



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

Volume 35, Issue 3

March 2015

From Trash to Treasure

by Walter Doll

Our March meeting on March 3rd at 7pm features Whit McLeod at his shop in Healdsburg. Whit designs and produces furniture in the Arts and Crafts style using reclaimed and salvaged lumber. He relocated his shop from Arcata about two years ago to be closer to his main market, which are wineries and tasting rooms.

Whit acquires his materials most notably from discarded wine barrels, even utilizing the metal hoops. He laminates and steam bends the staves, and has a variety of techniques and machinery to accomplish this. He also uses a radio-frequency hydraulic press that squeezes and elongates his resawn blanks, if you can believe that! Whit still uses a chain mortiser and a single end tenoner, along with the more modern Domino techniques for joinery.



“Good form is a pleasure to see, and when born from something that’s been left behind, it’s even better.”

Whit McLeod



Directions to Whit McLeod Woodworking: Drive north on US 101 to the last exit in Healdsburg, which is the Dry Creek Road exit. At the base of the exit turn right and head east one block to Grove St. Turn left and head North 1/2 mile through an S curve and turn right to Whit’s shop tucked under a line of trees by Foss Creek. You’ll see an SCWA sign at the appropriate driveway.

February 3, 2015 Membership Meeting

by Art Hofmann

Larry Stroud, Guild Chairman, taking a turn at the rotating Chairmanship as a result of Bob Moyer's resignation, opened the meeting shortly after 7 pm, by thanking Bob for his service, noting that he served as Chairman in years past, and then stepped into that role again in 2013-2014, plus serving as newsletter editor for a period, too. "We squeezed as much juice out of Bob as we could." Larry then proceeded to our newest Guild Members, Bill Taft and Hugh Buttram, who were present and acknowledged by the assembled membership with a round of applause. Members are elected to the Guild on the basis of consistently high quality of workmanship in pieces that are entered in our *Artistry in Wood* show and service to the organization.

Larry continued by explaining that our bylaws have been updated, mainly to reflect the changes that have been brought about by our new website. The updated bylaws can be found in the About Us section of the website. Michael Wallace was elected to the Board, and is the Webmaster.

Larry then cited a donation by member Bill Anderson, who gave his collection of woodworking books to the organization. The Board, after mulling the matter over, decided in turn to donate them to the Sonoma County Library. It is an extensive collection, including many books about Japanese woodworking and Greene and Greene houses in northern and southern California. Art Hofmann explained that a list will be posted on our website in several weeks, after the books have been cataloged and become available to the public.

Art Hofmann told us about next month's meeting, which will be in Healdsburg on March 3 at the shop of Whit McLeod, who makes chairs out of recycled wood. Scott Clark told us the dates for *Artistry in Wood* 2015

at the Sonoma County Museum have been set. The opening will be Friday night, September 11; Judgment Day will be September 9; Entry day will be September 2; and pick-up day after the show will be October 19.

There was a brief conversation among various members relating to the disposition of superfluous copies of *Fine Woodworking* and other magazines, the upshot of which was to post them on the website, or give them to Bill Hartman for his students.

Larry Stroud told us about a little "problem" we are having, namely, an expanding surplus in our treasury, which has prompted us to put out an email survey as to what to do with the funds. Possibilities are things like having guest speakers, or improving our audiovisual equipment, a projector, perhaps, or whatever else the membership will suggest.

Our host for the evening, Bill Hartman, spoke to us about his woodworking program: it is comprised of 13 to 17 year olds, a "powerful group" who like woodworking; the program oversees about 140 students a day. Bill alluded to his students' work on display at the Sonoma County Fair, where they do very well, and to various projects that are underway. His co-teacher, for instance, is building a teardrop trailer, with student help, which will be auctioned off upon completion. Tables are in the planning

stage. Bill cannot use scraps, but is very willing to take in donations of wood in board form. Volunteers are welcome. All in all, an exciting program.

Carol Salvin asked about an auction for the Sonoma County Museum some years back, but apparently that was a one-time deal and has been discontinued. David Marks announced that he has some bocote lumber for sale and related his experience with the wood, which he is selling for someone for seven dollars a board foot. Don Naples announced that he is selling Baltic birch plywood, about 20 4'x 8' sheets, 25mm, for \$50 apiece.

Art Hofmann introduced Jeffrey Dale as a long time local woodworker who has developed a unique look by following his own inner vision of what furniture should look like. Larry Stroud said that Jeffrey had worked on the addition to his house, a Japanese room, long ago, and Jeff's meticulous craftsmanship was an inspiration to him early on in the '80's.

