



# WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

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## May Meeting Bruce Johnson, Sculptor



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# May Meeting Notice

by Art Hoffman

**Who:** John Economaki, Toolmaker

**Where:** Steve Wigfield's Shop, 660  
Lakeville Highway,  
Petaluma, CA 94954

**When:** Wednesday, June 20, 7:00  
PM

John Economaki's name is undoubtedly familiar to nearly every SCWA Member. John is the founder and CEO of Bridge City Toolworks of Portland, Oregon, a company he founded nearly 30 years ago. Formerly a fine woodworker by trade, Bridge City grew out of John's need for accurate tools that were good-looking as well as useful. John says, "Tools spend most of their time doing nothing, and therefore deserve to be a silent voice of inspiration."



John Economaki has been making tools since 1983. They are unique and innovative and he has stubbornly and successfully fought all the fiscal odds and caprices of our unstable economy to stay in business. He produces innovative and immaculately crafted heirloom tools for woodworkers and collectors worldwide. Made in America, all of his tools are produced in limited quantity numbers and are made to order. This means they only produce as many of a tool that is pre-sold before production begins.

Not only are the tools special in look, feel and function, but his tenacity in dealing with marketing issues and staying afloat since founding the business merit our admiration. We are in for a fascinating evening. Please convince yourself at the Bridge City Tool Works website: <http://www.bridgcitytools.com/>.

The June meeting will take place on Wednesday, June 20<sup>th</sup> at Steve Wigfield's shop in Petaluma. Directions from Highway 101 are as follows: Take the Highway 116 exit in south Petaluma, then take a right and go north on Lakeville St. Look for Steve's address on the left (west side of street). Steve emphasizes that he does not have very much in the way of seating, so that you are strongly advised to bring your own chair if you wish to be seated.

## May Meeting

By Mike Burwen

### Business Meeting

No business meeting was conducted.

### General Meeting

The May meeting was a departure from the usual evening meeting. It was held during the day at the home/studio/shop/sculpture garden of sculptor Bruce Johnson in Cazadero near Fort Ross. The meeting began about 11:20 AM with an escorted walking tour of Bruce's sculpture garden, followed by a visit to his outdoor work-in-progress area and his shop. The group then visited Bruce's "Poetry House." The meeting then adjourned for a sumptuous lunch at about 1:00 PM. About 30 people attended the meeting including several spouses of members.

Bruce started with a bit of background. He attended UC Davis in the 60s and was first exposed to sculpture in an art class. He said that he was hooked immediately and knew that was the avenue he wanted to pursue. He said that he began as a sculptor full-time in 1972. In 1990, he

purchased his current property in Cazadero and has been there ever since. He mentioned that he has not sold a piece since 2009 and is currently working in construction to earn enough money to buy what he needs to pursue his sculpture career.

The basis of most of Bruce's pieces is massive pieces of redwood, often the root structure of large trees. Many of his structures include copper-clad components, particularly "boulders", sometimes weighing as much as 300 pounds. The interior of the boulders are big chunks of redwood, generally faceted.

The copper he uses for cladding is the "Grace Ultra" brand of Vicor, a sheet-copper roofing product that he buys by the skid load. The material comes in three levels of hardness. He uses the non-annealed softest product. To apply the cladding, he first pounds it into shape with a rubber mallet, then uses a "needlescaler" for the final conformation to the redwood substrate. A needlescaler is a tool that is designed to knock excess flux off of welds. The copper is then nailed to the substrate using copper boat nails.



As mentioned, the program started with a tour of Bruce's sculpture garden. He discussed several of his pieces, their inspiration and the techniques he used to construct them. The pieces were typically attached to copper-clad bases, using bolted steel straps. In addition, some pieces had steel threaded rods through their centers. Bruce talked

about the difficulty inherent in boring a hole, sometimes 10'-12' long in a straight line using an auger that is about 18" long!

Some of the pieces are just sanded and oiled. Bruce said that process does not always work out well after the piece has been exposed to the elements for a while, but that sometimes it does work out, and, when that happens, the piece acquires an attractive patina.

A common finish he uses involves burning the surface. He first uses a Makita Japanese "brush sander" to prepare the surface. Then he chars the surface and scrapes off the residue with Scotchbrite pads. He said these pads do a terrific job and last a long a time. He then applies several coats of oil. The oil brand he prefers is called "Superdeck," a product designed for outdoor decking.

This article contains a few pictures of Bruce's pieces, but they are just the tip of the iceberg. For more pictures, go to Bruce's website, [www.formandenergy.com](http://www.formandenergy.com).

Following the sculpture garden tour, the group went to an outdoor area where Bruce had several pieces, both in the raw state and partially completed. He mentioned that some of the pieces can weigh as much as 6 tons. He buys the raw pieces, paying about \$.15/pound. Thus a big stump can cost nearly \$2000. Smiling, Bruce said that, when he sells a piece, he wants to get \$6/pound in return!



