

WORKING WOOD BY HAND

MARCH/APRIL 2022 QM11
@QUERCUSMAGAZINE

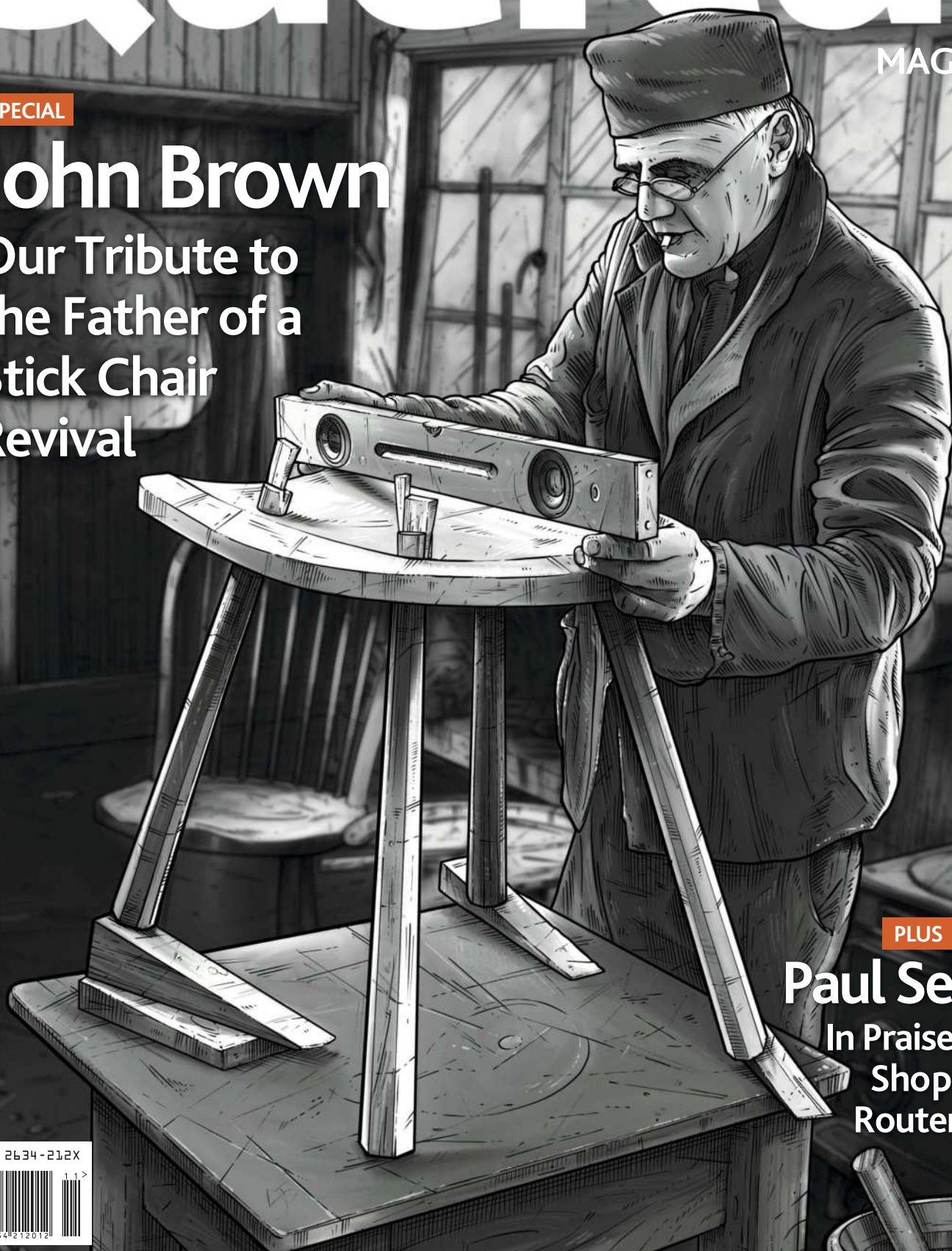
Quercus

MAGAZINE

SPECIAL

John Brown

Our Tribute to
the Father of a
Stick Chair
Revival



PLUS

Paul Sellers
In Praise of the
Shop-Made
Router Plane

ISSN 2634-212X





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Tributes from Christopher Schwarz, Chris Williams, Kenneth Kortemeier and many more.