Jeff related how he came to California in the late '60's and found himself in Bolinas, where he worked on houses. He enjoyed that time, when hippies gardened in the road and dominated the place, and he regrets its passing. He met Art Carpenter after being

told to visit him, and Art encouraged him to follow his own path, which he has always done. There were two major influences from his youth: he traveled the world



Photo by Anatole Burkin

with his family and took in a lot while the old cultures were still intact; and he went to art school for a period in the east before returning to California. Jeff showed some early work in small picture format and noted that the round and oval elements still predominate in his present work as shapes (chair seats), or as rounded corners (raised panels); chair and table legs are splayed somewhat and resemble elements of nature, like the shape of a branch. Early work included many Shaker elements with square corners, but Jeff went away from this when he could, attracted to more organic shapes. A commission came in the form of a client in Tiburon, who appreciated what Jeff was doing, even though his stockbroker character left something to be desired. Jeff turned out a successful chair that sold at Nieman-Marcus, who paid him with a check each time and with whom he enjoyed a successful run. He learned that in designing a chair, legs have to be in right position, the armrest, too, not too high, not too low, splats and sights just right. The back has to be angled correctly, the all-important seat needs to be comfortable and angled just right. A good period, Jeff recalls.

Jeff met Dennis Young, a Sonoma County legend among woodworkers, who came to California after apprenticing in Japan and in England. He shared his shop with him for a time, and learned some of what Dennis knew about the use of hand tools and their origins. These are integrated into his work, and he uses some of them now, and appreciates their powers.

Jeff permitted himself to an excursion about his living space; after being in a small house in Petaluma that he had completely remodeled, he lost it to the bank, and now finds himself in a series of shipping containers, which he has transformed into a usable and esthetically pleasing space at an existing wood dealer.

He shared some of his work with us. One table had a glass top that let you see the joinery while eating. Another featured a lip around the edge, essentially transforming a two dimensional tabletop to show off the solidity of the wood. An altar for an ashram in Sonoma came out well, as did a variety of other projects. Jeff did some scenes in wood for a home in Bolinas; using thick cut veneers of different texture, some live-edged, bleaching and dying others, local scenes emerged. Jeff did their bathroom as well, tricking it out to mimic the interior of a boat.



Photo by Anatole Burkin

Another digression, an important one for future woodworkers, emerged in the form of comments concerning being compensated at a level appropriate to one's skill and experience. Jeff admitted that this is not a form that he has mastered. Though he has experienced the odd exception, such as a chair for which he got fourteen thousand dollars, most times he has not come off well financially. Some members knew what he was talking about and echoed their agreement.

Jeff is a long-time surfer, loves the ocean, the water. He showed us images of works involving driftwood, simulated and real, and ocean battered forms. A panel of curly maple dyed a brilliant blue looked like water.

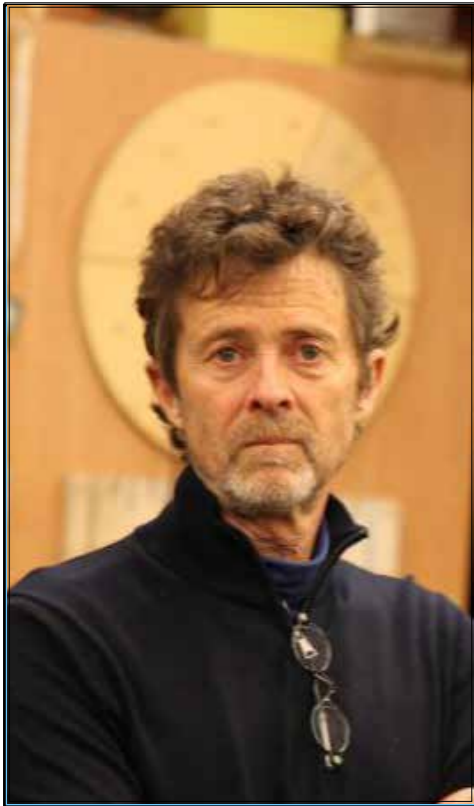
As to finishes, Jeff finishes with DuraSeal, a floor finish. He has used it with good effect for twenty years, though he has experimented recently with water-based finishes. In DuraSeal, Jeff finds a 'great finish' that nothing penetrates. He prepares carefully, applies the finish with a specially folded rag, and quickly exits the room for health reasons.

Jeff continued his discourse about his pieces, concluding that he wanted to re-invent Arts and Crafts, to make things more by hand and bring the form back to an era before manufacturing ala Stickley took hold. He likes to incorporate found wood, rejects, warped boards that do not have predictable straight lines. He uses paint, bleach or washes and dyes when he feels it necessary, and textures caused by chain- or band saws and other tools. Fun is word that Jeff uses a lot; it is the joy of the visual, the vision that he has cultivated over the years, achieved by the work of his hands.

