



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

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June 2014

Smell the Sawdust, Feel the Beat

by Art Hofmann

Our next presentation will be Tuesday, June 3, 2014 at Cotati Cottages Clubhouse in Cotati, and will feature Jefferson Shallenberger, the innovative furniture and drum maker based in Santa Cruz, and familiar to us as one of the judges at our *Artistry in Wood* show in 2013. He began his career at College of the Redwoods, where he took a summer course late in the '90's, which led to two years in the full time program. Thereafter he joined forces with another COR graduate with whom he opened a furniture making business in Emeryville that fared well in the early 2000's. After several years, Jeff moved to Santa Cruz, where he established two businesses, Sugar Percussion, which produces drums with wooden staves (www.sugarpercussion.com) and Jefferson Design Group (see <http://www.jeffersondesigngroup.com/>), where he does custom furniture. On occasion, he has been known to do housing as well, at least to the extent that he designed his own apartment over his shop.



From the time of his training Shallenberger established a reputation as a skilled, effective, and efficient woodworker, who brings his full attention to his all facets of his work. His furniture is meant to produce an effect: "I care less about utility than esthetics. Many of his pieces exhibit curves, a feature which might trace its roots to one of his grandfathers, who built sailboats. "When I can, I design on the fly. Often I'll start with one specific part, and with only a loose idea as

to how the whole piece will look. As it progresses, it tells me what the rest should be like. I appreciate the element of discovery along the way." Always, he aspires to create "fine things," things that inspire and demonstrate the care of their maker.

This is an opportunity to hear an inventive woodworker look back from a place in the mid-point of what will hopefully be a long career.

Directions:

Cotati Cottages is located west of the H'wy 101 and H'wy 116 interchange. Take Highway 101 to Gravenstein Highway (116 West) exit. Head west towards Sebastopol about ¼ mile to Alder Avenue. Turn right on Alder and then turn right on the first street, which is Ford Lane (Cotati Cottages sign). Proceed to the end of Ford Lane and park in the gravel parking spaces. The Clubhouse is the small building on the northeast corner of Ford Lane and Starr Court. There is limited parking near the clubhouse. If the gravel parking area is full, please park on the east side of Alder Avenue. The address is 8050 Starr Court if you need it for a GPS.

Monthly Business Meeting

May 6, 2014

SCWA chairman Bob Moyer opened the meeting by asking for new members and guests to introduce themselves. There were two new members: Bob from Phoenix AZ, and Shoshi, who works at the Murphy bed manufacturer near Graton. There were also two guests: Judy who recently moved up from Oakland, and Bob from Napa.

Q&A

Michael Wallace asked for recommendations for a "simple, stupid finish for cherry." Larry Stroud began by suggesting shellac. Others recommended tung oil and BioShield, which offers several non-toxic alternatives for stains and oils. General Finishes are also high quality, are easy to use, and recommended by David Marks. One other member uses Minwax Antique oil.

Announcements

Hugh announced that Wine Country Turners is hosting a one day demonstration by Ray Key on May 9. Cost is \$30 by May 7, \$40 at the door. Ray is a well-known turner from England.

Joe Scannell offered some chunks of elm suitable for turning projects available for free, and Jim Heimbach has 150 board feet of 8/4 wenge available for sale.

Bob thanked the committee working on the new SCWA website, including Michael Wallace and Mike Burwen, plus members of the board which includes Bill Taft, Joe Scannell, Larry Stroud, Scott Clark, Walt Doll, and Art Hofmann. The new website will have far more to offer than the current site and should be up and running in mid-June.

Bill Taft gave the treasurer's report. The SCWA has 89 members at this time. We expect more to join as the show nears.

The show chairman, Scott Clark, said information about the show is available on SCWA's existing website. Changes to the show this year include a new fee structure. Bob Moyer encouraged hobbyists to enter a piece or two in the show to get feedback on their work. Entries are juried and not all pieces are accepted. For help please contact the Guild Chairman, Larry Stroud.