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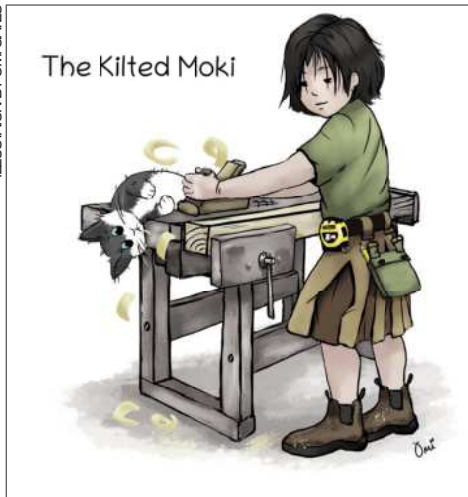
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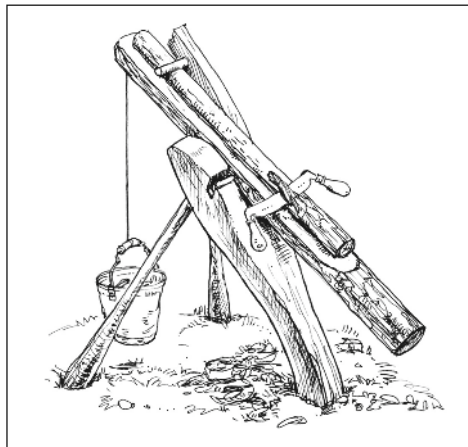
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ILLUSTRATION BY OMI GATES



Mitch Peacock shows how he made a plane, p07



Discover Ben Law's woodland craft devices, p30

Quercus

Now that *Quercus* is fully established it is time to give John Brown, without whom the magazine would never have been conceived, a tribute from ourselves and from woodworkers worldwide. Readers of his writings have been inspired to spend more evenings and weekends in their sheds, while for others, like Christopher Schwarz, Kenneth Kortemeier and Chris Williams, John transformed their lives, in each case creating chairmaking and writing careers of their own. And next issue you can read John's own words in his essay Good Work.

Elsewhere this issue, Robin Gates shows how to have flatter plane soles, and how this can be achieved with wooden and metal models. Bill Ratcliffe discusses timber choices, Ben Law reveals the devices he uses for greenwoodworking, and Charles Mak shares his tips for checking assembly for square.

Then there's Paul Sellers answering our questions regarding tool design and manufacture, and why he loves the unsung router plane. And there are new contributors: Matt Day, showing how he adds texture to the outside of his carved Kuksa bowls; Shrenik Savla-Shah on the story of Bench.Talk.101; and Mitch Peacock making a wooden scrub plane.

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The Lockdown Fellowship

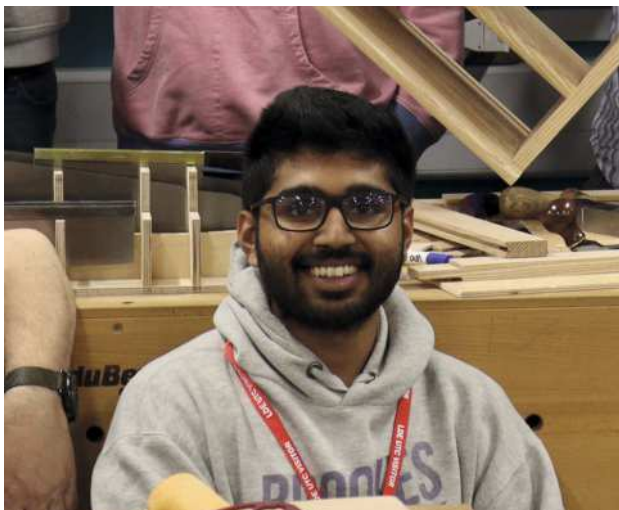
Shrenik Savla-Shah celebrates the conception of an online group of like-minded woodworkers

The lockdowns at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic brought a halt to most woodworking meet-ups across the globe. As a result, BenchTalk101 was formed as a fellowship for like-minded woodworkers to meet virtually and talk all things wood and toolmaking. Learning new skills, refreshing old techniques, and sharing our knowledge and experiences is what it has been about to date. Talking shop would have normally taken place at shows, courses, and tool auctions but the pandemic took this away. The theory of BenchTalk101 is in its name. Woodworkers from across the globe meeting with each other from behind their bench. So, on the 14th May 2020 BenchTalk101 was launched on the social media platforms Instagram and Zoom, and 18 months later without a week missed and even two Christmas Day Specials, we have created a friendship group of woodworkers and other makers from all over the world!