To round off the evening, Jeff showed us a sequence based on a table and eight chairs that he made for a client in southern California. He is happy with the outcome. He had made a complex jig, designed to do chair backs, which is finished like a

piece of fine furniture. Crest rail blanks are inserted and the slat mortises and upper leg mortises are registered for routing with the aid of the jig. After a round of applause for his presentation, members hovered over the jig, admiring it and asking questions. The meeting concluded sometime after 9:15 pm.





In response to a question from the audience, the wood bleach that I use is Lite-N-Up, pictured below. The product that I liked better was made by Jasco, but I haven't been able to find it for a few years. If anyone finds Jasco wood bleach, could you please let me know?

- Jeff

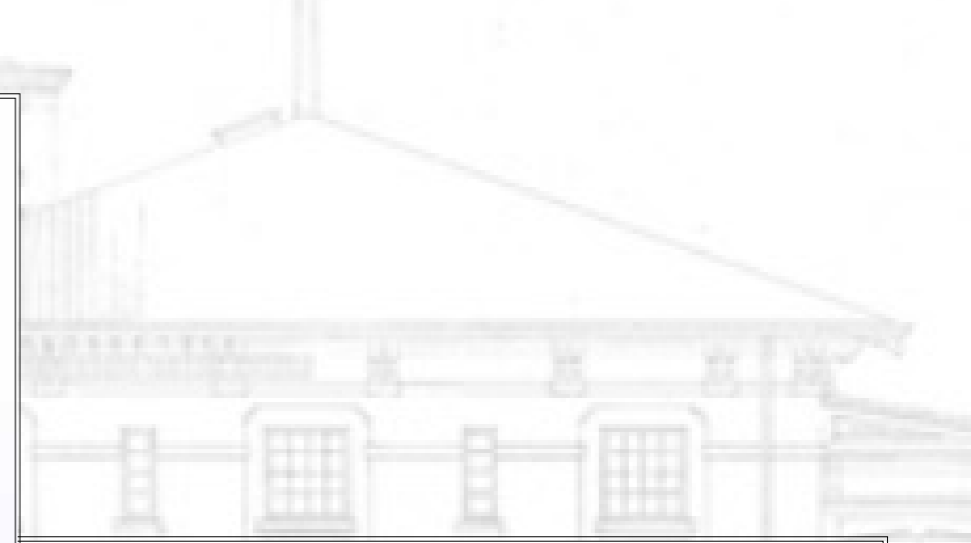
Lite-N-Up is a 2-component liquid wood bleach system sold by Wood Kote Products that will remove the natural color from bare wood. The Lite-N-Up components are mixed prior to application and the degree of bleaching can be controlled by the strength of the Lite-N-Up solution and the number of applications.



Maple Burl Natural Edge Bowl by Chuck Quibell



No Doilies by James Meinders



Yello Desk by Fabrice Landa



tylerchartier.com
tyler@tylerchartier.com
415.264.0638 • 707.386.4882

Woodworking in Costa Rica

by Jose Cuervo

While on vacation in Costa Rica recently, I had occasion to visit the shop of Biesanz Woodworks in Escazú, on the outskirts of San Jose, the capital. The company is



the life work of Barry Biesanz, an American ex-pat who has been in Costa Rica for over forty years. When he arrived in the country, he saw spectacularly beautiful woods being used, but thought the woodworking skills needed improvement, so he set up a shop, hired a few locals, trained them in his methodology, and began producing fine woodwork for sale.



In the early days of the business he was producing the standard furniture items: chairs, tables, etc. This has since evolved into smaller, decorative items such as boxes and bowls, allowing him to use his time more profitably while maintaining his exacting standards. My family and I were met in the showroom by an employee named Minor, who ushered us into the lovely garden and thence to the shop, where production was underway. One man was making small jewelry and ring boxes that were so perfectly finished it was impossible to find a flaw anywhere. This is Barry's secret, a finish produced by shellac and a great deal of sanding,



Barry Biesanz

with a touch of carnauba at the end. Another man was making larger boxes, with tambour lids that slid like they were supported on ball bearings. Again, the flawless finish. Everything here is made with local hardwoods of incomparable beauty.

Minor took us into the drying room, which reminded me of one of those ossuary caves where thousands of skulls are heaped in a pile. Barry uses the twice-turned method of bowl making. He takes a green chunk of wood, turns it to a rough shape approximately 7/8"



thick, then dries it and tosses it onto the pile. It looks like he started out by stacking the blanks on shelves, but somewhere along the way he ran out of shelf space, so now everything goes on the pile. These blanks will remain here for ten or perhaps 15 years, at which time they are deemed dry enough to turn to completion.



