

AUSTRALIAN

Wood

REVIEW

132

LAST CHANCE
TO ENTER!
MAKER OF
THE YEAR 2026
PRESENTED BY JAMES FORBES
(MACHINEHOUSE)

COMPOSING A CABINET

Krenov's
designing in
3D method

THE ROCKING CHAIR PROJECT

Make a future
family heirloom

RAF NATHAN

A tribute to
an influential
woodworker

\$12.50 / NZ \$16.00 (incl GST)
PRINT POST APPROVED 100010918

ISSN 1039-9925



03



Dedicated to creating Australian tools + machinery that enhance your woodworking experience.



BENCHTOP DRILL PRESS
330MM (13")
OT-DP33016B #9700082
240V 0.5HP
12 Speed



DISC SANDER
300MM (12")
OT-DS-305 CAST ALUM #8722401
or OT-DS-305 CAST STEEL #8043221



BELT + DISC SANDER
OT-BDS-760X125 #8043013
25mm x 760mm (1"x30") Belt
+ 125mm (5") Disc



BENCHTOP THICKNESSER
OT-TH-330 #8001750
330mm (13") with
Segmented
Style Spiral Cutterhead



**WET STONE / WATER COOLED
SHARPENER + BUFFER**
200MM (8")
OT-WSS-200 #8001841
180W 1450RPM 220G Disc



SCROLL SAW
410MM (16")
OT-SS-410 #8100263
Variable Speed
Includes Flexible Shaft +
Rotary Tool Attachment

Crafted from over 40 years of experience in the Australian market.

www.oltretools.com.au

WOODFAST®

EST. 1941 AUSTRALIA



AUTHORISED AUSTRALIAN DEALERS

VIC

JCWalsh
03 9335 5033
jcwalsh.com.au
Pop's Shed
03 9727 0611
popsshed.com.au
Machinery
Maintenance VIC
03 9720 1678
mmvic.com.au

TAS

TheWoodworking
Emporium
03 6344 7300
woodworkingemporium.com.au

WA | NT | ACT

Beyond Tools
08 9209 7400
beyondtools.com.au

SA

Harrison's Hardware
08 8126 3874
harrisonshardware.com.au

NSW

Trend Timbers
02 4577 5277
trendtimbers.com.au

QLD

Woodwork
Machinery Plus
07 3705 8558
woodworkmachinery.com.au
HammerRoo
07 3180 2311
hammerroo.com.au

www.woodfastmachinery.com.au

THE BEST JUST GOT BETTER



THE PRODRILL PRESS TABLE JUST GOT BETTER WITH THE PRODRILL PRESS TABLE V3 - PREMIUM

The ProDrill Press Table has been in our top 10 list of products for over a decade. In this time we have received many comments with the most significant one being, "why isn't the fence higher?" After significant research and refinement, we have just released the PRO Drill Press Premium.

THE KEY IMPROVEMENTS ARE:

- 75mm tall fence with embedded setting tape for stops
- 2 x robust positioners with ratchet lever knobs to ensure the fence is held firmly in position
- Heavy duty embedded tracks for fence positioning.
- Easily read adhesive metric tapes, that are able to be set accurately from the centre point of your drill press
- Heavy duty knuckle hold-down clamp with clamping capacity of 80mm tall workpieces

900mm Telescopic Fence Version also available
Search Drill Press tables for more details



WANT A SPECIAL ROUTER BIT?



Check out the thousands of bits in the Whiteside Catalogue, send the Part Code to us, we'll then send a prompt quote for delivery to your workshop and we will get it to your workshop in 15 business days.

STEP 1
Browse catalogue



STEP 2
Submit cart



STEP 3
Receive & review quote



24hrs

STEP 4
Follow link to pay



24hrs

STEP 5
Order arrives 2-3 weeks



STEP 6
Route with Whiteside



Contents

ISSUE 132 – SEPTEMBER 2026



PROJECTS

- 28 **The Rocking Chair Project**
Ben Adams finds that skills he learnt in the performing arts can be useful for chairmakers.
- 50 **The Sliding Deadman**
Damion Fauser shows how to make the best workbench accessory you never knew you needed.
- 74 **Mid-Century Plant Stands**
From a pile of hardwood flooring scraps, Charles Mak shows how to make versatile and stable plant stands.

PROFILE

- 36 **Raf Nathan, Woodworker**
A (very) personal tribute to an influential woodworker. Story by Linda Nathan.
- 42 **Traditions Revisited**
Aspen Golann combines her artistry with 17th century woodworking techniques and forms to create contemporary works.

TECHNIQUE

- 22 **Composing a Cabinet**
James Krenov's 3D approach to design was based on models and close observation of the material. Story by Lachlan Park.
- 69 **Roadmap to Carving**
Carol Russell reflects on attitudes and techniques that help to develop carving skills.

FEATURE

- 55 **Making a Masterpiece**
We interview Danish furniture designer Rasmus Fenhann to discuss the making of his incredible *Cosmos Cabinet*.
- 65 **Beneath the Brush**
Jake Lunniss looks back in time to explain why Japan's woodcraft is widely venerated while China's is not.
- 82 **Man and His Tools**
Mike Preston reviews Gil Rogers' new book that illustrates close to 2,000 hand tools.





28



36



56



50



64

REGULARS

- 06 Editor's Letter
- 12 Maker of the Year 2026,
presented by Hare & Forbes
- 19 Subscribe to Wood Review
- 80 Wood Diary

TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

08 Machinery & Tool Reviews

- Zen-Wu block plane
- Tooley Park 3-in-1 gauge
- Hongdui chisel sharpening jig system
- Hongdui dovetail saw guide
- Zen-Wu Y2 chisels

Editor's Letter

Writing a story about my late (it's very hard to say that) husband, Raf Nathan wasn't easy. I went back to it every now and then when I could handle looking at it. How personal should one get with a topic that couldn't get much more personal?

Just to be clear, Raf would never have permitted an article, let alone a cover, to feature him. He had a good sense of self but that was a step too far. For Raf, and for many of us, woodworking can be a 'metaphor' for any kind of creative pursuit that can anchor a life. It certainly was for Raf, however for him it went further.

Raf worked as a full-time furniture and cabinetmaker for many years. He wrote innumerable articles and reviews for this magazine, and he conceived and established the first large scale public wood shows that took place in Australia. Along with me, he founded this magazine. There's no denying that in Australia he was a very influential woodworker, which is why this issue contains a tribute to him, albeit written from a personal point of view.

When I think about it, we're being flooded with imagery, words and sounds that are artificially generated, so to hang on to our human made lives perhaps we really do need to keep it personal in any case.

It's all about the process

The AI revolution is all about speeding things up in search of greater efficiency and productivity. But for some it's definitely not the shortest path to generating ideas. Aspen Golann is an award-winning US maker whose approach is perhaps the antithesis of AI. She says, 'Basically, I think hand tool woodworking moves at roughly the same speed as my thinking...long stretches of repetitive work are how I arrive at creative decisions. The toil is part of the thinking. It's how I process ideas, emotions, observations, and questions before they emerge as form. That pace allows for a relationship between maker, material, and object and feels incredibly direct to me.' Aspen has her own unique (and personal) way of translating traditional techniques and forms into the things she makes. She expresses these ideas and many more in the interview from p.42.

This issue we also learn about the work of Danish furniture designer maker Rasmus Fenhann. He explains how his astounding *Cosmos Cabinet* represents the culmination of 30 years at the bench and is an unfettered exploration of process. 'Whenever I felt a particular detail or idea was necessary, I made it regardless of the time required', he says. His masterpiece is a celebration of what he has learnt and it is also a reflection on contemporary patterns of consumption and waste. Turn to p.56 to find out more.

Maker of the Year 2026

At time of writing, we're just a few weeks off the deadline for Maker of the Year, presented by Hare & Forbes, and already there is an incredible array of work to be seen on the Maker of the Year website, and on our Facebook and Instagram pages. You still have time to add your work to Wood Review's yearly showcase of fine woodworking and wood art. Enter now at www.makeroftheyear.com.au

Linda Nathan, Editor
linda@woodreview.com.au



www.woodreview.com.au

PRINT AND ONLINE EDITOR:

Linda Nathan
linda@woodreview.com.au

CONTRIBUTORS:

James Brook, Damion Fauser, David Luckensmeyer
Neil Erasmus, Robert Howard, Charles Mak
Terry Martin, Raf Nathan, Darren Oates
Andrew Potocnik, Carol Russell, Graham Sands
Richard Vaughan, Peter Young.

PUBLISHER:

James Ostinga

STUDIO MANAGER:

Lauren Esdaile

SENIOR DESIGNER:

Bree Normoyle

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Graham Sands

MARKETING MANAGER:

Lucy Yaffa

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

WWW.GREATMAGAZINES.COM.AU
CALL: 1800 807760
EMAIL: subscriptons@yaffa.com.au

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

1 year / 4 issues \$45
1 year PLUS (print + digital) \$50

NATIONAL SALES MANAGER:

Jodie Reid
Tel: (02) 9213 8261
jodiereid@yaffa.com.au

ADVERTISING PRODUCTION:

John Viskovich
Tel: (02) 9213 8215
johnviskovich@yaffa.com.au

PRODUCTION MANAGER:

Michelle Liebenberg

PUBLISHED BY:

Yaffa Media Pty Ltd
ABN 54 002 699 345
17-21 Bellevue Street, Surry Hills 2010
Tel: (02) 9281 2333



ALL MAIL TO:
GPO Box 606, Sydney NSW 2001

RECOMMENDED RETAIL PRICE:

\$12.50

ISSN:

1039-9925

COVER:

Raf Nathan in his Brisbane workshop.

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY:

Linda Nathan

Australian Wood Review is copyright, no part of it can be reproduced in any form by any means without prior written permission of the publisher. All material is printed in good faith, however the publisher will not be held liable for any form of damage whatsoever or liability, claim, or proceeding arising from printing of same. The opinions of writers and advertisers presented in this magazine are not necessarily those of the publishers.

SAFETY: Woodworking can be dangerous. Do not undertake any work, process or action without adequate skill, training, safety equipment and/or awareness.

IN STOCK IN FIVE STORES NATIONALLY

The Swivel Head Wood Lathe is mainly made up from cast iron to provide the rigidity that's required and needed in all good wood lathes. Changing the spindle speed from 500 to 2000rpm is extremely easy via the stepless variable speed control lever mounted on the front of the head.

The lathe comes complete with an outboard tool rest extension which is used to get the bowl rest into the best position when turning with the head rotated. The head and tailstock both have 2 morse tapers and the drive spindle thread is a common 1" x 10tpi. Supplied as standard with the machine is a 4 prong drive centre, revolving tailstock centre & faceplate.



\$2,585

WL-46A

(W387)

**ELECTRONIC VARIABLE
SPEED WOOD LATHE**

Ø462 x 1194mm turning capacity | Electronic speeds 100-3200rpm | Cast iron bed, head and tailstock | 1.5kW/2hp, 240V motor

MINI WOOD LATHE



WL-14V \$605 (W385)

- Ø356 x 470mm turning capacity
- Electronic variable speed (450-3850rpm)
- Digital readout speed display
- 12 position spindle indexing
- 0.75hp, 240V motor

SWIVEL HEAD WOOD LATHE



WL-18 \$715 (W382)

- Ø310 x 900mm turning capacity
- Swivelling headstock
- Variable speed 500-2000rpm
- 0.75kW/1hp, 240V motor



WL-20 \$825 (W384)

- Ø370 x 1100mm turning capacity
- Variable speed 500-2000rpm
- Swivelling headstock
- 0.75kW/1hp, 240V motor

OPTIONAL ACCESSORIES



**CTR-4 Curved
Tool Rest Set**

(W295)



**BSS-5075
Bowl Sanding Tool**

(W305)



**WT-3C Carbide
Wood Turning Tools
6 Piece Set**

(W300)



**WSC-KIT
Scroll Chuck
Accessory Kit
Suits WSC-100 Scroll
Chuck**

(W375)



**Replacement
Carbide Tip - 4 Piece
Set - Suits WT-3C**

(W300T)

View and purchase these items online: <https://www.machineryhouse.com.au/AWR26009>

Specifications & prices are subject to change without notification and are valid until 31-10-26



**HARE & FORBES
MACHINERY HOUSE**

SYDNEY
(02) 9890 9111
1/2 Windsor Rd,
Northmead

BRISBANE
(07) 3715 2200
625 Boundary Rd,
Coopers Plains

MELBOURNE
(03) 9212 4422
4 Abbotts Rd,
Dandenong

PERTH
(08) 9373 9999
11 Valentine St,
Kewdale

ADELAIDE
(08) 9373 9969
11/20 Cheltenham Pde,
Woodville SA 5011

03_AWR_010926

Zen-Wu Block Plane

Reviewed by *Damion Fauser*

My immediate impression on lifting this tool out of the box was 'whoa, this is light, it's got to be titanium to be this light'. It indeed is, and immediately my curiosity was picqued. I've had this plane on my bench for some time now and let me just say, it is a beautiful and effective little tool.

The designers have clearly taken some inspiration from the Norris stable, with the aesthetic and ergonomics of the timber palm rest paying clear homage. It also contrasts strikingly with the satin titanium body, which shows some elegant detailing. In a further, and more practical tip of the cap to the Norris heritage, the lateral and depth adjustment mechanism features the threaded rod for depth control and the pivoting axis for lateral adjustments. The engineers at Zen-Wu have made one small but significant change to a true Norris system, building in a ball-and-socket arrangement as the interface between the blade and the adjustment mechanism. This is easy to assemble and works well in use.

Overall, this adjustment system works very well, with smooth and precise adjustments possible without the requirement to loosen the threaded locking wheel on the palm rest. Zen-Wu literature does advise that for very fine lateral adjustments, the user should instead hold the whole tool in the hand and gently tap the adjustment knob on a bench surface – I tried this and it indeed works, but I'd suggest you could also use a gentle tap from a small brass hammer to achieve the same effect.

The thread on the depth control rod is cut crisp and fine, with a small amount of backlash to be accounted for, but this is common to all planes and is therefore merely an observation and not a criticism.

The blade is quite interesting, with the main body being titanium and the cutting edge a section of tool steel fixed to the

blade body via a lapped and sliding dovetail form of joinery. The cutting edge is genuinely ready to use out of the box, and while the precise metallurgy of the blade is not evident on the Zen-Wu website, it sharpens easily and seems to hold an edge well. The long edges of the blade are perfectly parallel, making registration in common honing guides very easy and accurate. The blade is a whisker over 4.5mm thick, which aids in reducing chatter in use.

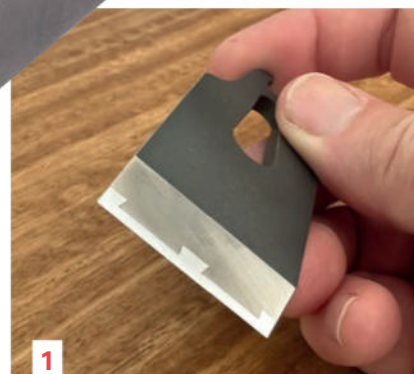
The back of the blade is polished and flattened extremely well, to the point that the tool cuts very well right out of the box. Blade width is 32mm, a nice balance to be able to work small surfaces and edges as well as being wide enough to flush down inlays and the like. The bed is nicely ground and has an area that is very shallowly ground out, which serves to reduce the contact area between the blade and the bed, reducing friction to allow depth adjustments to be smoother. The bed is ground at 12°, which combined with a factory bevel of 30° makes a total cutting angle of 42°, common to many block planes and appropriate for this style of tool.

The tool is 150mm long, 40mm wide and 55mm high when assembled, making it small and ergonomic enough for easy one-handed operation, even for someone like me with smaller hands. The mass of the tool is a mere 360g, and it hardly feels like you have anything in your hand at all, so I suspect work sessions of extended duration won't be



Left: Light at 360g, the plane body is made of titanium.

1. Tool steel is dovetailed into the titanium blade body.
2. Showing the adjustment mechanism.



an issue when compared to some other planes in this class that are substantially heavier in the hand.

The sole of the tool is ground beautifully flat and is very finely corrugated, greatly reducing surface contact and therefore friction in use. Whilst I don't see this as an essential feature in a tool of this scale, it's clear the designers at Zen-Wu have done extensive research and are making genuine attempts to produce a tool of the highest quality.

This is a beautiful tool, both to admire and more importantly to use in the hand. It is certainly on the upper end of the price range for a small block plane, and therefore I suspect it will cater to the more discerning end of the market.

Review tool supplied by Zen-Wu and available from zenwutoolworks.com

Damion Fauser is a designer maker and also teaches from his Brisbane workshop. Learn more at damionfauser.com/



triton

EXPERIENCE TRITON IN ACTION, AGAIN.

Visit Timbecon at Tools, Timber & Techniques



Perth, WA

September 12th 8:30am - 3pm
31 Canvale Road, Canning Vale, WA



Melbourne, VIC

October 10th 8:30am - 3pm
594 - 598 Edgars Road, Epping, VIC



View The Full Range

BORN HERE. **BACK HERE.**

www.tritontools.com

Tooley Park 3-in-1 Gauge

Reviewed by Robert Howard

Marking gauges were traditionally fitted with a pin and were designed to mark along the length of a board. Cutting gauges were fitted with a small blade and designed to mark across the board. A blade marks a clean line across the grain, whereas a pin tears a line across grain, but marks cleanly along the grain.

Marking gauges (with the pin) are more common on the secondhand market, but the cutting gauges are more versatile, doing a clean job both across and along the grain. However, care must be taken when using a blade along the grain, as it will have a tendency to follow the grain and thus veer off-line if the grain does not run parallel to the edge.

This gauge, made in England, has an unorthodox construction that cleverly combines both marking and cutting in the one tool, and also allows it to work as a pencil gauge. The usual construction is to pass the stem of the gauge through a mortise cut into the fence, but this gauge seats the stem in a notch cut into the upper edge of the fence. It is sized to sit proud of the upper surface, so that a spring-loaded brass strip passing above it secures it in place.

When the stem is removed from the fence, it allows access to two holes drilled into the bottom of the notch, which store the fixtures that hold the blade or the pin in place at the end of



the stem. Each fixture, with the blade or pin in place, is inserted into a brass tube fixed to the end of the stem and held there by a finger tightened brass locking screw. This locking screw passes through a brass barrel nut fitted to the end of the stem. The tube holds a normal pencil for the third type of use. The fence has a brass wear strip inlaid into its front face.

The tool is beautifully made. The surfaces are silky to touch, with all the corners having small, flat arrises. The brass fittings also carefully finished and fitted, and suitably substantial in size.

There are two points I will make about this tool. Whilst the blade and pin fixtures are housed within the tool, the blade and pin are not, so care is needed not to lose either one when using it as a pencil gauge.

A slightly more subtle point is one I have learned from the gauges of Colen Clenton and Chris Vesper. Careful inspection of their gauges shows how they have designed their locking mechanisms so the stem is locked both vertically and horizontally in the fence. The Tooley Park gauge locks vertically, but has a small amount of horizontal movement which could be eliminated by either method. It is a subtle point as I said, and it probably does not affect the accuracy of the tool. What it does show is how the best makers of the best tools pay attention to the smallest details in their quest for perfection.

Review tool supplied and available from <https://tooleypark.com/>

Robert Howard teaches woodworking and woodcarving from his Brisbane workshop, roberthoward.com.au



GIFKINS DOVETAIL

The only Australian made dovetail jig!

WWW.GIFKINS.COM.AU

THREE WAYS WE SUPPORT YOUR BOXMAKING

OUR CUSTOMISED BOX MAKING COURSES

OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL, LIVE 10AM SUNDAYS, AND OUR LARGE VIDEO LIBRARY

THE GIFKINS JIG AND BOX MAKING ACCESSORIES



SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR DETAILS WWW.GIFKINS.COM.AU 0411 283 802

Proud Sponsor of



THE WOODWORKING MASTERS

Over 45 years of quality Australian made tools.

For quality tools in woodworking, cabinetry, joinery, furniture making and panels, Carbitool has you covered. As a trusted Australian family owned business, you can rely on the Woodworking Masters.



- ROUTER BITS
- SAW BLADES
- WOOD BORING DRILLS
- MEASURING TOOLS
- PLANER & BUZZER BLADES and much more

Shop now at www.carbitool.com.au



**Free Shipping
over \$90 in
Australia**

**10% OFF
FIRST ORDER**



A family
owned
Australian
business





Last chance to enter

Entries close Sunday 30 August 2026



The Maker of the Year Awards, presented by Hare & Forbes, is looking for the best woodworkers from Australia and around the world.

More than
\$20,000
in prizes, including \$11,500 in cash

Categories

- Furniture
- Art & Objects
- Musical Instruments
- Recycled & Rescued
- Woodturning (Jan Pennell Award)
- Student (Secondary & Tertiary)

Top 100 entries published in Australian Wood Review

Enter now

www.makeroftheyear.com.au

Entries close Sunday 30 August 2026

For terms and conditions visit makeroftheyear.com.au



PRESENTED BY

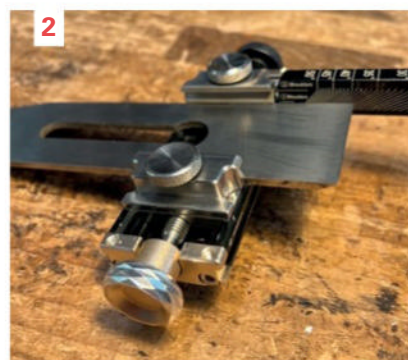


SUPPORTING SPONSORS



Hongdai Chisel Sharpening Jig System

Reviewed by Robert Howard



Let me begin by saying that I firmly believe in using a honing guide, especially when sharpening tools with a micro-bevel. Most tools sharpened without a honing guide end up with rounded over edges and an included angle larger than the one intended.

The Krenov method of hollow grinding the bevel so that it rests on the stone on the front and back edges of the bevel can work until the micro-bevel gets too large or the hollow disappears, but it still needs considerable care to prevent rounding of the edge. This tends to invalidate the main reason for not using a honing guide i.e. that it is faster.

I know Japanese blades are traditionally sharpened without micro-bevels, or honing guides, but this is aided by the way their blades are made. The blades are quite thick, with a small area of very hard steel laminated to a large area of soft steel, making up a relatively wide bevel. This wide bevel gives a larger reference area to guide the sharpening process, and the softer steel means the time required is reduced. Western chisels have neither advantage.

So, what about this guide? At first glance, it looks as though a top clamping Veritas honing guide has been crossed with a

side clamping Lie-Nielsen guide, but while it could be used both ways, it is intended to be a side clamping guide. The top clamping part is detachable, and is intended to be used for blades that are not flat, or with non-parallel surfaces.

The guide looks frighteningly complicated, but is quite simple to use once you understand it (**photo 1**). The clamps hold plane blades up to 62mm wide in the lower position (**photo 2**), and chisels up to 9mm thick in the upper position (**photo 3**). They can also hold skew blades in two positions: 18°s and 30° (**photo 4**), and when reversed, can hold any blade up to 70mm wide (**photo 5**).

As with all honing guides, the required bevel angle is determined by the distance the blade projects from the clamps (squareness is automatic with the side clamping action). So you know what angle you are after, included with the guide is a very nice round rotating angle guide (**photo 1**). I have a simpler one made by Veritas which I have found to be very useful. The required angle is set on the guide using a cross arm attachment that fits to the clamp body in a sliding dovetail, as shown in **photo 6**.

The cross arm can be adjusted and clamped in any position, with the major

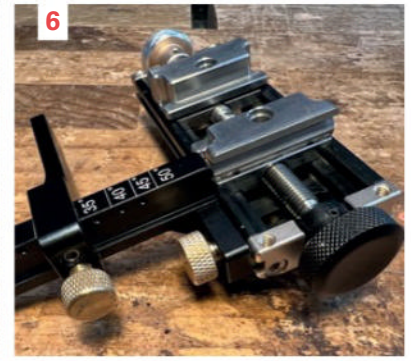
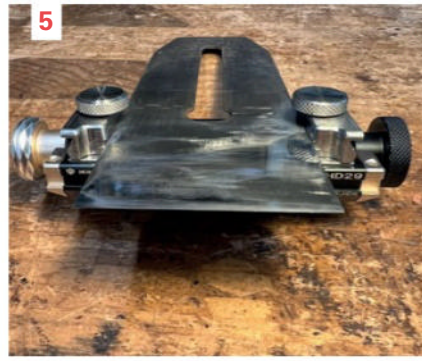
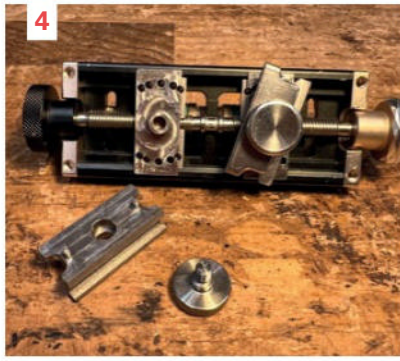
positions clearly marked and easily found via what I initially thought was a spring-loaded ball but later found was a hollow screw with polymer material protruding from the end. Tightening the screw increases the pressure on the polymer and once it has clicked home, it can be clamped as usual.