In this time, BenchTalk101 have met weekly, from 8:30pm UK time, via Zoom to hear guest speakers present a topic on their expertise. We have had the pleasure of hearing from several of the well-known names in the woodworking world. More importantly, BenchTalk101 has been able to come together to support those who are still making their journeys into fame with the work that they do. In weeks where a speaker has not come forward, we have hosted our 'Topic Talks' including the most requested 'Craftsmen on Canvas' series: participants discuss a painting depicting a woodworker or a shop. Our recordings tend to last around an hour, followed by our free chat where a whole plethora of discussions can be heard, lasting into the early hours of the morning.

Due to the Lockdown

In 2020, some founding members were unable to hold the event as they had in years before due to the lockdown. So, the 2020



Shrenik Savla-Shah was one of the BenchTalk 101 Class of 2021

Richard Arnold Charity Draw for MacMillan Cancer Support became the subject of the first three BenchTalk101 meetings hosted by Geoffrey Fowler (Jim Hendricks, Richard Arnold and Bill Carter all did a talk). The connection to MacMillan Cancer Support started some years ago when Richard Arnold realised that he had amassed too many tools. Richard collects 18th Century planes and often buys a box of wooden planes when he might only be interested in one. This resulted in Richard deciding to hold an open workshop, giving people the opportunity to take the tools they wanted in return for a donation to charity. He looked

around and settled on the MacMillan Cancer Support charity. This event continued annually as an auction until the pandemic put it on hold. In fact, this open workshop day had become such a great event that people would travel across the globe, just to visit the workshop and see other woodworkers, particularly unplugged woodworkers. This followed suit in 2021, when we were able to host the drawing of the winners of the 2021 charity draw live on BenchTalk101. It was a pleasure that we could use the BenchTalk101 platform to support and promote this.

The variety of knowledge within the fellowship has been astonishing. Very rarely has a person joined the group to find an answer to a question and leave without it, or a resource at the least. The willingness of all our members to share their knowledge and experiences, as well as guide people through their journeys is exemplary of the values of BenchTalk101. With lockdowns being lifted and people returning to their offices and their schedules returning to normal, we have still found our fellows joining us like clockwork every week. This on its own shows how much BenchTalk101 means to our fellows, and the value they see in our weekly meetings. The benefits of meeting virtually extend

James Howard
"Taking a whack at it: Making Mallets"
Thursday 20th January 2022
20:30 - 21:30 (UK)
15:30 - 16:30 (EST)
@hashtagwoodworking
Bench.Talk.101
<https://linktr.ee/BenchTalk.101>

Boaz Zeffertt
"Fire Welding Demystified"
Thursday 18th November 2021
20:30 - 21:30 (UK Time)
15:30 - 16:30 (EST)
Bench.Talk.101
<https://linktr.ee/BenchTalk.101>

Anton Vierthaler
"Holzhoargascht - A layman's musings on traditional woodworking in rural Austria"
Thursday 27th January 2022
20:30 - 21:30 (UK)
15:30 - 16:30 (EST)
Bench.Talk.101
<https://linktr.ee/BenchTalk.101>

beyond the Pandemic, and our intentions are life-long. Our fellows have attended from most corners of the world. Hosted in the UK, we have had people join from the USA, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Ireland, Belgium, Austria and even a few people waking up in the early hours of the morning to join us from Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. Having met weekly, it now almost feels normal to meet with people from all over the world so often; but of course it is not. Meeting virtually reduces our costs, meaning that no one is charged to join us. It also means that people do not have to take time to travel across the world to meet, allowing us to meet more regularly. The broad depth and variety of experiences in different corners of the globe are discussed regularly, with people learning different techniques. People who may never have met before without BenchTalk101 have now done so.

Having met for over 18 months virtually, as is natural, our members were itching to have the opportunity to meet in person. Although many had met in person at other woodworking events before the pandemic, many who had spent hours speaking to each other via video calls had not. As a result, Geoffrey Fowler (on behalf of BenchTalk101), hosted our first ever woodworking course for its fellows to finally meet in person at the London Design and Engineering University Technical College (LDEUTC) in London. We have called this the 'Bench.Talk.101 Class of 2021', with the intention that an annual event of the sort will continue in years to come.

BenchTalk101 Class of 2021

The course was organised to be held over 3 days starting on Tuesday 2nd November and ending on the Thursday evening where we would host our first ever in-person BenchTalk101 (well, hybrid).



Geoffrey Fowler at London Design & Engineering University Technical College (LDEUTC), with a live BenchTalk feed worldwide

Geoffrey designed a whisky cabinet that we were to build out of ash, with a drawer, shelf and door. The course was held both in person at the college and via Zoom, allowing Phil Smith to join our course as a virtual student. Participants attended from Scotland, Wales, Ireland, America, Belgium and of course England.

