

# St. Louis Woodworkers Guild



May 2010  
Issue 302

## Our Next Meeting

Thursday 7:00 PM  
May 20, 2010

Creve Coeur Government  
Center, 300 N. Ballas Rd.  
Creve Coeur, MO

## Wood Carver Boris Khechyan.

The next meeting, on Thursday, May 20th, will take place at the St. Louis Woodcraft store. This month's featured presenter is Boris Khechyan, an internationally known wood carver. Boris constructs furniture, carves designs into the furniture, and also teaches carving in his shop in South County. He will be discussing carving for furniture.

## Reconstructing an Historic Theatre Hand Rail by Mike Jones

April 16th, 2010

Mike Jones has been involved in woodworking for most of his life, starting with historic preservation work to fund his way through college. More recently, he held the position of president for the Kansas City Woodworkers Guild. During a recent period of unemployment, he was approached by someone who needed a stair rail in an old theatre rebuilt. He was told he had a five-week time line to get it done. He agreed to do it. He refers to this as, "the day two fools met."

The theatre was built in 1921, originally the Main Street Theater. It opened on October 31st, 1921, as a 3,200 seat vaudeville and flicker theater. It was designed by Rupp and Rupp Architects of Chicago as part of a 28 Opheum Theater circuit. The interior was initially designed in the French Baroque style while the exterior was in the Neo-Classical and French Second Empire style.

Until the Midland was opened, it was the largest theater in Kansas City, boasting a curtain that was 120 feet tall. It had animal cages in the basement big enough to hold elephants and other circus animals.

The original rail was probably built over a period of about five months and completed by two different craftsmen – one group that built the risers and another group that built the balusters and hand rails. Back then, rails were commonly built by families (several generations of craftsmen) who would travel around the U. S., from town to town, building hand rails and balusters. Each family had their own unique profile for the chair rail, so you could easily tell who had made what railing. (*continued on page 4*)



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*Meeting Room, Mailing Address  
Courtesy of Woodcraft*

## Scott's Thoughts

May 2010

Last year I was working on a large job with lots of wood trim. My job was to supply the trim that would later be finished by the painters. I laid out the trim in a room that was about 25' x 50' and there was enough of it to cover the floor with a little room left to walk around. There was a lot of trim and all of it needed to be finished before the carpenters could install it. The single painter dispatched for all of the trim told me that he planned to have it all finished in one day – by himself. He was using a sprayer, but it was obvious to me that he was planning on doing no sanding.

The finish he was using was water-based, which only made things more difficult. He sprayed the first piece and it came out with a beautiful, as a friend of mine describes it, "Corn-cob finish". It was super rough and really needed to be sanded. Since he wasn't going to do it, I spent the next two days sanding the trim and had plenty of time to think about the whole process.

No matter what you do, no matter how smooth you sand rough wood, you still need to sand or scrape after your first coat. Even if you take the time to raise the grain before applying a water-based finish, it still won't be perfectly smooth. There is no way around it. The first coat of any protective finish basically fattens up the wood fibers and sticks them in place, making them solid and stationary. After this first coat, the sanding or scraping that you do is leveling the surface and knocking down the high wood fibers that perked up when they sucked up the last coat of finish. Knowing this, you should make sure that your first coat of finish is specifically made to sand or scrape easily. Sanding sealers, for example, are specifically made with additives to make the finish sand easier and not clog sandpaper. They tend to go on rougher because of these additives.

Your second coat of finish should also be sanding sealer if you sanded through the first coat, or it should be your first coat of truly protective finish if you did not. Sanding after the second coat of finish is done to clean up imperfections in the finish itself and not in the wood. This sanding and the sanding afterwards is mostly done to remove dust particles in the finish, making a smooth surface for the following coats. You should be sanding or scraping, addressing the surface in some way, between each coat. And if you are using a finish like polyurethane, which does not melt into the previous coat, you need to sand to make each successive coat stick to the previous one.

Before you apply your last coat of fish it is important that the surface you are applying it to is smooth, with no dust particles, and that it has previously been sealed. A good trick that I picked up from "This Old House" is to use a razor blade to scrape the finish between coats. The razor doesn't clog and will only remove the high spots caused by dust particles in the finish. The other main advantage of the razor is that it will keep you from sanding through the finish. And remember, if you sand through the finish, you have to start the whole process over.

As always, have fun sanding (or scraping)!