As the blade clamp can hold the blade at two different levels so as to accommodate both plane blades and chisels, the required projection distances for each angle need to be adjusted to marks shown on the side of the cross arm attachment (**photo 6**). This system works beautifully for Western chisels, ranging from very thin bladed old Sorbys and old Bergs, through to modern thick Lie-Nielsen and Veritas blades. However, it cannot clamp blades of Japanese chisels less than 70mm long as the tang begins to contact the body of the guide.

A pair of longer clamping jaws can be bought that will allow short, thin blades, such as those in spokeshaves, to be sharpened. I think these would be more important for most woodworkers than the top-down clamping fixture. All the steel components are stainless to prevent rust.

In another nod to the Veritas guide, the roller that the guide runs adjusts to three positions, raising the blade to positions just enough to produce a micro-bevels at the edge.

Whether or not this is useful to you will depend on your sharpening practice. What I did like, however, was the width of the roller, because it made the guide feel much more stable on the stones than the other side-clamping guides which only have a single, narrow roller.



I was also keen to see how the roller ran on its four O-rings (**photo 7**), but was disappointed to find the rings were too close to the diameter of the brass roller to make any difference. That makes me question why they are there at all, and I have no idea what the answer to that is.

A more troubling problem was quickly obvious when I put the guide to use. After a very short time the roller stopped turning, and started to slide on the stone, then would turn and stop in a variable sequence. When I examined the roller there was an obvious resistance to turning, as well as the evidence of small flats starting to form on the round surface.

I finally thought to go back to the instructions, and found the suggestion to keep a pan of water handy when using the guide, and dunk the roller every 10–20 strokes to keep it clean and free running. And that worked, but it might get a bit tedious after a while.

All the common honing guides are prone to this problem. It would be hard to design a more destructive environment for a simple

wheel-on-an-axle to run in than a slurry specifically designed to grind away steel. As a result most rollers or wheels become increasingly loose as they wear, however dunking the roller right from the start will keep it cleaner and so extend its life.

I must admit to being seriously impressed by the manufacturing capability that this guide represents. The complexity and the precision of the parts is quite amazing to me, though I might be showing my age there.

But when all is said and done, is it a good, reliable honing guide? My answer would be an unqualified yes if it wasn't for the issue with the roller jamming, and you don't need it to sharpen Japanese chisels. It has the superior side clamping action of Lie-Nielsen, with the skew angle function built in, along with the quick angle setting of the Veritas guide, and a roller width halfway between them both. And it is beautifully made. The choice, as always, is yours.

Review tool supplied by and available from www.hongduitools.com

1. Hongdui's honing guide looks complex but is easy to use once you understand how it works.
2. Showing the lower clamp for blades up to 62mm wide. It also shows the set for thin blades.
3. Using the upper clamp for chisels up to 9mm thick.
4. Showing the removable jaws and available hole settings for skew blades.
5. The jaws open to a max of 70mm and are shown reversed to take a no.8 plane blade.
6. Here you can see the sliding dovetail clamp as well as the indents for the major angles.
7. The wide roller has four O-rings.



REPLACE YOUR TRADITIONAL STRAIGHT KNIVES WITH A TRUE HELICAL, SPIRAL CUTTER

- **MAJOR NOISE REDUCTION:** Dramatically reduces planing Noise
- **SUPERIOR SURFACE FINISH:** True shearing action on difficult and figured grains
- **QUICKER KNIFE MAINTENANCE:** Square carbide inserts means no more tedious re-setting



Woodcraft Supplies specialises in retrofitting everything from modern DeWalts to 60-year-old workshop legends.

REVOLUTIONISE YOUR WOOD PLANING.

R.D.G INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES
(07) 4129 4644 or 0418 184 048
rdg@bigpond.com
www.woodcraftsupplies.net.au

Affordable Insurance

For artists and craftspeople



Inclusive of full membership with the
Victorian Woodworkers Association Inc

PP&L FULL YEAR COVER & VWA MEMBERSHIP

30th August 2026 to 30th August 2027

Public and Product Liability Insurance:
Cost \$285
for \$20million cover

For professional and amateur craftspeople making and selling craft products or teaching, or undertaking markets or craft demonstrations in public.

(Arranged through Insurer Berkley Insurance Australia and Broker Consolidated Insurance Agencies Pty. Ltd. (CIA) AFS License No. 245584)



Contact Meg Allan, VWA Membership Secretary

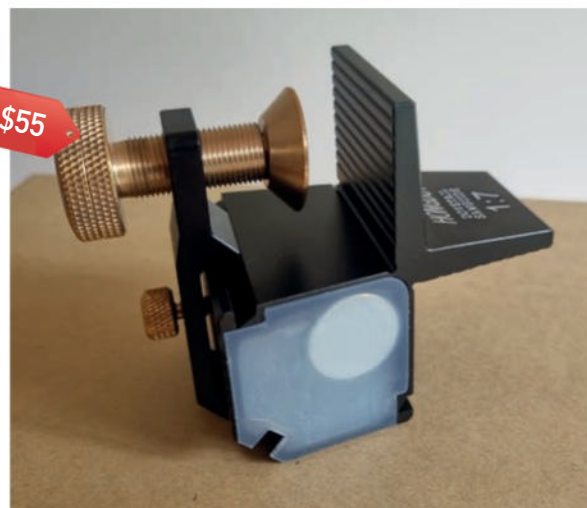
Email insurance@vwa.org.au

Online Application and Information go to
vwa.org.au

Important: Victorian Woodworkers Association Inc (VWA) does not hold an Australian Financial Services License, but as a Group Purchasing Body has engaged Consolidated Insurance Agencies (CIA) to arrange Group or Master Liability Policies for its members. VWA does not receive any form of remuneration (including commission) or other benefits that are reasonably attributable to the group purchasing activity.

Hongdui Dovetail Saw Guide

Reviewed by
Robert Howard



I have a recurring problem when it comes to writing tool reviews, and that is that my brain shoots off in all sorts of directions. So I will begin at the beginning. Yes, this jig will work as claimed. It is a simple solution to a task which many people have difficulty with. It will clamp to boards up to 1" or 25mm thickness. It has two parts which assemble for either cutting tails or pins.

It is quick and easy to assemble and use, but judgement refined by practice will be required to get the best fit of the joint. As with cutting the joint freehand, the jig has to be set to cut relative to where the line, or lines, are. Getting that right will determine how tight the joint is. Or isn't.

You will need a saw that is compatible with the jig. None of my dovetail saws, Western or Japanese, can be used with it. The jig is 40mm high, so any saw with a back needs a blade width below the back of 40mm plus the width of the piece of wood used. So to cut carcass dovetails for a cabinet with 19mm sides you would need a blade depth of about 75mm or alternatively, a Japanese ryoba, or backless saw.

The jig is designed to help maintain the saw at the correct angles to the wood. And that brings me to the first 'other' issue. This jig is designed to do one thing: help you cut dovetails that have a 1:7 slope to the tails and pins. If you want another angle, you will have to buy another jig. The company website shows 1:6; 1:7; 1:8; 14° and 90°. To put

this issue plainly, at best jigs do what they are designed to do, but that is all they do, which in turn restricts what you can do.

This brings me to the broader 'other' issue. Your choice, when contemplating jigs like this (and they are multiplying faster than rabbits), is to buy the jig, or to take the harder, but far more rewarding and versatile, road of learning the skills to make the jig unnecessary.

In my very first article in this magazine, way back in issue 11, titled 'On Technique', I compared woodworkers with sportspeople, and asked 'Where is the woodworker who gets up at 5:30am to cut ten dovetails before breakfast? Or who practises basic woodworking skills for two hours every afternoon?' Those with woodworking ambitions need to think carefully about this. If you want to be good at something you need to practise. There is no shortage of help available, in written form or on the internet.

Having said all that, this is a very well made jig, and it works well. The removable plastic faces keep the saw blade off the magnet, and allow it to move quite freely. A spare set is included with the jig.

Review tool supplied by
www.hongduitools.com

Robert Howard is a woodworker who teaches woodcarving from his Brisbane workshop, see roberthoward.com.au/

Australian Made



NORGLASS

Specialty Finishes

Australian Owned

NORGLASS CLEARS RANGE

A product for every timber finish

LIQUID GLASS

A high quality water clear pour on glass finish for bars, table tops, river tables and creating great art pieces. Add our colourant or Metallics for extra effect.



POLYCLEAR GLOSS

A tough abrasion-resistant gloss coating with high levels of UV inhibitors for interior and exterior use. Ideal for floors, furniture and marine applications where a high gloss finish is required.



POLYCLEAR SATIN

For interior or exterior use where a durable satin finish is required.

Note: Build up coats with gloss and finish with satin for exterior finishes.



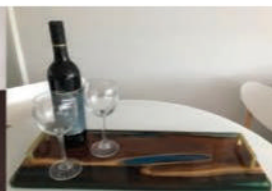
MICROSHIELD SPAR VARNISH

A clear, low odour, high gloss blend with state of the art UV inhibitors for maximum exterior protection. Perfect for Panelling, outdoor furniture, window sills and general marine brightwork.



NORTHANE CLEAR

A 2-pack, non-yellowing polyurethane with outstanding chemical and abrasion resistance. Great for bartops, kitchen benches, tables, cool rooms, terracotta pots and more... **Satin finish also available** (interior use only).



DIY LIKE A PRO

For your nearest stockist go to our website and enter your postcode

norglass.com.au

NORGLASS LABORATORIES PTY LTD

ABN 92 001 807 245 | 59 MOXON ROAD, PUNCHBOWL, NSW 2196 AUSTRALIA | TEL: (02) 9708 2200

US\$275

Zen-Wu Y2 Chisels

Reviewed by Damion Fauser



were surprisingly sharp right out of the box, with a 30° bevel.

The backs are ground quite flat, and the grind quality is up there with the very best. Upon close inspection, some visual evidence of the circular grinding process remains, and so some minor further polishing will help achieve even better sharpening results. The polish on the back extends between 40–50% of the full length of the back of the tool – this may in some cases reduce the effectiveness of the tool when paring into deep recesses, but this would only be in extreme cases.

The blades have a very small land surface, so they're technically not a true bevel-edge chisel, but very few production chisels actually are, so this is not a criticism, and I would have every confidence of using these tools to get into acute angled areas such as when cutting dovetails.

What I was really pleased to see was how thin the blades are. I ran my digital calipers over the 25mm chisel supplied in the box and found that from end to end the thickness tapered from 5.7mm at the far end down to 3.5mm where the bevel first commences, meaning these chisels will be better suited than some others in this class for paring into finer dovetail socket spaces for example.

The length of the useable blade is quite substantial also, with all

These chisels are the real deal. They're elegant to admire, super-comfortable to hold and most importantly they cut beautifully in both chopping and paring operations.

The Y2 is the successor to the Y1, and the team at Zen-Wu have made some subtle yet effective changes to

improve these tools. The tool steel on these tang-construction, western-style chisels is Zen-Wu white-paper carbon steel, an ultra-pure high-carbon steel often used in high-end kitchen knives. It is heat-treated to 64RC through multiple cryogenic cycles, meaning it is very hard wearing yet remains easy to sharpen. These tools

The “No Worries Oil”

It penetates deep so no peeling or flaking



www.whittlewaxes.com.au



GREAT
MAGAZINES
.com.au

RENEW OR SUBSCRIBE

with auto-renewal for just **\$8.80**
PER ISSUE (print + digital copies)



VISIT **GREATMAGAZINES.COM.AU/AUSTRALIANWOODREVIEW**
OR CALL **1800 807 760** AND QUOTE **AUTO-RENEWAL**

Conditions: This offer is only available to readers with an Australian postal address. By subscribing via auto-renewal you give Yaffa Media authorisation to charge your nominated credit/debit card account or direct debit bank account regular amounts, in regular instalments, as set out in the terms of the subscription you are purchasing, until you request it to be stopped, or your card or account expires. You may voluntarily stop your subscription at any time by providing Yaffa Media's customer service department (subscriptions@yaffa.com.au) with written notice. For full terms & conditions, visit www.greatmagazines.com.au.

four chisels in the set supplied for this review measuring out with approximately 100mm of useable tool.

The ergonomics of these chisels is outstanding. The tang-style construction helps to distribute the mass and position the centre-of-gravity around the middle of the length of the tool, giving them a real balance in the hand. The satin-finished wooden handles are elegant and comfortable to hold, with a well-positioned circumferential scallop for the user to register the thumb on the master hand.

One particularly pleasing ergonomic aspect for me is the unpolished and scalloped profile on the top of the blade. I'm not sure if this was a deliberate design decision or merely a happy accident resulting from aesthetic design choices, but this surface provides an exceptionally comfortable location with good grip from the unpolished surface



to register the thumb of your non-master hand when holding the chisel in the technically-correct 'thumb and forefinger' style. Well done Zen-Wu!

These are exceptional tools in either individual sizes (metric from 3–25mm and imperial from 1/8" to 1") or in a set of five imperial chisels or four metric chisels. I was sent the metric set, which contains the 6, 10, 16 and 25mm sizes. I consider this to be exceptionally



good value for money given how impressed I am with them, and I suspect it won't be too long before they develop a dedicated following.

Review tool supplied by Zen-Wu and available from zenwutoolworks.com

Damion Fauser is a designer maker and also teaches from his Brisbane workshop. Learn more at damionfauser.com/

THE PERFECT EDGE

MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY WHEN SANDING EDGES AT THE BEST PRICE

The Hammer HS 950 is the perfect entry-level machine for demanding edge sanding

- Innovative machine technology
- Minimal space requirement
- Compact functionality

FEATURING

- Continuous adjustable sanding unit & tilt
- Sanding unit with oscillation
- Additional table for radius sanding



FOR MORE INFO **CALL 02 4735 1011** OR VISIT **WWW.FELDER-GROUP.COM/EN-AU**

Make Beautiful Work. Build a New Future. Fit training into your life.

At SkillBuild Mount Egerton, we teach the craft of furniture making through **accredited, hands-on training**. Hands-on. Small groups. Real makers. Professional mentoring.

Intensive short workshop series that build to a full nationally recognised qualification.



Scan QR code
to enrol or
for more
information

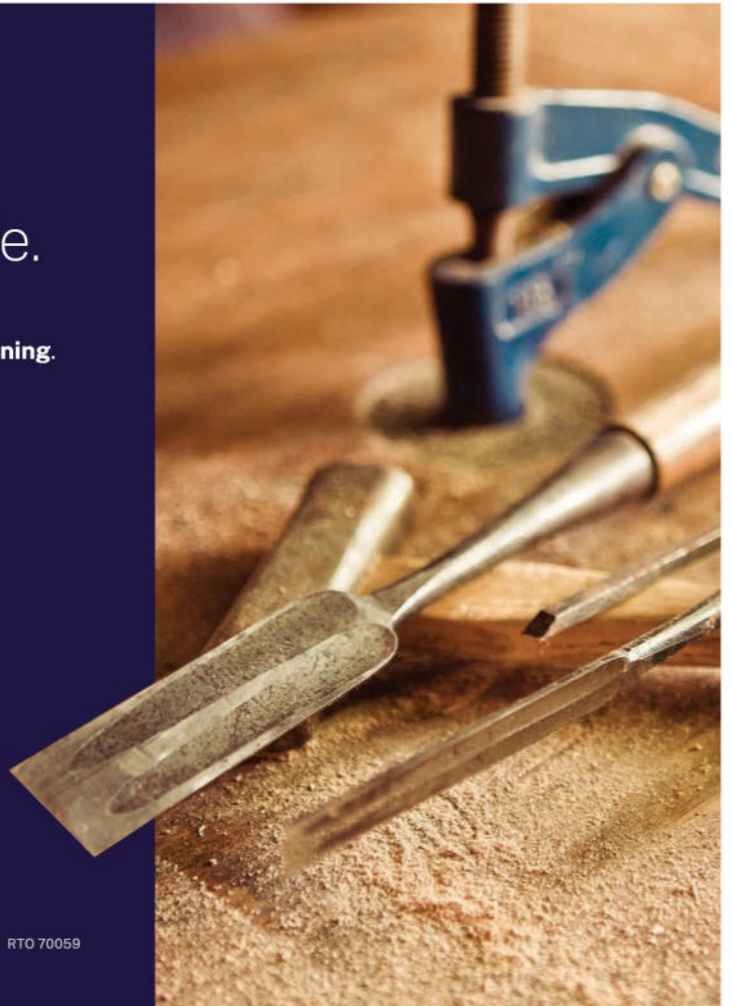
Location
Mt Egerton, VIC

Trainer
Ross Annels

For more information
☎ 0407 489 227
✉ ross@skillbuild.edu.au
🌐 skillbuild.edu.au

SkillBuild
Your future. Now

RTO 70059



Precision woodworking has never been easier



**The PantoRouter®
Woodworking
Joinery Machine
delivers accurate
joints in minutes**

PantoRouter

PantoRouter.com
info@pantorouter.com



- Mortise & Tenon
- Box Joints and Dovetails
- Easy to Use
- Set-up to glue-up in minutes
- Ideal for both hobby and professional woodworkers
- The All-in package ships with the RoutMaster Pro 230 Volt 50/60Hz router motor

NEWSTEAD WOOD SCHOOL

A PLACE FOR ASPIRING CRAFTSPEOPLE
TO GATHER, LEARN AND PURSUE THE ART
& CRAFT OF FINE WOODWORKING

- 1 day to 4 weeks intensive courses.
- Dedicated student bench spaces, indoor and outdoor workspace.
- Onsite sawmill and collection of special cabinet making woods.
- Intimate environment, with the focus on a sensitive and thoughtful approach to woodworking. Helping others to become confident and independent designer/makers.

LOCATED IN CENTRAL VICTORIA 2 HOURS FROM MELBOURNE CBD

CONTACT LACHLAN PARK: LPWOODWORK@GMAIL.COM • 0447 520 818
WWW.LPWOODWORK.COM/NEWSTEADWOODSCHOOL



Composing a Cabinet

James Krenov taught others to design in 3D, and often the wood to be used was the starting point. Recently, a course based on material-led design took place in Victoria. Lachlan Park explains.

In April 2026, five students came together at Newstead Wood School for a new two week immersive workshop with three tutors. Alongside me were David Fleming (USA) and John Shaw (New Zealand), both of whom studied with Krenov in the early 1980s.

‘Composing a cabinet’ is a concept rooted in the methodology and teaching of James Krenov. Long-time past student David Fleming explains: ‘It focuses on modelling and mocking-up designs using cardboard, wood, and other materials, rather than technical drawing. The maker’s ideas are tested by observation and manipulation of the physical models, which may be only part(s) of the design, but are typically made more-or-less full size.’

‘2D drawings simply can’t convey the information necessary to fine-tune a furniture design,’ says David Fleming. ‘Modern 3D CAD drawing programs do a better job, but (I and others would argue) cannot compare to Krenov’s method of designing with physical materials. Everything, from the overall dimensions, to the relationship of components to one another, to the positioning of pulls and other crucial decisions can be made on the basis of physical testing, rather than theoretical conjecture.’

In practice

‘This was an opportunity to explore making woodwork where the outcome is variable and perhaps even unknown,’ said John Shaw. ‘It starts by looking open-mindedly



at the wood we have. Jim Krenov presented this method and argued profoundly for it in his books. Such a way of working demands time for reflection and consideration while making. Jim Krenov called this approach “composing”.

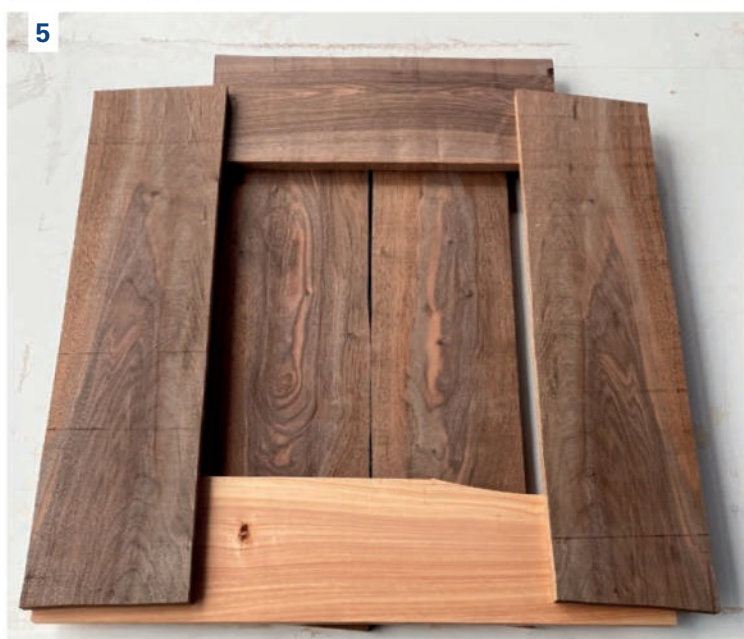
Teaching in this way differs from the norm says David Fleming. ‘Unlike the more common cookie-cutter or carrot-and-stick approach: “Here’s some wood, here’s a drawing,

Main: From above, the Composing a Cabinet workshop well in progress with ‘Sensei’ Fleming standing watch.

1. David Fleming studied furniture making with James Krenov from 1984 to 1986. He lives in Arizona and is a full-time furniture maker and educator.
2. ‘Now sawn in two, a precious board which presented an idea now offered many more possibilities.’
3. ‘This is material-led design... Boards are kept long and wide and over thickness, then scrub planed and passed over the jointer to reveal colour and pattern.’

4. John Shaw writes: 'James Krenov looking at his vertically standing planks is a classic image used to depict the starting point for his way of woodworking. Composing, as he chose to describe his process. Is this approach relevant today as the search to remove human labour from manufacturing processes accelerates exponentially?' John's photo featured on the cover of *Australian Wood Review*, issue 63. This issue included James Krenov's last recorded interview which you can read at www.woodreview.com.au/profiles/calling-james-krenov

5. In this way of working with wood, arranging the grain before machining components can give the best results.
6. This course was about working with solid wood. Amongst the many topics discussed were frame and panel construction.
7. Ongoing dialogue and discussion were a big part of the course – Lachlan Park is on the left.
8. John Shaw was co-founder of the Centre for Fine Woodworking in New Zealand and has since made furniture and taught woodwork on a full-time basis.



everyone makes the same thing, and the goal is to completely finish the project in two weeks." The goal of this course was centred on learning to see; learning to translate ideas into practical, intentional designs; and then learning how to choose the material and transform the design into the physical object. Basically, it was a brief but very intense immersion into the Krenov approach to designing and making furniture.'

In the beginning

Constraints and parameters were discussed and then soon challenged. What is a cabinet? Does a cabinet have doors? If so, how many? Should it have shelves? What about drawers? With coffee in hand, the morning discussions were underway on design principles such as proportion and balance, and design elements such as shape and space.

All about the wood

At the core of the composing concept the wood is our hero, to be listened to – this is material-led design. It's the reason I am doing this after all. I began salvaging and sawing wood from locally grown trees around 15 years ago. The first one was a small apricot tree from my parent's garden, a small but precious



log with purples and oranges sliced with an old Stihl chainsaw on an Alaskan mill frame. The endgrain was painted with melted candle wax and stacked to air dry in the shade. These days a slightly bigger chainsaw and on-site bandsaw mill are used, and finding the next board in a 20 foot shipping container may be easier said than done though.

With the container doors flung open, the students were let loose. 'What species is this? Is this one nice to work? Is there any more of this one?' When possible, it is always nice to have a whole log which has been live sawn, resulting in sequential boards.

From here, composition of the material can be considered and a harmony of wood arrangement strived for. Perhaps those outer flitches which are flat sawn with their cathedral pattern will be nice for a door panel? And those quartersawn boards may be more appropriate for the carcass pieces.

Nothing is out of the question at this stage, but sooner or later we will have to make our first cuts. Boards are kept long and wide and over thickness, scrub planed and passed over the jointer to

reveal colour and pattern. Then left to rest while the kettle goes on.

Usually at this stage we have seen something we like, a contrast in colour, some figure or maybe some spalting – a pattern caused by fungus while the board was still part of the log. I personally find this one of the most challenging points in the journey, finding the treasure but then hoping not to destroy it with one false cut or composition decision. Maybe this board is too interesting...back in the container it goes for when I'm feeling braver.