**A 6-ton Work-in-Progress**

The raw pieces have to be debarked and cleaned of dirt and debris before he can begin working on them. He mentioned that a big piece can take two men 10 days to clean, working full time. First the piece is pressure – washed and then various tools are used to scrape and clean. Because the typical piece contains many nooks and crannies that are difficult to reach, the cleaning process is challenging and time-consuming.

The group then moved indoors to Bruce's huge shop, where he showed us several of the tools he uses in his work. These included:

- The aforementioned Makita brush sander. This tool contains a 6" wide fiber brush that is imbedded with grit.
- A chain saw that has a planer head at its tip, which he uses for debarking and carving.
- An Arbor-tech tool on a die grinder for hollowing
- A "power-adze," a tool he said was no longer made. He uses it for cleaning and shaping.

Also in the shop are several smaller pieces made from osage orange stumps that he recently acquired. He said he had a lot of that material and was willing to part with some of it in any SCWA member is interested.



**Osage Orange Sculpture Collection**

Following the shop tour, the group visited Bruce's "Poetry House," a small building designed in the Japanese style that was built to be knock-down and easily movable. It was impossible to capture this beautiful building (at least by this amateur photog), and the reader is referred to the website [http://formandenergy.com/poetry\\_house/index.htm](http://formandenergy.com/poetry_house/index.htm) for some excellent pictures. Although the building looks much like a Japanese small temple, Bruce said that he did not use traditional Japanese temple joinery, but devised his own system.

Next came a fabulous potluck lunch. The members and spouses prepared a sumptuous repast. Salads, cheeses, chips and dips, beer and soda, roasted vegetables, BBQ ribs, sausages, burgers, desserts, an unending list of goodies. Bruce's wife Marjorie, went all out as hostess of the affair, and deserves a big thank-you from everyone.

If you missed this meeting, shame on you. In my not very humble opinion, it ranks among the best ever.

Art Hoffman put together a pictorial collection of many of Bruce's works. You can see it at <https://plus.google.com/photos/117837855408013913273/albums/5744661948265156225>.

## Calendar

**June 20:** John Economaki, Tool-maker extraordinaire

**July 10:** Tripp Carpenter, Kathleen Hanna, Grif Okie on Arthur Espenet Carpenter

**August 22:** *Artistry in Wood Show Meeting with the Judges*

**August 25 – Sept 23:** *Artistry in Wood Show*

## Forum Editor Needed

*By Michael Burwen*

I need an editor to review the content of the *Forum* each month. The right person will know how to use the revision features in Microsoft Word and be reasonably proficient in the written word. The job should take no more than an hour each month. If you are willing to volunteer for the assignment, please email me at [mike@pamg.com](mailto:mike@pamg.com).

## From the Chairman

*By Michael Wallace*

Summer is almost upon us. I'm writing this during Memorial Day Weekend, the unofficial summer start. The weather here is terrific. I am so glad we live where the temps are in the "Cinderella" range - not too cold, not too hot. I can't use the weather as an excuse not to be in the shop.

Speaking of woodworking, our Artistry in Wood show is about 2 1/2 months away. August 25th is opening date and items will be expected around the 19th (but don't hold me to that yet, we're working on a schedule).

I have a great project in mind, but if I don't get into shop this week, it ain't going to happen. Know what I mean?

A couple of weeks ago, I visited Fort Bragg to see the work done by the students from the College of The Redwoods School of Fine Woodworking. I saw some

amazing workmanship. I hope a few of the students will be exhibiting at our show.

We are halfway through the year. Looking over our past programs, I am tremendously grateful that we have a vibrant organization that reaches out and attracts so many interesting artists. Although I wasn't at Bruce Johnson's studio this month, I was told it went well. We have a couple of great ones coming up - John Economaki and the son of Art Carpenter with Grif Okie.

Speaking of meetings, I am always curious as to why, out of an organization of 130 active members, we don't see more people at the meetings. What would induce more Members to come to the meetings? If you have any ideas, I'd love to hear them. We will soon start planning for next year and want to make sure we know what subjects will peak your interests. If you are willing, send me a note at scwaforum@gmail.com!

See you at the next meeting!

Michael

## Thanks to SCWA

*By Bill Hartman*

I would like to thank the Board and members of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association for the recent donation of \$500.00 to my furniture program at Rancho Cotate High School in Rohnert Park. My program is the only one in the county that teaches elements of fine woodworking (as opposed to construction).

Every day, 120 students come through my classes. For the last two years the number of students wishing to take two or more years in the woodshop has increased so much that I now have two periods of advanced woodworking. Seventy-five students signed up for these two classes next year, that can accommodate only 54 students, and my first year classes have always had a long waiting list.

It is innate in our beings that we wish to modify and beautify our environment. I have the honor to teach students the skills they need to safely operate tools and produce useful products. For the last three years, I have been lucky to have a member of SCWA, Bob Moyer, volunteer his time in my shop. His presence has allowed students to build complex and beautiful projects.

As you all know, running a shop is an expensive proposition, and many of my students cannot afford the cost of materials. Your donation to my program will allow all my students to make beautiful projects with beautiful woods.

