



WOOD FORUM

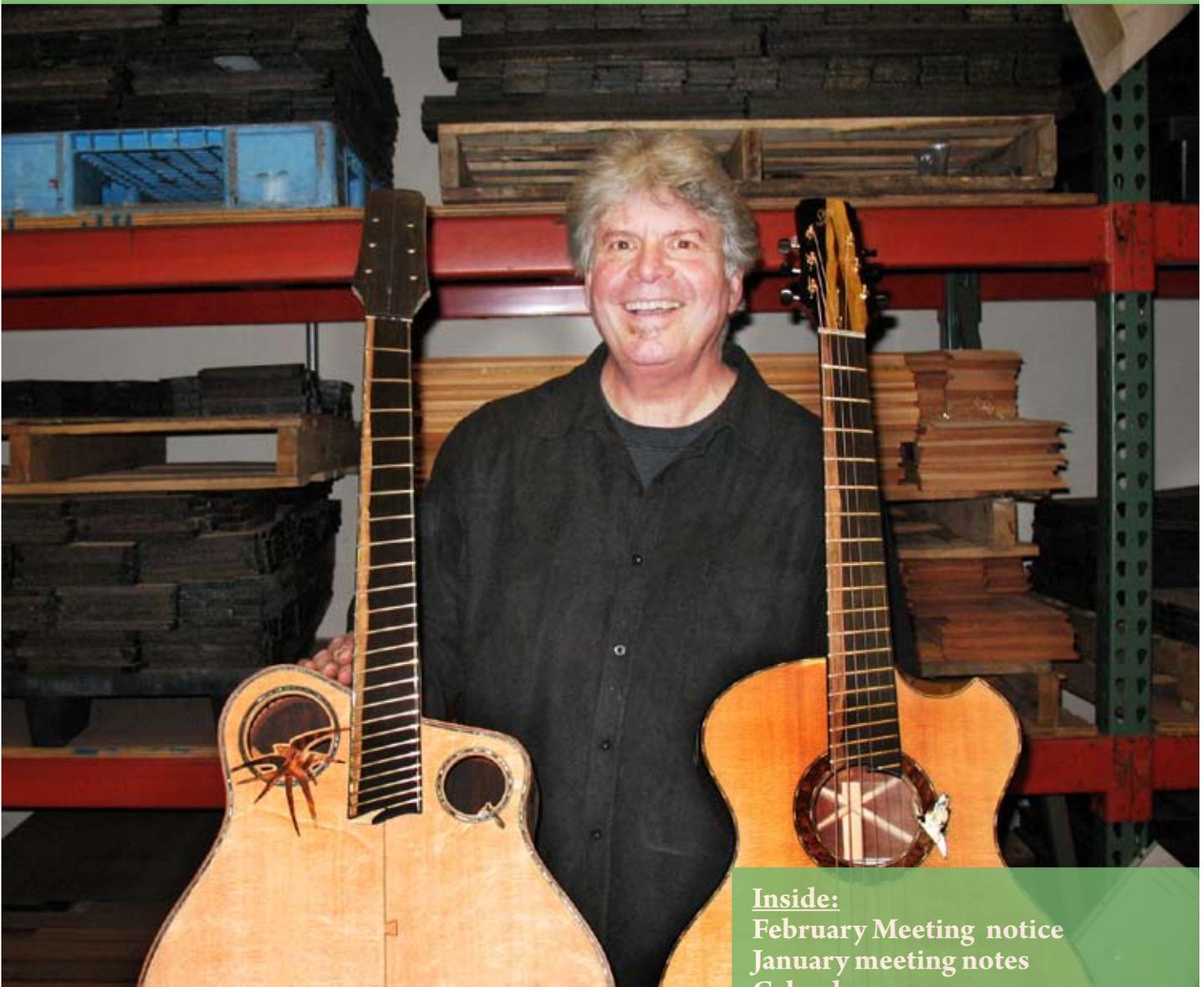
Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

www.sonomawoodworkers.com

Volume 30 Number 02

February 2010

January Meeting at the Luthiers Mercantile with Harry Fleishman, guitar maker



Inside:

February Meeting notice

January meeting notes

Calendar

An announcement - A. Wallace

From the Chairman

February Meeting

Where: Jerry Kermode's shop - 8891 Avila Rd, Sebastopol, telephone (707) 824-9893.

When: Feb 2, 2010 at 7:00 PM

Jerry Kermode, a international recognized turner and teacher, will be demonstrating the art of woodturning. He will show us how he goes about making one of his signature bowls.

Directions: Take Hwy 12 WEST from 101. Stay on road through Sebastopol where it turns into Bodega Hwy.