Contemplation, discussion, kettle on again but inevitably the plunge must be taken. It's 'the workmanship of risk' as David Pye called it in his book *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (1968). It was over to the 24-inch Centauro bandsaw for a John Shaw re-sawing demonstration and to see a 10 inch wide board now sawn in two. A precious board which presented an idea now offered many more possibilities.

Construction considerations

'A dowelled joint? Aren't they weak? Why not dovetails?' All very valid

questions. Dowelled joints are somewhat maligned these days and with good reason. For I'm sure more than a few of us have pulled apart a wonky chair to discover a dowel joint where a mortise and tenon should be. But here we have a cabinet, perhaps subtle in scale and of delicate function. The back leg to side rail connection of a chair will be at the mercy of its occupant, but this little cabinet will do just fine with dowelled joinery.

'But why not dovetails?' Don't worry, they can come later if you wish, perhaps a drawer inside this little cabinet. There is no reason not to dovetail the side to the top and bottom of your cabinet, however the dovetail joint is often visually pronounced, which may distract from other more subtle details and arrangement of the wood. Also, a dovetail joint will not allow us to carry through the bottom and or top pieces past the sides.

For the cabinet shown on p.26, 6mm diameter x 30mm long dowels were used to connect the sides and top. A simple drilling jig can be made from scrap material of the same thickness as either the sides or top and bottom components



9. Fitting doors to one of the cabinets 'composed' and produced within the two-week workshop.
10. A dowelled construction can allow the base or top to overhang, or the sides to extend. Dovetails can be added to drawers if desired.

– whichever is to have the dowels fitted to the endgrain.

This was an example of a composition decision. Should the top and bottom pieces overhang the sides or should the sides protrude past the top and bottom? Both will work but result in very different looking cabinets. Perhaps one will be more visually successful than the other.

Now where to place these dowels? Well, if we have flat sawn boards which will have propensity to cup, we may be best to place the dowels closer together towards the outside edges of the boards, this will help to resist the board from cupping. A small decision but a considered one – and dowelled joints are fine, if done right!

The deep end

What was the student experience? Well, you would have to ask them but 'thrown straight in the deep end,' comes to mind and that was half the point. The composing element of making can be overlooked or simply parked while technical competency is prioritised – and this is not without merit. But I can't help think it would be a shame not to explore ideas

right from the beginning of one's woodworking journey. This was an educational setting with tutors who have lived the struggle before. We were there not to prescribe absolutes but rather to offer guidance, informed by our own past failures and successes.

This was an intensive and immersive experience for all. The learning profound, hopefully inspiring and possibly at times overwhelming, but in those moments we only had to glance sideways to renew our enthusiasm. In one corner David Fleming masterfully planed the edges of narrow pieces of elm to produce a non-concentric arced coopered door. And a few feet that way was John Shaw playfully arranging slices of red cedar for the sliding doors of his whisky cabinet. One making, the other composing – both are inspiring craftsmen who were sharing their experience with others.

Images courtesy Lachlan Park



Lachlan Park is director and tutor at Newstead Wood School. An extended four-week 'Composing a Cabinet' course is planned for April/May 2027. Learn more at www.lpwoodwork.com/

DOWNLOAD YOUR COPY

HERE

PLUS

Get access to the *Australian Wood Review* newsletter - a round-up of the best stories, projects, profiles, news and gear. Everything that's going on right now in the wonderful world of woodworking.



Scan the QR code to download or go to:
woodreview.com.au/page/5-fabulous-furniture-projects-step-by-step-guides

This 36-page collection of projects will take you through the techniques needed to build five beautiful and functional contemporary furniture items. Each of these five popular projects by *Wood Review* authors includes measured drawings, cutting lists and step-by-step instructions.

INCLUDED PROJECTS

Hand-Built Wall Cabinet, Kitchen Stool, Zen Bed with Crossed Edge Lap Joinery, Dovetailed Entry-Way Table and Woven Toni Stool.



The Rocking Chair Project

Ben Adams finds that many of the skills learnt in the performing arts can be helpful for chairmakers. He describes the making of his award-winning rocker.



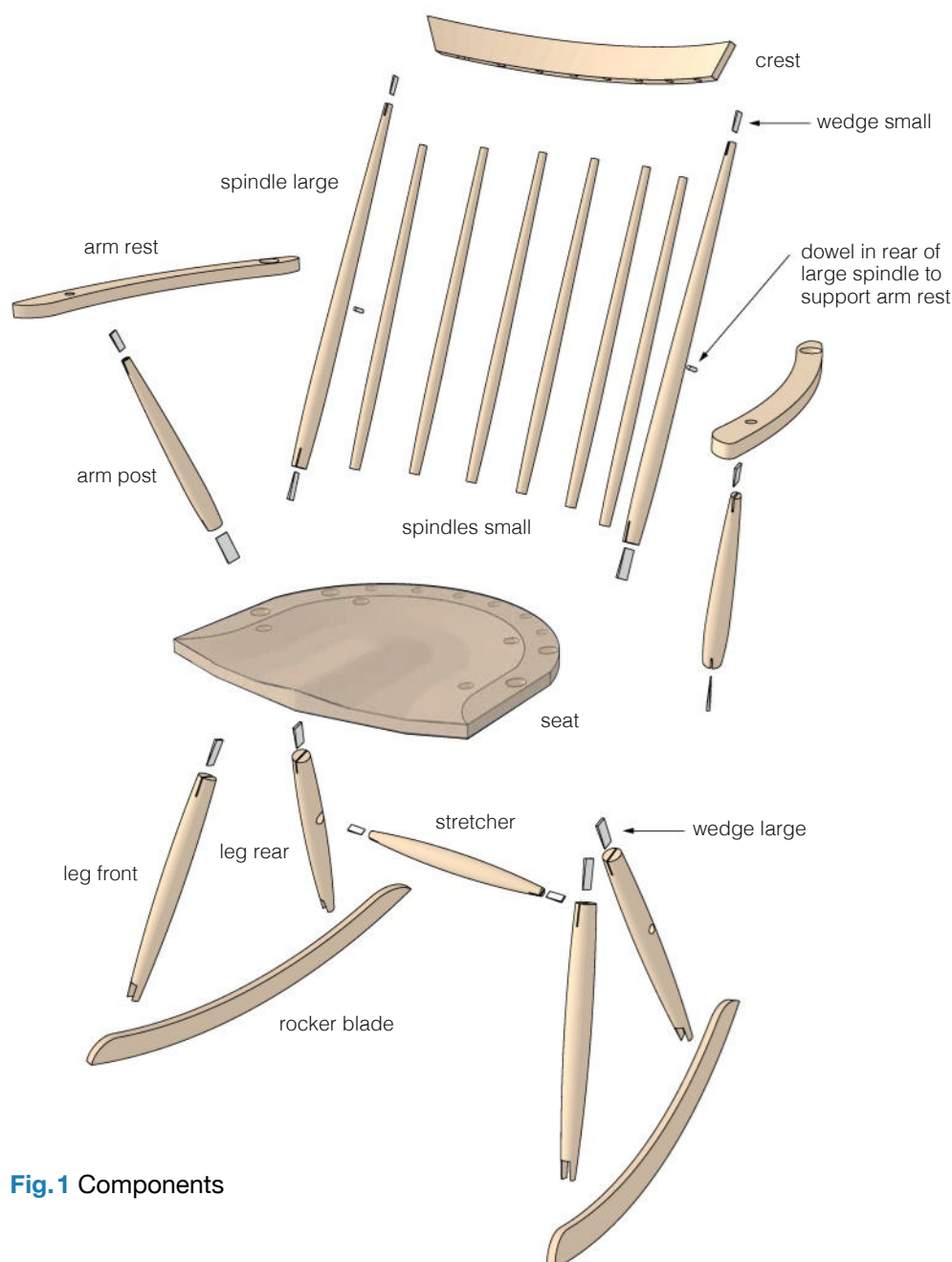


Fig.1 Components

Some say that to truly prove your mettle as a woodworker, you must learn how to make a chair. I think the maxim should be amended: you must learn how to make a good chair. This might be an unpopular opinion, but I believe it's relatively easy to make a chair.

Before you toss this issue of Australian Wood Review in the bin, hear me out. As long as it's fit for purpose, a chair only needs a surface to rest your cheeks on and enough legs to keep them off the floor. That's a project accessible to almost anyone. Making a really good chair, however, takes dedication, practice and no

CUTTING LIST (mm)

PART	QTY	LENGTH	WIDTH	THICKNESS
Top	1	544	455	45
Front legs	2	400	40	40
Back legs	2	405	40	40
Spindles, large	2	600	30	30
Spindles, small	6	525	19	19
Stretcher	1	345	35	35
Arm posts	2	310	30	30
Armrests	2	400	75	16
Crest	1	550	90	50
Rocker blades	2	760	100	13
Wedges, large	10	45	19	4
Wedges, small	4	25	12	3

Main: Ben Adam's
Wootha Rocker in Vic
ash and red cedar



1. First step was looking through journals and notebooks before developing initial sketches.
2. A half-scale maquette was built to test proportions and make adjustments.
3. Offcuts of Vic ash were selected for the rocker project.
4. A simple jig was used to turn the tapered leg tenons to size.
5. This sharpened spanner became a useful tool for achieving consistent straight tenon diameters.
6. A drawknife and spokeshave were used to shape the spindles.
7. A simple shave 'pony' was made from pine screwed together and clamped to the bench.

small degree of skill. It's a lesson I'm reminded of every time I undertake a chairmaking project.

When it was announced that the Wootha Prize would return in 2026, I saw an opportunity to challenge myself and apply everything I'd learned about chairmaking to the design and construction of a rocking chair. Alongside my woodworking experience, I often find myself drawing on lessons from a previous life as an actor to guide the creative process.

I come from a performing arts background, and I've found that actor training provides a surprising number of transferable skills. I began my adult life working in theatre, studying in Perth before building a reasonably successful career in Melbourne. When I wasn't on stage, I was making theatre sets to satisfy my love of working with my hands. Eventually I moved back home, undertook further study, and earned a modest living in Brisbane's theatre scene.

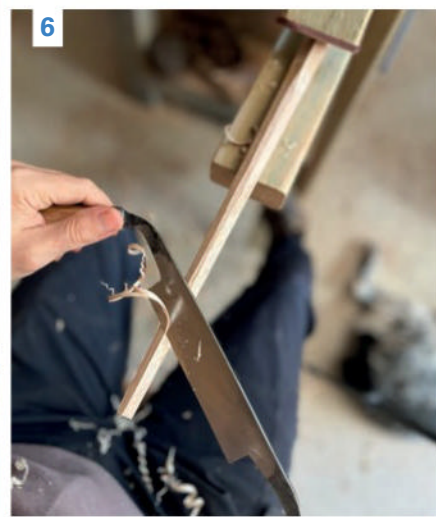
When Covid arrived, I pivoted – as many people did – and started a furniture making business. Skills you gain from working in the performing

arts like the ability to creatively problem solve, see projects to completion on a deadline and to have the outward confidence to sell yourself and your story all prove very useful when starting a business. I still indulge in local theatre productions whenever I can and often feel the pull of the rehearsal room. Despite focusing on woodworking these days, I see many parallels between preparing for a role and designing a piece of furniture.

Research

Just as an actor begins with research when preparing for a role, the first step in any furniture project is doing your homework. An actor must understand both their medium and the history and context surrounding the work they're undertaking.

For this project, I studied classic continuous arm Windsor rockers and George Nakashima's *Conoid* rocker for inspiration. Out came the old chairmaking journals (**photo 1**) and notebooks from previous projects. After some initial sketches, I built a half-scale maquette (**photo 2**) to test the proportions. Using the seat pattern from a continuous arm rocker as a starting point, I established the



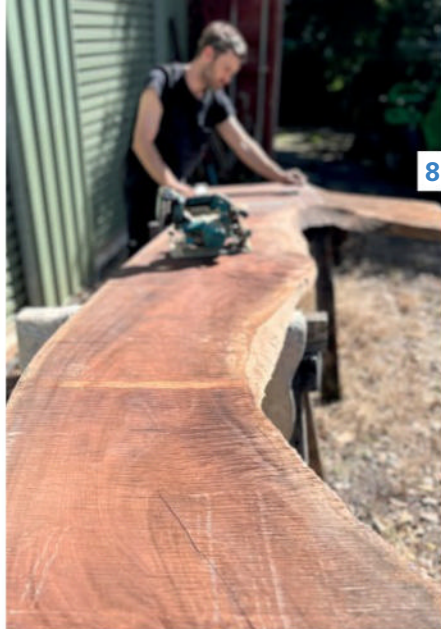
rake and splay angles. Tweaking the maquette allowed me to make subtle adjustments until the form felt right.

Material selection and turnings

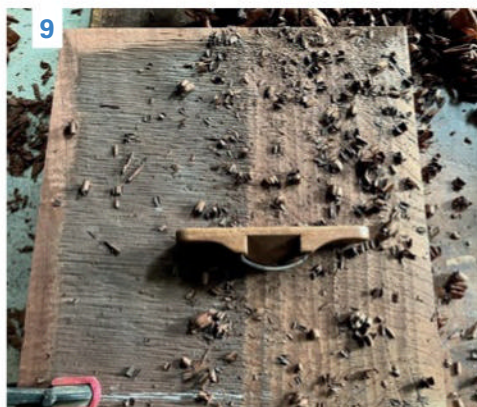
One of the requirements of the Wootha is that entries must be made using sustainably harvested native species, weed timbers or recycled material. After a short expedition through the offcut pile, I found the longest and straightest pieces of Victorian ash I could salvage. One of the beauties of Windsor chair construction is how little timber it actually requires (**photo 3**).

After selecting the best stock for the turned components, I turned the legs and stretcher to their final dimensions. A simple gauge was used to fit the tapered leg tenons precisely (**photo 4**). The gauge is nothing more than a scrap block containing a 6° tapered hole, sawn in half down its centreline. It allows me to compare the tenon against a perfect cross-section of the mortise and gradually work towards a flawless fit.

The stretcher required a cylindrical tenon, so I employed a sharpened



8



9



10

8. Cutting spectacular slabs into smaller lengths requires confidence in the value of the outcome.
9. A homemade travisher was used for the initial flattening of the seat.
10. Using a jack plane to refine the seat surface.
11. A laser level guided the drilling of mortises in the legs and arms.
12. A reamer made from recycled materials was used to taper the mortises, once again with help from the laser level.
13. The laser level also allowed projection of datum points onto ply to create a full-scale diagram so the design could be repeated.
14. Cutting a butterfly key to stabilise a crack was another opportunity for enjoyable hand work.
15. Sculpting the seat with one of the author's travishers.



11

16mm spanner to cut a consistent diameter (**photo 5**).

Preparing the spindles

To honour and show respect for the origins of the craft, I decided to shape the spindles the old-fashioned way using a drawknife and spokeshave (**photo 6**). Much like incorporating period-accurate costuming in a stage production or paying homage to a classic choreographer through movement, it felt important to acknowledge the traditions that came before.

Beyond authenticity, I simply find spindle shaving immensely satisfying. In practice, it takes little more time than turning them on the lathe.

I don't own a shave horse, so I make do with a simple shave pony made

from construction pine screwed together and clamped to the bench (**photo 7**). The pivoting arm provides much the same functionality as a shave horse, albeit with less versatility. A tall stool helps bring me to a comfortable working height. Once all the spindles were brought to final dimensions, attention turned to the seat.

Starting the seat

I suspect every woodworker feels a pang of sadness when cutting a large piece of timber into a smaller one. Like any creative endeavour, you have to trust the process and believe the outcome will justify the sacrifice.

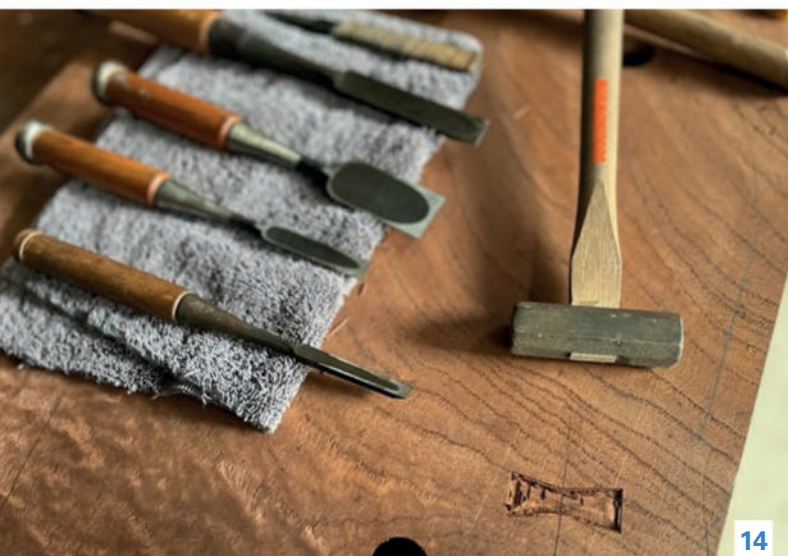
I chose to make the seat from a spectacular slab of Queensland red cedar (**photo 8**). I won't pretend cutting into it was easy, but I took comfort in knowing the timber would

become something capable of lasting for generations.

Flattening the seat blank was made easier with one of my homemade travishers in place of a scrub plane (**photo 9**), followed by a jack plane to refine the surface (**photo 10**).

After carefully drilling the leg and arm-post mortises using a laser level as a guide (**photo 11**), the holes were tapered with another homemade tool – a reamer (**photo 12**). My reamer was fashioned from an old rosewood door jamb, with a blade made from a handsaw plate cut to shape and sharpened much like a card scraper.

Years spent working in theatre taught me that creativity often flourishes within constraints. Whether building a stage set or a chair, there's great



value in looking at the materials already at hand and imagining what else they might become. That mindset proved invaluable when making both the reamer and shave pony, transforming a handful of scraps into tools that earned their place in the workshop.

With the legs inserted in the seat, the stretcher holes were then drilled by eye, assisted once again by the laser level.

Calculating the drilling angles

With the leg and arm-post mortises complete, I reached a point where I had no clear method for accurately drilling the spindle holes.

When preparing for a role, actors spend months analysing scripts and

character motivations so that, during performance, reactions become instinctive. We often say, 'Think before you act, so you can act without thinking.'

The same principle applied here. If I could accurately record the spindle locations and angles, I could stop guessing and simply follow a plan. Just as importantly, I wanted to create a permanent record of the chair's dimensions and geometry so that the design could be repeated or refined in the future.

Using the laser level as a datum, I measured key points on the partially assembled chair relative to the projected line. This information allowed me to draw a full-scale side elevation on a sheet of bracing plywood laid on the workshop floor

(**photo 13**), almost like a form of pseudo-stereotomy.

With the full-scale drawing complete, I could confidently drill the remaining spindle holes and move on to shaping the seat.

Carving the seat

Before enthusiastically reaching for the travisher, I needed to stabilise a crack on the underside of the seat with an inlaid butterfly key (**photo 14**).

I've grown to enjoy this process: scribing the outline with a knife, chopping out the waste, and carefully paring the walls with a sharp chisel until they meet the knife line. It's a valuable exercise that develops a broad range of hand-tool skills and provides a good excuse to reach for the Japanese *oire nomi*.



16. Using a rasp to shape the armrest.



17. A 'hidden' leaf carved under each handhold is a quiet detail for the user to discover.

18. Housings for the rocker components were cut into the ends of the legs by hand.

19. Apart from the seat, all components were pre-finished in India ink. A simple jig made the process easy.

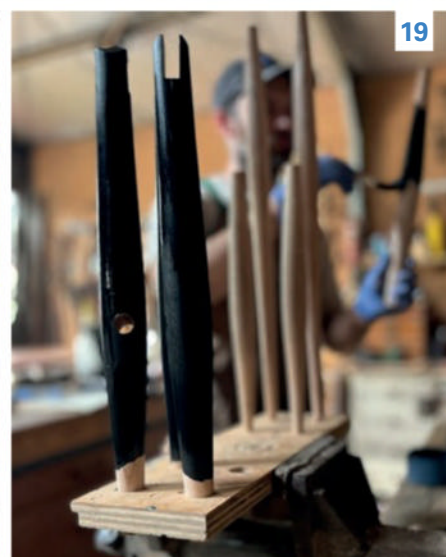
20. All the parts are now complete and ready for assembly.

21. Strengthening the armrest-to-spindle joint with a small dowel.

22. The completed rocker functions well.



18



19

Continuing the Japanese influence, I based the seat shape loosely on a George Nakashima rocker. Two small depth holes were drilled approximately 15mm deep before most of the waste was removed with a travisher (**photo 15**). A spokeshave established the crisp edges, while scrapers refined the surface and removed tool marks in preparation for sanding.

A gentle undercut beneath the front edge creates the illusion of a much thinner and lighter seat when viewed from the front.

Carving the armrests

This stage offered the greatest opportunity for artistic expression.

Much of the final forms of the armrests and crest were dictated by what simply felt right during the shaping process. A few pencil sketches guided the bandsaw work, while the remaining shaping was carried out using a drawknife, spokeshave and file (**photo 16**).

I must admit the final form differed somewhat from my original intention. A few errant strokes of the drawknife dug deeper than expected, creating a more fluid and organic shape than planned. In theatre, we'd call that a gift from the gods.

Unexpected moments often lead to decisions you could never have

consciously planned. Theatre training teaches adaptability and the importance of setting aside your ego to embrace opportunities that emerge unexpectedly. As said by one of my theatre mentors, Lyne Bradley: 'hold on tightly' to your convictions, but 'let go lightly' when a better idea presents itself.

One detail I had planned from the beginning was a small carving of a red cedar leaf hidden beneath each handhold (**photo 17**). It's something the user won't discover until they sit and run their fingers along the underside of the armrest – a small, quiet moment of connection and reflection. In theatre, actors often

develop rich histories for their characters that never make it onto the stage. The audience may never know those details exist, but they lend depth and authenticity to the performance.

Final details

As with the rigorous 'cleaning' carried out in a tech rehearsal, the devil is in the final details. The rocker housings were cut by hand into the ends of the legs (**photo 18**), while the rocker profiles themselves were traced from the same continuous arm rocker that provided the original seat pattern.

I chose to pre-finish all components with India ink, followed by hardwax oil, taking care to keep glue surfaces free of finish (**photo 19**).

Photo 20 shows the chair laid out before final assembly. After a rehearsal of the glue-up procedure, construction began with the undercarriage before the protruding leg tenons were trimmed flush and sanded smooth. The spindles were then glued in place, followed by the armrests and finally the crest rail, which was secured with two through wedged tenons on the outer spindles.

Finally, a small dowel was driven beneath the armrest through the outer spindle to prevent any movement over time (**photo 21**).

Like stepping onto the stage on opening night, there comes a point where all the preparation, problem-solving and craftsmanship have to stand on their own. The chair either works or it doesn't. Fortunately, this one rocks.

Photos: Ben Adams

Diagram: Graham Sands



Ben Adams

@benadamsfurniture is a furniture maker and toolmaker who works as an advocate in

his local area of the Sunshine Coast, Qld to promote woodworking and other handmade crafts. Learn more at www.benadams.studio/



Raf Nathan, Woodworker

Creative outlets can anchor a life, as was the case for Raf Nathan,
an influential contributor to the woodworking world.
Story by Linda Nathan.



Writing eulogies, much less an article about someone you've loved and lived with for over four decades is not a welcome task, however Raf Nathan has certainly been an 'influencer' in the woodworking world. There are things you say and talk about with some people, and not with others. Personal, private, public – there are many threads to untangle, and even as far as woodworking goes, in Raf Nathan's woodworking life there were many.

An incomplete index shows Raf has written hundreds of articles for this magazine – tool and machine reviews, how-to projects and technique explainers. His first was in the very first issue 'A wholly resolved way – impressions of Japan'. This was a pictorial article which followed a trip he made on his own in 1992. Thinking back to life with three very small children I'm not quite sure how he pulled that one off. From Japan he hopped over to Europe and visited the Milan Furniture Fair (iSalone di Mobile).

Wood came into Raf's life in his early 20s and never left it. He died suddenly on 2 April, 2026 at the age of 73; put simply his heart failed. Even months later, the workshop is still as he left it. Tools laid out on his bench, open sketchbook, two projects on the go which my son and I will finish (in good time), his drums and headphones (the shed was also

his practice place), timber, machines, more tools, half finished components, scrap bins, sharpening gear on the outside step where he liked to sit when he did that. Woodwork was a huge thing in his life. It anchored him, he was lost until he found it. It fed his spirit and for a good period of time, put food on our table.