Raven Bowl by Kalia Kliban

Full Circles

Sebastopol Gallery presents an exciting collaboration between wood turner Kalia Kliban (SCWA Guild member) and painter Sandy Eastoak, April 28-June 21, with a reception on May 16, 5-7 pm. Showing finished wood bowls, watercolor and acrylic paintings, and painted and pyrographed bowls, the two friends explore intricate meanings of circles and cycles: turning of the lathe and the year, phases of the moon, migrations, the interlinking circles of time, life, biology, and materials. In discovering the unexpected turns of collaboration, the artists celebrate friendship as well as mysteries of matter and spirit. 150 North Main, 707 829-7200. Open daily 11-6. On the web: www.sebastopol-gallery.com.



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Rain Bear by Kalia Kliban



tylerchartier.com
tyler@tylerchartier.com
415.264.0638 • 707.386.4882

Studio Furniture 101

Russell Baldon is currently the chair of the wood program at California College of Arts (formerly known as California College of Arts and Crafts) and lives in Oakland, California. In his presentation, he spoke about his background growing up in California, showing slides of his work over the years and the work of his colleagues and mentors, and concluding with his thoughts on studio furniture today. He brought with him many books and brochures from shows for the audience members to peruse before and after the meeting.

Wikipedia defines studio furniture as, “a subfield of Studio Craft centered around one-of-a-kind or limited production furniture objects designed and built by craftspeople. The work is made in a craftspeople’s studio setting, as opposed to being made in a high volume factory.”

Russell was raised in Atwater, CA because his dad was in the Air Force, but his dad left the family when he was seven years old. The architecture surrounding Air Force bases, especially towers, can be seen in many of his sculptures and furniture. He is fascinated by the industrial look which is functional without decoration. His father was not around much, so mom raised him and supported all of his interests. While in Cub Scouts, his scout master (who eventually became his stepfather) introduced him to a new world of crafts and skills that he found fascinating. His mother and stepfather started selling simple wooden toys at craft fairs and created a business, Happy Hollow Wooden Toys. Through junior high school and all through high school, Russell helped with the business, basically growing up in a woodshop.

From an early age Russell knew his future did not lie in Atwater. After working for his parents’ company after high school, he was rewarded with a one-year scholarship to the California College of Arts and Crafts. This was a big break for him, as he grew up in a house with

lots of craft but not any art. Russell felt he couldn’t justify going to school to just make art. He wanted something more functional, something that people could touch, so he concentrated on furniture at CCA.



Home Sweet Home by Russell Baldon

Prior to Russell’s entry to CCA, Wendy Maruyama and Gail Fredell were running the furniture program. Both were nationally known figures, and Russell learned about them before beginning school; however, both left the program just prior to his starting at the school.

The interim director was Tom Loeser, who is a second generation studio furniture maker, but Tom was not hired as the permanent chair of the program. (Russell showed slides of many of Tom’s pieces.) Russell and other students were not completely satisfied with the way the program was being run under the new chair. The program stressed “concept,” but Russell wanted to build skills and didn’t care so much about concept.

After graduating, Russell began working with Gail Fredell in a studio in Oakland at a time just after the 1991 Oakland hills firestorm, when well-off people needed to furnish their new homes. That, and the recovery effort following the 1989 earthquake brought about a need for high end furniture work. One of their first projects was to replace all of the pews in the Stanford chapel. Instead of building pews, they built 110 chairs. Russell recommended many of his friends from CCA to join the work in rebuilding the area. The friends made drapes, did tile work, and other crafts – it was a “time of endless money.”

There was still much Russell didn’t know how to make, so Gail suggested he go to graduate school. He chose San Diego State because that is where Wendy Maruyama was teaching, plus the state university was relatively inexpensive. Russell showed many slides of Wendy’s work.