Several of us chose to stay at a hotel a short train ride from the college and we arrived on the Monday evening, excited to meet each other for the first time. Several of us received gifts of tools made by others, a mark of friendship. It was an exciting time to watch the un-boxings! We chattered into the night before we decided to finally part ways for a

few hours and get some rest before the long day ahead!

On Day 1 (Tuesday), we took the mildly adventurous journey on public transport to the LDEUTC to arrive bright and early for a sharp 8:30am start. Arriving to meet all the other participants, it is amazing Geoffrey was able to end our chattering to actually get the course started. We began by selecting our timber for the cabinet, followed by dimensioning the boards to length. While we were doing this, one of the staff members at the college kindly offered to go and collect our meal deals from the local supermarket for us for lunch, for which we were grateful. The dimensioning took all morning, after we all realised that we wanted to check out the variety of tools that everyone had brought with them. After lunch, we all began the first step of the joinery, we cut the tails. After cutting the tails, we laid out and chopped the mortises and housing joints for the shelf. At the end of the day, we went out for dinner and again talked about all sorts, just as we have done online for what feels like years.

On Day 2 (Wednesday), we arrived at the college at 8:30 once again. The plan for this day was to cut the pin boards followed by cutting the tenons on the shelf panel. Our aim was to have

Chester Spier

"There's no tool like an old tool: Part II"

Thursday 6th January 2022

20:30 - 21:30 (UK)
15:30 - 16:30 (EST)

Bench.Talk.101

<https://linktr.ee/Bench.Talk.101>

A black and white portrait of a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a light-colored shirt.

Bench.Talk.101

CLASS OF 2021

Join us to see our whisky cabinets!

Surprise auction to be held in aid of charity!

Thursday 4th November 2021

20:30 - 21:30 (UK Time)
16:30 - 17:30 (EDT)

In aid of:

MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT

<https://linktr.ee/Bench.Talk.101>

Charlie Earnest talks:

"Making saws in my basement workshop"

Thursday 30th September 2021

20:30 - 21:30 (UK Time)
15:30 - 16:30 (EDT)

C. EARNEST WARWICK

Bench.Talk.101

<https://linktr.ee/Bench.Talk.101>

A color portrait of a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark shirt.

the cabinet glued up by the end of the day, ready to make the door and drawer the following day. Many of us stayed at the college late into the night in a determined attempt to get our cabinets glued and clamped in time. Unfortunately, several of us did not get this far due to the varying experience and skill level of the class.

The morning of Day 3 began with some of us taking clamps off our cabinets, some of us helping others who had fallen a little behind, and others playing with all the amazing tools that people had brought along to show. We cut the grooves in our door rails and stiles and bored the mortices. Some even managed to glue up their doors. By the afternoon, many of us fell away into conversation and showing each other our tools, and some of our guests had begun to arrive.

Tool makers worldwide

Several participants in the course brought the tools they make to show and share. Scott Anderson brought a selection of dovetail markers made from various materials, Rusty Tchernis had three of his spokeshaves represented, and I displayed the marking gauges and pinch sticks made by Mitch Peacock. Tate Watt showed the winding sticks I'd made, Kevin Gooch (from Wales) brought along some planes he had made, and of course there was a selection of Bill Carter mitre planes. Ric Archibald was unable to attend due to travel restrictions, but 3 of his unturned pencils were present. It shouldn't be forgotten that Geoffrey's tool chest was filled with a range of incredible tools for us to play with made by the finest makers in the world today. Tools are important to unplugged woodworkers, but it is the camaraderie that we came to experience from the sharing of these tools.

The Thursday evening was surreal, with all of us showing off the progress we had made over the three days. This would be our first ever in-person BenchTalk101. Those who had been unable to attend the course had been invited to join us for dinner that evening. The evening began with the dinner at the college, with all the course participants and dinner guests sitting at the long table. Many of us were also sporting our freshly printed 'Class of 21' polo shirts, printed out of excitement using the new draft logo produced for us by our very own Anton Vierthaler.