Jerry's shop is a bit over a mile from downtown. Look for the French Garden restaurant on the right at Pleasant Hill Road (traffic light). Avila is about 8 tenths of mile on the left going west from that point.

January Meeting at Luthiers Mercantile - Art Hofmann.

The January 10th meeting was held at Luthiers Mercantile International at their relatively new location in Windsor. LMI is the cornerstone of a thriving northern California guitar building scene, many of them well-known and respected names. The new facility is extensive, about 10,000 sq. ft., divided into three main sections: a receiving area, which also houses some equipment used for bending and preforming for guitar kits, an area that houses dehumidifiers, in effect, creating a low temperature drying facility, a huge section devoted to storage, featuring many racks of pre-cut and



The bargain bin hunt

sorted wood for fronts, backs, sides, fret boards, sundry tools, books and supplies, plus a large area devoted to shipping, and a machine room used for re-sawing and making up kit

components.

The meeting took place in the central area, the retail inventory room, the one with the drying equipment. Natalie Swango, a long time manager, had us set up there with some decent chairs, an area for the evening's speaker in front and a large assortment of chocolate cookies in the rear, which disappeared through the course of the meeting. This area also contained a large bin arrangement chock full of assorted wood rejects, boards of a wide variety of various woods, strips of ebony and diverse leftovers and rejects on sale for \$5.00 per pound. This became an focus point very quickly, as members poured over it, extracting attractive treasure, like matched claro boards about 6 inches wide and 20 inches long, somewhat less than .25" thick. Lots of stuff. That was a hit with the members, many of whom swarmed over it before and after the meeting.

SCWA Business

Mike Wallace called the meeting to order somewhat after 7:00 P.M., thanking Carl Johnson for his hospitality in hosting the December party at his home north of Windsor. Mike went on to announce the year's officers, himself as Chairman; Carl Johnson as Vice Chairman; Larry Stroud - Seminar Coordinator and Guild Director; Bill Taft - Show Director; Art Hofmann - Program Director; Bill Hartman, - Secretary; Dennis Lashar - Video Librarian, and George Nostrant, - Treasurer. Guests were introduced or introduced themselves.

LMI

At that point the meeting was turned over to Natalie Swango. Natalie revealed that 2009 had been a good year for LMI. The new facility, which houses between two and three million dollars worth of stock, is working out well. LMI sells woods and supplies to all guitar makers from neophytes, who want kits, to the most discriminating makers, who seek exotic woods. All of them, of course, need tools and supplies. LMI is one of six companies in the world who do this, and is second largest among them.

Wood for guitars is mostly pre-cut into blanks for tops, sides and backs. The tops and backs are book-matched and the side material is selected to contrast or mainly, to match closely so that the instrument has a uniform look. Sound is one property that most woodworkers do not regard too much, focused as we are on appearance of color, texture, line and form.

Guitar makers buy their tops as two thin book-matched boards, usually of a rather fine grained softwood, like Sitka or Engelmann spruce, or old growth redwood, which is prized but hard to find. After looking at it carefully, they hold it up and tap it to assess it's potential for producing a good tone. Sometimes if makers are ordering over the phone or the Internet, they ask a manager to tap it for them, or order ten tops, keep five and send back the rest, a practice that LMI readily accepts. Makers are very specific in their requests concerning sound, since the final effects they want to achieve are clear in their minds. Backs and sides are usually a hard wood and often dramatic and colorful. The

guitar can be thought of as a kind of drum with a soft top, like a skin, over a tight frame and container. Sound is less important with backs and sides.

For top material, the selection is rather limited --the two aforementioned spruces, plus citrus spruce and some European spruces. For backs and sides, the selection becomes much more extensive, many being the woods we know, like walnut and such. They also have African blackwood, zebra wood, koa, black acacia, cocobolo, mahoganies of various sorts and many other exotics. (See web site at <http://www.lmii.com/>) LMI does its absolute best to stay away from endangered species like pernambuco and woods from disreputable sources. Regulations on this issue have gotten stricter with every passing year. They do saw up at times their own stuff, though most of it arrives pre-cut. A new re-saw does the work quickly. Mainly, they dry and sand the wood to dimension. The tops are usually sold at .187 (3/16) and for a fee they can sand them down to near-final thickness (.090). Backs are sold at .160 and sides are .120. They can be sanded down to near-final thickness as well (.095/.090).

LMI has machines and facilities and the know-how to fabricate parts, like necks, for neophyte makers or those that need them. Most prefer to make their own. Of course they sell rosettes and colored veneers for inlay work, and all of the other paraphernalia like tuning pegs, pick guards, and specialty tools, like saws for cutting slots for frets and jigs for inserting them. Larger tools are available: side bending devices, and a jig for routing in the channels that receive tops. Want their catalog or more information? The web site address is www.lmii.com and is super-well organized.