At graduate school he began delving more into “concept”; he thought, “how many chairs do we really need?” At this point in his career he made a display case on wheels called, “Home Sweet Home” where the back of the case was the back side of a lath and plaster wall. As a young boy he found the construction of an old wall fascinating, and the wheels represented the trailer they used to live in. He still has the piece, and it’s filled with trinkets.

Another piece he built at that time was a free standing window with two panes of glass. At the turn of a switch water would flow between the two panes of glass to simulate rain. The audience found this quite amusing.

During grad school, identity began to be an intellectual problem. He felt conflict with selling things for lots of money, and dealing with people who he didn't really like or who didn't understand the art the way he did.

While in grad school he built a time capsule into one of his pieces. It's a case of drawers with a hidden compartment that requires some knowledge to access. If one were to remove tamper resistant screws he/she would find a note saying it better be 2095. The note also contained directions on how to open the capsule which contained things about Russell at that time of his life.

A member of the audience asked why many of Russell's pieces are on wheels. He had been asked that before, but putting so many of his works on wheels was never a conscious decision. It may have something to do with having grown up in a trailer, or a connection to the wooden toys he made with his family. He still makes things on wheels, because he thinks it makes sense for the pieces.

Towards the end of graduate school Russell and a friend put on a show of "crack pot ideas." One piece was a couch covered in grease – not very functional but something that people found interesting. When searching for a discarded couch to use, they picked up abandoned junk they found over two nights and assembled it all over the back wall of the show. The image of so much stuff, chairs, lamps and other things, was well received.

After graduate school he moved to San Francisco to work for Garry Knox Bennett. He and a few others helped Garry finish pieces for a show, then drove it back to New York. After the show, he and others started Pokensniff Studios in a 6,000 square

foot space at Alameda point. During this period, after a friend's home burned down, he built "Home Beacon," which was a free standing sculpture with a candle burning in an armored case, with a drawer to hold seven candles, one for each day of the week. Other pieces he made during this time include "Prop," a high chair with 13 legs to represent how parents throw money at their kids, a table with a "barnacle" form of lights pulling down the table, a table made of 2x2 offcuts



Home Beacon by Russell Baldon

last for a year. He made two stout, cypress chairs tied to a bollard with a very heavy jute rope. The chairs weathered well for the entire year.

Russell believes strongly in the benefits of collaborating

with others. Today, he encourages his students to work together, saying they will learn more from each other than they will from him. Russell once participated in a workshop held in an isolated stone house in Alberta, Canada where 18 artists gathered to just make stuff. With nothing else to do at the isolated location, they worked late into the night and had a great time.



Prop by Russell Baldon

that looked like a highly pixelated image of a table with curves. He also participated in a show at Fort Mason called "Seat." Artists were directed to create a seating area outside near the ocean that would

an interesting series of cubed paper boxes with ink drawings of figures that could be stacked three high: each box had either heads, torsos, or legs on its four sides. The boxes could be stacked in different combinations to make humorous creatures.

He also came up with a series of insult birds. The drawings are beautifully detailed birds, each with a thought balloon with some insult: "Why don't you try doing something?"; "What are you going to do, cry?"; "Now look at what you made me do"; "You wouldn't have the sense to come in from the rain"; "You'd lose your head if it wasn't attached," and many

A few years ago Michael Hosaluk was a visiting artist to CCA and was working on a show at the time. Michael made 100 tiny chairs and gave them to other artists to use in their work. Russell tied his chair to a weather balloon and took photos of it as it drifted over San Francisco Bay and beyond, out of sight. (This was the opening image for Russell's presentation.) Late one night Michael and Russell assembled a wooden chair around a major branch of a tree outside Garry Knox Bennett's studio, which greatly amused the SCWA audience. The chair remains high in the tree to this day.

