FURNITURE DESIGN MARQUETRY VENEERING CARVING MILLWORK

WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

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Party Time!

Don and Janet Naples are opening their home to SCWA for the annual holiday party. It is in Healdsburg, north of Santa Rosa. SCWA is bringing the meats and drinks, so beer and wine will be available. The party is potluck, so please contribute a dish or something to share. This is an opportunity to socialize in the pleasant setting of a home. Don's company, Wood Artistry, makes loudspeakers, and his home is outfitted with the best. Please do come!

- Art Hofmann

Directions:

Go to Healdsburg and take the downtown exit onto Healdsburg Avenue. Take this about half a mile or so, to Mill Street, where you will turn right. Go two blocks to East Street where you will take a left, and go to Tucker Street, a short distance. Right on Tucker and go about one and three quarter blocks and look for your destination, 419 Tucker Street.

November Meeting

by Bill Taft

The SCWA Annual Meeting was held November 3, 2015 at the Cotati Cottages Clubhouse in Cotati CA, hosted by member Bill Taft. Guild Chairman, Larry Stroud called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm. About 30 members were in attendance, constituting a quorum. Board members Scott Clark, Art Hofmann, Joe Scannell, Larry Stroud, Bill Taft and Michael Wallace were present. One new member and two guests introduced themselves.

Scott Clark presented the *Artistry in Wood 2015* **Peoples Choice Award** to Joe Scannell for his winning box entry, 'Escher's Inspiration / for Christina.' Larry Stroud announced that two members, Ralph Carlson and Mark Tindley were elected as members of the Guild.

Art Hofmann announced that the time and place of the December 'Potluck Meeting' was unknown as we did not have a venue for it. Don Naples arose to the occasion and spontaneously volunteered to host it this year. Details may be found on page 1, as well as on the SCWA website.

Larry Stroud announced the nominated candidates for the SCWA board. They are:

Chairman – Bill Taft

Treasurer – Judi Garland

Program Chair – Art Hofmann

Show Chair – Scott Clark

Guild Chair – Larry Stroud

Newsletter Editor – Joe Scannell

Webmaster – Michael Wallace

Larry stated that the Secretary position does not have a candidate and asked the members if any would like to fill the position. There were no volunteers. The nominated candidates were elected by a show of hands vote by the majority of the members at the meeting.

The members also approved the change to Section IV. A. Officers, regarding the nomination process that was published in the Annual Meeting Notice.

This concluded the business portion of the 2015 Annual Meeting and the meeting was turned over to Brian Condran.

Brian Condran *Photo by Jose Cuervo*

Brian Condran on Design in Woodworking

by Art Hofmann

Brian Condran took the floor and proceeded to give us a very nice presentation on the subject of Design in Woodworking. He is an accomplished woodworker from Martinez, a graduate of the College of the Redwoods program in Ft. Bragg. Before he began woodworking, he was involved in selling auto parts, disliked it, and gave that up to enroll at COR in the early '90's under the old man himself, James Krenov, whom he admired endlessly. Indeed, the evening was a kind of retrospective of Brian's work and an homage to his venerable teacher, though Brian added a lot of his own elements to the style of his school, in terms of techniques as well as aesthetic points. Other preparation for his career came to light as the evening progressed, when Brian revealed that he studied mechanical drawing and then went on to study architecture for several years. But it's the Old Man whom he mainly credits for teaching him about the aesthetics of woodworking, the *why* but not the *how* of woodworking. One of Brian's later pieces is a direct homage to Krenov, where an inlaid image of the man adorns a cabinet (see page 4). JK kept a photo of it on his fridge, according to Brian.

Two techniques have become spotlights on Brian's career. One is his use of veneers. (JK was not against using veneers, and used them for casework at the end of his career, though he used solid wood for his stands). Using veneers has become second nature to Brian over the course of his career. He bandsaws his own thick veneer, 3/32". The second technique that Brian has mastered is marquetry, which JK did not employ.

Brian based his presentation on slides of his work and on an array of wood samples that he had brought along. The work he showed us progressed from elemental pieces that he had made at COR to elaborate

commissions and pieces that he had made for his own use.

The design theory that he learned from Krenov and others at COR was dictated by the material, by the wood or woods involved. That was the way Krenov worked. Something in the wood, the color or a grain pattern or both of those elements, spoke to him, and looked best when in combination with other woods. A given piece of wood itself is the source of this sort of inspiration, and the finished piece is a direct reflection of that source. Brian illustrated his point with an image of a JK cabinet done in the early 2000's. He went on to discussed some pieces he had made using that mode as the driving force behind the design, pieces whose direct utility is not the motivating factor in its origin. It was a wonderful way to learn, and Brian still uses this mode as one of his sources of design inspiration. On the basis of an ebony board he brought with him, one with a lot of white sapwood in it, Brian showed us how the board would likely yield four sawn veneers that could be double bookmatched. The resulting pattern left the heartwood rimmed in by the white sapwood, and said to him: entry table.