Half of your donation was used to purchase materials for our annual cutting board build. I sell these boards each summer at the Petaluma Farmers Market. Please stop by and say hello. My goal is to sell at least \$1000 worth of product to put back into the program, a great return on your investment. Your seed money will make this the best year ever.

You are all welcome to stop by my classroom and check out what we do. Thank you very much for supporting the future woodworkers of Sonoma County.

## 2012 Artistry in Wood

*By Bill Taft*

This year, the 24th Annual *Artistry in Wood* Show will run at the Sonoma County Museum from August 25th through September 23rd. Entry day will be Wednesday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, and our meeting with the judges will be held on Wednesday, August 22nd. The Show will be in the upstairs gallery again this year.

We will be providing more information in the *Forum* as the Show date approaches. Entry forms will be published in the July and August *Forums* and will also be available on our website.

## Osage Orange: Interesting Possibilities

*By Mike Burwen*

As mentioned earlier, Bruce Johnson acquired a pile of osage orange (*maclura pomifera*) and made some very attractive sculptures out of the material. He said he obtained the wood locally. I've always thought of osage orange as a southeastern species, and was surprised to learn that it has been – and presumably is – grown in California. In any event, I got curious, and decided to do a bit of research to see what attractions the wood might hold for woodworkers.

The tree goes by many names including bois d'arc, bodark, bodock, horse apple and hedge apple. Native to the Red River Valley of Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas, it was once the most widely planted tree in the United States for hedgerows and windbreaks. In the thirties, FDR had 220 million of them planted to contain soil erosion in the dust bowl. Today it grows virtually everywhere in the US and in the Ontario province of Canada.

It is one of the densest trees of North America with a specific gravity of nearly .8. In many ways it behaves like a dense tropical. It machines well and takes a great finish. Although the wood tends to be twisted and gnarly, straight pieces make what many bowyers consider the finest bows, even better than English yew. The Comanche used it exclusively in their bows, and the names bodack and bodark derive from that usage.

It is known for its rot-resistance and was once used extensively for fence posts. When burned, the wood is said to produce more BTU than any other American species.

When first cut, it has a bright orange color, but the wood is phototropic and will brown out over time from exposure to light. The browning process can be arrested by using UV protective finishes and renewing them often. One woodworker says that rubbing with high-SPF sunscreen will retain the color.



Osage orange can be purchased as lumber in thicknesses up to 8/4 and widths up to 18" by 12' long. Pieces this size are uncommon, given that the maximum trunk diameter is about 24" and the trunk is usually quite short, although the tree can grow to 60' (25' is more typical.) One woodworker made a workbench out of two big pieces and claims it looks as it did when he built it 40 years ago.

The wood is readily available as bowl and spindle turning blanks. (See [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) Small pieces are often used for making knife handles and pistol grips, and longer pieces make great tool handles. The wood is also available as flooring.

Prices online vary quite a bit. For straight grain clear lumber in 4/4 and 8/4 thicknesses, you can expect to pay \$15 – 20/bf. Rough pieces with knots and splits are typically around \$5/bf. Staves (long pieces) and billits (short pieces) for bow-making are available from specialty dealers. These come from trees that have been trained and pruned over 25 years to produce wood that has an absolutely straight grain. There are also places that

specialize in selling pieces that have been selected specifically for use by luthiers.

If you grow your own trees, be aware that they are very thorny and were used to fence cattle before the invention of barbed wire. The trees are messy and produce inedible softball size fruit. If you are so inclined, you can extract the juice of the fruit and use it as a mosquito repellent that is reputed to be better than Deet!

## Art at the Source

*by Don Aiello*

Please come to **ART AT THE SOURCE** open studio June 2-3 & 9-10 from 10 AM to 5 PM at the Sebastopol Center for the Arts, 6780 Depot Street, Sebastopol. Follow the Sonoma County woodworkers involved in this West County Art event. Details are available at <http://artatthesource.org>.

## About the Association

The *Sonoma County Woodworkers Association* is a 32-year old association of more than 100 professional and amateur woodworkers. Monthly meetings are held at member's shops and other venues to share experiences, ideas and techniques, and to hear well-known woodworkers discuss their work. Each year, the Association sponsors the *Artistry in Wood* juried exhibit at the Sonoma County Museum at which members are invited to submit pieces. Annual dues of \$25 cover membership for one calendar year

*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. Submit your entries to:

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Email: [mike@pamg.com](mailto:mike@pamg.com)  
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## Officers of the Association

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Vice-chairman	Michael Burwen	658-2844
Treasurer	James Heimbach	355-9013
Secretary	Bill Hartman	696-0966
Program Director	Art Hoffman	542-9767
Guild Director	Larry Stroud	823-1775
Artistry in Wood	Bill Taft	794-8025
Librarian	Dennis Lashar	823-8471
Forum Editor	Michael Burwen	658-2844

# 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 \$25 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 Web site.

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Address 2 \_\_\_\_\_

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

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