LMI Tour

After some explanation and questions from the members, Natalie took us on a tour. We first visited the large space that housed most of the wood, all of it neatly arranged and stickered, easy to locate for shipping. Several people worked in one end of this area, making and shipping packages and shipping all day long. The legal issues surrounding wood sources has become a much larger issue over the past several years. Natalie cited the Lacey Act many times, and its formidable punishments for sellers of woods from illegal sources. From there it was on to the receiving room, where the wood is sorted, and some kit operations, such as side bending are performed, and finally, to the machine room, where wood is re-sawn or put through their new Time Saver sander. We then returned to the original area where there was seating and the floor was turned over to this evening's speaker.



Harry Fleishman, is an energetic fellow who has been building guitars for well over three decades in Sebastopol. Here he makes instruments, runs a small school for guitar making and writes articles related to the field. Harry brought along two guitars of his make, one finished and almost ready to ship, the other close to completion. Frets on both were not straight across as in traditional guitars, but splayed in a fan-like arrangement. Harry told us there was ergonomic justification for this, as well as one based on tonal physics, and that it is also a matter of esthetics: he likes the look. The top was finally inlaid with a motif in abalone shell near the sound hole, as was the top with the tuning machines. Just the image of the instrument evoked music. All of the nearly 400 guitars that he has built are different. "I never build a guitar the same way twice."

Harry talked about the tension in his field between data and lore. The hard facts of research and experience, have expanded in the last twenty years or so as makers applied themselves to the physics of sound and structure, versus the more cerebral, artistic store of information that has been passed down about exceptional makers over the centuries. Still with all the instruments in existence and still being produced, there is a lot of territory left to explore, he maintains. A solid grasp of the data, the facts and technical aspects of sound, makes it possible to dive off into the dark and try new ideas.

In the past, people made guitars along classical lines on the basis of instruments by makers like Torres and Ramirez, or acoustic guitars by Martin or Gibson. Then about forty years ago, other makers began to experiment and this phase has not ended. Though the top is very important, the neck,

Harry says, plays a very important part in the tone and action of the guitar, and the sides and bottom act as a balance and equalizer to the other parts. Wood for guitars, Harry opines, should be thought of not only in terms of hardwood and softwood, but in terms of three characteristics: strength, stiffness, and hardness. Different woods give different tones. Cedar, he says, always sounds better.

If you like long lunches and arguments, disputes, theories and discussions with like-minded folk, guitar making is something you definitely ought to consider. You also have to have the ability to stay with something until you get it perfect right down to the .001 of an inch. If that scares you, then maybe the field is not for you. There are lots of control possibilities, ways of achieving appearance and tone: that is the good news. The bad is that it takes a lot of experience to gain that control, so don't go giving up your day job right away. It is difficult to make a living in this field, though not impossible. Certain makers knock out a fair number of guitars a month. Harry finds it takes him longer, but when he is finished, he can sell them for good sums - up to \$20,000.

On the issue of bracing - moving the brace, reducing it by shaving it, a tweak here and a tweak there can make a big difference, according to Harry. Guitars that sound indifferent at first can be improved considerably by making adjustments over an hour or so. Harry makes a door at the bottom of his guitars, an idea he got from another maker. The little portal which can come off and be put back on, is ideal at the end of the making process, for making final adjustments to the bracing and other internal components.

Finishing is not his cup of tea, Harry says, and he farms his out. Lately he favors French polish, plus a coat of water-borne lacquer plus a coat of nitro. Finishes depend on the end user and their demands. They are different for the person who plays at home, or for a concert musician than for the musician who plays in a bar. *"You have to figure out who you are as a guitar maker"*, Harry said. This remark rings true for many of us as woodworkers. A lot of it is willingness to explore.

Harry does not just tap the wood, he feels it and sniffs it too. He builds guitars from salvage woods if they are rare. He also buys furniture that is made of rare woods, a table here, or some bookshelves there. He will pay good money for them, and then make a number of guitars out of the wood. A new guitar he is working on for himself shows a top that is made of two woods attached with strange dovetails, yin-yang style:

Nothing seems quite ordinary or regular about his guitars: the tuning peg section of the neck is attached at a strange angle to the fret section, something he has worked out over a long period of time. The back is not flat, but has a scalloped dish at the waist which gives the guitar an overall boat-like look. When he talks about sculptural effects, he is not exaggerating in the least. He talked about experiments on given guitars, repairing a neck on a guitar for a customer, exchanging necks and having it sound somewhat different, and experimenting with five different bridges for a guitar within the space of a few days and having them sound different with each change.

