

St. Louis

Woodworkers Guild



June 2010
Issue 303

Our Next Meeting

Thursday 7:00 PM
June 17, 2010

Woodcraft Supply Store
2077 Congressional Dr.
Maryland, Heights, MO

Guild President Scott Wunder.

Scott will give a condensed presentation of his Logs to Lumber seminar from last November. This two-day seminar was packed with information that Scott promised to share with the rest of the members. You will learn what it takes to make high-quality lumber for your projects and the different ways to do it. This talk starts from picking out the best trees and will go through the entire process from sawing to drying. Come prepared to ask lots of questions

Carving a Music Stand by Boris Khechoyan

May 20th, 2010

This month's presenter, Boris Khechoyan, is no stranger to the St. Louis Woodworkers Guild. Over the years, he has given several presentations on wood carving and several members have taken carving classes in his workshop. For anyone who has joined since Boris' last presentation, a little history might be in order.

In 1990, with the help of Catholic Charities, Boris made his way to America as a refugee from civil war in Azerbaijan. He arrived here with little more than a box of chisels, his fine arts education from Azerbaijan College, and work experience from a restoration shop. After years of hard work, many of his finished pieces now end up in California or New York where they demand top dollar.

When he first started carving back in 1978, he mostly worked with beech, mahogany, and oak; he didn't carve basswood until five years later. He said it was like carving butter after having used oak for so long! Nowadays, he prefers mahogany and walnut for his carving pieces. Both are stable, easily found with clear pieces, and look great when finished. He prefers his wood air-dried, but he'll use any wood he can find.

After a brief introduction, Boris spent some time detailed the process he went through when a client asked him to turn a walnut coffee table into a music stand. Since the client is a doctor, Boris' design idea incorporated the caduceus, the staff used as an emblem by members of the medical profession.

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*Meeting Room, Mailing Address
Courtesy of Woodcraft*

Scott's Thoughts

June 2010

I was showing a friend of mine, Dan Brown, some pieces that I had built and showed him one of my favorites. It is a secretary made from a curly cherry log, with most of the major components milled from one really wide and thick resawn board. I was trying to impress with the wood, but the conversation quickly turned to the finish. I didn't think the finish was anything special – it was the wood that was special. The finish was just oil and wax. Then he asked me about the color and I realized what he was getting at. The color was a dark cherry, which was obviously altered in some way. I told him that I used lye and he admitted that he never had.

This surprised me, because Dan is one of the best woodworkers I know. He has worked in the biggest shops in town and learned through the proper channels, not from watching "This Old House" like me. I thought this was an old trick that he would be aware of, but he wasn't. I explained to Dan how I did it and I figured if he didn't know about the beauty of lye, others may not know either. I talked about this at a guild meeting a few years ago when I built the piece, but I thought it would be good to officially put it in writing.

The piece I showed Dan and the guild is shown below. The color is a medium dark cherry and the light and dark areas are created by the curliness of the wood, not from splotchy stain (as you move around the piece to view it from different angles, the light and dark areas shift). That's one of the main reasons to use lye. It changes the actual color of the wood without covering it. It is consistent and works below the surface as well, so sanding through the stain is not an issue. And, after it is oiled, light can penetrate the surface and show the true depth of the piece. It is a perfect way to get an aged cherry look almost immediately.

The process is very simple, but sourcing lye is now more difficult. Apparently Home Depot no longer carries Red Devil lye, which is what I have. There are alternatives on the web, but nothing I can recommend, since I haven't used them. After you get your lye, mix about 2 tablespoons of it (sodium hydroxide) with a pint of water. This ratio is not critical. Start with this ratio and do a sample, if it is too dark add more water. If it is not dark enough add more lye. Apply the solution to the wood with a brush and saturate the surface. Keep a wet edge and make sure to blend in drops and splatters. With a little bit of time everything will end up at the same color. Let it dry and then finish as you normally would after staining. I have used oil and wax and lacquer with great results.

A few notes before you try this at home. The lye is aggressive. It will melt natural hair brushes and is not good to breathe. Make sure to wear gloves, eye protection and that your space is well ventilated (I prefer the great outdoors). Cleanup is easy, just put it down the drain.

Scott



Over the years, I've bought and tried many different kinds of chisels, from contemporary Stanley and Blue Marple bought through retail stores to 50 year old Union and Buck Chisels I picked up at estate and garage sales. The new chisels are obviously easy to get in the full sets, but the tool steel is questionable. The older chisels tend to have better edge retention

and sharpen easier, but some of the desirable sizes are a little harder to find.

Either way, I found myself frustrated with them. So with the last box I sold, I decided to treat myself to something pretty much guaranteed to reduce my frustration – I bought a set of five Lie-Nielsen Bevel Edge Chisels (with the split leather roll) from Woodcraft.

The five-chisel set includes the 1/8", the 1/4", the 3/8", the 1/2", and the 3/4" chisels. The Lie-Nielsen Bevel Edge chisels are made of A-2 Tool Steel, hardened to Rockwell 60-62, cryogenically treated, and double-tempered. They come ground with a 30 degree bevel and dead-flat backs. The handles are Main-harvested Hornbeam, which gives them a great tactile feel when used. The only thing they didn't come with was chisel guards. I fixed that with an order from Lee Valley (\$6 for a set of 10).