Brian discussed his efforts as a student and what he had learned: mortise and tenon, pillowed forms, curved work. Design factors sometimes consist of details or small elements.

Early on, Brian handed the audience a dovetailed corner, which looked like a rather ordinary set of half-blind dovetails, nicely done – but with a difference. These dovetails were employed in a plywood case that was eight feet long and perhaps 20" high, a sideboard. The tails were visible from the side; the pins were cut in the top and bottom pieces. The plywood was itself veneered, on the outside with his thick veneer made from oak, and on the inside with a lighter veneer, probably maple, also thick. Naturally, the edges had to be banded as well, to hide the plywood laminate edge. But here's where it gets tricky: in order to cut true dovetails in the plywood, and have them appear authentic, the ends of the plywood also had to be banded, but with *end grain* veneer. To achieve this, the endgrain was first cut off the plank that was the source

Photos this page are by Jose Cuervo

of the veneer, one piece for each end. The pieces were marked for proper orientation in relation to the plank, then the interior of the core was veneered (maple). Next, the endgrain strips were glued to the ends of the core, and the face edges were also banded. The side panels were completely veneered on all surfaces; the top and bottom exterior surfaces were not yet veneered. At this point the dovetails were cut just as in solid wood, though with a bit more care because of plywood's splintery nature. Because the outside of the pin boards had not yet been veneered, the dovetails could be sawed as for standard (not half-blind) dovetails, making the task a bit easier. Finally, when everything was fitted, glued, and assembled, the outside of the pin boards were veneered, resulting in half-blind dovetails! A lot of work, but this allows him to use dovetails as part of his design process with veneered casework.

Another technique that Brian employs is his 'board stretcher,' for situations where he has only a certain amount of wood for bandsawing his veneers. He matches up the wood he has as best he can, but interrupts the flow of the side piece with a crossband of veneer, some horizontal, some vertical. It gives the maker the

design opportunity to use wood in a more efficient and playfully interesting way.

The use of marquetry is the other way Brian's work distinguishes itself. Brian learned this from no one less than our own Greg Zall, one of the best in the nation. He uses the double bevel technique, and, by the way, made his own pedal-powered scroll saw. This saw has an unusually deep throat, permitting work on larger panels. And the fact that it is powered by foot gives significant control advantages. He is one of the more resourceful woodworkers, a standout in a group known for its resourcefulness.

Sketch or SketchUp? Krenov worked from a small drawing, something that he produced after reflection on what he wanted to achieve. Brian is a proponent of this way of designing. For his creative work, he does a hand drawing of what he is intending to achieve and then sets off for the shop. Brian teaches woodworking in the East Bay with Tim Killen, author of *Sketchup for Woodworkers*, from whom we shall hear in the near future. Some woodworkers say, make a drawing in Sketchup or in CAD program and you will know precisely what each dimension is before proceeding to the shop. Still, a small drawing is what he prefers.

As his experience grew, commissions became the main source of the design process, where the need and function of the client dictated the final form, but not without the maker's hand showing its training. Sometimes contests will present design opportunities: the wants of the contest organizer, i.e. what does the museum want, what is the theme of the contest?

Brian offered some examples of design by happenstance. One piece (upper left) involved an oak plank from a park tree in Walnut Creek, which had died and been removed. The plank was sawn into veneer, but while sanding the veneer to thickness, the machine blew through

All photos this page courtesy of Brian Condran

one piece, which presented (guess what?) a design opportunity in the form of marquetry leaves. Another example: a shattered piece of marble Brian had obtained and kept for a dozen years without knowing why, became the top of a standing cabinet (pictured above). For this, he made a full scale mock up of cardboard and cheap materials tacked together with tape and hot glue. These stood in not only for the wooden structure but the marble as well. This method reveals a lot, and will quickly tell you what might not look right. It offers another way to find your way into a design.

To illustrate these points, Brian showed us a succession of images in which he had employed marquetry to embellish his works, mainly on natural themes, leaves, mountains and the like. The session ended with a big round of applause for this obviously talented woodworker, who has produced a long series of stunning pieces.

Bamboo? Woohoo!

by Lars Andersen

I like bamboo. It's sustainable, and I find it beautiful. Since hearing that some local cabinet makers have been working with bamboo sheets, I wondered if I could make furniture with it. The catalyst for action was a few bamboo samples at a SCWA meeting at Rancho Cotate High School. I looked into it further and found that some of the better options were Teragren and Plyboo, and ordered various samples.