Harry aims for his own satisfaction in making a guitar and that his standards are high. He wants his customer not just to be satisfied, but to be ecstatic on receiving the instruments, to call him three minutes after it arrives and order another one. This has happened but only twice. Still that is the mark he aims for. He has always loved to make things. Process and its enjoyment is what his life is about. He has done a great deal of fine work and is still impressed with many new ways of making guitars. The possibilities continue to excite him. Alone and with his students, he builds different guitars: traditional classical, parlor, (a smaller instrument), modern classical and electric. He is continually engaged, he says, by dramatic subtleties, *"dramatic, because you didn't know you could get that."*

One of the best aspect of Harry's engaging talk was his understanding of the behavior of materials, and his ability to explain them to us. Harry's engaging talk ended with him strumming lightly on the about to be shipped guitar, and more talk about the ins and outs of guitar building. If you want more information, contact him at www.fleishmaninstrumensts.com and sign up for one of his courses. Members gave Harry the traditional round of applause for his presentation, and then it was time to mill around and look over the wood pile one more time, pay up the \$5 per pound to Natalie, and say good night.

Luthiers Mercantile also hosts the Healdsburg Guitar festival, in conjunction with Santa Rosa's Luther Burbank Center and Acoustic Guitar Magazine. This has come to be an important event in the guitar world, when as many as 100 makers descend on this little town. The next festival will take place in 2011, and is from all the existing images of fine guitars and descriptions of interesting workshops definitely worth attending.

Calendar

February 2nd- Jerry Kermod turns a signature bowl

March 2nd - Joe Amaral at Bill Hartman's shop in Rancho Cotate H.S.

April - 10- Design Workshops in Hayward, 11 A.M. Saturday

An announcement from Andrew Wallace

I have opened a woodworking tool and supply store in Fort Bragg selling the nice things that can only be found online or more than 2 1/2 hrs away from the coast. It is called Mahout Tool & Supply (mahout is the Indian word for elephant caretaker/driver and a nod to my CR roots). It is nestled in a quiet hallway in my shop and every month is growing into a fine store. I am selling finishes, waxes, files, some hand tools, books, sharpening stones, abrasives and adhesives, like Unibond 800. Unibond is made by Vacuum Pressing Systems in Maine. Usually takes over a week to get out here due to shipping restrictions. I am distributing it on the West Coast and can ship it to Santa Rosa in a day and any where on the west coast within 2 days.

I am now just spreading the word and planning to have a catalog online in a few months. I currently have a web page at <http://mahouttool.com/> where my address and phone number is listed.

If you find yourself in town give a call and drop in at 122-C East Fir St., Fort Bragg, CA 95437 (707)964-0670. I am open most days from 10-6.

I will be having monthly events and demonstrations to help build the woodworking community here so any that might be interested in getting announcements can email me at sales@mahouttool.com.

From the Chairman

According Art Hofmann, our Program Director, we have now a full slate of programs for the next year!

This is wonderful. We should all thank Art for putting his efforts into this project. I'm looking forward to all of the programs for the year.

February is our month for membership renewals. Your membership helps us to bring in the kind of people that we all want to see. Many of our guests come a long distance, and as such we have been compensating their expenses. At times, we will pay a bit more to get that "special guest".

I am hoping that this year, we will have a higher turnout for the meetings. I know that our show meeting has the highest turnout, mainly because, everyone who shows should be there to hear the judges remarks. However, there are many meetings that are educational, informative and fun.

Many of you are probably aware that the city of Santa Rosa has a been given a proposal by two developers that will make over the ugly AT&T building downtown. The bottom floor of the new building will be the home of the Sonoma County Museum. I had a brief conversation with Eric from the museum on the plans, and what they are thinking is that they would use the new space for rotating exhibits. The current space on 7th would show pieces from their permanent collection. Of course, this project will take some time to complete. Right now it has gathered a lot of support from officials and interested parties. I think it would be great for us because we would get more space for the show. If you are a city resident, let your officials know what you think if this plan.

Dennis Lashar, our association Video Librarian, has promised us a list of all the videos we have for you to borrow. Including, (thanks Dave!) all of David Mark's shows. In a future newsletter, I'll post the list.

See you at the next meeting!

Michael

Photo Credit: Rick White, Michael Wallace

WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

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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 March issue must be received by February 20, 2010. You may submit your entries to the editor listed below.

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Santa Rosa, CA 95402
February 2010

PO Box 4176
Vol. 30 No.02

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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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