



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

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Culmination of a Dream

As was outlined in our last newsletter, there is a lot going on in our members' shops. One enterprise that's making a lot of headway is Andrew Carruther's **Redwood Violin Project**. Andrew has released numerous videos documenting the progress in this ambitiously wide-ranging build of a violin that is scheduled for completion sometime in March. These videos are available on YouTube, and I found a list of them at:

<https://theredwoodviolin.org/videos/>

Many readers will remember Mark Tindley's violin build back in 2015 (read about it in the June 2015 *Wood Forum*). This project is similar, but

with the added handicap that virtually everything used on the violin will be a product of Sonoma County, including the glue, the varnish, dye for the purfling, and of course, the woods.



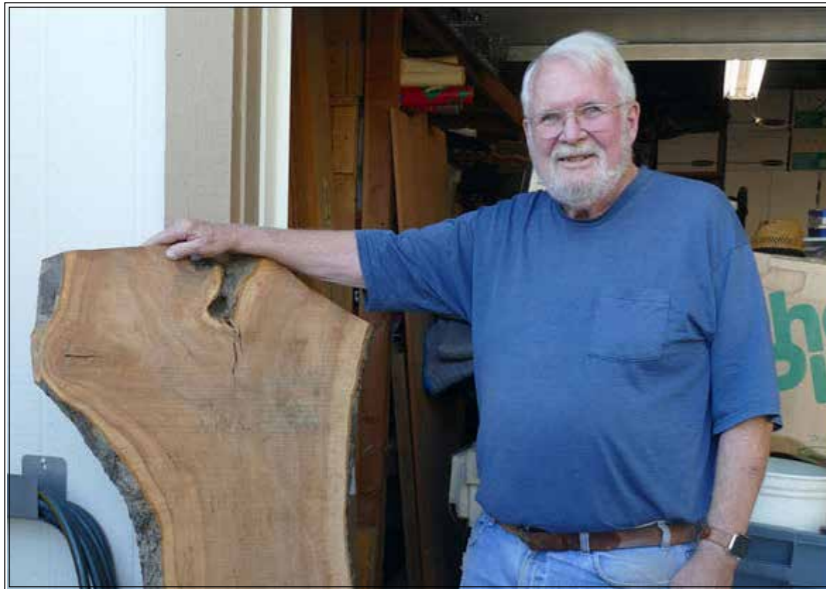
The list of those woods is tantalizing. Andrew obtained a slab of Gravenstein apple timber from Steve Wigfield, and had it sawn into manageable pieces by Greg Zall

made of three layers of thin stringing in a black-white-black pattern. Marilyn Buss, a local natural dye artist known for dyeing yarn and fabric, volunteered to

and Mark Tindley. Together they produced wood for the back, the ribs, the neck and scroll.

The front is, of course, old growth redwood, obtained from a local source. This is used for the bass bar and sound post as well. The fittings (fingerboard, pegs, tailpiece, chinrest, and endpin) need to be made from a hard wood like ebony or rosewood. But on this instrument they will be made from manzanita donated by Mike Center. Locally grown boxelder, also from Mike Center, became the internal linings and blocks, as well as the purfling.

And speaking of purfling, it will be



Steve Wigfield with the apple timber he donated

produce the black stringing, which she did using the traditional tannin/iron method. She grinds acorns to make flour for baking, and part of that process involves leaching the ground acorn meal in water. This results in a tannin-rich “tea” that she used to infuse the boxelder strips Andrew brought her. She made a second bath of vinegar, water, and rusty nails, and that reacted with the now tannin-rich wood, turning it black.



Dyed and natural boxelder - soon to be purfling

Andrew carved the manzanita into the shapes needed for the fittings, but drew the line at the pegs and endpin. He admits to having no skill at woodturning, and was happy to hand this task off to Kalia Kliban.



Marilyn Buss, natural dye artist

There is some great video on the subject of producing the tail gut hanger that starts with sheep intestine he obtained from Diamond G Ranch Slaughtering. The two part video takes the process from just after it left the previous owner all the way to the finished product. Most of the videos are listed here:

<https://theredwoodviolin.org/videos/>

but some required a bit more detective work. This one:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BU11AAUpqs&feature=emb_rel_pause

takes you through the final process of turning the sheep intestine into the tail gut.



