



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

Volume 37, Issue 11

November 2017

Artistry in Wood 2017

Fall is upon us and the final touches are being applied to projects throughout the region. The *Artistry in Wood* 2017 Show opens in less than three weeks. Thursday, November 9 (drop-off day for show entries) is less than two weeks away, and the judging and general meeting is a mere six days later.

At 7pm Wednesday, November 15, the membership will gather for its monthly meeting, with the Judges in attendance, at the Sonoma County Museum.

The judges will have spent the afternoon considering the various qualities of this year's entries. At 7pm we will hear the judges express their opinions and extend awards to those lucky few who got things "just right."

Between now and then a great deal of energy must be expended to get those pieces on display. Several members will be preparing the exhibit space, helping take down the previous exhibit, painting walls and display pedestals and doing whatever is necessary to make the gallery worthy of holding the artwork.

Following Entry Day, the Guild members will review all of the entries to make certain everything is within the guidelines. The displays then must be arranged in a pleasing and logical layout. Not surprisingly,



this doesn't "just happen." Under the direction of the Show Chair, volunteers will arrange the entries in preparation for the Judging and photographs. The judges will spend a full afternoon examining each of the entries, which are identified only by a number and title at this point, concealing the maker's name to ensure fairness. After the judges break for dinner, the membership meeting will convene in the Museum to hear the judges' impressions, comments and verdicts. This is an event not to be missed.

Two days later, on Friday, November 17, the Show opens to the public. The Museum will host an Opening Reception for Museum members and SCWA members, starting at 6pm that evening to kick things off.

The next membership meeting will also be held at the Museum, on Tuesday, December 12. This is always an enjoyable evening: the makers of the various pieces in the Show will be there to discuss their entries and answer questions. Don't miss this one either!

The show closes on Sunday, January 7, 2018, and all entries must be picked up the following day.

Best of Show: *Sensei* by David J Marks Photo by Tyler Chartier

Meet the Judges

Artistry in Wood 2017



Brian Condran left a career in sales to return to college and, ultimately, to the College of the Redwoods, at the time under the direction of James Krenov in the mid '90s.

Since that time, his work has centered around fine furniture and marquetry, residential and commercial commissions, and more recently, independent seminars in design, tools & techniques, and marquetry. His creations have received awards from *American Woodworker Magazine* and others, and have been exhibited in galleries and shows in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago and Pennsylvania.

He currently works in his shop in Martinez, California.

[For more on Brian Condran, see the December 2015 *Wood Forum*]



Kevin Fryer moved from the Midwest to San Francisco in 1976 to study at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He began making harpsichords in 1980, and became a professional instrument maker in 1984. He has been located at his current studio in the Bayview District of San Francisco since 1990. In addition to building harpsichords on commissions, he provides rental and tuning services for Arts organizations including Carmel Bach Festival, Music@Menlo, San Francisco Opera, San Francisco Ballet, and Music at Kohl Mansion. Further activities include repair and rebuilding harpsichords, technician work for recording projects, and instrument appraisals. Fryer also runs the concert series Live at Mission Blue which just completed its 13th season. He has built over 70 harpsichords, and is best known for his instruments based on the 17th century Flemish tradition of the Ruckers family.

[More about Kevin Fryer can be found in the October 2017 edition of the *Wood Forum*]



Joshua Salesin is a unique woodturner from Santa Cruz, who applies traditional turning techniques dating back hundreds of years to the challenge of producing unique, engaging and beautiful contemporary designs. He utilizes an ornamental lathe that is more than 180 years old, with only a few updates to the cutters and a motorized lathe spindle drive (although there are still times he prefers to treadle or hand operate it instead). For additional capabilities, he also uses a rosette lathe, a method of turning that dates back more than 500 years. "My fascination with merging the organic and the industrial, the natural and the machine-made feeds my passion for woodturning."

[His website: <http://joshuasalesin.com/>]





Red Chinese Gourd Vessel by Don Ajello



In the Field by Paul Marini



Waiting for the Judges...

Photo by Jose Cuervo



Hall Table in Maple and Jatoba by Rod Fraser



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Each Piece Unique

by Joe Scannell

The October membership meeting featured a presentation by Thomas Fetherston, who was accompanied by his business assistant Rush Stevens. Mr. Fetherston operates a successful custom furniture design business in San Rafael, employing 10 crafts people in an 8000 square foot shop. They cater to the decorator market, and in fact began business 39 years ago in San Francisco on De Haro Street, in the midst of the major interior design showrooms.

He describes Custom Furniture Design this way: “We build beautiful things for beautiful people, as long as they pay the freight.” This allows him to employ ten people and keep them quite busy. Two of them have been with him for 35 years. At any given time they have roughly one hundred projects in various stages of progress, with a lead time of 14 to 16 weeks.