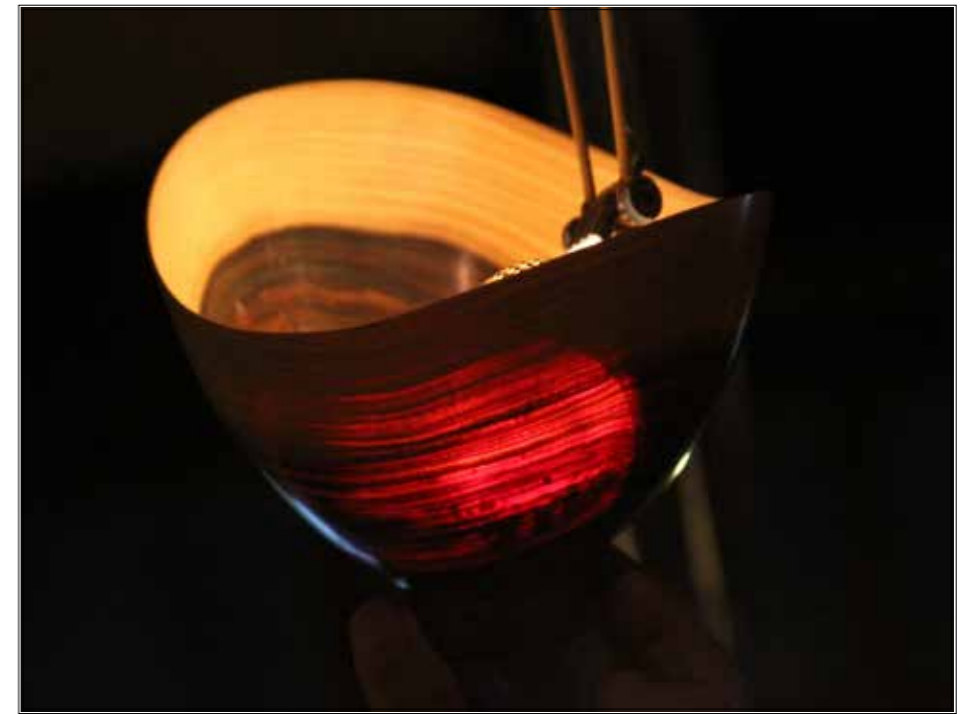
About this time Barry Biesanz himself came into the shop to say hello. He asked me where I was from, and I replied, “North of San Francisco.” To which he asked, “Sonoma County?” I asked him how he knew about Sonoma County, and he replied that he used to live in Novato and attended the College of Marin! *This is indeed a small world.*



Barry showed us the other secret of his finishing process. He takes the finished bowls from the lathe and soaks them for 24-48 hours in a barrel of rum, then does the finish sanding. I’m not sure of the science



behind it, but there is no arguing about the results. His bowls are delicate, graceful of line, and flawlessly finished. And they smell great. Back in the showroom, he showed me a bowl he made from lignum vitae that appears to be green in color. But held to a light source, the thin, translucent shell shows a beautiful deep red. Another bowl was made from purpleheart, which he said was becoming more difficult to find. But not to worry: Barry has his own “tree farm” near Quepos and Manuel Antonio National Park, where he harvests windfall trees and is simultaneously replanting trees for the next generation and the one after that. He told me he had a 12-year old purpleheart tree that is one of his prized children. When I commented that he probably wouldn’t be able to harvest that one, he said that woodturners in Costa Rica have been known to live 150 years, so he has high hopes. Good luck on that. Pura vida.



Lignum vitae bowl

All photos in this article are by Jose Cuervo except toucan photo by Meghan Scannell

For you Facebook fans, Barry has a very nice Facebook page with lots of pictures, both of bowls and the logs they came from, as well as his garden.

<https://www.facebook.com/biesanzwoodworks>

**WOODSHOP
MERCANTILE**

A Mobile Store bringing Tools and Supplies to North Bay Woodworkers

for store location visit
WOODSHOPMERCANTILE.COM

Don Ketman, Proprietor
don@WoodshopMercantile.com (707) 331-4609

Officers of the Association

<u>Chairman</u>	(vacant)	<u>Secretary</u>	Walt Doll
<u>Program Chair</u>	Art Hofmann	<u>Guild Chair</u>	Larry Stroud
<u>Treasurer</u>	Bill Taft	<u>Show Chair</u>	Scott Clark
<u>Editor</u>	Joe Scannell	<u>Web Master</u>	Michael Wallace

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 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 woodworking. 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.

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____ Home Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Please send check and completed application to:

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