Manzanita tailpiece



Mike Center in his shop

The violin is essentially a hand-carved object. Both the front and the back are carved to exacting dimensions along compound curves that have been handed down by instrument makers from centuries long gone. Violins are traditionally carved with a maple back and a spruce front plate, which have their own peculiar acoustic properties. By switching to these



Fitting the redwood bass bar to the front

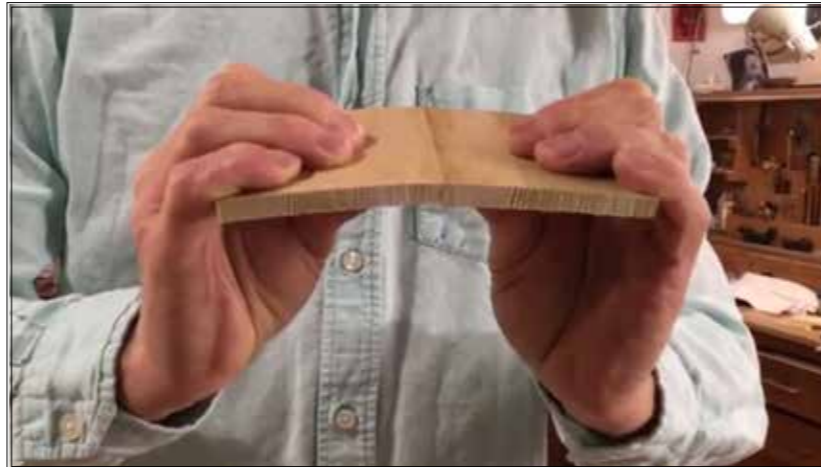
alternative materials, Andrew is having to reinvent the instrument's dimensions and thicknesses to accommodate the new acoustic properties. This is at once

the challenge and the fun of the Redwood Violin.

And Andrew is obviously having a lot of fun with this project, in part because he is meeting a lot of people he would not have otherwise. There are so many steps to take, so many processes to learn - or reinvent - when you want to do it the "old way." Not the least of these was his determination to make his own glue. Starting with a pile of beef ankles, he carved out the tendons,



cleaned them free of fat, chopped them into small segments, and slowly cooked them at low temperature until he had a gelatinous soup. He cooled and dried this on a baking sheet, then broke it into small flakes that would later be reconstituted with water and become "tendon glue," which is apparently much like hide glue. To bolster the confidence he was hoping for in this glue, Andrew took it further and conducted tests of his glue to validate its strength. You'll have to watch the video to see the whole process.