Our cabinets were placed either side on tables in presentable fashion. Andy Brown set up shop with his tool display, containing a plethora of unusual tools which we all admired and learned from. Then... it began. Our first Hybrid BenchTalk101 meeting. The meeting began with a short presentation by Geoffrey, which

involved a few gifts. A Holtzapffel coffin smoother was gifted to Richard Arnold, while me and Scott Anderson were thanked with bottles of whisky for their support with the course. This was followed by a 'thank you' to Geoffrey Fowler from all the participants of the course for the enormous amount of effort and planning that went into allowing many of us to meet for the first time together, with a fine bottle of whisky kindly sourced by Phil Smith. We then continued with an auction, with all the proceeds going towards McMillan Cancer Support. There were two 'Little Billy's' sold, kindly donated by Bill Carter, a foreplane made by Richard Arnold, and two books donated by Andy Brown. We then proceeded on through the night, with the call progressing online as normal and those in person enjoying their cheese and crackers and continuing to chatter away.

We offer a great 'thank you' to Geoffrey Fowler and his team for their support in making the event possible. A further special 'thank you' must go to Ryan Saunders, Scott Anderson and Kevin Gooch in giving up their time during the course to help other participants who were struggling. We worked together, we laughed at and with each other, and we raised close to £5,000 for charity. I had the pleasure of sharing a bench with Rusty and I have cemented lasting friendships with everyone who attended. We hope this will be an annual event and we'll get to see each other more often. Next: the Bench.Talk.101 Class of 2022.

Having read this article, you may wonder how you can join us. You can follow @bench.talk.101 on Instagram, Facebook or YouTube. To find all our social media channels and to sign up to our mailing list, go to this site: <https://linktr.ee/Bench.Talk.101>. Alternatively, send us an email at bench.talk.101@gmail.com to find out further details.



The BenchTalk Class of 2021 with Geoffrey Fowler at the centre (note that Rusty Tchernis has already left)

Bill Pavlak

"Weirder Than I Thought: Lessons in Period Furniture Making"

Thursday 13th January 2022
20:30 - 21:30 (UK)
15:30 - 16:30 (EST)

Bench.Talk.101
<https://linktr.ee/Bench.Talk.101>

Richard Arnold talks:

"The language of joinery. Do you know your Frankings from your Muntins?"

Thursday 27th May 2021
20:30 - 21:30 (UK Time)
15:30 - 16:30 (EDT)

Bench.Talk.101

"Let's get hammered":
Show us your favourite hammer!

Topic Talks

OUT NOW ON YOUTUBE!

Bench.Talk.101

The Comfy Scrub Plane

One of the BenchTalk101 Class of 2021, *Mitch Peacock* shows how you can make a simple plane

Like many woodworkers my age, I cut my teeth as a young boy, making go-carts and the like with the help of my father, and making a pencil box, amongst other small things, in the school workshop. I pursued a career in communications, but of course we never forget our first loves, and when the chance came to take it up again in my 30s I didn't hesitate. Such was my passion, I began helping others, and started my woodworking YouTube channel.

Over time, my focus has shifted further and further towards unplugged woodworking, and also to making my own tools. Most recently I made a wooden scrub plane entirely from scraps around the workshop. For anyone who hasn't used a scrub plane, hopefully I can inspire you to try, or even build one. Chances are if you start your projects from riven or sawn boards, they won't be flat. Wind, cup, and bow is almost inevitable as the boards initially dry and then acclimate to their surroundings. Accurate joinery in stock that isn't flat isn't impossible, but it's certainly a far more difficult proposition, and so flattening of boards is usually the way to go. Every wonky board has a flat board within it, and as woodworkers we just need to remove the excess wood to reveal it. Whether it's obvious or not, removing material from the high spots, until everywhere is as low as the lowest spot, will create a flat surface, only saying it can be easier than doing it.

Having made one side of the board flat, you'll most likely want to make the reverse side flat and parallel to it, and the distance between these sides a given thickness. This will require more wood to be



removed, more time and more effort. All this, before even getting to the width the board wants to be.

The Solution

Using power opens up some easy solutions, most of which require little in the way of hand skills or experience. Jointers, table saws, router jigs, CNC tables, I've tried them all. Most of my early work started with some time at a little jointer/

thicknesser, and I was glad to get down to the joinery in short order. Gradually I began dabbling with unplugged woodworking, taking rough boards, or even logs, through to finished furniture with just my own effort.

Flattening boards for furniture begins by breaking them down towards component sizes – imagine a 12ft two-by-ten that you're planning on making into a sofa table. If it

starts with a one inch bow in it's length, and you flatten it as a single board, you end up with a one by ten, having wasted half of the wood! In fact, having removed so much wood, the changes in the boards internal stresses would almost certainly introduce new wind, new cup, or new bow.

The unplugged woodworker can call upon hatchet, adze, or draw knife, amongst other tools, to lower the high spots, but for the smallish furniture components that I'm regularly preparing a scrub plane is usually my tool of choice. Equally, for thickening a scrub plane will often prove the best choice.