Looking through Raf's files, I found these words, that hint where it all started: 'Woodworking has been a lifelong thing for me. In my early 20s I was somewhat lost and, after travelling through Asia bounced around from job to job – everything from a senior computer operator (it was the 60s) to grave filler (lower than a digger), I finally found a pursuit that absorbed and challenged me.

'The turning point was a night school class in woodcarving where the first thing I made was a small dragon. It was enough to get me hooked. After that I devoured woodworking books and magazines, and devised my own practice exercises to steadily acquire the skills that then became my full-time livelihood for next 20 odd years. Making kitchens

and cabinets were a mainstay until custom orders for furniture and the odd restoration took over.

'Twenty-five years ago I then took another path and earned a degree in health sciences, and now work as an acupuncturist. It would still however be a rare day that I don't spend time in my workshop.'

Self taught, woodworking was a profession that didn't fit the family mould, in fact Raf didn't really fit any mould as such. He was a self-made, self-taught and self-driven kind of guy. For some reason, his father wanted him to be an optometrist – that was never going to happen. Raf studied law and business at uni but dropped out after a year – it just wasn't his thing. He hit the hippy trail. Hitched to Darwin, caught a plane to Timor and then went overland throughout Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Laos before eventually returning to Australia.

When we met, he had a job in a small furniture factory in Melbourne. He got the sack for being late (intentionally!) but was

Main: Raf Nathan in the workshop. There was rarely a day when he didn't spend time there.

1. Raf's 'personal tool box' (as he called it) featured on the cover of his first collection of articles, *Handmade Furniture Projects*. He wrote how to make it in issue 43 of this magazine. It's still emblematic of his life.



2



2. Made from recycled wine vat kauri pine, this 'Wine table' was used by our family until I came home one day and it was gone, sold to someone while I was out. It wasn't the first time that happened.
3. Wall boxes in celery top pine with bookmatched blackheart sassafras door panels. They featured on the cover of his second book and remain in the family collection.
4. Raf's *Altar table* in jarrah is a personal favourite with its subtle grain selection and use of figured jarrah in the frame. It's understated and it's mine.
5. *Refectory table* in Huon pine. Raf made several of these over years for different clients and his brother Greg owns a blackwood variation.
6. Over the years, Raf made limited editions of various designs. This large-scale *Cabinetman* or *Barman* was a one-off. It's made of Vic ash.

3



4



then reemployed there and later 'promoted' to manager. The owner went overseas, and discovering the business was broke, Raf was left to oversee its liquidation.

Raf told the story in a journal: "Nathan, if you are late again tomorrow you are sacked." That's what the boss said one morning. It was a pine furniture factory and it was exciting to be working full time at furniture making. I was living the dream as an aspiring woodworker. Not only that I was the lackey, the assistant to the trade guys. I had to sweep, sand, learn to spray polish and clean the lunch room. This would be good humility training as well, as they say in the martial arts.

'But arriving on time at 8am in the morning was a drag and you had to do it every day. Plus I had a new girlfriend who stayed over a lot. So for the fifth time apparently he is telling me that I will be sacked if it happens again. All the other guys working there can hear all this and are keenly listening in. The next

5





morning I was deliberately late and was sacked on the spot. It always feels so free when you leave a place.'

After ending that business he set up his own custom workshop behind a bakery before moving to the larger one we had in Ripponlea. Kitchens, built-ins and then mostly 'colonial' furniture made from recycled Baltic pine floorboards were then the bread and butter stuff of our lives. I assisted to a degree and had my own picture framing business alongside.

In those days he moved fast in the workshop. He wore khaki King Gee overalls and always had a sharp pencil point-side up in his top pocket. He sketched and wrote sizes to cut on scraps of wood. He could make a table in a day. I know it's not amazing in terms of woodworking, but I always marvelled at how he would run around gluing up frames and carcasses, knowing just how much to tweak long pipe clamps to square things up. And best not to speak to him at those times!

Around that time Raf had an idea that nagged him. How great would it be to go to a giant wood show, like the ones that had started happening in the USA? I've written in this magazine before how he arrived home from work one day and announced that he had hired the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne. For me, it was one of those frozen-in-time moments. Across the kitchen table I could see his mouth moving as my life flashed forward trying to comprehend the enormity and doubtless folly of his latest 'initiative'.

Short story, we worked hard and in 1988, around 22,000 people turned up to the Timber & Working with Wood Show. It was massive. The Timber Promotion Council sponsored it and the woodworking industry came on board. There were paid independent demonstrators and an amazing exhibition of fine woodwork.

We ran the show three times but after that Raf declared he didn't want to become 'a suit' and truck his concept around the country to other states – so

we sold it. Others owned and ran it for years afterwards. Large consumer wood shows are a thing of the past now for various reasons – things change.

After that Raf returned to making furniture in our workshop, then in Gembrook, and we looked after our kids together. He was a very present father.

The idea for starting this magazine grew out of somewhere and came to both of us – obviously woodworking was the connection point for both of us. The first issue came out in 1992 and we sold the publishing of the magazine to Yaffa Media in 2013, for whom I continue to work.

As a woodworker (and as in real life), Raf was a fairly no-nonsense kind of guy. He preferred solid wood and native species – blackwood, silky oak and Huon pine were favourites, though he did have a soft spot for oregon. He liked fairly substantial proportions, not too heavy though. He liked cabinets with frame and panel doors and not overly busy design. His past

7



7. Chinese and Japanese joinery and furniture styles were an inspiration. His brother Greg owns this blackwood. *China cabinet* and loves it.
8. Modelled on a 'colonial' style table that Raf used to produce in recycled Baltic pine, this blackwood table was part of a swap he did with our then-dentist. Three months of his work making this and other furniture paid for dental work for our kids. I was never convinced about the gold 'balls' but Raf loved them.

8



commercial life as a cabinet and furniture maker made him keep highly labour intensive processes in check, and sometimes he just didn't have the patience for it.

He didn't particularly like making drawers and at various times this had been a discussion point. Knobs were another issue. To this day, the house we built that I still live in has foot (toe!) operated sliding doors, i.e. no knobs or handles, and to be honest this works just fine. There's the odd door, fitting or fixture made from cut-off components that were repurposed or dimensioned – because why would you buy that when you could make it? Our kitchen is also minimal (which suits me) and includes one of Raf's free-standing two door cabinets in oregon, in the style of the frame and panel door cabinet shown here.

He also wrote about his own learning: 'Whilst I spent years studying how to make woodworking and to make a living from it, sadly I never spent enough time studying how to design. Therefore many of my particularly early works weren't very good at all. Of course I studied, searching out museums and galleries and read books constantly. There were no woodworking classes as we have today back then. Imagine how

many years and how many awkward pieces would've been saved had I created the opportunity to enrol in art and design courses.'

Hand tools were a love of his, and he had a fascination for measuring and marking tools. He designed and made many iterations of squares and rules. An article about developing and getting his popular 'Multi-Square' and 'Supersquare' locally manufactured could indeed have been written.

Raf, the man

The more I reflect on Raf, the more I see that he was lots of things, and sometimes he was both ends of many spectrums. Overwhelmingly Raf was a good man, and as with all of us, there were shades of character, and some people saw what they might call eccentricities. He was authentically himself and believed in honesty and caring about other people without necessarily feeling sorry for them.

In the most straightforward way Raf was a life builder, a creative. He designed furniture and tools and he made life plans. He was a woodworker who also worked as an acupuncturist. For over 20 years, as a volunteer, he treated people at

QuIHN and regarded it as one of his most important jobs – he hated missing his Monday appointments.

He was a fantastic entrepreneur but as an employee, not so much – having been sacked from a string of lesser jobs. He was however a very good boss. Not mine of course, neither of us is very good at being told what to do. However we made that work. We carved out our own areas and conferred with each other.

Sometimes he came across as cynical but then he would seem almost naïve and somewhat of a mystic. He changed his name, wouldn't eat meat or tofu and didn't like foods that were too red. He did his yoga and breathing practices every morning and later had a puff on a cigarette. He loved his shed – it was kind of synonymous with him. It was place to make things in and play his drum, a place to just be.

Oddly, his sinner/saint duality made him the rock of our family. He was definitely 'real' – you could tell him stuff. The things that he often said became family mottos. If he had issues with someone he wouldn't hesitate to (quietly) confront them to discuss. He believed in telling it like it was. 'The truth will set you free,' was one of his sayings, even though we often wished he would just keep some things to himself. 'Recovery is everything', was another of his lines that we often quoted to each other if something went pear-shaped.

It's been difficult writing this so soon after losing Raf, but without overstating, he did make an impact in the woodworking world. He was a great character and an innovator, and could be hugely fun to be with. He loved his family intensely and made beautiful things that we will cherish. We only have good things to say about him now.

Is the maker's identity reflected in the things they make? It's easy to construct a narrative in hindsight but I like to think the things we make and do reflect our character and attitudes.



9

9. Reverse taper low table in blackwood, a favourite timber.



10

10. Sushi boards like these were a good seller in a few galleries Raf sent work to.

11. This three-door frame and panel cabinet won a design award from the Victorian Woodworkers' Association way back in time. Raf was very chuffed about that and I was too.



11

I'll let Raf's words as a woodworker be the last here: 'While woodworking is no longer my main livelihood, it will always be my creative outlet and a source of enjoyment for me. Wood is an amazing medium and when you buy a piece of functional crafted woodwork you get a product but also some spirit of the tree and the maker.'

As I write, Raf's workshop is still frozen in time, as are nearly all his belongings in the house we built. I know we are supposed to move forward but to just keep moving is the initial goal. For the moment, I'm still living in his world and take comfort from it.

Photos of furniture by Raf Nathan and Rebecca Nathan, with the portraits taken by Linda Nathan

Traditions Revisited

An interview with award-winning US artist Aspen Golann looks at her exploration of traditional woodworking forms and techniques to produce contemporary works.

Aspen Golann is an intriguing and unique figure in the fine woodworking world. With a foot in both old and new worlds, she brings things together in fresh and unstuffy ways. Grounded in traditional woodworking forms and technique, her work gives voice to contemporary values and interpretations.

Her bio says it succinctly: 'Aspen Golann is an artist whose work explores gender, power, and history through the language of American furniture.' In the interview below, we learn about her influences and aims.

What took you to North Bennet Street School to study traditional furniture making?

Physically, what took me there was that my partner at the time wanted to study preservation carpentry. I found the school for him, and when he enrolled, I started paying attention to it myself.

I had always loved drawing, painting, and making things, but woodworking was never something I had access to growing up. Like many people I simply never had the opportunity to try it.

When I visited the school, I got pulled into a tour and found myself standing in the hallway looking at a student-made demi-lune table and this strange thing happened – it kind of abstracted itself in front of me and split up into a collection of skills, decisions, moves, and ways of shaping material. And I realised I wanted those moves...and the only thing separating me from it was choosing to go.

I will also say that I remember worrying that I wasn't qualified because I had never done any woodworking. The admissions director said, 'We're not looking for people who already know how to do woodworking. We'll teach you that here. We're looking for people who can focus on a physical object for an extended period



of time. That, I'm not sure we can teach.' I applied that night and was accepted within a week.

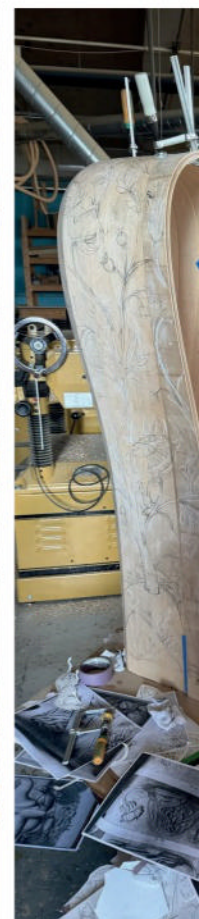
What have you taken from that course – and what have you left behind?

What I took from that course was the vocabulary of woodworking. I learned how the material behaves, what it supports, what it resists, and how generations of makers developed techniques around those realities.

What I left behind was the historical sequence of those techniques and the objects they traditionally pointed toward. If you walked into my shop

Main: Aspen Golann in her workshop.
Photo: Vacheron Constantin

1. A Clock Body, walnut, rosewood, brass, hand enameled glass, hand painted dial, ivory escutcheon. 'The form is inspired by Eli Terry designs, and the panel is an original painting intended to emphasise the relationship between furniture and the female form.' Photo: Lance Patterson
2. Aspen Golann, Greg Pennington, *Garden Settee*. 'Reimagining an Arrowback settee with imagery in the iconic gold-on-black Hitchcock painting style depicting the settee's dual roles – golden hands both offering and withholding symbols of prosperity and hospitality.' Photo: Loam Marketing



today, you would see me using many of the same skills I learned at North Bennet Street School. If you stayed long enough though, you would notice they are no longer being used in their original order, context, or in service of the same objects.

What is it about 17–19th century hand tool woodworking that interests you, and what guides your translation of those techniques and forms into the 21 century?

I've often thought that riding a bicycle moves at the same speed as my mind can process the world. Any faster and I start missing things. Hand tool woodworking feels similar.

Modern machinery is incredibly powerful, but it processes material faster than I can make decisions. Hand tools create a pace where making, observing, designing, and reflecting happen simultaneously. Basically, I think hand tool woodworking moves at roughly the

same speed as my thinking. Long stretches of repetitive work are how I arrive at creative decisions. The toil is part of the thinking. It's how I process ideas, emotions, observations, and questions before they emerge as form.

Can you give us some examples of your work that 'explores gender, power, and history through the language of American furniture'?

My work is rooted in traditional American furniture, but it's also rooted in my complicated relationship to that tradition.

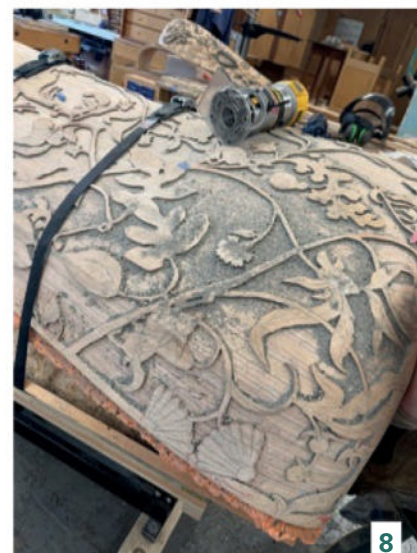
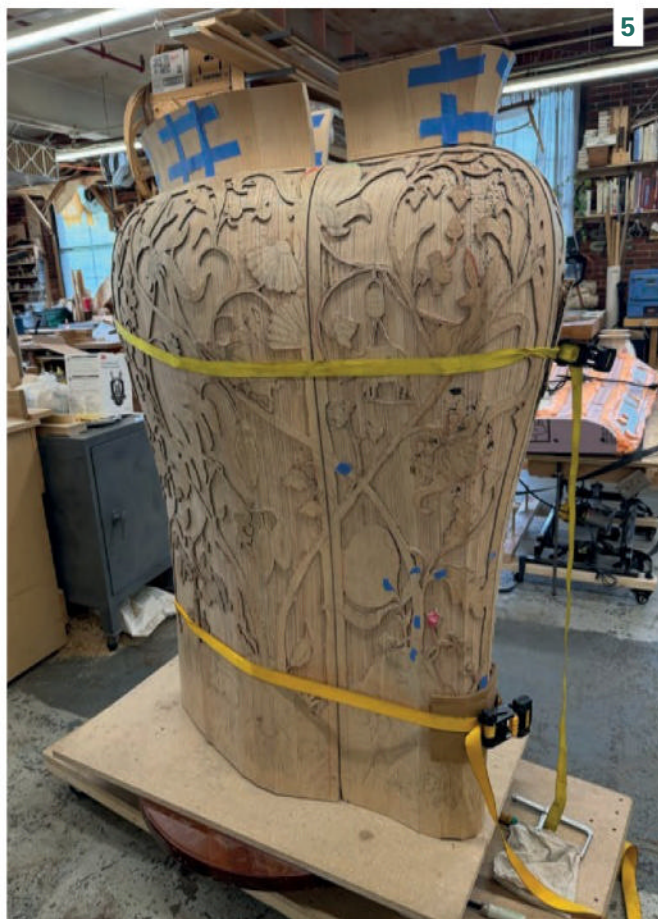
I was trained as a 17th–19th century British and American furniture maker. During that training I found myself falling deeply in love with the beauty, ingenuity, and technical sophistication of these objects. At the same time, I became increasingly aware that many of the styles and decorative languages I was being taught were developed within systems

of colonialism, patriarchy, slavery and concentrated wealth.

That realisation forced me to ask a difficult question: Can the beauty of these objects be separated from the histories that produced them? Most of my work emerges from wrestling with that question.

In the *Garden Settee*, I use the visual language of colonial American furniture to depict women simultaneously nurturing, controlling and being constrained by the environments around them. I'm interested in taking familiar historical forms and using them to tell different stories.

My brooms and brushes come from a similar impulse. Furniture making has historically occupied a place of enormous prestige within craft, while tools associated with cleaning, maintenance, and domestic care have often been overlooked. By treating brooms and brushes as



sculptural objects, and applying the masculinised techniques of early American fine furniture making to them, I can bring those worlds together. They become opportunities to think about labour, gender, value, and care while also celebrating the dignity and importance of the people who use them.

Ultimately, I'm interested in using the language of traditional furniture to speak about people who have often been excluded from its history. The goal isn't to abandon traditional forms, but to ask more of them and to broaden the stories they are capable of telling. My goal is a kind of simultaneous celebration and critique of the history of American decorative arts.

You are also adept in painting, drawing, photography and writing. Where did you learn these skills?

Drawing, painting, photography and writing all entered my life long before

woodworking did. As a child, drawing was a way of processing the world around me and an excuse for spending a lot of time alone, something I always wanted to do. It gave shape and purpose to that solitude.

I was fortunate to have wonderful teachers who encouraged me to attend graduate-level figure drawing classes while I was still in high school. I would take the train into Boston to study. They taught me that making things was not only about expressing ideas, but about developing the attention and discipline required to express something clearly.

But I think the deeper thread is that I've always wanted to understand materials. Whether it's charcoal, paint, wood, photography, or language itself, I'm interested in what happens when you spend enough time with a material to become fluent in it.

How many hours are there in an Aspen Golann day...?

3–8. Scenes from Aspen Golann's workshop as she works on the commission to be completed during her residency within the Met and Vacheron Constantin Artisan program. This will comprise large coopered floor standing vessels with all-over relief carvings inspired by 17th century crewelwork embroidery. She was awarded the residency for work that emphasises the preservation and reinterpretation of traditional craft techniques. *Photos: Aspen Golann*



9



Ha. You're not the first person to ask that. I don't really know how to answer it except to say that I basically wake up around five in the morning and immediately start thinking about craft. Then I go on a run and think about more craft. Then I talk to my friends about craft. Then I go to the studio and practise craft. Then I write emails about craft and think about what kind of craft I most want to practise next. Then I read books that have absolutely nothing to do with craft and somehow end up thinking about how they are, actually, all about craft, if you really think about it.

The few times in my life that feel genuinely protected from work are the times I spend deeply with friends. That's probably the only time when I'm not thinking about it.

On a day to day level, what's your life like as a maker?

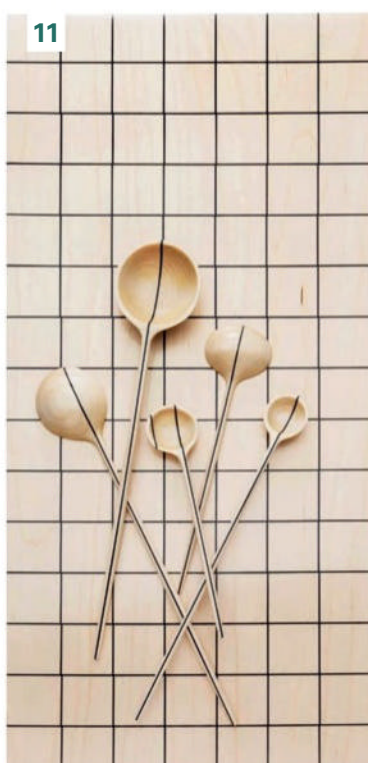
Lately, I've been trying to work more sustainably than I did when I was starting out. I want to be doing this at 70, 80, 110. Early in my career, I would work nearly every day of the month and spend ten or more hours in the shop. These days I wake up early, spend time exercising, arrive at the studio around eight or nine, and work until five. Then I leave. That boundary has been surprisingly important.

What's your basic MO? Do you work on one thing at a time, or many?

When I've got a tool in my hand and I'm working on a piece, I typically have very little else on my mind.



10



11



That's probably a big part of what makes it so addictive. That said, I rarely work on only one project at a time.

Three projects is my favourite number: one that's nearly finished (no decisions left, just toil), one that's somewhere in the middle (it has a shape, but still requires a lot of creative thinking), and one that's still emerging from the ooze, where I get to dream, imagine, and come up with completely new things.

What motivated you to start a non-profit that offers tuition and community support?

The Chairmaker's Toolbox emerged from a mixture of rage and optimism. When I entered the field, it was already fairly homogeneous. As my own career progressed, I noticed something that troubled me: the more successful and visible I became, the less diverse my world became. The rooms I entered, the people I met, and the opportunities available to me often reflected a very narrow slice of

who gets to participate in craft at a professional level.

At the same time, I was discovering green woodworking in Peter Galbert's shop and realising how accessible it could be. Unlike many forms of woodworking, it doesn't require enormous shops, expensive machinery, or extensive infrastructure. It can happen in backyards, garages, sheds, and community spaces. People can begin making meaningful work without first gaining access to a professional shop. That helped me see both the problem and a possible solution more clearly.

The goal of The Chairmaker's Toolbox became creating opportunities, redistributing resources, and helping people find community in a field that can be both financially difficult to enter and inherently isolating. We offer scholarships, mentorship, tool redistribution, educational programming, and support networks because talent is widely distributed, but opportunity often isn't.

9. *Playground Candelabras*, ash, ebonised oak, brass, glass. From a series of homewares 'blending 17th–19th century American furniture forms with contemporary sculpture, stretching the boundaries of function, and using playful forms to express the internal lives of the people who wield them. In this piece the miniature lamination process is lifted from traditional 19th century ornamental bandings used for inlays in fine furniture.'
10. *Penland Vessel*, carved and joined hollow vessels with contrasting inlay – maple and ebony, with ebonised red oak and maple. Photo: Kate Benson
11. *Pinstripe Spoons and Graph Board*. Photo: Loam Marketing
12. *Wavy Lady with Shelf*. Photo: Aspen Golann
13. *Pinstripe and Maybe Spoon*. Photo: Aspen Golann
14. *Woven brush*. Photo: Aspen Golann
15. Low relief carved hollow vessel in hard maple. Photo: Kate Benson



The response has been extraordinary. We've seen people find mentors, skills, friendships, confidence, and careers. Some of the scholarship recipients whose applications I remember reading years ago are now teaching, exhibiting, and mentoring others themselves. Being a small part of that has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my craft life.

You have received several prestigious awards. Aside from acclaim and funding, what have these awards given you?

I'd say at times the awards have given me confidence in my instincts and permission to pursue ideas that might otherwise have felt too strange, ambitious, or uncertain. They also quite literally funded those ideas. They've also created a kind of isolation that I did not expect.

Craft, at least in my experience, is fundamentally communal. None of us arrive here alone. We learn from other people. We borrow from other people. We work alongside other people. We help each other survive moments of scarcity and celebrate moments of abundance.

Awards do something strange. They take that deeply interconnected community and single out one

person for visibility, resources, and opportunity. For me, that can create forms of separation that are difficult to talk about.

The support is incredible and I am deeply grateful for it. But I also think grants and awards can undermine, or at least obscure, the communities that make individual success possible in the first place. They don't always reflect the interconnectedness that allows any of us to do anything well.

Can you please tell us about the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Vacheron Constantin Artisan Residency?

The residency brings together three craftspeople from different disciplines and countries and gives us extraordinary access to museum collections, archives, curators, conservators, and researchers. For me, the most exciting part has been the opportunity to make something I never would have made otherwise.

The residency gave me permission, resources, and support to move much further afield. Suddenly I was studying mirrors, enameling, gilding, embroidery, carving, decorative arts collections, and all the strange and beautiful intersections between them. It felt less like making a single

object and more like growing an entirely new branch of my practice.

What I've come to appreciate is that the residency wasn't really about producing a perfect object. It was about creating the conditions for genuine exploration. It gave me access to extraordinary collections, but perhaps more importantly, it gave me permission to be a beginner again. That's a rare gift for any maker. I think it has changed both my work and my understanding of what my work can be.

What's the focus for this and will you be producing related work?

The project began with an interest in mirrors, but once I started spending time in the collections I became fascinated by 17th century carved chests and crewelwork embroidery.