When I got them home, I set about getting them ready for use. I started by flattening the backs, which just took a minute or two on my 1000 and 8000 grit water stones. Since they came ground to 30 degrees, I put a 35 degree secondary bevel on them. After putting a nice edge on all five chisels, my total time invested in them was about an hour, all said and done.

I was able to use them occasionally over the following two or three months, but I didn't really have the opportunity to put them through a real test. In March, that opportunity came in the way of the Frank Klausz Dovetail Box class. During that class, I used three of them to chop out my pins and tails with great success. The edges held up well throughout the weekend and I was pleased with how well they worked.

After using them on one or two other projects since, I can still report that I'm happy with their performance. So I think it is time to get rid of my other sets of chisels. Well... at least the Stanley and Blue Marples sets.

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.

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

In May, 188 toys were delivered to the local hospitals. Our grand total to date (since 1994) is 30,786 toys. We can currently use any craft items you might be able to make, from coyotes to cats and heart medallions to bears. Patriotic items will also be in demand around this time of the year. If you need patterns or help, contact Steve Briner (636-922-1947) or John Patton (314-843-0616) or go to the website, www.stlwoodworkersguild.org.

Other Notes

There were a total of 57 members and guests at the May meeting last month. Keep up the great turnout! There were three raffle items; John DeLuca won the 50/50 drawing.

Mike Sisteck said there was no new information yet on the Guild hats, t-shirts, and sweatshirts.

Carving a Music Stand by Boris Khechoyan (cont)

The first part of any project for Boris is usually wood selection. Since this was to be a piece made with the wood from a walnut coffee table, it was the easiest part of this project.



During the design phase, he worked out his ideas for the music stand. His ideas of how to design the caduceus were worked out between him and the client until full agreement was reached. After that, full-scale templates of each piece were created.

Construction of the piece began with the Caduceus, which consisted of several pieces of wood. The snakes were roughed out on the table saw and then carved to final shape with carving chisels. The wings were roughed out at the band saw. At that point, he used straight chisels, not curved gouges, to add the feather details to the wings, cutting and undercutting until he achieved the final desired shape. He used straight chisels because they gave him more control and he didn't have to keep switching out gouges to get the amount of curve he wanted. Boris pointed out here that one of the best lessons he could pass on to us is to know when to STOP carving. Making your carving too delicate can make it unusable as a finished piece, especially when it is going to be used on a daily basis, like a music stand.

Construction of the base began before the Caduceus was completed. Boris likes to work on several different projects at the same time, so this was nothing unusual for him. When asked how many hours he spends working on a piece, he replied that he doesn't try to calculate the number of hours he spends on a project. Because of his methods of working on several different pieces throughout each day, calculating the hours spent on one of them can be difficult. Instead, he said he just works on the project until it is completed.

Like the Caduceus, the base started with a pattern. After the pattern was traced onto the walnut, it was rough cut on the band saw and then taken to final shape with a router and a template bit. Gold leaf was applied to the edge of all three sides after shaping was completed.

The top of the stand was carved first with a router to remove most of the waste. The pattern was marked and carved with care, leaving most of the carved area at least 1/2" thick, which is important for strength. The edges were reinforced with purple heart to prevent the top from warping.

Finally, the tilting mechanism was designed and carved. Since this was a music stand, he decided to make the mechanism look like a Treble Clef. The handles, made of solid brass with mother-of-pearl accents, were added before a lacquer finish was applied.

If you want to learn more about carving in the European style, Boris can be reached at 314-843-3236 or via email at boris@woodcarver4u.com. You can also find out more information at www.woodcarver4u.com.



Show and Tell

Steve Briner showed off some mahogany and silver maple boxes he made from some scraps he aquired at Hibdon Hardwoods.

Vic Barr showed a custom pen box he made with maple and walnut.



Steve and Vic's boxes



Steve Briner (l) and Vic Barr (r) show off their boxes.

Mentoring Program

The SLWG's mentoring program aims to help new members increase their skills in safe woodworking by participating in projects with longer-term members. As part of this program, recent member Kent Robinson has designed and built the entertainment center, shown beside him in the picture, for his TV and audio equipment. Kent worked with Don Snyder to complete his project in the mentoring program. New members who want to learn more about this program should contact its coordinator, Mark Koritz (mkoritz@charter.net or 314-579-0401).



Calendar of Upcoming Events

Thursday, July 15th

Greener Lumber LLC was recently featured in the April 2010 issue of Popular Woodworking Magazine. This company, based out of Mexico, Missouri, works hard to provide woodworkers everywhere with high quality old growth lumber from South America. One of the owners, Rich Petty, will be on-hand to talk about his company, what it does and how, and show everyone some examples of the wood that comes out of rivers in Belize!

Thursday, August 19th

Jerry Cox will be discussing the design process and how that plays an important part in woodworking.

Other Notes

Spring Fine Arts and Crafts Festival

On Saturday, May 15th, two guild members – Vic Barr and Mark Koritz – had booths at the Spring Fine Arts and Crafts Festival in Faust Park. It is always great to see fellow guild members making a presence at a major juried event! Way to go Vic and Mark!

**Start Marking
Your Calendars**

The fall guild picnic will be on September 18th.

If you have any ideas 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.*