The Scrub Plane

With a sole to limit the depth of cut, and two hands to power and steer it, a plane is a great way to remove material just where you want to. To quickly remove material, the scrub plane specifically employs a narrow, heavily cambered iron, designed to take thick shavings across the grain. The heavy camber means the cutting edge slices through the top of the wood at the edge of the cut, much like using a carving gouge, minimising any splintering.

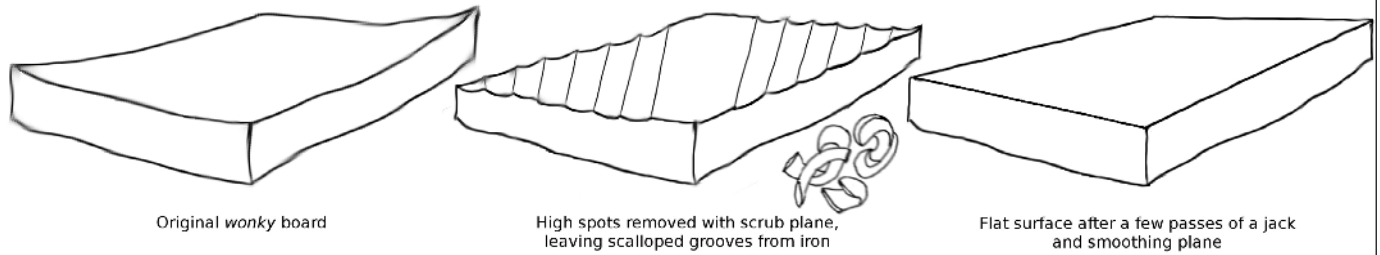
Heavy irons are used to back up the cutting edge, minimising chatter. Probably the best known scrub plane would be the metal Stanley No.40, introduced at the end of the 19th Century, but wooden scrub planes have been around for many more centuries and are still made today.

For several years I used a slightly modified Stanley No.5 as my scrub plane. I ground a replacement iron with a significant camber, and set the frog as far back as it would go. It worked, but shaving thickness was slightly limited



Pic.1 Mitch Peacock's scrub plane has a dovetailed sole

Fig.1 Flattening a board is one of the uses of a scrub plane



by the mouth (Pic.2). This led to a little orthodontic work, as I opened the mouth up little by little, checking that with the frog set forward I could still close the mouth up tight enough when using the plane for smoothing with its original iron. The result has been a very useful scrub plane over the years since.

However, after problems with arthritis in my hands, it was time for a new scrub plane. I reasoned that a plane built to fit my hands, one that put less pressure on the areas that were painful, would allow me to continue the unplugged board preparation I had become accustomed to and loved.

Simple challenge

Building the plane was fun, and mostly simple except after accepting a friend's challenge to dovetail a sole onto it. Attaching a sole as a separate piece isn't necessary, so anyone thinking of having a go at building a plane shouldn't be put off by my crazy detour!

By laminating the plane body (Pic.3, and Fig.4) the bed, throat, and mouth, are sawn before assembly, avoiding the task of chopping out and trying to get everything just so. By using a bridge pin, and



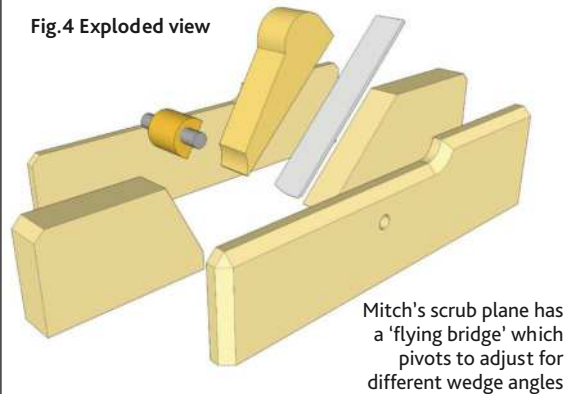
Pic.2 Shaving thickness has been limited by the Stanley No.5's mouth

optional flying bridge, the more complicated wedge abutments are also avoided.

For the iron I simply used an old Dunlop tyre iron; the high carbon steel was easy to shape and hardened in my home-made micro forge (Pic.4). Ready to use irons are available to purchase, for example a Hock Tools No.40 blade.

The trickiest part, and it really wasn't tricky at all, would probably have been making the wedge, which should be close to eight degrees to allow ease of adjustment, however I decided to add a dovetailed sole (Pic.5). Getting the tapered dovetail slots to fit and tighten up at the right point was a real challenge.