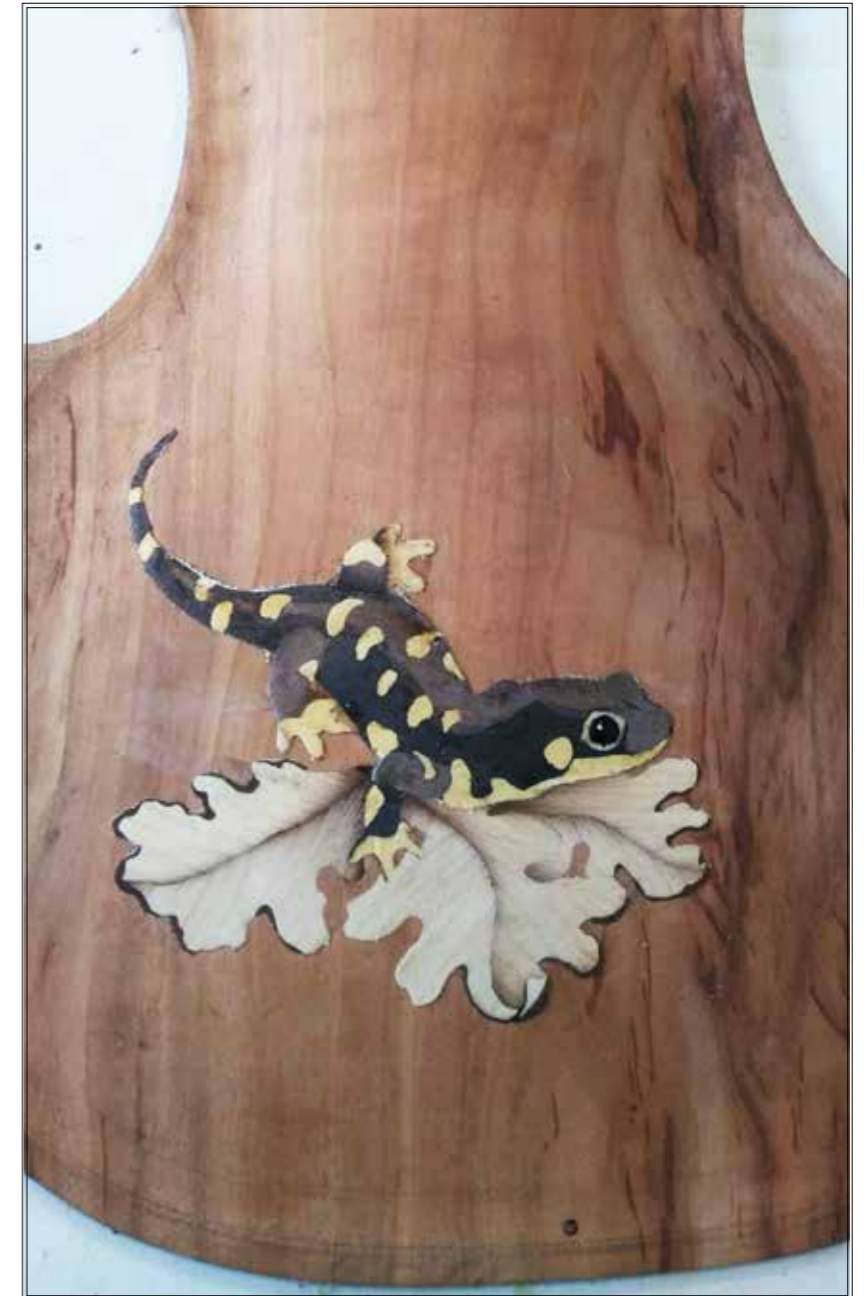


He has made walnut oil, which is a drying oil, for use in the varnish; built a still to heat pine sap to produce turpentine to use as a solvent for the varnish; even derived a powder from grape skins that can be used to tint the varnish.

He has used equisetum (horsetail) as an abrasive; used ashes from the September 2020 Glass fire to make lye for subsequent use in the tail gut string project; even made ink from walnut hulls. The ink? That's for the label that goes inside the instrument to identify the maker. For this task Andrew enlisted Jane Ingram Allen, a Sonoma County artist and papermaker, and Sherrie Lovler, a local poet, artist, and calligrapher.



A recent addition to the Redwood Violin is a lovely bit of marquetry executed by Greg Zall and inlaid into the applewood back plate by Mark Tindley. It features a tiger salamander, a Sonoma County resident on the endangered species list, positioned on a cluster of valley oak leaves. This was a very tricky bit of work, in particular because the back is so thin, and curved as well.