What captivated me was the way these objects seem to occupy a space between observation and imagination. They contain recognisable plants, animals, and landscapes, but they also drift into fantasy, doodling, storytelling, and invention. They feel rooted in the physical world while simultaneously revealing an interior one.

The piece I'm creating is a large carved vessel that sits somewhere between



18

16. *Courting chairs*. Photo: Kate Benson

17. *Comb Back Windsor Settee*, made in collaboration with Peter Galbert. White oak, hard maple, eastern white pine, milk paint finish. The design blends contemporary proportions with classical construction and ornamentation. Photo: Kate Benson

18. Aspen Golann and Peter Galbert, *Meeting Bench*, made for the Linde Wing at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the design draws from the MFA's American furniture holdings and Boston's long history of Windsor chairmaking. 'It represents a blend of traditional and contemporary approaches to craft, made accessible within a public space.' Photo: Kate Benson

19. *Dresser*, ebonised red oak and maple, hand shaped and cast bronze handles. Photo: Kate Benson

furniture, textile, container, and body. It's made from layers of coloured veneer, a material normally used as a surface. As I carve into it, the layers reveal themselves and begin to behave almost like threads in a textile.

What's next for Aspen Golann?

In five or ten years I hope to have a workshop that I own and share with people I love. I want there to be a separate room for drawing, reading, and thinking. I want there to be at least one empty bench so new people can always pass through. I want it to be both quiet and bustling.

I love parallel play. I love looking up from my bench and seeing other people struggling, experimenting, succeeding, and learning nearby.

More than anything, I want to keep building a life that allows for ambitious, technically demanding, deeply intuitive work – and I want to stay available to and connected to my community. I want to be a deep well for myself and a resource for others. I hope that's not too much to ask.

Aspen Golann @aspen_golann lives in Southern New Hampshire, USA and alongside her studio practice teaches at Rhode Island School of Design. Learn more at www.aspengolann.com



19





The Sliding Deadman

Damion Fauser shows how you can boost the workholding capacity of your workbench with this simple to make yet powerful accessory.

Fundamentally, your workbench exists to support and secure your workpiece so your hands are free to operate tools. It stands to reason that the more versatility you have in this regard the better off you'll be. If you fit a sliding deadman to your bench, I'm confident you will ask yourself 'why haven't I done this before?'

The sliding deadman is often misunderstood or even overlooked as a functional design feature in a workbench, and yet the concept

has been around for centuries. It's a board that slides in the vertical plane in the window defined by the lower rail, the legs and the underside of the benchtop. It has holes in it, that when fitted with a peg or a holdfast can support the lower edge of substantially wider and/or longer and heavier workpieces than your face vice would normally be able to support by itself.

I have deadmans fitted to all of my workbenches, and I use them all the time. The three most common tasks

being when cutting hinge mortises into the edges of assembled cabinetry doors, shaping panels and components with handplanes and when planing the edges of long boards, such as when preparing boards for dining tabletops for example (**photos 1–4**).

The name originates from the generic rigging term 'deadman', which relates to anything fixed and heavy that can be used to support a workpiece or from which something can be tied off, such as an anchor, buried log, large rocks etc.



Showing the varied capabilities of the sliding deadman as a versatile workbench accessory.

1. Shaping the curved edges of a long dining table rail.
2. Full view of a workbench fitted with twin sliding deadmans for extra holding capacity.
3. Springing the final edge of one half of a 2600mm long tabletop.
4. Supporting door panels on edge to cut hinge mortises.



I've made hundreds of workbenches over the years, and I've developed my own style and techniques for making it easy, fast, and most importantly, with a slick and clean sliding mechanism.

Two primary elements

The sliding action is different at the top and bottom of the board. At the top, a stub tenon rides in a groove cut into the underside of the benchtop (**photo 5**). At the bottom, a V-shaped profile rides on a matching symmetrically-pitched rail on top of the lower bench framing rail (**photo 6**).

I've seen some people, for simplicity, use the same stub tenon/groove arrangement at the bottom end as well, like in a sliding door arrangement. I would suggest this is not the best approach as this bottom

groove will quickly fill up with sawdust and woodshavings and prevent your deadman from, well, sliding. Whilst a little more challenging to cut, the pitched lower rail will allow workbench debris to simply fall away and not bind up your deadman.

The primary elements here are the deadman itself and the lower pitched rail. I'll discuss each of these in turn – but please note that my techniques have been developed for optimisation on my sliding table panel saws, with a right-tilting blade – if you run a saw that tilts to the left you will need to adjust cutting operations to suit.

Material selection and preparation

Whilst I'll discuss the two components separately, it is useful to select and

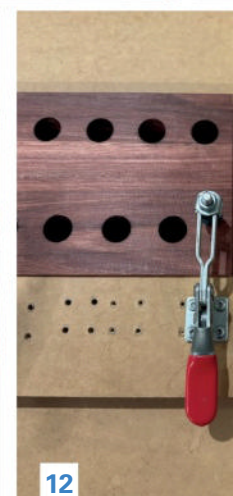
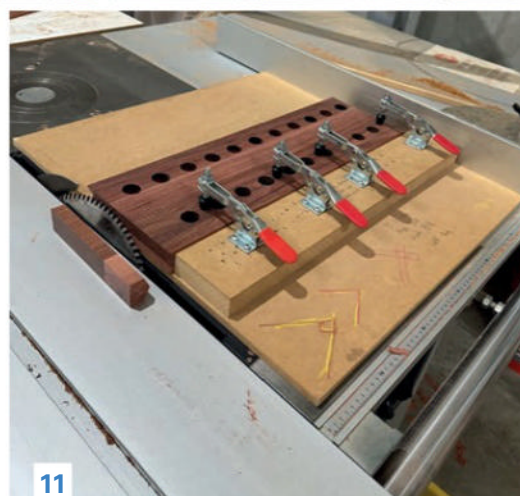
prepare the two concurrently, as this sliding mechanism is optimised when the deadman and the lower rail are dressed to the same thickness. I typically aim for a finished thickness of between 35–40mm, giving the board loads of structural integrity yet not being so heavy that undue friction is caused where the deadman runs on the rail.

I highly recommend using a suitably dense and hard-wearing hardwood to ensure longevity of the components. Students who come and build a bench with me often choose a contrasting timber, but this is a personal choice.

Geometry

I use a 22–25° angle for the matched V-groove and pitched rail. I see a lot of literature proposing to use a 45° angle, and I certainly understand

5. Stub tenons on a small batch run of deadman boards.
6. V-grooves at the bottom end.
7. A crisp interface between the two elements is critical to a smooth sliding action.
8. Set and record the blade angle with a sliding bevel.
9. First cut when forming the pitched peak on the rail.
10. After the second cut, the 'offcut' created is your deadman rail.
11. A simple crosscut sled turns a dangerous operation into a much safer cut.
12. A stop block creates solid end registration when flipping the board to make the second cut.
13. The blade height must be set so that the base of the V-groove is a clean and crisp intersection between the two faces.
14. The relationship between the stub tenon, its shoulder and the top of the leg.



that this could potentially make cutting these elements a little easier with more basic tooling such as router cutters, but my preference is for the much lower angle, for two main reasons. Firstly, the reduced angle means the acute edges on both the deadman and the rail itself aren't quite as fragile and prone to bruising. Secondly, and functionally, the reduced angle greatly reduces the surface contact area between the deadman and the rail, greatly reducing friction.

Lower rail

For the lower rail, prepare a board that is slightly longer than the distance between the two front legs of the bench, and minimum 100mm wide. This additional width allows the safe cutting of the pitched profile on my right-tilting blade, and I always like to create narrow forms and mouldings by cutting them on

the edge of a wider board and then ripping them away. Set a rip blade to slightly higher than half of the thickness of your stock and to your chosen angle and take a record of this with a sliding bevel gauge to be able to reset it for the cuts on the deadman (photo 8).

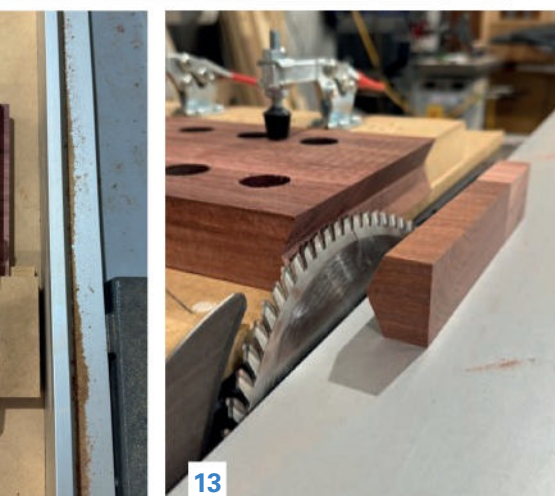
The symmetrical pitch will be formed in two passes, with the two cuts intersecting inside the board and the resulting offcut is the rail itself (photos 9, 10). Run the first cut, flip the board end to end to keep the same reference edge against the fence and repeat. Whilst it is theoretically possible to cut the pitch on the very edge of the board and then rip the rail away, with a right-tilt blade, this is three cuts instead of two. I also try to avoid cutting situations whereby thin offcuts can slide down the angled blade and potentially get caught in the throat plate of the saw.

The fence setting here can be somewhat arbitrary at this stage, as we'll use the reality of the rail to inform the dimensioning and joinery cuts on the deadman itself later. I usually aim for the rail to have edges that are between 15–25mm tall. The rail can now be cut to length to the distance between the front legs and is now complete.

The deadman

Prepare your chosen board so it is approximately 100mm longer than the length from the top of the rail on your bench frame to the top of the leg – note how we're discussing this when the workbench frame is made but the benchtop is not yet fitted, I'll discuss retrofitting a deadman to an existing bench a little later.

I like to make my deadmans between 175–225mm wide – I find the wider deadmans slide better and are less prone to racking.



You first need to cut the V-groove on the bottom end. Switch to a crosscut blade and reset the blade angle from the rail cuts. Because of my right-tilting blade I've made a simple crosscut-sled to make this cut on the right-hand side of the blade, with the edge of the sled running against the fence. This prevents racking, and therefore a potentially dangerous kickback situation during the cut. Mark the centre of the thickness of the board with a pencil gauge and, with the board installed in the sled set the blade height to just under this mark.

Run a pass, flip the board over and run it again. If you get this right you'll have an offcut fall away and be left with a small birds-beak of waste left in the bottom of the V-groove. Raise the blade slightly, run the two cuts again and repeat until the two facets of the V-groove meet in a clean and crisp intersection – this is essential

for a smooth sliding action (**photos 11, 12, 13**). You can now put the deadman and rail together for the first time and see how well the two elements meet.

Now locate your rail in place on the bench frame and put the deadman in place on the rail and up against the leg – you can now mark the reality of the top of the leg with a pencil (**photo 14**). This mark represents what will be the underside of the bench and is an important reference position from which to cut the stub tenon. From this point, measure and wrap a baseline 1.5–2mm towards the bottom end of the deadman – this will form the shoulder of the stub tenon.

Now, from this shoulder, mark a line on the edge of the board 10mm towards the top end of the deadman, which forms the length of the tenon and therefore the overall length of the

deadman board, which can now be cut to length. In my image I've relocated the board back into place after the stub tenon has been cut to give you a better visual of the relationship between the tenon and the top of the leg.

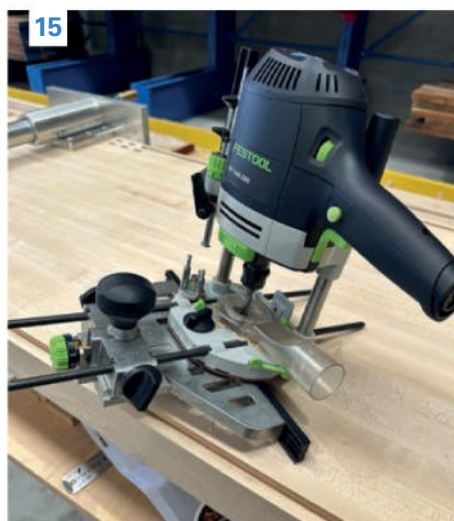
In terms of the progress of making your bench, it's important at this stage that you have your benchtop made, and you've identified where the benchtop will meet the tops of the legs. On the underside and front edge of your benchtop, mark the locations of the inside faces of the front legs.

Now you can cut the groove to accept the stub tenon. I set the groove approximately 10mm in from the front edge and use a router with the edge guide fitted and a 3/8" inch (9.5mm) cutter, although this is somewhat arbitrary and you could easily use up to 1/2" (12.7mm) with no issues here (**photo 15**). Cut the groove so that it runs slightly past the leg markings, which will ensure your deadman can run all the way up to the inside faces of the legs.

Run the groove in a number of 2–3mm passes to a total minimum depth of 12mm, which ensures the end of the stub tenon won't bind against the bottom of the groove.

Now use the reality of the groove to mark out and cut the stub tenon, which can be formed in any number of fashions – rebate plane, handheld or table-mounted router, dado stack or spindle moulder. Whatever method you choose, cut the stub tenon slightly thicker than the width of the groove at this stage – we'll dial it in with hand tools later.

At this point you can mark out and drill the holes for your chosen support device. I use 1" (25.4mm) pegs and therefore drill matching holes, but you could also choose to use commercially-available bench dogs or even holdfasts – just make sure you drill the appropriately-sized holes. I mark out my holes along each edge of the deadman in a staggered formation.



Functionally this increases the fidelity of height positions of the holes and in my view it adds some visual interest. Drop a 3mm radius roundover bit into the holes and soften the edges – this visually softens the holes and makes locating your peg or fixture so much easier in use (**photos 16, 17**)

Shaping or profiling the long edges is a purely aesthetic decision. I like to add a simple curve to add a little elegance to the bench (**photo 18**).

Dialling in the fit

Now you can fit the stub tenon to the groove underneath the bench, and my favoured method for this is the shoulder plane. Both to enable the deadman to slide well, and to aid installation, I make the thickness of the tenon approximately 0.5mm thinner than the width of the groove. For some bench designs this is as far as you need to go, but I favour bench designs where the benchtop is level with the front plane of the legs, so in this case I also make the front face of the deadman in this plane as well, therefore effectively adding the deadman to the inside jaw surface area of your front vice.

If your bench is of this design, then you should complete this element of the tuning process first. Measure the thickness of the wall between the groove and the front of the bench (**photo 19**) and then plane the front cheek of the tenon so the shoulder is



between 0.25-0.5mm wider than the groove wall (**photo 20**). This is the dimension that keeps the front face of the deadman in the same plane as the front edge of the benchtop.

Now dial in the thickness of the tenon from the back cheek only until you achieve the fit in the groove as previously described (**photos 21, 22**). You can slip the tenon up into the benchtop groove and check the fit, both that the front faces of the deadman and benchtop are coplanar and that there is a little wiggle room inside the groove.

Installation

Whilst the deadman and its rail could be installed at the same time as the benchtop, for me this entails too many moving parts and so I attach the benchtop first and then the deadman and its rail. To do this, locate the deadman rail into the V-groove on the deadman and, together as one unit, put the stub tenon into the benchtop groove and pivot the whole system into place. If all your measurements are accurate and you've worked to the tolerances I've described, it will just fit. If not, take a few more passes off the back cheek of the tenon and continue test-fitting until you can successfully dry-fit everything.

At this stage you'll be able to do a dry run of the sliding action, and this is always a very satisfying milestone for me. Now remove it all, dab a few small glue dots on the top surface of



the bench frame rail, re-install and pin the rail in place with a number of clamps gently tightened, ensuring the front edge of the deadman rail remains flush with the front edge of the main bench rail (**photo 23**).

Once the clamps are off you have a fully-functional sliding deadman, but to really make it skate, you can either wax or oil the rail, and then it will really fly with a gentle one-fingered flick. I simply oil it with the rest of the bench with a 50:50 turps and linseed mix.

Quite clearly my system does not allow for the deadman to be removed, and I prefer it this way as one of the key factors in the successful sliding action is the narrow space between the stub tenon shoulder and the underside of the bench, which greatly helps to prevent racking. So if you have tool storage underneath your benchtop, particularly drawers which will come forward of the deadmans vertical plane, then you can simply slide your deadman aside to open any particular drawer.

For those that do want to be able to remove their deadman, you'll have the deadman rail permanently fixed in place and then you'll need to cut the groove in the benchtop significantly deeper and cut the stub tenon shoulders significantly further down from the end of the board.

The delta between both the tenon shoulder and the underside of the bench,



as well as between the end of the tenon and bottom of the benchtop groove needs to be greater than the height of the pitched peak of the deadman rail. This then allows the deadman to be lifted into the benchtop groove and pivoted over the top of the deadman rail and down and away out of the groove. For me in this case the larger gap now creates a much larger risk of the deadman racking in use, which is why I don't favour this version, but I understand why some woodworkers may choose to do this option.

Retrofitting to an existing bench

If your bench is already made, you can still install a deadman, all you need to do is create a secondary rail with the groove that would normally be cut directly into the underside of the benchtop and then attach that to the underside of the bench. I would suggest it needs to be 15–20mm thick to accommodate the 10mm deep

groove required. Once this is in place, the process remains largely the same, except for marking the location of the stub tenon shoulder, but this will be simple enough when working directly against your bench in reality.

Again, I'm confident that the first time you use your new sliding deadman you'll wonder how you ever managed without it. Remember to plan your rail and V-groove cuts according to which way your blade tilts, and with some simple and diligent marking and cutting you'll significantly boost the work-holding capabilities of your workbench.

Photos: Damion Fauser



*Damion Fauser
@damionfauser is a Brisbane
designer maker who also
teaches woodwork classes*

*from his workshop. Learn more at
www.damionfauser.com*

15. Use a router fitted with an edge guide to cut the groove into the benchtop.
16. I prefer to use Forstner bits for drilling fast and clean deadman holes.
17. Soften the holes on both faces with a small bearing-guided roundover bit.
18. Curving or otherwise shaping the long edges is a personal aesthetic choice.
19. Measuring the thickness of the groove wall at the front edge of the benchtop.
20. Checking the front shoulder to ensure the front face of the deadman and the edge of the benchtop remain coplanar.
21. Dial in the tenon thickness from the back cheek and aim to have this 0.5mm narrower than the width of the groove.
22. A shoulder plane is the quickest and easiest way to dial in the tenon cheeks.
23. Gluing and clamping the rail in place is quick and easy.



Making a Masterpiece

Danish furniture designer maker Rasmus Fenhann reflects on the making of a cabinet which draws on 17th century traditions and represents an unfettered exploration of process.



Filled with light and his tools of trade, the workshop of Rasmus Fenhann is in Copenhagen, Denmark. Photo: Frederikke Brostrup

Rasmus Fenhann has had a lifelong career as a woodworker. Initially he trained as a carpenter and then graduated in furniture design from the Danish Design School. His style defies categorisation and references other traditions, cultures and philosophies.

An outsider looking at the work of Rasmus Fenhann might note that

he's not one to shirk intense detail, and overall, accuracy is paramount. However there is also poetry in his love of texture, sculpted surfaces and a Japanese influence is apparent. He has created minimalistic furniture designs that magnify beautiful joinery as well as geometric constructions that rely on pinpoint machining. However, it seems his latest work has done away with minimalism and gone

all out with complexity and labour intensive processes.

Rasmus says his latest piece, soon to be unveiled, is the culmination of his 30 year journey. What he fondly calls his 'madness cabinet' will soon be unveiled to the world as the *Cosmos Cabinet*. It's an extraordinary piece, painstakingly completed over a two year period. We asked him to tell us more.

1



What's behind this latest piece?

Since I first began working with wood, I have regularly undertaken personal projects driven by curiosity – both about wood as a material and about woodworking techniques. These projects have been essential to the development of my craft, allowing me to experiment, learn, and refine my skills. I have often kept the resulting pieces for myself to learn from them and get inspiration.

This cabinet represents a culmination of that lifelong exploration. At the same time, it is a contemporary interpretation of an ancient Copenhagen tradition: the making of a masterpiece. Historically, a masterpiece was the piece of furniture a cabinetmaker had to produce in order to gain admission to the city guild. In that sense, this cabinet is both a personal milestone and a tribute to a long tradition of craftsmanship.

Who or what is it for?

The cabinet was conceived as an exhibition piece. It is intended to celebrate the joy of woodworking and to inspire other makers and craftspeople. It will be shown as part of my solo exhibition, *Offcut/Recut*, opening in Copenhagen in September 2026. I plan to keep the piece.

What's the reason for your use of offcuts?

I have always been fascinated by offcuts. Rather than seeing them as leftovers, I see them as opportunities. They are often the beginning of new ideas, and the limitations they impose can lead to unexpected and inventive design solutions.

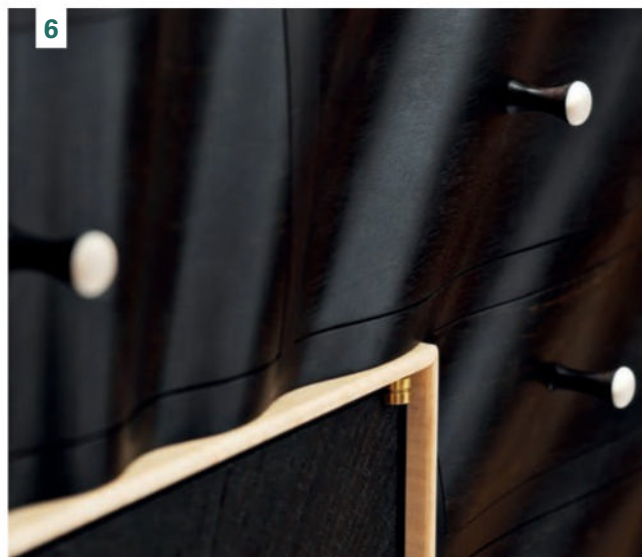
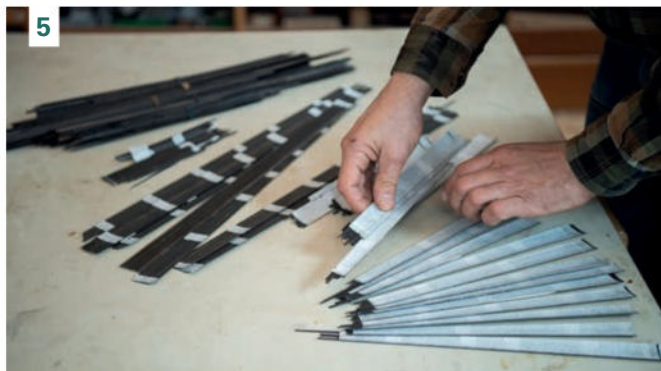
The project is also a reflection on contemporary patterns of consumption and waste. As woodworkers, we have a responsibility to use our materials with care and respect. Every tree that is felled deserves to be used to its fullest potential, and we should strive to create objects that will endure for generations.

2



3





Wood is often described as a sustainable material, but it is not especially suited to recycling once an object reaches the end of its life. Furniture can rarely become furniture again; in most cases, the wood is downcycled into particleboard, turned into paper, or burned for energy. For that reason, longevity is an important aspect of sustainability.

Where do the offcuts come from?

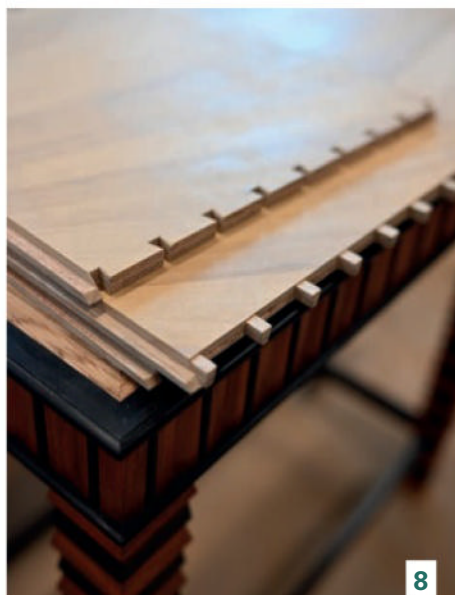
The cabinet is made entirely from offcuts I inherited from the renowned Italian cabinetmaker Pierluigi Ghianda, together with offcuts of oak and maple collected in my own workshop. Ghianda frequently worked with ebony and other fine hardwoods, and these precious remnants became the starting point for the project. The cabinet grew from a desire to give new life and meaning to materials that might otherwise have remained unused.

How did you arrive at the design of this cabinet?

During a visit to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, I encountered

1. The *Cosmos Cabinet* represents the culmination of Rasmus Fenhann's 30 year-long career. Inspiration came from an ebony cabinet made by Herman Doomer in 1640.
2. The textured ebony surfaces reveal marking from initial processing of the wood in its raw state.
3. The handles were turned from mammoth bone and have shagreen applied to their ends.
4. The ebony offcuts were 'inherited' from renowned Italian cabinetmaker Pierluigi Ghianda.
5. Laying up thin sections of ebony offcuts to be applied to the *Cosmos Cabinet*.
6. Detail showing the wavy profile of the sculpted drawer fronts.
7. The centre of the *Cosmos Cabinet* is inlaid with mother-of-pearl in 'star constellations'.