Fig.4 Exploded view



After the basic plane was assembled (Pic.6) I shaped it to fit my hands, removing a bit off here and a bit off there, testing it out, and then repeating countless times. Worth it, as I have ended up with the most comfortable plane in my workshop.

Using a scrub plane

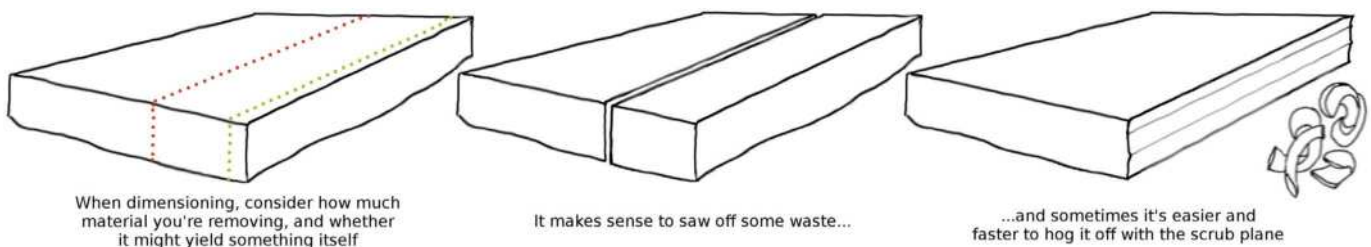
I have three main uses for a scrub plane, all of which benefit from its ability to remove wood fast. Flattening a surface, usually a face side (Fig.1). The scrub quickly knocks down the high spots, preparing the surface for a jack plane, which is used to remove the rippled surface before smoothing.

To thickness or dimension

components (Fig.2). Removing less than a quarter of an inch from a board by sawing is often slower than hogging it away with the scrub. Either method will require a few passes of a jack and smoother to finish off, and choosing correctly whether to saw or scrub first will minimise the time and effort required. The scrub greatly reduces the plane strokes required to produce significant chamfers (Fig.3), and profiles such as door and window sills, leaving just clean-up for jack and smoother planes.

Follow Mitch Peacock on YouTube, Instagram (@mitch_peacock_womadeod) or visit womadeod.co.uk.

Fig.2 Dimensioning stock





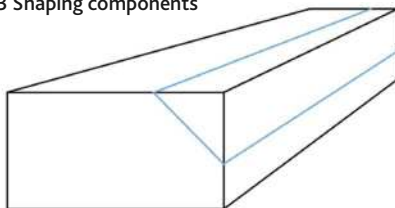
Laminating the body, bed, throat and mouth (Pic.3, above) means there is less chopping to be done. The blade was made from an old Dunlop tyre iron, hardened with Mitch's micro forge (Pic. 4, right)



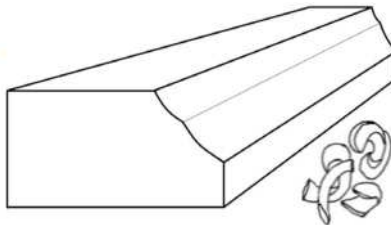
As an added detail Mitch decided to add a dovetailed sole, with the dovetailed grooves (Pic.5, above) set at an angle. The dovetails were sawn by hand, the waste was chiselled out, the bottoms cleaned with a router plane and the sides finished with a side-rebate plane. They didn't need to be angled across the sole, but it does mean the dovetails appear on both sides and ends, which initially looks impossible. After assembly the plane was rasped (Pic.6, right)



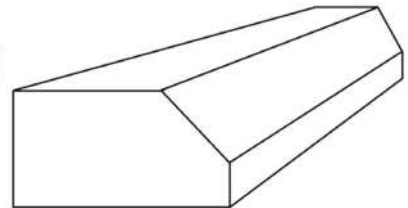
Fig.3 Shaping components



When planing a chamfer, it can pay to use the scrub planes deep cut to get things moving along



Take most of the waste off with the scrub...



...and finish with a jack and smoother

Shop Habits

**Keen to challenge his workshop time, barefoot
Ron Guritzky records his woodworking time**

I work full-time 40-60 hours a week (including needing to be available 'on-call'). This makes my shop time very precious. On the flip side, there always seems to be an excuse not to get to my bench. Usually it's in the form of: "I want to get this done, but only have a short time. I guess I'll have to wait." There were always too many of those days.

While listening to the *Mortise and Tenon* Podcast episode #31, Josh Klein and Mike Updegraff had a discussion of 'Making Woodworking a Habit'. They argued that you should get into the shop every day, even if it was only for a couple of minutes to make a single cut. The important thing was the habit, not the time. At the time, it didn't really hit home, but after ruing my lack of shop time, it made me realise how many shop opportunities I was missing. I knew what I had to do...