Thomas says, “We are an old fashioned furniture maker, much like the shops that existed before the Industrial Revolution. When a client wanted a table made for example, they would go to a shop and



Thomas Fetherston

Photo by Jose Cuervo

together discuss the specifics: type of table, size, wood species, style, etc.” They make each piece to order, and Thomas works with the interior designer or architect who represents the client to achieve a design that fills the bill. They work not only with wood (solid and veneer), but also employ metal, leather, distressed wood, bleached wood, and other materials to create the perfect design.

Thomas brought a number of samples with him to illustrate some of the carved surface textures they may use. Several of these were what he called “aqua carving” - an undulating texture over the whole surface, like waves on water. One of his employees is very good at this technique, using a power gouge.

The process begins with a series of sketches offered to the client to zero in on the design, then a set of full-size drawings are prepared to work out the details of the design.

Thomas kiddingly says,
“I only work half days now
-12 hours.”



Parts of the job may be subcontracted to smaller specialty shops: metal work, stone work, upholstery, and woodturning are examples. Philip Nereo, who was in the audience, recently did some large turnings for a bed that Thomas was building.

Another project recently completed was a 22 foot long table built around two large slabs of petrified wood. The tabletop was supported on a stout metal base, and the whole thing had to be able to be disassembled. This piece involved many craftsmen outside of his shop.

He likes working with interior designers because they generally have a more intimate knowledge of how things are built and what the possibilities are. He tries to stay away from retail clients, because they usually require him to spend a lot of time educating them in the design process. In addition, interior designers and architects are usually repeat customers, often commissioning multiple pieces at one time.



He has built more than five thousand pieces of furniture. "It always takes longer than you think it will, and it always costs more." Nonetheless, he insists on maintaining a high standard even if he may lose money on the job, because that client commissioned him to make something important, something of quality. His reputation is more important than the money, and a satisfied client will come back again. With a reputation for high quality workmanship, he can charge top dollar and not worry about the client price-checking with IKEA.



Photos courtesy of Custom Furniture Design

They do not do kitchen or bathroom cabinets. When a client asks for something like that, they will try to refer them to another shop that specializes in that kind of work.

This is an old fashioned business model, run much as cabinet shops were run a century ago. The client wants something made, he goes to a cabinet shop, the project is discussed, details are ironed out, the job is paid for, and the piece is delivered. There is a renaissance of people wanting nice things, well made furniture. Where does such a person turn for this? Studios such as Thomas' firm, Custom Furniture Design, are rare and in demand. Word of mouth from satisfied clients is their best advertising.



Grif Okie

On Saturday, September 9, 2017 family and friends gathered to say goodbye and celebrate the life of Grif Okie. One of the early members of the Baulines Crafts Guild and longtime member and Program Director of SCWA, Grif was a studio furniture builder, and most of his furniture was a Grif original.

He was very creative, so a table was not just a table but a 'River Rock #2' table (see the photo below). This table was awarded the Best Furniture Piece and named as the Peoples Choice Award in 2012.



Grif entered his work in eight of the ten years between 2006 and 2015. His entries were awarded two Peoples Choice Awards, one Award of Excellence, and one Best Furniture Piece Award during that period. Grif was very proud of his work, as he should be. Bill Taft, the Show Chair in those days, has the fond memory of Grif being someone who didn't always agree with the judges' comments on his piece and was not afraid to tell them about it, which Bill found admirable.

David Marks was introduced to the Baulines Crafts Guild through a show of some of their members' work at the Oakland Museum back in 1981. The show featured the works of Garry Knox Bennett, Art Espenet Carpenter and numerous other amazingly talented wood art furniture makers from the Bay Area. In the early 1980's, Grif owned a building in San Rafael that he shared with Bruce McQuilken and Dale Holub on DeLuca Street. David took classes from all three. "I was so excited to learn from Grif and very appreciative that he was willing to share his knowledge with me! It's

as if he just gave me the keys to a brand new car and said, 'Here, go for a drive!'"

River Rock #2 Table by Grif Okie

John Keller remembers Grif as a pivotal player in making custom woodwork a sought-after commodity in northern California. "He was a self-taught woodworker who always provided excellent craftsmanship and design for his clients. Our industry is better off today for his continuing efforts to always be better."

The September 9 memorial gathering was held in Grif's shop, and Grif's gallery of furniture that he had built over the years was on display in his showroom. Grif owned one of Art Carpenter's famous wishbone chairs, which was also on display.



Michael Wallace recalls the first time he met Grif. It was at his shop, which was open for an Open Studio event, and when Grif found out Michael was a woodworker, he tried to sell him some wood. Years later their paths crossed again when the two volunteered to help in Montgomery High School's wood shop, about 18 months ago. Grif worked until he could work no more, and never stopped giving of his time.

It is said that you are alive as long as someone out there remembers you. Grif touched many, and will be long remembered. Goodbye Grif, we all miss you buddy !



Koa Roll Top Desk



Game Table



Grif Okie



It's Olive



Flying Tomato



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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 nominal cost for paid members.

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.

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____ Home Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

What can you do to help further the organizational goals of our volunteer-run association? Please tell us how you would like to help:

Please send check and completed application to:

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