Photos 1, 2, 3, 6, 7: Jeppe Gudmundsen Holmgreen
Photos 4, 5: Frederikke Brostrup



8



9



10

- 8, 9. Traditional joinery was used for the oak carcass and drawer construction.
- 10. The oak cabinet carcass was covered in applied ebony offcut pieces.
- 11. Triangular sections of pernambuco and Macassar ebony were applied to the frame and legs.
- 12. A close-up of Rasmus Fenhann's well used hand tool collection.
- 13. Portrait of Rasmus Fenhann

Photos 8–10: Rasmus Fenhann
Photo 11: Jeppe Gudmundsen Holmgreen
Photos 12, 13: Frederikke Brostrup



11

a remarkable ebony cabinet made around 1640 by the Dutch cabinetmaker Herman Doomer. I was immediately captivated by its sculptural surfaces and strong architectural presence.

I have long been fascinated by Renaissance cabinets of curiosities and Kunstkammer furniture, so seeing Doomer's cabinet became an important point of reference. For this project, I wanted to create a contemporary interpretation of that tradition while incorporating the undulating surfaces that are a defining feature.

What was the most labour intensive process?

The cabinet has taken two years to finish. One year of full time work, just for the workshop labour. Then there is the design process. The drawers, the legs and the internal cabinet was the most time consuming, but every part of the project has been massively time consuming. Whenever I felt a particular detail or idea was necessary, I made it regardless of the time required. The time spent on the entire project is difficult to estimate, but more than 2,000 hours.

How did you create the radiating sculpted fronts?

The front consists of thin pieces of ebony scraps glued onto oak. I was able to cut this into 24 drawer fronts in three different heights. The cabinet front, with drawer fronts and compartments, was placed into a frame, affixed with double-sided adhesive tape and milled on a CNC machine at the Danish Art Workshops. The computer-generated design was based on sine curves, to form a wave pattern inspired by Herman Doomer's cabinets.

How did you achieve the starry scene inside the cabinet?

The centre of the cabinet holds a miniature cabinet with doors that can be pushed in from the back. The sides are oak, lined with golden (East Indian) satinwood in a radial pattern inlaid with mother-of-pearl zodiac 'constellations'. As a reference to the old cabinets of curiosities, which often had mirrors in the middle, I used shellac to polish the surfaces to a mirror shine.

The inlay pattern was achieved using CAD drawing. I found a star map of the northern hemisphere and selected the most well known star constellations and used a Shaper router.

What's your attitude to the use of hi-tech tools?



12



13

Although I work with traditional craft techniques, I have never viewed technology as the opposite of craftsmanship. I see it simply as another tool. I am always curious about new technologies and how they might contribute to my work. What matters is not whether a tool is old or new, but whether it helps realise an idea with precision and quality.

How is the base constructed?

The entire undercarriage is made of solid oak. To support the heavy cabinet, the stretchers have tenons going all the way through the legs, reinforced with ebony wedges in the tenons for optimal strength.

The oak is covered with carefully selected wood scraps. The orange pernambuco scraps have a triangular profile and are offcuts from an earlier process. During the Renaissance,

pernambuco was used as red dyestuff for textiles. The black wood is Macassar ebony, a type that is not quite black but has brown stripes.

For the triangular profile to cover the legs, I joined the corners with a 45° chamfer. As an additional aesthetic detail, the legs weren't tapered into a conical shape, as this would not produce 45° mitres. Instead, I tapered them with a 1mm indentation for every third row of triangular profiles.

How did you achieve the blackened surfaces and textures on the edges of the cabinet?

The black parts of the cabinet are all African ebony. The pieces that look like charred surfaces are offcuts cut from the outside of the original plank. The rugged surfaces come from the process of removing the outer white

part of the trunk, which does not have the same properties as the black core. This was done using axes and chainsaws decades ago when the tree was felled and hewn in the jungle.

The little handles are exquisite. What are they made of and how did you make them?

The drawer grips combine black ebony and white ivory as a reference to Hermann Doomer's 17th century cabinets. I had a bag of small pieces of mammoth tusk that my wife, who is a jeweller, had collected during her apprenticeship in the Georg Jensen silversmithy, which for a time used mammoth tusks for handles on their silver teapots. The pieces were very small and all different shapes, but I was able to turn on the lathe to make a delicate white detail at the end of each grip. For the larger central grip, I combined the mammoth tusk with white shagreen (stingray skin).



14



15



16



17

What was the most difficult process...?

The most difficult process has been the fact that my own imagination was not sufficient for this project. Many of the decisions in the cabinet I had to make without being sure that the result would be nice and harmonious. Sometimes the cabinet itself was making the decisions for me and I just had to hope for a good result.

...the most enjoyable?

The most enjoyable part of the process has been when I succeeded in using some nice offcuts. For me it is an incredible moment to see that some leftovers in a cardboard box could be transformed into beautiful parts in the cabinet. One example is the rough ebony fragments used on the cabinet corners. I only had a small box of these pieces remaining after using most of the material on an earlier chest of drawers. Seeing them find a new life in this cabinet was immensely satisfying.

Were there any disasters...?

Fortunately, there were no major disasters, although there were many moments when things came very close. For example, the sculpted drawer fronts were routed so deeply that in some places only a few tenths of a millimetre



of ebony remained. Had I cut through the ebony, it would have been almost impossible to repair convincingly.

...or triumphs?

The greatest triumph was simply that the cabinet came together as a coherent whole. A project of this complexity relies on experience, patience, and careful judgement. After 30 years as a cabinetmaker, I have learned to work slowly and methodically – and I have also learned that a good cabinetmaker is often someone who is very skilled at concealing small mistakes.

What does the *Cosmos cabinet* represent to you?

The cabinet is a project where the process has been the central purpose. This year I have 30 years anniversary as a trained cabinetmaker and the project is a culmination of a series of projects I have made in my career solely to develop my creativity and craftsmanship. I know that I won't be able to make many of this kind of projects in my lifetime, so I thought this was an opportunity to make a masterpiece.

Learn more about Rasmus Fenhann
@fenhannfurniture at www.fenhann.com

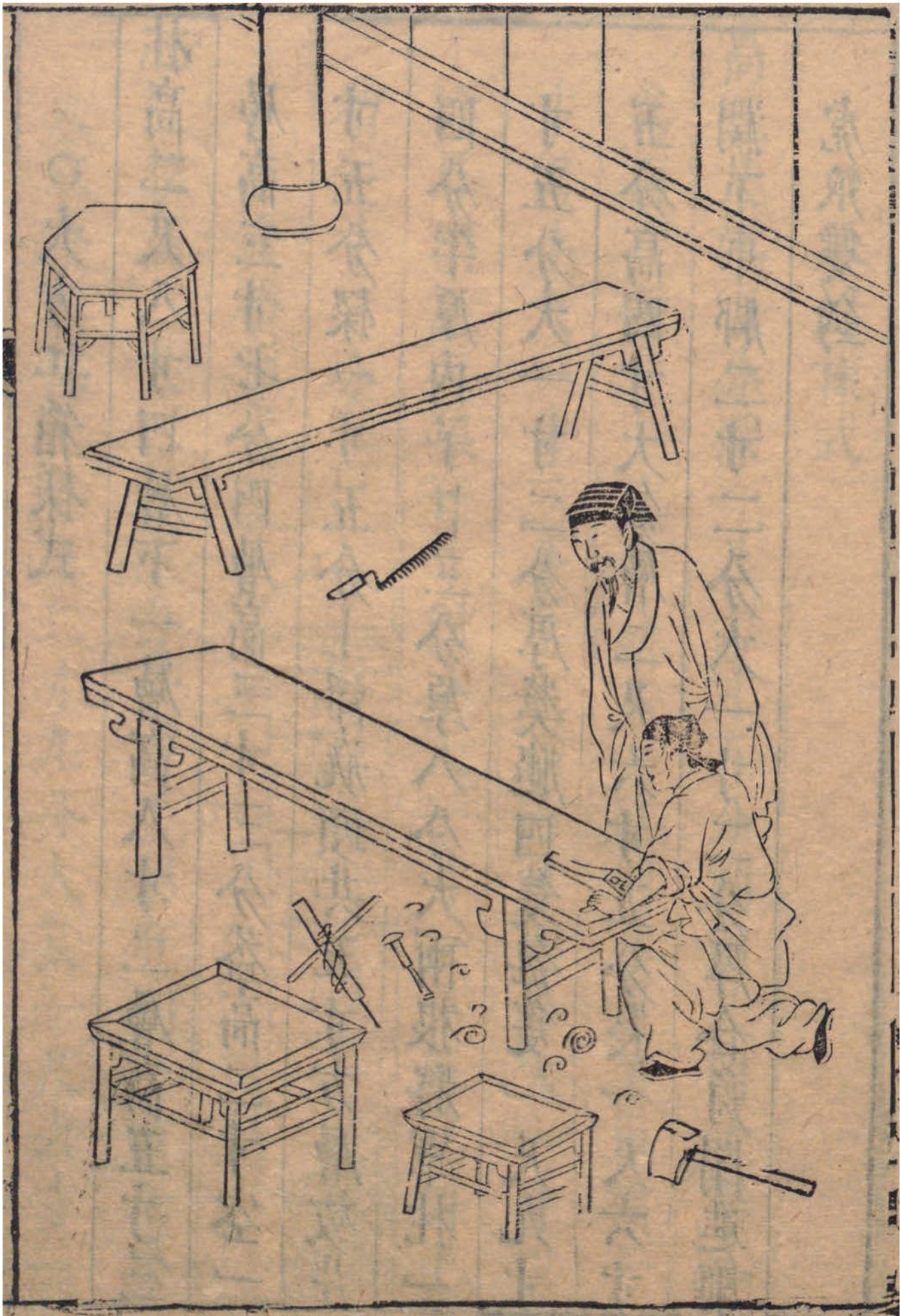
14. *Pyramid Grande table*: 'Eight triangles are joined together to form a double pyramid. This geometrical shape is one of the strongest and most harmonious polygons and it is also the natural shape of a raw diamond. I combined the double pyramid shapes in different formations, playing with positive and negative space. The accuracy of this perfect shape requires perfect craftsmanship.'
15. *Daiku bench*, detail. 'When Japanese *daiku* (carpenters) process large pieces of timber for columns they use facets to control the large curvy shapes. I used this technique on a uniquely large piece of wood originating from Pierluigi Ghianda's workshop in Milan.'
16. *Bee Hotel*: 'A luxury hotel for wild solitary bees. Built in solid hardwood it has a selection of room hallways for different species of wild bees. Each guest has their own private entrance at the front of the hotel. The round pillar on which the hotel is standing allows orientation to the sun and you can easily place the hotel close to the flowers that the bee-queests like most.'
17. '*Naguri bench* refers to a Japanese woodcut technique in which large cuts are made using an axe. The bench is made of a very old piece of mahogany salvaged from Pierluigi Ghianda's workshop. My thoughts go to him when I use this wood.'
18. *Contrahedron, Hikari series*, 700mm diameter, commissioned by Design Museum Denmark for the exhibition *Learning from Japan*. 'The mathematician talks enthusiastically about the beauty of geometry. The cabinetmaker is obsessed with perfect joinery, constructions and sensuous materials. I try to combine the beauty ideals from science with the aesthetics of natural materials. The work of the hand and the machine combined achieving what it's all about: absolute precision. Traditional craft lives on and gives new meaning in interaction with modern computer technology, which helps in the design process and the accurate processing of the wood as a new tool in the toolbox.'
19. *Sakyu bench*, made at the Danish Art Workshops using CNC machinery and Japanese hand tools. '*Sakyu* is Japanese for sand dune. The title reflects my fascination with Japanese craftsmanship and culture. What inspires me is not a particular Japanese style but rather a way of thinking. I admire the respect for materials, the care given to every detail, and the deep understanding of wood as a living material.'

Photos 14, 16, 18: Jeppe Gudmundsen Holmgreen

Photos 15–17: Rasmus Fenhann

Photo 19: Anders Sune Berg





Beneath the Brush

Despite its profound influence on the art and craft of woodworking, Chinese woodcraft is not well understood. Jake Lunniss looks back to explain why Japan's woodcraft is venerated and China's is not.

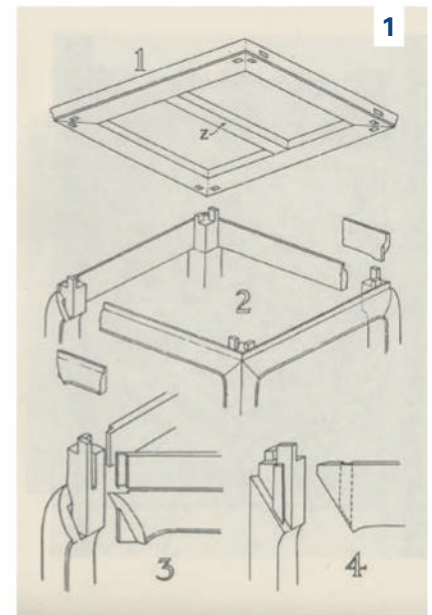
Japan is uttered with something close to reverence by almost every woodworker in the West as the pinnacle of the craft. Yet the Ming-era Chinese furniture I've been digging into: the joinery, the forms, the sheer bloody-mindedness of the engineering, leaves me asking why? Why is it that Japanese craft has gained universal prestige while China's has not just failed to achieve the same level of recognition, but has only the vaguest recognition amongst woodworkers at all?

An embracing shoulders tenon (*baojiansun*) went together this morning. Three pieces meeting at a point, every face mitred, an internal interlock that pulls itself tight as the parts come home. The tenons are, if I may say so, perfect: when pulled apart they make a titillating 'pop'. It will hold for centuries without glue, assuming I become incredibly famous and the NGV keep my test joints for their cultural significance.

I've only cut a handful of these, but every time I do one I get slightly faster, slightly neater. There's no meaningful way to electrify the process (unless you have a 5-axis CNC – I put one on my

Christmas list, but I'm still waiting), so there's a lot of hand work. But the cutting isn't the hard part; by the time you're at the bench with saw in-hand the hard part is behind you. The marking, the order of operations, the mental model of which face you reference from which datum and in what sequence are where the struggle is. Get those right and the joint goes together as easily as any ordinary mortise and tenon.

I sat with it on the bench and thought – did anyone else come up with joinery this sophisticated? I don't believe so. The embracing shoulders tenon is, as far as I know, a uniquely Chinese answer to a uniquely Chinese problem: stylistically, the Chinese didn't want to see endgrain; practically, animal based glues softened and stopped holding in China's humid season and the governing class were required to move often and far, so the furniture needed to hold mechanically with the fringe benefit of being demountable. The makers who solved this not-so-sticky situation solved it at some point in the late 12th century with tools that, by any modern standard, were crude. A rise-and-run chart, a shared template,



Main: Some things are timeless: shavings everywhere and tools on the floor. Plate 17 *Lu Ban Jing*, Source: National Archive Japan

1. Variations on the embracing shoulders tenon. From Gustav Ecke, *Chinese Domestic Furniture in Photographs and Measured Drawings* (Henri Vetch, Peking, 1944).
- 2, 3. 'The finest carpenter work the country has ever seen: the Japanese Commissioner's Building', 1876 Philadelphia Centennial. Credit: Library Company of Philadelphia





4. Hand tools that can trace their lineage back to China: Australian made HNT Gordon plane in redgum, Japanese kanna or pull plane, Western Stanley bench plane.
5. On the outside, the original 'clean lines'; on the inside, it is one of the most complex joints in any furniture tradition. *Joinery and process photos: Jake Lunniss*
6. This is a joint that is mechanically held in all three axes without glue, self-tightens under load, and appears from the outside as nothing more than a clean meeting of wood.
7. These three components are designed to interlock and now ready to assemble.

a master, an apprentice. And work that we, in this golden age of robot precision, cannot equal. Yet hardly anybody talks about it.

Walk into any decent newsagent and pick up a woodworking magazine. Watch a few minutes' worth of woodworking YouTube. The eastern tradition that gets all the love is Japan's. The *kanna* (pull plane), the pull saw, the laminated chisels, the obsessive sharpening; the temple carpenter filmed in slow motion as a sheer, shimmering shaving curls from the plane. I'm not knocking it, I have a couple of Japanese chisels myself and the work coming out of contemporary Japanese *miyadaiku* (temple carpenters) is extraordinary. Japan's tradition is one of the great achievements of human craft.

But there is another tradition, older, equally accomplished, that the same newsagent, the same magazine, the same algorithm does not show you: classical Chinese furniture. Specifically the late Ming and early Qing – roughly 1500 to 1700 – when

the literati workshops of Suzhou and Beijing were producing furniture in *huanghuali* and *zitan* where every leg meets its apron with an unbroken flow of grain, where a cabinet door closes on a pivot carved from the door itself and where the curves of a horseshoe-back chair are meticulously formed from tiny scarf joined sections.

I have spent enough time in the English-language books we have to be confident saying no one else in the history of furniture making achieved this level of refinement. Not because the people who made it were better than anyone else – they were makers no different in essence from a Welsh stick-chair maker or an Italian intarsia worker to a Japanese *sukiya* (tea-house) joiner. But because they were the beneficiaries of more than 3000 years of continuous culture and the incremental improvement it facilitated.

The Chinese tradition was the source of many others. Japanese carpentry inherited is through the Korean peninsula in the centuries before it diverged into its own line. The pull

stroke, the laminated blade, the template framing logic – those are Japan's developments, brilliant, but built on a foundation that came from elsewhere. Chinese tools sit closer to ours than Japanese tools do: the push plane that HNT Gordon makes in Australia is a Chinese plane, and the wooden European planes came down the Silk Road to Rome. We all drink from the same well, and the well is in China.

So what happened?

The English-language scholarship on classical Chinese furniture fits on one shelf. I know because I've acquired almost all of them. Wang Shixiang's *Connoisseurship of Chinese Furniture from 1985* is the foundation. Gustav Ecke's measured drawings from Peking in 1944. Sarah Handler, George Kates. A handful of museum catalogues and dealer monographs. Five or six names. The Japanese equivalent runs to thousands of books. A western maker who wants to study Japanese joinery has entire libraries at their disposal. A western maker who wants to study Chinese joinery has a shelf.



The reasons why run through everything from the proclivities of the writing class to the conditions of war, cultural revolution, and a centuries-long instinct to face inward while Japan was sending carpenters to Vienna.

In Japan, from 1615, the warrior class was legally required to be literate. The shogunate's *Buke Shohatto* (Laws for Military Houses) opens with the principle of *bunbu ryodo* (the two paths of writing and warring) – both mastered. The men who held the swords also held the brushes. The class that patronised carpenters wrote about their patronage. The *daimyo* (feudal lord) noted the joinery of his pavilion. Over the centuries this produced a culture in which material things were worth writing about because the people who could write thought so.

In China the scholarly tradition went the other way. Confucian orthodoxy held that the gentleman was not a vessel (*junzi bu qi*) not a tool, not a specialist, not someone whose

dignity rested in a narrow technical skill. To write technically about workshop practice was, in a sense, to decline the gentleman's robe. A handful of literati wrote about furniture in the late Ming – Wen Zhenheng's *Zhang Wu Zhi* (*Treatise on Superfluous Things*) is the most well known example – but they wrote about taste: what a chair should look like, how to arrange a study. It was more like an instruction manual for new money on how to fit in with the gentry. They did not write about how the carpenter cut the joint, because that was 'beneath the brush' – not worthy of being written about.

Then came the 19th century. The Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s and 60s destroyed the Suzhou heartland where the literati furniture tradition lived. Twenty to thirty million dead, the workshops dispersed, the patrons killed or impoverished. The Yuanming Yuan (Garden of Perfect Brightness) burned in 1860. Beijing was looted again in 1900. The Qing fell in 1911 and the imperial collections began to disperse. Japan was invaded by no one

in this century. China was invaded by everyone, including Japan.

Then came the Cultural Revolution. Family pattern-books were burned. Master carpenters were sent to the countryside. Huanghuali furniture, the apex of the tradition, was variously chopped for firewood, split among households, or confiscated to county warehouses where it sat rotting for decades. The lineage that had survived thousands of years did not survive 1966 to 1976. And the government that did this has, since the late 1970s, been working steadily to repair what can be repaired. Wang Shixiang, sent down to tend pigs and oxen at Xianning in 1969, had his confiscated collection returned, was appointed to the State Administration of Cultural heritage, and was given the Ministry of Culture's national award in 1985. The years his generation lost in the cattle pen do not come back, but the work that has happened since is the work of a country trying to set right what it got wrong.

I cannot read any of this without sadness. Not anger – the people who



8



9

made the catastrophe are mostly dead and the people now living are inheriting it the same way I inherit my own civilisation's debts. But sadness, and plenty of it. A tradition this good lost most of its lineage in a single decade. A scholar as important as Wang Shixiang spent four years tending livestock. A country that should be the most respected craft civilisation on earth is, in the English-language imagination, known for an export industry making pretty much everything *but* quality craft.

Something that became clear to me when I started attempting Chinese joinery for myself is that the hard part is behind you by the time a tool touches wood. The hard part is the procedural knowledge. The order of operations. The marking sequence. What survived from Ming China

is the form. The chairs, the tables the cabinets – the ones that didn't get chopped up, looted or buried – survived as objects. They are in museums in Shanghai and Beijing and Minneapolis and Melbourne. They have been measured, photographed, drawn and catalogued by Ecke and Wang and Handler. The form survived.

The procedure did not. Or rather, what survived of it is locked in the form itself, encoded in the wood, waiting for people to work backward from the object to the method. That is what contemporary makers in China are doing (and their *bilibili* videos have been a gift, even without understanding a word said).

The Japanese tradition exported procedure. Centuries of patron-class

writing about technique, an unbroken apprenticeship lineage, *miyadaiku* temple workshops that have rebuilt the same buildings every twenty years for a thousand years, and a post-war state that put master craftsmen on national stipends and translated their books into English with foundation money. Japan kept the how. The result is what you see in every magazine, every book shop, every algorithm.

For the Western maker who has come to love Chinese forms they will have to do the patient work of reconstructing procedure from form. That's what I am doing on my bench, with a piece of silky oak and a one-shelf library. They will have to cut the joints by hand, in whatever timber is available, and write down what academics can't divine from photographs. And hopefully put more books on the shelf, and inspire other woodworkers to stop a bit short of Japan the next time they look East.

Editor's note: Last issue Damion Fauser wrote about cutting the Chinese 'rice dumpling' three way mitre joint using hand and machine tools. The article included diagrams and process images.



Jake Lunniss is a furniture maker based in Ocean Grove, Victoria, specialising in marquetry and parquetry. He writes a weekly newsletter at jakelunniss.com.

8. Drawn on a piece of wood, a joint that can seem baffling makes perfect sense.
9. The only step worth electrifying. Mortise from both sides, overlapping at the floor.
10. A one-shelf library of books on classical Chinese furniture compares with the extensive literature available on Japanese woodworking.



10



Main: Carol Russell in the Melbourne workshop of Vintage Tool Shop. Photo: Nick Russell

Roadmap to Carving

As a woodcarver, Carol Russell explains how there are things she wished she had known sooner.

I've been thinking lately about the importance of sports psychology in elite athletes and how so much of their success is in their mental attitude. I think being aware of the psychology of making things is an important tool to help take your work where you want it to go.

This article is about ideas and concepts that have helped me and my students take our woodcarving further, make it more enjoyable and

more productive. I hope it's a bit of a roadmap of things to consider when making choices about your work and your approach to it.

Time is of the essence

When you begin a carving project, you have a few things all happening at once. What will I carve? What timber is best for it? Do I have the right tools? How do I sharpen them? Each of these elements can provide obstacles.

I've noticed that people expect a lot of themselves right from the start. They set aside valuable time and pay money for tools and materials, and understandably want an outcome for their efforts. You do have to give yourself time to learn. There is really no substitute for time spent developing skill.

I truly believe that any time spent pushing a sharp tool through wood, even with no planned outcome



is time well spent. Following the fibres, learning how they behave with different tools and changing the angle of the cut to accommodate the changes in grain direction, and observing the beautiful marks left by the tools is all about building muscle memory and understanding. You can watch videos and gain knowledge in your head but it's the understanding and skill in your hands that will take you forward into producing the work you want to make.