He is currently on a one-year sabbatical, and while on sabbatical Russell has been working on things he feels he is not very good at. Drawing is something he does, but until now he has never shown his drawings. He made

more. Drawing the images and coming up with the insults was fun and in some way therapeutic for him.



Garry's Chair by Michael Hosaluk & Russell Baldon

Recently Russell was in a residency at the Australian National University in Canberra, Australia. He was in their shop for four weeks at the Old Parliament Building, which is now the Museum of Democracy. In a collaboration with five artists to respond to the Prime Minister's suite, Russell worked with the old Security Office leading to the suite. Because connecting the north with the south with a railroad was historically significant in Australia, similar to how the USA's west was connected with the east, Russell built a piece resembling a railroad trestle. Wood available for the residency was off-cuts from constructing the new parliament building, all local hardwoods that he had never used or even heard of previously. The residency ended just a couple of months ago.

Russell is now back at CCA as chair of the furniture program. He stresses to his students that if they are not fully engaged in the program they should wait until they can be fully engaged. Right now Russell has more jobs available than students to fill them. It's different than studio furniture, but they're making their own brands. At this point in the presentation, Russell showed many examples of students' work.

Technology is bringing new possibilities to the craft. Laser cutters and CNC are being more commonly used

to produce concepts. The machines are just tools for doing things that can't be done by hand. Artists then can do things with those pieces that machines cannot do. Whether a tool has a cord or not, Russell believes they're all just tools to get the job done.

To finish up the presentation, Russell talked about international trends in studio furniture and showed photos of some interesting pieces. Some were from the International Contemporary Furniture Fair, and the Milan Furniture Fair. Well known, high volume brands are now making one-off pieces for the shows, and major designers are now selling pieces at Ikea at affordable prices. Here Russell showed photographs of many spectacular pieces shown at these international furniture fairs. A lot of the pieces are a mix of steel and wood; one person used aluminum plates for the joints in a chair where the seat meets the back. This is a joint that often fails in all-wood chairs, so it simply makes sense to make the joint of metal, he said. Studio furniture these days may be found at a fancy furniture store in addition to art shows.



Prime Minister's Suite, Old Parliament Building, Canberra



Russell Baldon

For a new way to use technology, David Trubridge of New Zealand designed spherical lamps of wood where the parts can be made with a CNC machine. To save on costs and the carbon footprint of shipping his finished products around the world, he can email a file to a CNC shop anywhere in the world and have his lamps made locally.

In another unusual use of technology, an artist makes chairs with a 3D printer using recycled refrigerator plastic components as the raw material. Another person took old, very nice chairs, burned them, then impregnated them with epoxy and sold them with a very high price tag. Derek Chen of Council Design (woodindesign.com) in San Francisco made a sculpture from silver-plated blocks of wood. The silver tarnished from sap, and the checks in the blocks added character. The piece sold for \$20,000 very quickly.

Another artist made fascinating, functional, but very complicated curved sculptures using very long, steam bent pieces. To design the pieces he must loft the designs in a fashion similar to how boat builders loft curves of boats.

Russell sees the current furniture market as ripe for his graduating students. There is a lot of new money in the San Francisco area and elsewhere. The students' work is not being commissioned by collectors; they are too young and too unknown for that. But there is a market for skilled artists to produce imaginative, fun, well-built and functional furniture.





Canyon Dawn by Ralph Valentine



The Wizard Table & Bench by M. Carol Salvin



Geode by Robert Nelson



Thanks George by Vincent Van Dyke

What are *you* working on?



Claro Rocker by John Moldovan



Burl Expression by Chuck Quibell



Window Table by Joshua Smith



Walnut Bowl by Dennis Lashar

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<u>Editor</u>	Joe Scannell	(415) 892-9104			

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 joejakey@comcast.net or at SCWAMESSAGES@gmail.com. Advertisements are also accepted with a per-entry cost of \$5 per column inch.

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.

[] I am enclosing an additional \$15 to receive the Forum by regular mail.

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