Next, I shared my idea with Scott Clark at an SCWA meeting, and he was able to obtain a couple of 9"x9" Plyboo scraps from a local cabinet maker. I played with them, and I was able to make a mortise/tenon and a dovetail. Satisfied, I special-ordered a 4'x8' natural-color 1-ply flat-grain Plyboo sheet from Mount Storm. So far, I have made two small side tables for our home, with plenty of wood (or should I say "grass") to spare.

While I am neither an expert furniture maker nor an expert on bamboo, I thought this use of a new and sustainable material would be worth sharing broadly with the SCWA. The following is not a treatise on bamboo, and the furniture build is fairly basic. Still, it is my hope that my initial personal observations about bamboo will be of interest to our community.

Bamboo comes in many different varieties. Each sheet is basically made of 8' long 0.75"x0.25" laminated strips. A common configuration is 3-ply, where the laminates are edge-glued and for stability there is a core with the laminates rotated 90 degrees relative to the laminates for the top and bottom. This is similar to plywood, and means the core is visible from all sides. If you don't like this, you can flip the laminates up on the edge, face-glue them, and make a 1-ply version. Now the 8' edges look just like the top, but the 4' edge will still show the laminates vertically. You can get natural and amber color, and even other/darker varieties. They also make dimensional lumber - 2x4s and 4x4s. FSC certified and non-formaldehyde options are available, at an incremental cost.

Lars Andersen

Bamboo is medium priced. With tax, I paid roughly $250 for a 4'x8' sheet, which works out to about $8 per board foot. This is about mid-range for hardwood, but there shouldn't be much waste. Mt. Storm stocks the 3-ply natural and amber sheets, but since I wanted 1-ply it had to be a special order, which they happily did.

Bamboo is heavy. A single sheet weights roughly 90 lbs. Yikes!

Bamboo is hard. I read somewhere that it is four times as hard as oak.

Bamboo is strong. I ripped a 1/4 inch strip off a 30 inch board, and even with good leverage I would have to apply quite a bit of force to break it.

Bamboo can give you nasty splinters. While I usually don't work with gloves, doing so might not be a bad idea - "do as I say, not as I do..."

Bamboo responds to our usual array of hand and power tools. I ripped and cross-cut on a table saw. I used a thickness planer. I used a router. I used a chisel. I don't have a jointer, but I don't see why bamboo wouldn't respond to it - although the need may not be there for clean boards like we are working with here. Bamboo appears to respond just like wood, with one notable exception...

Bamboo is a grass. When you cross-cut it, it can fray a bit. My table saw is small and doesn't easily let me work with an 4'x8' 90 lb sheet, so to get to a more manageable size I cross-cut the sheet to 26"x4' with a skill saw with a somewhat dirty/dull blade. Horrible fraying all over! Luckily, my table saw performed much better when I cleaned up the cut, and I don't really consider fraying a limiter as far as working with bamboo. As always, it makes sense to think about how the wood is oriented as you feed it into the saw. I suppose you could use backer boards or blue masking tape to mitigate fraying if it becomes a problem, but I didn't have to do that.

Bamboo tends to burn easily. Keep feeding it thru the saw.

Bamboo sands just like wood, and any burn marks are easily removed. These boards are fairly smooth, so not much sanding is needed.

Bamboo glues just like wood. I used Titebond III, and it worked well. It happens to dry to a color that matches well with the color variations already present in the raw sheet. For bamboo that isn't natural color, I might try a different glue.

Bamboo appears to take a finish. All I have tried so far is wiping on Watco Danish Oil. While it doesn't absorb nearly as much oil as some softer and more porous woods, it does soften the surface and gives it a warmer hue, as expected.

As a first bamboo project, I decided to make a small side table for our media room – a top, four legs, four counter-sunk aprons, mortise and tenon joinery. The main idea was to make a not-too-complicated piece of furniture and learn something about working with Plyboo sheets.

The initial milling process was far easier than we sometimes encounter with rough stock – a few rips on the table saw, and you are done. For the legs, Plyboo does sell dimensional lumber which might have been ideal, but an 8' 2×2 is $22 and an 8' 2×4 is $60. I'm too cheap for that, and decided to simply face-glued two 0.75" thick sheets to get a single 1.5" thick piece from which I could rip the legs. It worked out, but I learned – again! – to use more clamps than initially estimated.

The table will go next to a deep couch in our media room. We spent a lot of time toying with different sizes and design variations. How wide should it be? How deep should it be? Should the edge of the table be beveled? How aggressively? Should the top float? How much of an overhang do we want – if any? How wide should the aprons be? How tall should the table be? How aggressively should we taper the legs?