Know your material

You won't become a timber expert overnight, but every time you work with a timber species is an opportunity to get to know its characteristics. It's easy to just take a piece of timber out of a box or accept it from your teacher and get stuck in. If you can, find out what it is, write it on the blank so you'll keep seeing the name as you work with it. Learn the botanical name for it – it helps to understand the family it comes from and allows you to make sure you're buying the correct species as common names can be confusing.

Find out where the timber grows and the landscape it comes from because these things influence how it

works, its density and patterns. This knowledge adds to your experience and will become an important tool to decide what timbers to choose for your projects.

Chances are if you've started carving it's because you love timber as a material – the more you know, the more enhanced your experience will be. As you work with different timbers, you'll gain insight into a whole variety of species, this knowledge will stay with you. You'll have your favourites and they'll become like old friends.

Wood is a fibrous material, the grain has an orientation, I always think of it like the fur of a cat, you want to pat the cat from the head to the tail, smoothing the fur in the direction it grows. The other way round seems unpleasant and jarring, and the cat won't thank you either. Laying the wood fibres flat off the tools is fundamental to carving and whittling, the timber will give you feedback instantly if you don't pay attention to its subtle changes and structure.

Finding your style

One of the greatest feelings is to look at the world around you and be

inspired to interpret it through your own eyes. For me, woodcarving isn't just a series of practical steps that will produce an object, but rather an exercise in observation, inspiration and interpretation. It's a way to tell a story.

There will be many makers whose work you admire and there'll be times you want to be them. That's not possible, you can learn from them, be influenced and inspired by them but move through that into your own space. Find your own voice and speak through your own original work, carve to your nature. If you want to create realistic pieces with intricate detail, look for the resources that will inform you and of course observation is everything. If you want your work to be interpretive and loose, find the relevant resources to help you.

Woodcarving lessons are great, you learn with other people and connect over the process and shared experience. It's also a great way to try out different tools and how to use them correctly before you buy them. Having a person standing beside you, helping you with your techniques is invaluable. Chances

2



3



are you won't get what you need from one teacher, play the field and gather what helps you to do the work you want to do. There are some amazing teachers who are prepared to share their knowledge, both online and in person.

Practice too, remember that the perfect form you see in a gallery or on an Instagram post has probably been made repeatedly to get it right, repetition is your friend and will solidify your practice into something you can have real confidence in.

We're bombarded with images; you can scroll through Instagram and find endless things you love and want to make. It can also make you feel that it's all been done and better than you could ever do. Go back to the source, look at the plants, rocks, animals and trees, the shapes, colours and textures viewed through your eyes is where your uniqueness begins, use it as a strength and bring it into your work.

I've really struggled with drawing, I practise and have improved over time, but the results are still very basic. I'm so in awe of people who draw and paint. I'll keep trying but I

1. The *Aurukun Camp Dogs* carved by the people of western Cape York are a perfect example of how the essence of a subject can be captured. They are so full of life and personality. Photo taken by the author at Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane (GOMA).
2. *Fish Wall Sculpture*, tiger myrtle, mounted on charred elm. Charring is a beautiful way to enhance grain and create a unique finish.
3. *Vivienne and Her Dog* – small carvings like these are a way to tell a story.
4. Stages in a carving exercise are shown below. Picking up a piece of scrap wood and practising your knife skills with no particular outcome in mind, really hones your skill. This exercise focussed on a series of stop cuts that give the impression of a spiral of timber wrapped around a core.



5. *Whimsical Cat* character – paint and other materials can add new dimensions to your carving.
6. An assortment of hand carved work by the author.
7. *Emu* from carved from found materials.
8. *Hunting in the Shallows*, a wading bird inspired by Bridget Farmer's books.

can also see that a lack of realism in my animals is what has given them their naïve nature and I really like that in my pieces.

A memorable moment in my development came after I had been told that it was unlikely I'd ever be a good carver unless I could draw well. I was feeling low at the time and a bit lost in my work. I went to the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane (GOMA) and saw the beautiful *Camp Dogs* or *Ku* from Aurukun in Western Cape York. I was so taken by their range of personalities and vibrant colour, some were menacing, others cheeky; they were tall, fat and thin, the full range of doggy options. To me they captured the essence of their subjects.

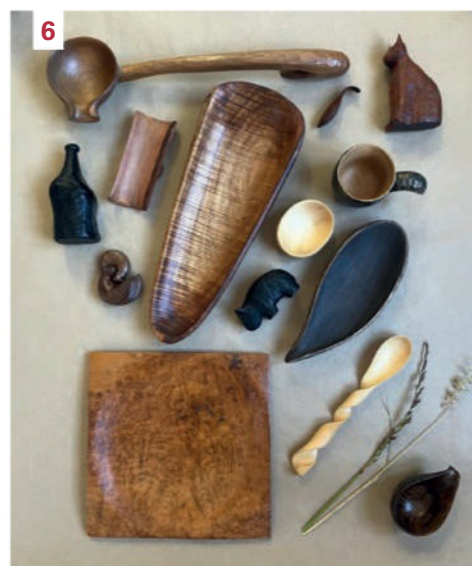
Seeing this interpretive work really freed up my thinking, I realised I could loosen up my mind, there was well and truly enough information in this work to convey everything about dogs that the artist wanted to communicate without taking it into realism. I had to be careful not to appropriate the work of the Aurukun community, but I took many lessons from it and am so grateful for it.

I also love to look at the illustrations in vintage children's books; they are often a terrific resource and a great example of how you can strip away detail and leave only what's needed to convey what you want.

Finish well

How you choose to finish your work is key to the aesthetic of the finished object. I like to have an idea of what finish I'll be using right from the start, will the timber be the main feature? Will the timber be neutral, but the form will take precedence? Do I sand the work or keep the tool marks as witness to hand carved process, or will the piece be painted?

These choices aren't meant to be an afterthought but are integral to the design, consider other options to smooth and shiny, but if you do make that choice, commit to it properly and sand the work well so there are





no distractions caused by faults in the finish to draw the eye away from how you want the piece to be viewed. Make samples and play, there is a lot of wisdom to be gained in play.

This brings me to one of my most spoken phrases, 'love your work', don't talk it down, stand proudly beside it. This doesn't mean you can't improve it but enjoy the fact that it exists as an artifact of your progress and the keep going, strive for excellence but don't be blocked by the pursuit of perfection or the judgement of others.

Stay sharp

Nothing will happen the way you want it to if your tools aren't sharp. It's a fundamental skill that if you don't come to terms with, will always hold you back. I think it took me a long time to understand sharpening and wished I'd grasped it sooner. I became bogged down with the products: the types of stones, the bevel angles, the differing grits and what role they played in the process of keeping your tools maintained.

When you buy a tool, it's your job to maintain the edge as it is when you first buy it. It's good to really look at the tool before use so you understand the geometry of it and how it works.

Strip the sharpening process right back and make sure you understand what it is you're trying to achieve. I would also advise not outsourcing your sharpening. Don't look for easy fixes, develop skill through practice and make sure you do it yourself, so you truly understand what's happening at the point where the tool contacts the timber. A little bit of regular maintenance can save you a lot of heartache, don't wait until your tools are blunt, learn to sharpen sooner rather than later. Also work tidy, and don't let sharp edges touch each other.

Wood comes from trees

I never imagined finding something that I loved doing so much. Making things from wood has been my whole life outside of my family and friends. I always remind myself

to look at the trees. It all starts there. The end of the life of a tree is the beginning of the process of repurposing what remains.

The memory of the tree is still in the material you use. It can be seen and felt if your mind is focussed. That bit of grain that is driving you crazy represents something that occurred in the growth of the tree, it's full of stories and you are another chapter. Sometimes the timber will tell you what to make and guide you, it's a lovely relationship and one that can last lifelong.

Note: I'd like to thank all the teachers I've had along the way. You often didn't know you were teaching me, but I was listening.

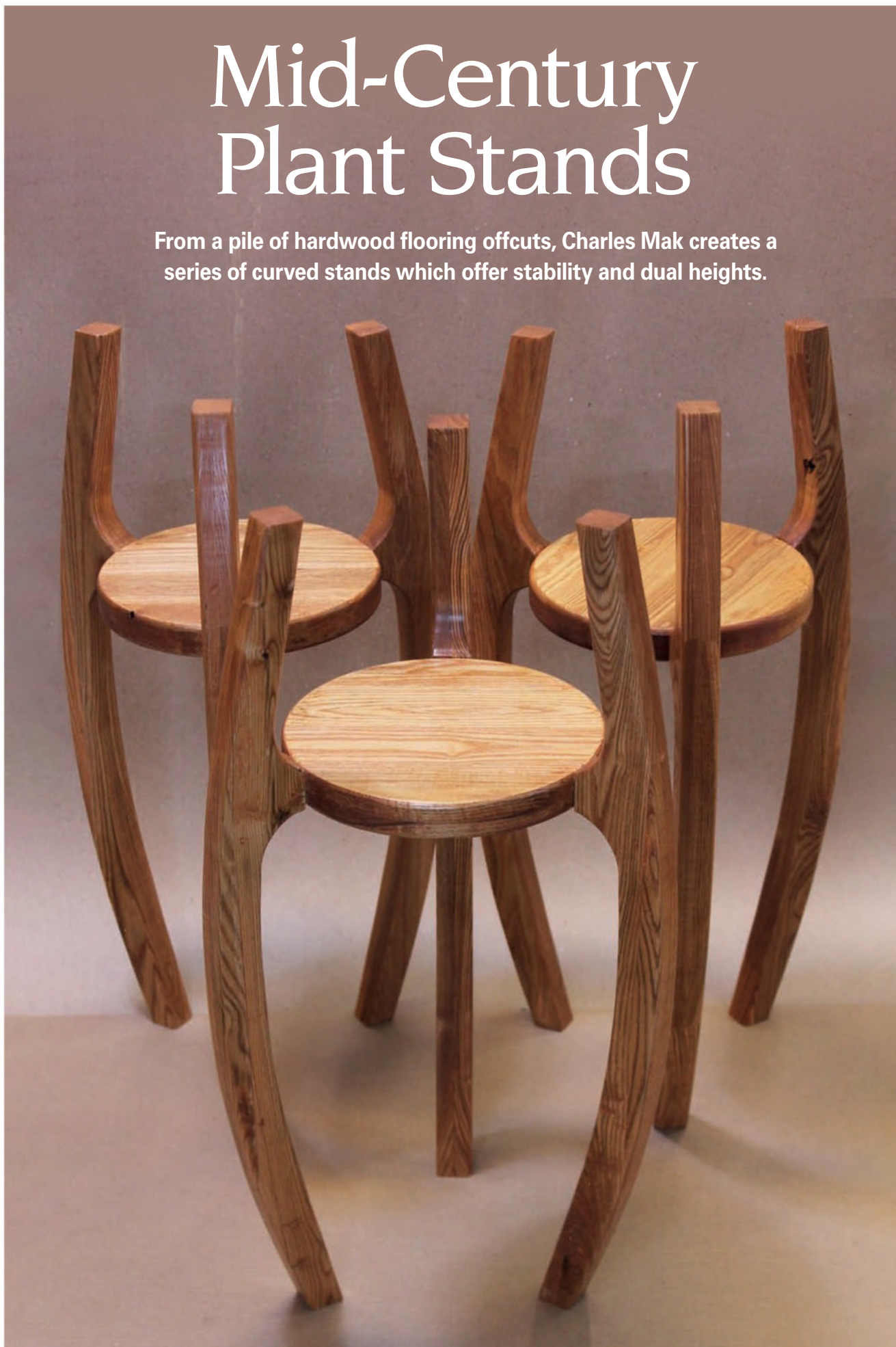
Photos: Carol Russell



Carol Russell @carol.a.russell is a woodcarver who lives in Melbourne. She teaches from her Brunswick studio and at times from other workshops. Learn more at www.carolrussellwoodwork.com.au

Mid-Century Plant Stands

From a pile of hardwood flooring offcuts, Charles Mak creates a series of curved stands which offer stability and dual heights.



The typical mid-century plant stand features four straight legs and a crossbar in the centre. This kind of design, however, is prone to rocking on uneven surfaces and the crossbar may give inadequate support for smaller pots.

After combing the web for alternatives, I found designs that are composed of three curved legs and a round base in the centre to be the most elegant and pleasing. A plant stand of such design can elevate a small plant to the window level or, when the stand is turned upside down, hold a tall plant at table level. This article shows how I made a total of seven indoor plant stands out of recycled hardwood floor boards (photo 1).

Preparing the stock

Because I used recycled ash floor boards, I needed to glue them up for the desired thickness and width as blanks for the legs and bases (photos 2, 3). You can save

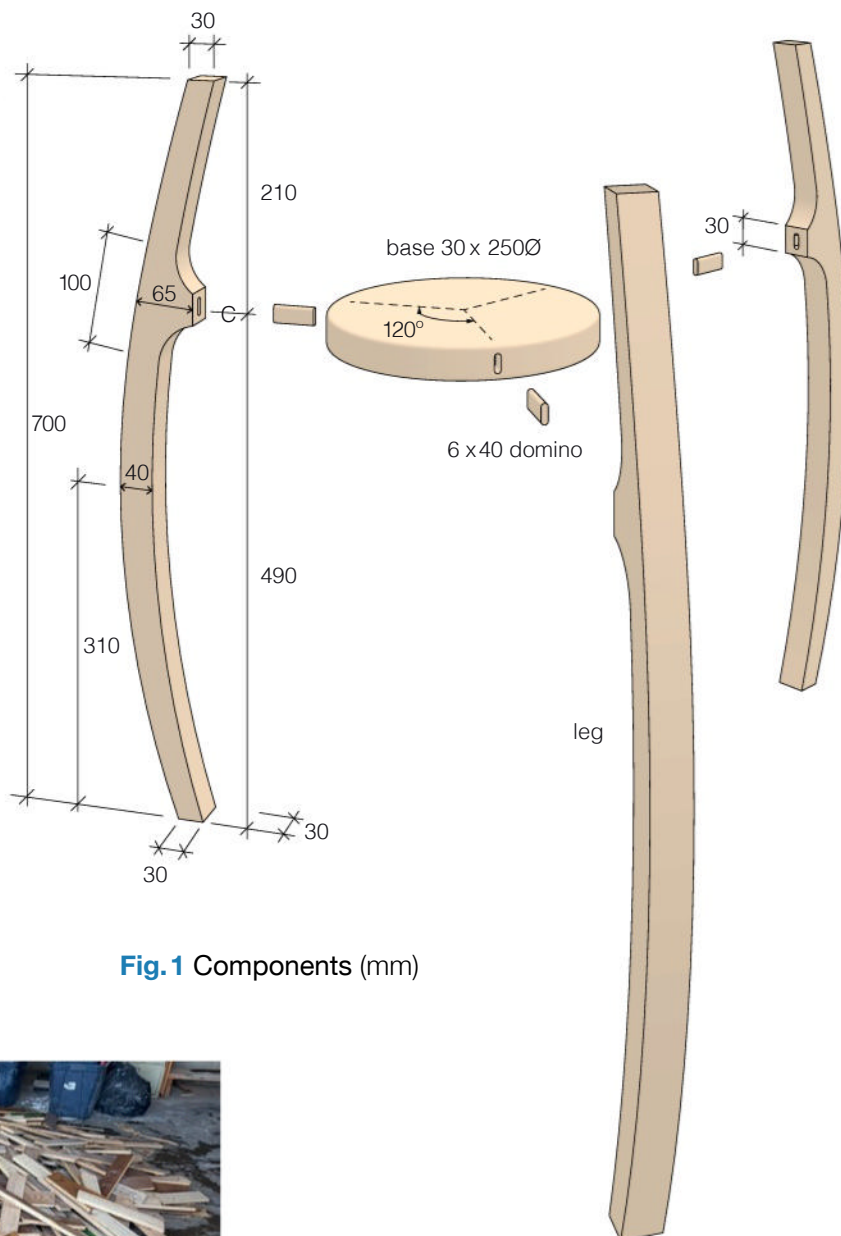


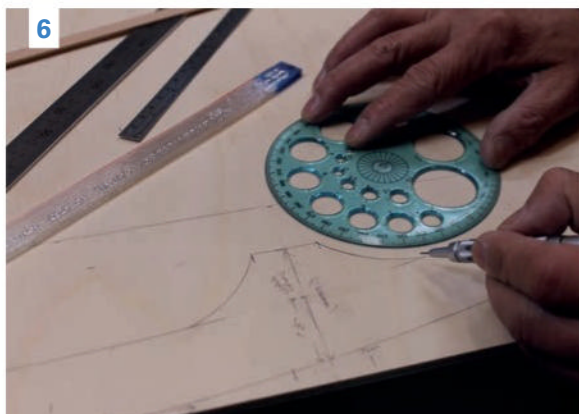
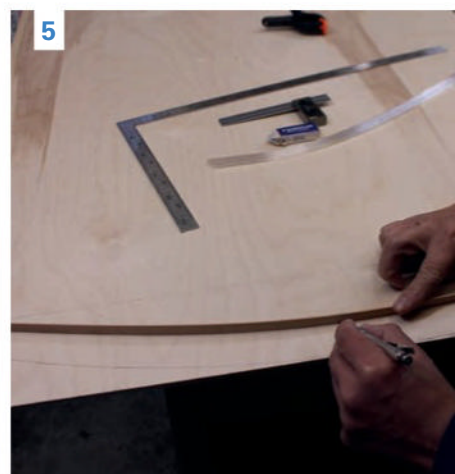
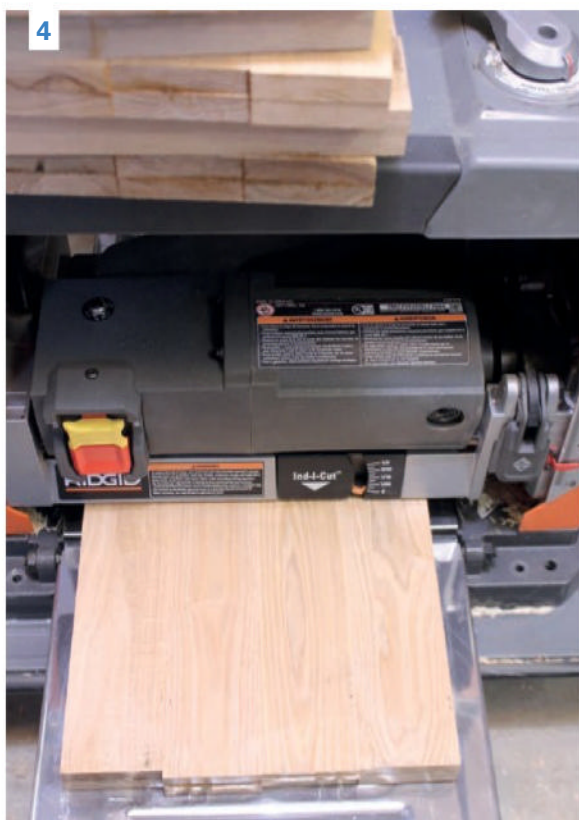
Fig.1 Components (mm)



Main: Plant stands made from recycled timber. They can be inverted to hold and display a taller plant.

1. The wood for the project came from some discarded flooring.
2. Glue up the shorter pieces to make the bases.
3. Glue up the leg blanks in thickness first and then in width.

4. Run the glue-ups through the thickness planer for final thickness.
5. Mark the leg pattern on a plywood sheet to make the templates.
6. Lay out the centre line and other details on the template before it is cut out.
7. The oscillating drum sander excels in sanding tight curves and removing humps.
8. For longer and continuous lines, the belt sander is my tool of choice.
9. Using the template, trace the leg pattern on the blanks.
10. A magnifying glass with light enhances visibility and gives a clear view of the line and blade.
11. Mark the grain direction of the blank on the template before attaching the template to the blank.
12. Rout with the grain and, if it is not possible, take very shallow passes or, better yet, use a compression router bit.
13. Trim the ends of the leg to its final length.
14. Add an auxiliary table to the mitre saw so the leg can be clamped in position and trimmed.
15. Install the centre pin in position on the tablesaw sliding jig.



many hours of work if you start with timber already of the desired thickness (**photo 4**).

The profiles and dimensions of the legs and base are given in the diagram on p.75. Prepare your leg and base blanks slightly larger (for example, 10mm wider and 20mm longer for the legs) than their finished sizes.

Making the template

When making multiples of an article, especially one with curves, it is good practice to create templates and use them to guide your work to ensure consistency. To make a set of three

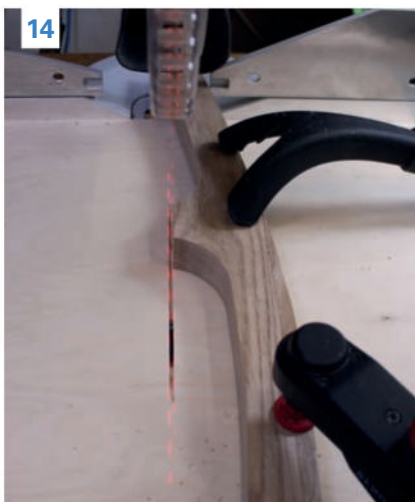
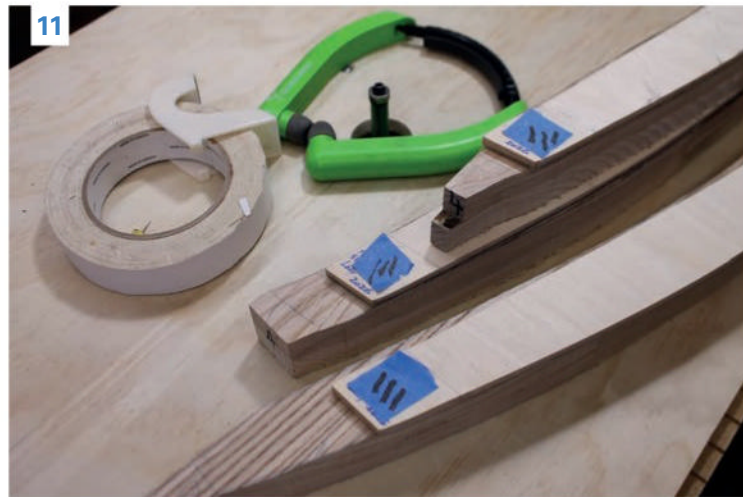
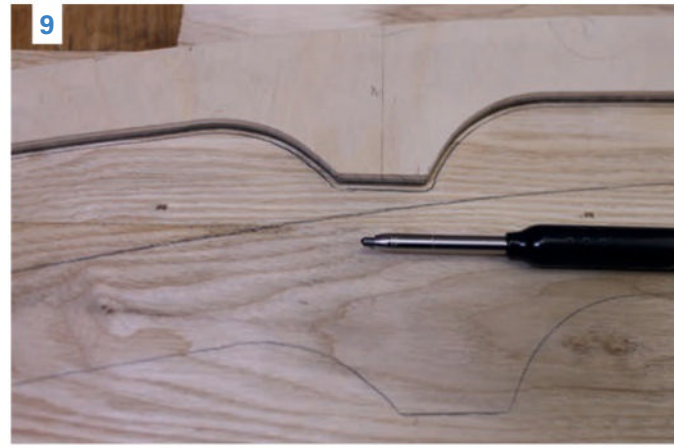
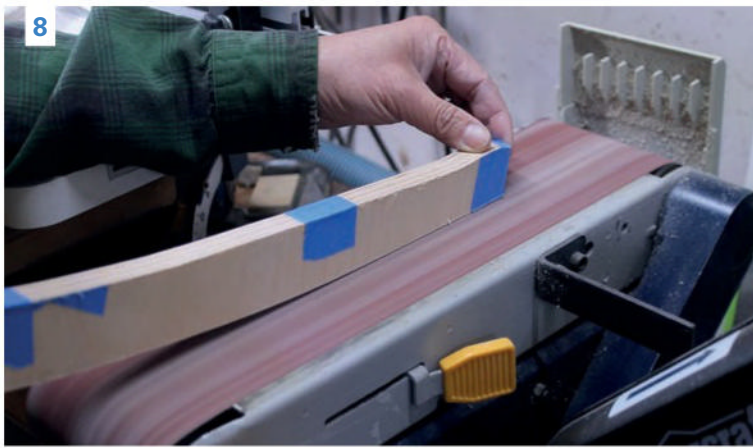
copies of the template for the legs, follow this simple procedure:

1. Lay out the leg profile on a 3mm (T) x 120mm (W) x 850 mm (L) plywood strip (**photos 5, 6**).
2. Tape or double-face tape the marked strip to two more plywood strips together to make a stack.
3. Cut the stack on the bandsaw.
4. Sand it to line to complete the templates with the oscillating drum sander and stationary belt sander (**photos 7, 8**).