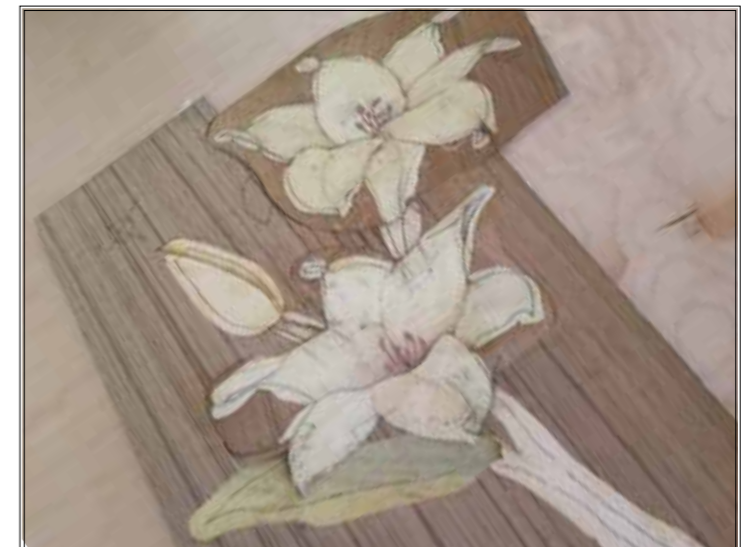
Modern Day Studiolo

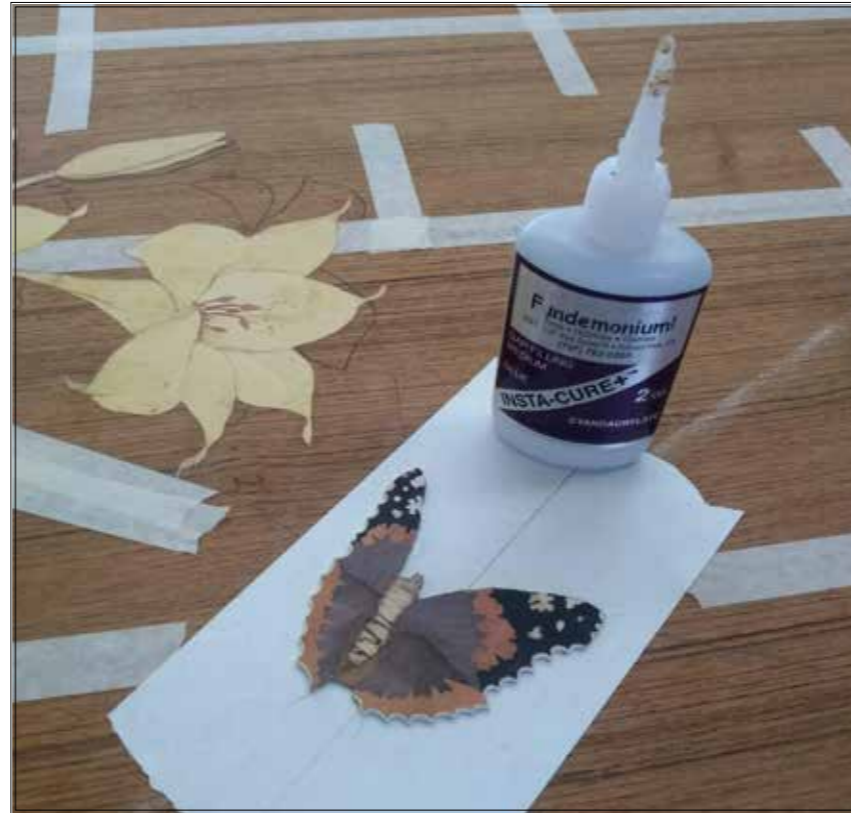
For Greg Zall and Mark Tindley, their part in the Redwood Violin project described on preceding pages may have seemed like a respite, considering what they've been up to these past several months. The two have been constructing a large (25' x 9' high) marquetry wall for a bedroom in San Francisco. Essentially a mural of natural subject matter - birds, butterflies, flowers, leaves - on a background of matched teak veneer, it took them four months to complete. There are over 100 flowers, each sand shaded to perfection.

Most of the work was done with 1/16" veneers using the double bevel marquetry technique, and then carefully glued down to a core of MDF. But some of the work had to be done as inlay after the veneer was glued to the MDF, because the panels were either too big or the design spanned two panels, making alignment very difficult.