*Scott*

### DECORATIVE WOOD INLAY



Zachary Taylor

At some point in your woodworking endeavors, you'll find yourself doing inlay of some sort. It might be intentional, such as the addition of stringing to table legs or banding to the lid of a box, or it might be to cover up a mistake, like when I had to inlay an escutcheon into the front of a box to cover up an error I made cutting the key hole. Whatever the reason, it never hurts to have a book handy to get you through these times. *Decorative Wood Inlay* is the first book I reach for when I want a refresher to get me prepared for my next inlay venture.

Zachary Taylor is a woodworker from England who comes complete with the dry, wry humor we tend to associate with our brethren from across the pond. His writing style is clear and concise and easy to follow, but also very "British". While wordsmiths will find joy in such sentences as, "The stroke is completed with the same attitude of the blade to the hone," others might have trouble digesting the English nuance. In this case, he means the blade should be in the same position on the sharpening stone when it ends as when it began.

The book is organized in an easy-to-follow format, beginning with a brief history of inlay and ending with, as he so aptly puts it, "the finish". Some of the chapters are a bit sparse, like the history (he does call it "brief") and the last two chapters on adhesives and finishes. In his defense, however, I would point out that a book written on inlaying wood in a decorative manner should mostly cover the process of inlaying wood and not focus on the most basic mechanics of woodworking.

The first few chapters are useful to the beginning woodworker who already knows they want to incorporate inlay of some sort in many of their pieces. Chapter 2 covers the tools and equipment one might find useful while Chapter 3 discusses what Mr. Taylor deems to be important features for a shop setup. It is important to keep in mind that his ideal workshop is created with his kind of work in mind, so it certainly wouldn't work for someone who builds kitchen cabinets for a living.

The bulk of the book, of course, is spent discussing various types of inlay, covering several techniques for each type. Mr. Taylor first starts with one of the simplest types, corner banding. His first method uses a custom purfling tool made for him by Carl Holtey, one of Britain's master plane makers. The second and third methods involve multi-tools (e.g. Dremel) and hand-made scratch-stocks.

He follows this process for each technique he discusses – how to perform the function with a variety of tools, going into enough detail with each method that they all seem comfortable and do-able. Throughout the next chapters, he outlines inlaying stringing, inlaying curved stringing, inlaying panels and motifs, and inlaying irregular shapes. Each technique he discusses builds upon the previous, finally ending with the high-end techniques of inlaying guitar rosettes and purfling.

Over the past seven years, I've amassed a nice little collection of woodworking books. Many of them are quite enjoyable and do get read from time to time. But this book gets pulled down from the shelf for reference and for reading pleasure more than almost any other. I think it would be a fine and inexpensive addition to any woodworker's library.

### Library Reminders

The books, magazines, and tools of the library are there for the benefit of all of the guild members. Please keep that in mind as you check materials out and try to return them in a timely manner.

### Announcements

#### Faust Park Restoration Projects

With several important projects completed, the people at Faust Park have managed to get the Chicken House ready for conversion into a woodworking shop. This is a great opportunity to help out the St. Louis community, build new friendships, and learn some great woodworking skills along the way. For more information, contact Scott Wunder via email at [wunderwoods@sbcglobal.net](mailto:wunderwoods@sbcglobal.net).

The SLWG board members are looking for ideas. Are there any community projects in your area where guild members could offer their assistance? Do you know of any ways in which the guild could do something to better your community? Think about it! And if something comes to mind, please contact Scott Wunder, President, at 314-731-2484.

## Toy Report

We delivered 228 items to the hospitals in April. Our grand total of toys distributed since 1994 is now up to 30,598. We can currently use any craft items, including coyotes, cats, heart medallions, bear kits, etc. With Memorial Day and the Fourth of July coming up, patriotic items would also be great. As per usual, see the guild website, [www.stlwoodworkersguild.org](http://www.stlwoodworkersguild.org), for patterns. Call John Patton at 314-843-0616 or Steve Briner at 636-922-1947 for patterns, parts, or to arrange pickup or delivery.

## Other Notes

There were a total of 60 members and guests at the April meeting last month. Keep up the great turnout! There were three raffle items; Harry Hodge won the \$50 Woodcraft gift card, Tom Tupper won a raised panel router bit set, and Bill Siefert won a parting tool for lathe work.

An idea was brought up at the last planning meeting to have SLWG hats, t-shirts, and sweatshirts made.