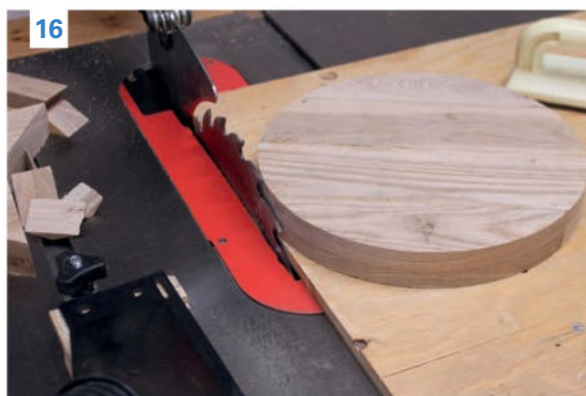
Making the legs

After the templates are formed, the legs can be made in these simple (but labour-intensive) steps:

1. Trace the profile on each leg blank with one of the templates (**photo 9**).
2. Bandsaw as close to the pencil line as you dare (**photo 10**).
3. Attach the templates to the legs with double-face tape (**photo 11**).
4. Rout the legs to final shape on the router table with a bearing-guided pattern bit (**photo 12**).



16. Progressively trim the base blank until the circle is formed.
17. Mark out the pencil lines on the leg and mill the mortise with the domino joiner.
18. Divide the circle into three equal segments and use the segment lines to lay out the mortise lines on the edge of the base.
19. One approach is to make a holding jig to mill accurate 'vertical' mortises on the edge of a circle with the domino tool.
20. A simpler method is to set up and align the domino's cutter with the mortise line marked on the circle.
21. Hold the machine against the blank tightly and plunge steadily and slowly.



5. Lay out the length of the legs and trim the legs to length on the mitre saw or the tablesaw using a crosscut sled (**photos 13, 14**).

Making the base

To cut the round base, you can employ any circle-cutting methods you are familiar with, such as on the bandsaw or with a router. I used the tablesaw technique illustrated in my previous article '6 Workshop Machine Tricks' (*AWR* #83). After marking the centre point on the base blank, I cut the circle out on the tablesaw with a sliding jig (**photos 15, 16**).

Milling the mortises

Instead of using dominos, you can choose dowels as the joinery for the plant stands. The basic steps to mortising the legs and bases for the dominos are described below.

Mortising the legs

1. Mark the registration lines for the mortises on the legs (**fig.1**).

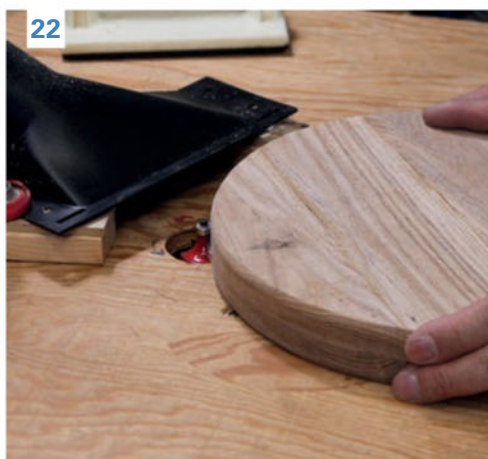
2. Set the domino machine for the use of 6 x 40mm dominos and machine the centred mortises for all the legs (**photo 17**).

Mortising the base

Lay out the position of the three mortises on the edge of each base (**photo 18**). Initially, I was planning to cut the mortises on the base with a jig, based on the same idea I previously used successfully on another project (**photo 19**). However, thanks to the suggestion of Narinda Jugdev, a local custom furniture maker and friend, I employed a quicker method by clamping the base in the bench vice and levelling the domino machine's cutter centre point with the mortise (**photos 20, 21**). This method is suitable when you have a small number of mortises to cut.

Rounding and sanding

To ease the edges, round all the edges on the router table (**photo 22**). Then, sand or plane the surfaces



smooth (**photos 23, 24**). Before heading to the assembly/finishing room, remember to sign and date your work.

Assembly and finishing

Glue and clamp the legs to the bases and let them dry overnight (**photos 25, 26**). Lightly sand to 320 grit between coats for better adhesion and to remove any imperfections. Lastly, stain the stands if desired, and apply several coats of protective finish to them (**photo 27**).

With their clean and sweeping lines, these plant stands are perfect for showcasing your favourite plants – but without stealing their spotlight. Whether they are a small potted plant, a climber or a tall umbrella plant, the planters transform them into curated

focal points around the house while elevating the interior décor. It took me about 60 to 70 hours to make all the stands – with three of them gifted away. This statement piece will be worth your while if you have family or friends who adore their indoor plants, and who doesn't have family and friends like that?

Photos: Charles Mak

Illustration: Graham Sands



Charles Mak is woodworker and woodwork teacher who lives in Canada. He has written numerous articles for Australian Wood Review, many of which can be seen republished at www.woodreview.com.au. Recently Charles published a book called 'Woodworking Tips and Tricks' which is available via Lee Valley.

- 22.** Ease all the sharp edges on the router table with a round-over bit.
- 23.** Plane with the grain. For reverse grain, use a low angle plane with a high cutting angle blade and a tight mouth.
- 24.** Protect your hands by wearing a pair of anti-vibration gloves when sanding for a long duration.
- 25.** For added grip, wear a glove to turn the clamp's handle.
- 26.** All three legs should be in contact with the surface when they are properly clamped.
- 27.** Place the stand on a lazy susan and apply a finish to the piece.

Wood Diary

For more events and news sign up to AWR fortnightly newsletters at:

 www.woodreview.com.au

Diary listings are free. Email to: linda@woodreview.com.au

Note: Listings are correct at time of publication but may be subject to change. It is advisable to check details with the organiser before visiting.

22 AUGUST–15 NOVEMBER

The Quiet Room

Artworks by Jono Everett that represent a culmination of his last two years' of work. Themes focus on domestic life, through the use of salvaged roadside furniture. Singleton Arts and Cultural Centre singletonartsandculturalcentre.com.au/whats-on/jono-everett/

28 AUGUST–7 FEBRUARY 2027

Plant Life: The Nature of Design

Explores the future of plant-based materials as an alternative to plastics and non-renewable materials. National Gallery of Victoria www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/plant-life/

23 AUGUST

Members and Friends Tool Sale

The Traditional Tools Group
9am–12:30pm
Old Eastwood Town Hall
74 Agincourt Rd, Marsfield, NSW
tttg.org.au/

24–30 AUGUST

National Skills Week

This year's theme is 'Life Changing'. Celebrating the powerful role vocational education and training (VET) plays in shaping futures www.nationalskillsweek.com.au/

30 AUGUST

Maker of the Year, presented by Hare & Forbes

Entries close 11:59pm AEDT for Wood Review's awards for fine woodworkers and wood artists. Information and entry at www.makeroftheyear.com.au

3–27 SEPTEMBER

OFFCUT / RECUT

An exhibition of work by Rasmus Fenhann featuring his Cosmos Cabinet, a highlighted detailed work which represents the culmination of his 30 years as a cabinetmaker. Copenhagen, Denmark www.fenhann.com/

4–5 SEPTEMBER

Handworks 2026

80 hand tool makers and vendors gather for an unplugged weekend in a timber-frame dairy barn setting in the historic village of Amana, IA, USA handworks.co/

10 SEPTEMBER

MADE 2026: The Queensland Contemporary Craft and Design Symposium

artisan
State Library Queensland
Cultural Precinct, Brisbane
artisan.org.au/

12 SEPTEMBER

Tools, Timber, Techniques

Timbecon Perth
31 Canvale Rd, Canning Vale
Free entry: 8:30am–3pm
www.timbecon.com.au

4–25 OCTOBER

Re: Form: Renewing Craft, Renewing Place

Studio Woodworkers Australia
Open weekends at Sturt Gallery,
Mittagong, NSW
<http://studiowoodworkers.org.au/>

10 OCTOBER

Tools, Timber, Techniques

Timbecon Melbourne
594–598 Edgars Road, Epping
Free entry: 8:30am–3pm
www.timbecon.com.au

9–18 OCTOBER

Sydney Craft Week Festival 2026

The theme for the 2025 festival is 'material intelligence'. The festival is an annual city-wide of making, presenting contemporary craft and skills workshops led by the UNSW Faculty of Arts, Design & Architecture, School of Art & Design sydneycraftweek.com/

18 OCTOBER

Antique & Collectable

Hand Tool Market

Hand Tool Preservation Assoc Australia Inc
164 Neerim Rd, Corner Neerim & Grange Rds,
Caulfield East, Vic,
9:30–12:30pm, \$5 entry
www.htpaa.org.au/

23–24 OCTOBER

Beyond Tools Annual In-House Woodworking Event

Demonstrations, tool experts, show deals,
free entry 9am–4pm daily
Beyond Tools, 23 Exhibition Drive, Malaga, WA
beyondtools.com/

30 OCTOBER–1 DECEMBER

Perfect Places

Woodblock prints and woodcarvings by Olivia O'Connor
Little Oberon Café, 9am–2pm
15 Falls Road, Fish Creek, Victoria
www.oliviaconnor.com.au

31 OCTOBER–8 NOVEMBER

Clarence Valley Woodworkers Jacaranda Display and Competition

South Grafton Ex-Servicemens Club,
2 Wharf St, South Grafton,
NSW 2460
Email cvwassoc@gmail.com
clarencevalleywoodies.com/

14–15 NOVEMBER

Eltham & District Woodworkers Club Annual Exhibition

Demonstrations and sales daily from 9am–5pm
Free hands-on workshop for children.
Eltham Community Centre
801 Main Road Eltham, Victoria
www.elthamwoodworkers.org.au

7–8 NOVEMBER

Out of The Woods Competition and Exhibition

A celebration of fine woodwork presented by Fine Woodwork Association WA
The Pattern Shop, Midland Railway Workshops,
Blacksmith Lane West,
Midland WA
Email ootw@fwwa.org.au
www.fwwa.org.au

22 NOVEMBER

Members and Friends Tool Sale

The Traditional Tools Group
9am–12:30pm
Old Eastwood Town Hall
74 Agincourt Rd, Marsfield, NSW
tttg.org.au/

21–22 NOVEMBER

Goulburn Valley Woodworkers Wood Show

Woodwork sales, trade stands, demonstrations, milled timber, food trucks
Multipurpose Pavilion,
Shepparton Showgrounds, Vic
Email gvwoodworkers.show@gmail.com
www.gvwoodworkers.com.au

RICHARD CROSLAND SCHOOL OF FINE WOODWORK

(accredited member Studio Woodworkers Australia)

Weekday/nights & Saturdays

Phone: (02) 9313 4142

Short Course on Sundays

with Adam Crosland

Mobile: 0409 444 760

Enquire by phone or via email

richard@crosland.com.au

www.crosland.com.au

No.43/566 Gardeners Rd Alexandria, Sydney

Make your own Windsor chair in Brisbane



- **Beginners welcome**
- Timber and tools supplied
- **1:1 tuition**
- Classes: 2 to 5 days by arrangement

For more information visit Frangou Design

www.frangoudesign.com.au or contact

Tony on 0438 131 646

or tony@frangoudesign.com.au

ROBERT HOWARD CLASSES IN WOODCARVING

- Discover the joys of using your hands
- Tools and wood supplied
- Beginners welcome
- Inner City Brisbane location



For full details:

www.roberthoward.com.au

PH 0403 161 111 E howardrobert@mac.com

 [roberthowardwoodworker](https://www.instagram.com/roberthowardwoodworker)

TASMANIA'S SPECIALTY TIMBERS

Sassafras, blackwood, myrtle, celery-top pine, Huon pine, and more, as logs, slabs, timber and turning blanks. Milling to order and seasoning services.

Contact: Chris Emmett **Phone:** 03 6295 7161 **Mobile:** 0419 998 452
Email: chris.emmett@stas.com.au

Address: 43 Cemetery Road, Geeveston, TAS
Hours: Mon-Fri 8am-4pm

islandsspecialtytimbers.com.au



Tasmanian Timbers and Veneers

Blackwood

figured, birds eye, fancy, plain

Myrtle

figured and plain

Celery Top Pine

crown cut, plain

Sassafras

blackheart and clear

Tasmanian Oak

Quarter Cut and Crown Cut

Huon Pine

birds eye and plain

Musk/Eucalypt/Myrtle Burl

when available



Contact: Luke Magee

3 Brittons Rd, Smithton TAS 7330

Tel 03 6452 2522

email: sales.tas@brittontimbers.com.au

www.brittontimbers.com.au

Qld: 07 3888 3351 NSW: 02 8783 9900

Vic: 03 8769 7111



- **HEGNER** – German made precision machines
- **STUBAI** – Austrian bench & carving chisels
- **GYOKUCHO** – Japanese saws
- **MARPLES** – British layout tools
- **RENAISSANCE** – British Museum quality wax
- **VERITAS** – Legendary tools & accessories
- **BRUSSO** – US brass box & cabinet hardware
- **WHITE CROCODILE** – German finishing brushes
- **LIOGIER** – French hand cut rasps
- Pure tung oil & thinners
- Hundreds of quality tools, equipment, books & videos.

Info@thewoodworks.com.au

www.thewoodworks.com.au

PO Box 1229 Mona Vale NSW 1660 Ph: (02) 9979 7797

Mention code AWR2013 to claim a discount.

WOOD ACADEMY

UNLEASH YOUR INNER MAKER

We celebrate the power of craftsmanship.

The way it can ignite passion, inspire creativity, and instill a deep sense of satisfaction.



Short courses

One & two day classes available for all skill levels.



Memberships

For passionate hobbyists who want special access.



Evening classes

Classes run during the week and evening to fit your schedule.



Fully Equipped

We provide all tools, safety gear & materials for every class.

WOODACADEMY.COM.AU

12 Gerald Street, Marrickville NSW 2204

info@woodacademy.com.au

02 8106 0033

The VACU PRESS SYSTEM is used by woodworkers worldwide. Used for veneering, laminating and curved panel production.

Uses are limited only by your imagination.



Mobile: 0417 020 976

Email: ray@yareus.com.au

www.yareus.com.au

U-BEAT ENTERPRISES WOODWORK FORUMS

woodworkforums.com

Australia's top resource for woodworkers with 131,601+ Members and 2,173,280+ Posts
And together with it's ever popular off-shoot

METALWORK FORUMS

A special place on the internet for Australian metalworkers

metalworkforums.com

There's well Over 120 forums of info & help between the two forums.

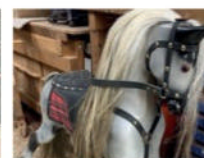
And the best part is:

It's all FREE



156 Moss Vale Rd Kangaroo Valley NSW 2577
02 4465 1002

Full range of rocking horse accessories including stirrups, bowler hats, swing irons and brackets in brass, stainless steel and rainbow. All leather work, stirrup leathers, bridles, reins and a wide range of saddles and saddle cloths. Mane and tail kits also available.



www.kangaroovallewoodcrafts.com.au

SQUARE DRIVE SCREWS

Heard They're Good? Try Them!



- High Quality
- Easier Driving
- Better Control
- Longer Life
- Heat Treated Steel
- Sharp Point
- Small Body Diameter

Wide range of sizes
INTRODUCTORY PACK
500, #8 and #10 Gauge screws with driver included
\$55.00 inc post



BUY ONLINE AND SAVE! WWW.SCREWIT.COM.AU

CWS

Your One Stop Woodcraft Supply Shop
CARROLL'S WOODCRAFT SUPPLIES

Phone - 03 5243 0522

Email - jim@cwsonline.com.au

Web - www.cwsonline.com.au

Woodworking and Furniture Making Classes

with **Ross Annels**

Location
Mt Egerton, VIC

For more information
0407 489 227
ross@skillbuild.edu.au
rossannels.com



Man and His Tools

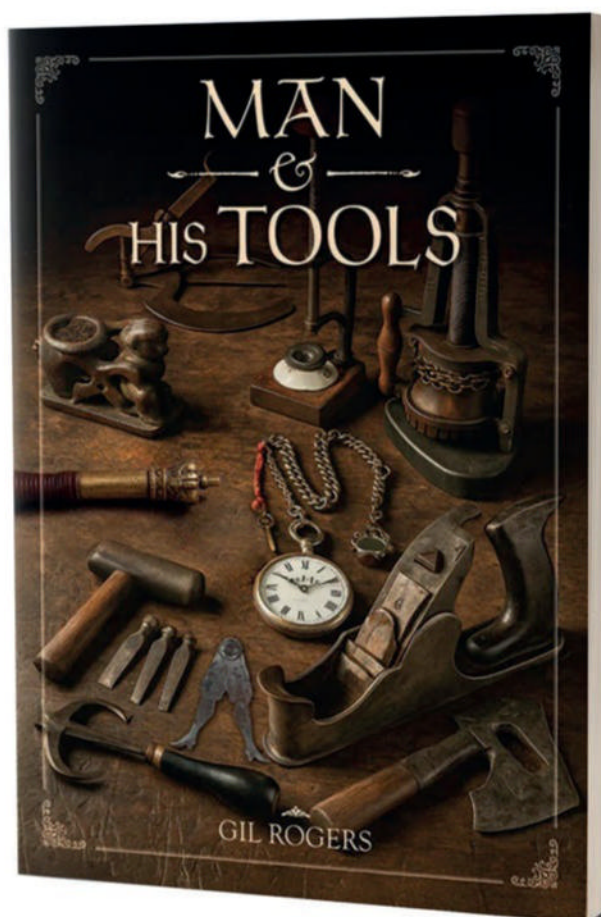
Mike Preston reviews Gil Rogers' 'illustrated journey through the history of hand tools used over the centuries to work wood, metal, masonry, and other materials.'

What defines a tool? A chisel is undoubtedly a tool, as is a flintlock tinder lighter and a cat's head turning hammer. But how about a first mate's persuader? Or a signal cannon thunder mug?

Gil asks this question in his monumental and impressive book. He himself defines a tool as an object one uses in order to make it easier to perform a task, whether that task be for pleasure or for work. Thus, say, a tipstaff was a tool which was issued to a court officer to authorise him to issue a warrant. And a church warden's smoking pipe was a tool used to enhance or induce pleasure for the smoker.



Above: The author Gil Rogers' love of tools started when he was 10 and has carried on throughout his whole life.



The reader may argue the point, but it makes for some lively and entertaining discussions. There are 1700 photos illustrating thousands of tools – from the familiar working tools, to the rare, the ancient, and the beautiful. So there is plenty here for the debate on what comprises a tool.

Gil first conceived of the idea of producing a book like this some 30 years ago, but it was only about five years ago that he started to put that thought into action. The finished product is an impressive and magnificently illustrated work. Yes, it is a coffee table book, it makes for compulsive and endless perusing. But it is also undoubtedly a book for the library of books on tools.

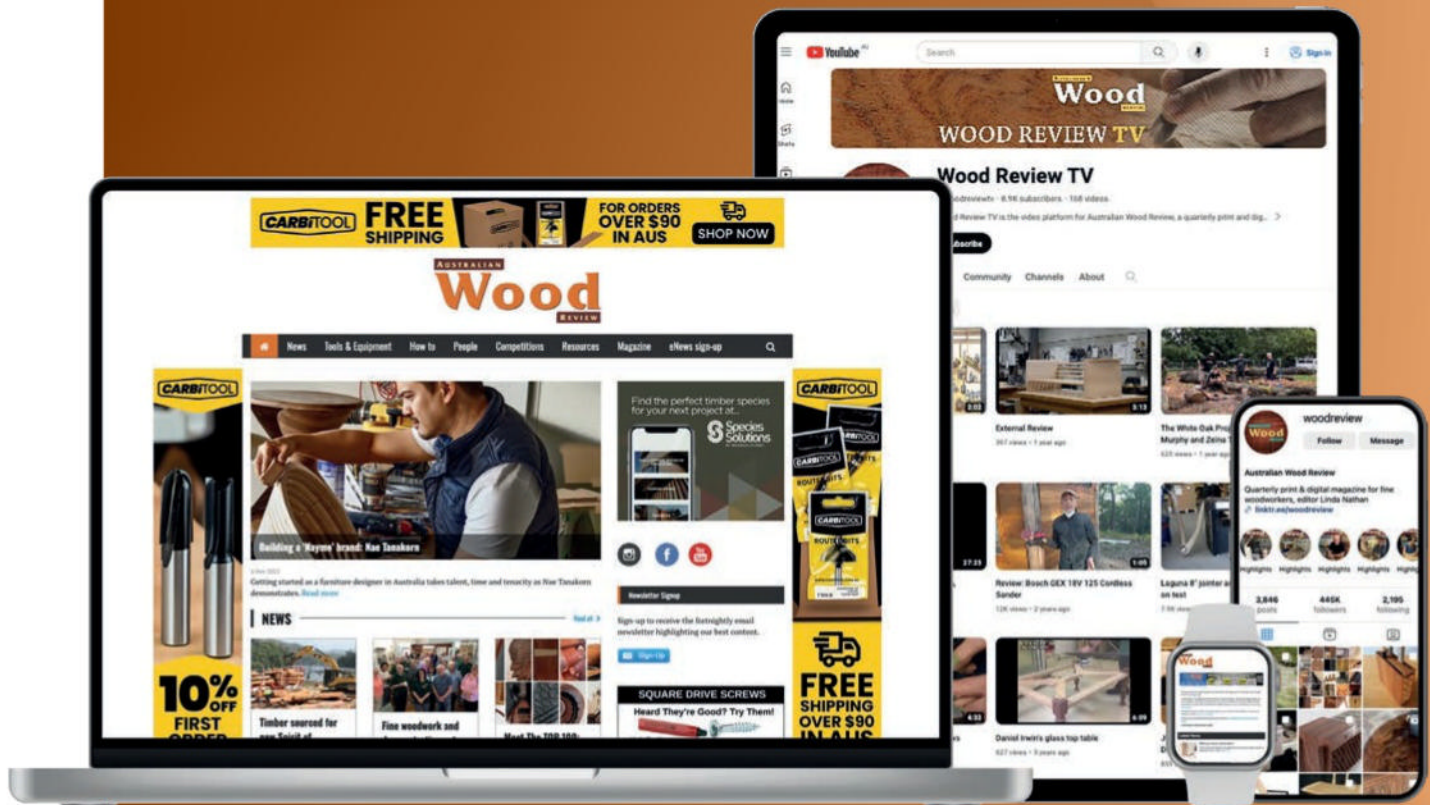
The enormous range of tools Gil has photographed is almost encyclopaedic, and he claims that he has more, plenty more that he could have included. Each time he thought he was ready to send his manuscript to the publishers another new and fascinating item would turn up, and then another.

Gil is himself an accomplished cabinetmaker, as can be seen in his beautifully made dovetailed steel smoothing plane shown in the book, or his blackwood and ivory inlay grease box. Thus it stands to reason that the tools he has selected for his book are either interesting, rare or unusual, and many of course simply exquisite to behold. The detail that went into the making of tools 200 years ago is testimony to the pride the makers back then had in their work, which sadly we simply don't see today in the mass produced tools on offer in a hardware store. *Man And His Tools* is a truly impressive book.

Man and His Tools – A History of Hand Tools is a full colour hardcover book with 412 pages that is available from manandhistools.com.au.

Mike Preston is a retired airline pilot with a long term interest in collecting tools. He has been a member of the Hand Tool Preservation Association of Australia (HTPAA) for more than twenty years.

Stay Connected



All the latest advertising, marketing, and media news at your fingertips



FACEBOOK
@woodreview



INSTAGRAM
@woodreview



NEWSLETTER
woodreview.com.au



Wood Turning Sets

**CARBIDE
TIPPED**

**CRYO
TREATED**

**NEW
RELEASE**



**VIEW FULL
RANGE**

WHY CHOOSE CARBIDE-TIPPED CHISELS?

Tungsten carbide cutters deliver exceptional wear resistance, and when the edge eventually dulls, simply rotate or replace the insert and keep turning.

**THREE & FOUR
PIECE SETS**

PRICED FROM \$99

WHY CHOOSE CRYO-TREATED CHISELS?

Our deep cryogenic treatment to -185°C creates a tougher, longer-lasting M2 HSS cutting edge that delivers smoother cuts and up to 2–3× longer edge life. Simply put, you'll sharpen your chisels less.

**THREE, FIVE & SIX
PIECE SETS**

PRICED FROM \$132



www.machineryhouse.com.au

Sydney
1/2 Windsor Rd,
Northmead
(02) 9890 9111

Brisbane
625 Boundary Rd,
Coopers Plains
(07) 3715 2200

Melbourne
4 Abbots Rd,
Dandenong South
(03) 9212 4422

Perth
11 Valentine St,
Kewdale
(08) 9373 9999

Adelaide
Unit 11/20 Cheltenham
Parade, Woodville
(08) 9373 9969

Specifications & Prices are subject to change without notification. All prices include GST and valid until 31-10-26