My wife is very visual. She has a great sense of design. She will know the right – or wrong – table when she sees it. Short of making a prototype, my only option was a flexible design process – I needed to be able to make changes as the table was built. For this, I adopted an approach I know well from the software design world. Software used to be designed in a Plan-Based manner – "plan the work, and work the plan." It sometimes works, but it often doesn't. Requirements change over time, and re-work kills you. Enter Agile Development – "don't attempt to look further than your headlights shine." You create something simple, but still useful. You evaluate it, and you iterate. Gradually, your design emerges. You assume that requirements will change over time, and your process lets you adapt. Don't pretend that things won't change – acknowledge that they will, and get good at dealing with it.

What does this mean for my table? Leave everything over-sized. Open mortises at the top, so the apron width is adjustable. Start with slight bevels and tapers, and get more aggressive later. Lots of dry-fits, based on which we discuss and iterate.

As far as dimensions, we think the top will be 15.5"x24"x0.75". Legs are 1.5"x1.5", and probably will be 24" long. The aprons are 3"x0.75". Assuming a 1" overhang all-around, the outside dimensions of the base are 13.5"x22". For the long aprons, we subtract 2×1.5"=3" to get to 19". Add to this 0.75" for each tenon, and we are at 20.5" long. For the short aprons, we back off 2×1.5"=3' to get to 10.5". Add to this 0.75" for each tenon, and we are at 12" long. The tenons are all 0.75" long and 0.25" wide. We set the apron back 0.125" from the face, so each 0.25" mortise should be 0.375" from the edge of the leg. Each mortise will be 2.5" long. That means the shoulder at the bottom of each tenon will be 0.5" deep.

The joinery is fairly simple. First I routed the eight mortises, and squared them up with a chisel. Then I cut the tenons with a table saw, a tenoning jig and a miter gauge.

At this point, I was able to dry-fit the base. It came together cleanly. I took it to our media room, we laid the top on, and we looked at it. We knew it needed to be lower, so for now I trimmed 3" off each leg. We

also knew the top needed to be narrower, so I ripped it to final 15.5" width. Finally, we decided to make the aprons a bit thinner. For now, I ripped each apron to 2.5", and cut 0.5" off the top of each leg.

Next, I put a bevel on the underside of the top. I have not done this before, and I was not sure what angle would look best. I did this by using a tall auxiliary fence attached to my tenoning jig which was attached to my fence, and holding the top vertical with the table saw blade at a 30 degree angle. That means a 60 degree bevel, which seemed about right to me. I had purposely left the top too deep, so as planned I did a few trials with the extra wood. I liked my approach, cut the top to final depth, and then put the bevel on all sides. Here is what it looks like:

Next, I tapered the two insides of each leg. I had never done this before. I built a basic tapering jig – a square board that goes against the table saw fence, another slightly angled piece of wood on top which serves as the fence for the table leg. Add a stop, and some sort of hold-down mechanism. I just screwed mine together, but if I ever need it again I'll probably add a hinge to make the angle adjustable. You see… I did a trial. It worked fine, but we decided to go with a more aggressive taper, so I had to adjust the slope on the jig for a shallower angle. Then I tapered the four legs.

I did the final dry-fit. We discussed whether to make the aprons smaller, or trim the legs. The table is 25" tall, which is a bit more than you would typically see on a mass-produced piece. But our couch is tall and has tall armrests, so we decided to leave it as-is.

I sanded everything down to 100-grit, and gently broke all edges. This is not rough wood, so a lot of it is much smoother than the 100-grit might normally suggest. I bought some high-quality figure-of-eight table top attachment hardware. They attach to aprons, and screw into the top. On the aprons, you use a Forstner bit overlapping the edge. I wanted to do this on the drill press, so I made these holes before the glue-up.

Glue-up was done in two stages - first the two sides, then the full base.

Then I gently sanded everything down to 220-grit, and applied a Watch Danish Oil finish. I did two coats 24 hours apart, sanding to 400-grit between coats.

Then I buffed the base and the top, screwed the six figure-of-eights into the aprons, centered the top, drilled six holes in the bottom of the top, screwed in the top, attached a brass plate serving as my signature of the piece, and wiped it down.

Next, I made a matching piece.

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

TS Elliot

The table by Lars Andersen, pictured at left, was entered into the 2015 *Artistry in Wood* Show, and was awarded an Award of Excellence.

Photo by Tyler Chartier

Officers of the Association

Chairman	(vacant)	Secretary	(vacant)
Program Chair	Art Hofmann	Guild Chair	Larry Stroud
Treasurer	Bill Taft	Show Chair	Scott Clark
Editor	Joe Scannell	Web Master	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.

Name _____ Email _____

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Please send check and completed application to:

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