## Reconstructing A Historic Theatre Hand Rail (con't)

With just a few small parts of the remaining rails to go off of, Mike could determine a few things about the original rails. They were originally rabbeted to fit the cast iron balusters and assembled with splines. The straight runs were birch and the curves were poplar.

In laying out a game plan, Mike came up with several problems he needed to address. There were a lot of compound miters, many at different angles, varying between 89 and 91 degrees. Trying to cut the miters after the pieces were profiled would have been too difficult, so he glued up larger blocks for each turn and carve them in place. He decided to use Miterbond and butt joints for joinery. Miterbond is a cyanoacrylate (CA) gel glue with a strong bond and a long open time that adheres in about five seconds after the accelerator is used.

Now that he had a plan in place, Mike had to find the tools to complete the job. He did inherit a lot of tools from his grandfather, but most of them were not suited for making handrails. Enter Kevin Brennan, owner of Kansas City Windsor Tool Works. Mike asked Kevin if he would help provide him with the tools – beaders and scrapers – to do this work. Kevin agreed and they set about making cutters and scrapers for the various profiles, using cutoff pieces of handsaw blades and spring steel.



The actual construction of the railing began with the newel caps, followed by the segmented volute blanks. The biggest difficulties came about when trying to calculate the angles and stopped rises to allow for maintaining the proper thickness. The newel caps began as solid blocks which were shaped by hand with rattail rasps and files and then finished with carving tools and scrapers. The curved sections were glued up into one big block and then shaped. The bottom channel, which fit in the metal railing, was carved with a power carver. Once that fit properly, a Lancelot, mounted to a grinding wheel, hogged off most of the waste. The shape was further refined with the power carver before it was finished with carving tools and scrapers.

Three full weeks were spent carving, scraping, beading, and sanding the compound risers. In the mean time, Mike had a company make a production run of the straight railing sections. But even these needed a lot of refining before they could be permanently fit into place.

Once all of the straight sections were glued to the carved turn sections, he had to shape the blend of straight and curved by hand. Finally, every inch of the rail was sanded by hand and a dark pigmented stain was applied. It was finished with four coats of polyurethane. Mike estimated throughout the project he walked an average of two to three miles per day, mostly up and down stairs. The entire job ended up being 1323 linear feet of railing. He usually worked 10 hours each day on the project and finished it on the last day of the five-week deadline.

If you're ever in the Kansas City area, you're invited to stop by the building to see the handrail in person. While you're there, you can enjoy a movie while being served food and drinks as it is now a dinner theater.

## Show and Tell

Cecil Robertson taught a Windsor chair class at Woodcraft in March. Three of his students came in with their completed chairs to show them off.

Don Snyder brought in an umbrella stand he made with mahogany.

Walter Henderson brought in two psalteries, one made from box elder and another made from paduk and canarywood.

Rick Sanders passed around his latest marquetry project, a pair of boots, and a book from the 1800's called Practical Carpentry.

Vic Barr needed some lower-priced items for his art shows, so he came up with several puzzle ideas. They are all laser-cut for precision.



Don Snyder



Walter Henderson



Rick Sanders



Vic Barr

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

### Thursday, June 17th

On Thursday, June 17th, Rich Petty will join us from Mexico, Missouri, to talk about his company, Greener Lumber. He will bring samples of reclaimed old growth lumber from Belize and discuss the process of picking up sinker logs from the 1800's and milling them into useable lumber.

### Thursday, July 15th

Jerry Cox will give a presentation on the process of designing furniture.

## Other Notes

Because we were under budget for the Frank Klausz Dovetail Box class in March, the board decided to get a gift and a plaque for the owner of the American Woodworking Academy and then refund the rest to the attendees.

## New Board Member Nominees

At the last meeting, the new board and officer nominees were announced and accepted by acclamation. Let's do our best to make them welcome!

Scott Wunder, President

Director-Bob Colegate

Jim Hoeller, Vice President

Director-Mark Koritz

Larry Grzovic, Treasurer

Director-Mike Sistek

Keith Lissant, Secretary

Director-Wayne Watson

## Start Marking Your Calendars

The fall guild picnic will be on September 18th.

If you have an idea of where you might want to go, then see one of the board members or elected officers and offer your suggestion.

## Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Type of woodworking you enjoy \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you obtain this application and learn about this Guild?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*If you would like to join the St. Louis Woodworkers Guild please attend our next meeting or mail this application and your check for \$25 for one years dues to:  
St. Louis Woodworkers Guild, 2077 Congressional Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146.*