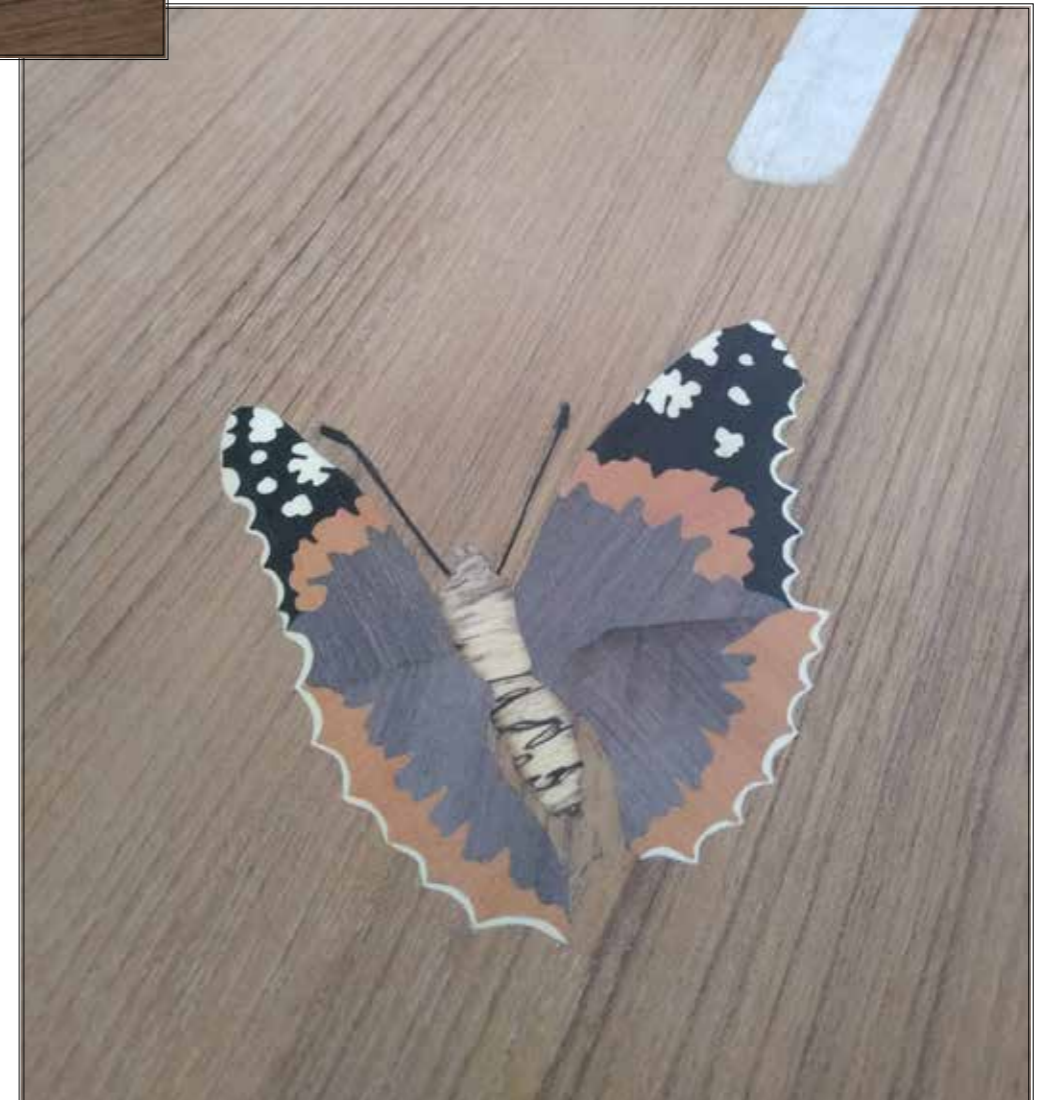


They bought about \$5,000 of 1/16" thick teak veneer, buying more than they needed to offset mistakes. It turns out they are better at this than they thought; they have quite a bit left over. Anyone need any teak? The other veneers came from many different woods from years of collecting.





Inlaying is a big challenge and can take twice as long as the marquetry technique.









As the World Turns

The woodturners have been busy, too. Stephen Forrest for one, who has turned out a very nice short video that can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdV2t2sJHOk>

In it he discusses the innate beauty of spheres, and his technique for creating them.

Seen at right are Steve's entries in the most recent *Artistry in Wood* Show, which just concluded. Below are some of the spheres featured in Steve's video. The one below left has a betel nut embedded in it, which Steve says cuts smoothly and cleanly. Below right is the same technique, but using a piece of black palm, which is nightmarish to work - it really wants to chip out.



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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