the first floor. Upstairs, she has a painting area. Merryl showed us some works in progress as well as discussed some of her techniques.

Those who were there had a wonderful time!

Thank you, Merryl!

Calendar

October - Artistry in Wood - artist presentations at the Sonoma County Museum

November - Michael Cullen

December - Holiday Party

From the Chairman

Just a short column this month, not enough room!

Things are going well for us. Looking for a great turnout at the August meeting. Several Guild members are giving presentations. Also, the granddaddy event of the year is only a month away. What are you building?

We need an auditor for our books! Can anyone step up? Please contact me!

See you at the next meeting!

Michael

WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

Officers

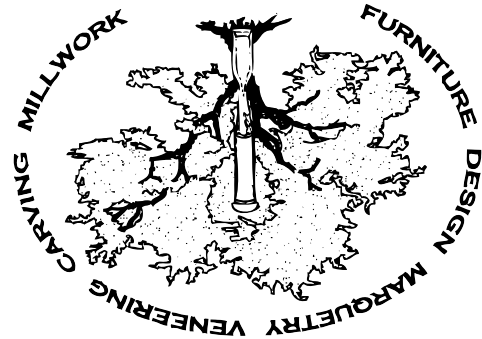
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Join Us! The Sonoma County Woodworkers Association is a 31-year old association of over one hundred professional and amateur woodworkers who meet monthly at members' shops to share experiences, ideas, techniques, and mutual enjoyment for creating with wood. Membership entitles you to attend monthly meetings, receive Wood Forum, our monthly newsletter, attend our annual show, and apply for seminars and demonstrations. Annual dues, payable at the beginning of each calendar year, are \$25. New members joining after September 30 may, for \$35, have their membership extend through December 31 of the following year. Please consider joining the SCWA and meeting people who, like yourself, are interested in the art and business of fine woodworking. Send dues to:

PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402 Santa Rosa, CA 95402

Wood Forum is the monthly newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association. Please feel free to submit articles, notices, photographs, announcements, and comments for inclusion in the publication. Advertisements are accepted with a per-entry cost of \$5 per column inch. All submissions for the September issue must be received by August 20, 2010. You may submit your entries to the editor listed below.

Contact Michael Wallace
 Snail-Mail PO BOX 1838, Sebastopol, Ca 95472
 E-Mail mjmwallace@gmail.com
 Home (707) 824-1013



Santa Rosa, CA 95402
August 2010

Vol. 30 No. 08
PO Box 4176

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association
WOOD FORUM

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ Yes, I would like to join the SCWA and meet other people who are interested in the craft, the art, and the business of fine woodworking. Here is my application. I have enclosed a check for the annual dues of \$25 that covers my subscription to Wood Forum and entitles me to attend the monthly meetings.

Send check and completed application to: Sonoma County Woodworkers Association
PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402

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