In the middle of August 2021, I committed to getting into the shop every day for 30 days. It didn't matter what I did: saw some board; carve a spoon; layout some joints; select lumber; anything. I made a journal of the experience on my Instagram account. A summary is in the table. Here's what I learned.

During this period I had three separate projects going. I was building three Civil War ammunition crate inspired boxes from salvaged pallet wood. I was repairing a little, wooden tray my son had been given which broke. Finally, I was building a bed surround for my father. Because I have limited space in my shop and on my bench, I could usually only work on one project at a time. Even with the three crates (which I was building in parallel), I was often limited to working on each step on each crate one at a time.

I averaged 40 minutes a session. I had one day when I was at work for fifteen hours and decided it was more important to spend the hour before bed with my wife than getting into the shop. I know it was the right decision. My shortest sessions were 10 minutes and my longest was 105 minutes. On a day I was at work from 0700 to 2100, I snuck out during my dinner break and spent 10 minutes sitting on the tailgate of my SUV and did a little spoon carving. (I had thrown the blank and a sloyd knife in my trunk for just such an emergency.) On the day I moved my son into his apartment, I repaired a broken piece of dovetail for 10 minutes. One of the things I found was that, because I use a liquid hide glue (Old Brown) which needs to dry overnight, I frequently got cut short when I had to do an impromptu repair. One day, when test fitting a dovetail, a glue line opened up where I had jointed the two boards that made up the panel. I reglued them, but then had to wait. I should have picked another crate and worked on that, but the motivation was lost by the failure. One issue that seemed to keep popping up is that, working on one project at a time, with a limited number of clamps, glue-ups always brought my day to an end.

Because of my work schedule, I took the shop time where I could get it. Unfortunately, I live in South Florida (USA) and my

Day	Mins	Activity
1	25	Planed board faces (on call)
2	10	Spoon carving – on call – worked 0700-2100 – carved during dinner
3	30	Jointed long edges of boards
4	15	Layout / re-glue failed joint
5	45	Planing / Dovetail layout / saw a tail board
6	60	Cut remaining tail boards & got called in to work
7	50	Chopped tails
8	10	Glued broken dovetail piece / Moved son into apartment
9	30	Laid out pins
10	30	Cut pins
11	50	Chopped pins
12	10	Attempted to tune a dovetail / re-glued jointed edge, instead
13	40	Fitted one crate frame
14	45	Fitted second crate frame
15	105	Fitted third frame / Glue up one frame / Test assemble bed surround & painted inside face
16	35	Glue up second frame / paint bed surround face
17	20	Glue-up third frame
18	25	Removed third frame from clamps / Finish painting bed surround
19	90	Level dovetails
20	20	Prep wood for crate bottoms (before leaving for work)
21	60+	Surface planed crate bottom boards / Sand and clear coat bed surround / prep tray repair
22	50	Kintsugi repair of tray
23	25	Fine sanded clear coat on bed surround / waxed / buffed
23a	20	Modify clips for bed surround
24	70	Ship lap crate bottoms
25	0	Worked 0615-2119 : no shop time : wife time
26	80	Nail on bottom of first crate
27	55	Nail on bottom of second crate
28	75	Nail third bottom / trim up all three bottoms
28	25	Layout hinges / select and rough size new lids
29	70	Laid out new lids / Smoothed faces / cut pieces to rough length
30	25	Joint and glue up one lid

shop is in my garage where summer days are frequently 90° and 90% humidity. I am weak. On days I was hand planing, I would frequently plane for three to four minutes and then rest the same. It was not very efficient. Right after my wife moved in with me, I moved my bench into the front hall of the house to plane the top level. Between the fore and try planes, there were a lot of shavings. I haven't done that since.

Reinforcing the habit

I also found that there were days I would find anything to do, just to get into the shop. These days were not my most efficient and, honestly, if I wasn't doing the 30-day thing, I wouldn't have done it. The benefit was, they reinforced the habit. The down-side was that they were not the most efficient use of my time.

My takeaways on the experience were that I can easily get more shop time. Saying: "I've only got a few minutes" is a cop-

Ron Guritzky, USA



Ron has always worked barefoot (left). He says: "Don't judge", and has a 'garage' workshop (below left). At any time he will be working on a number of projects, recently being a jewelry box (below right) made from reclaimed redwood, and crates for storing Civil War ammunition (below left). A poplar joined chest (above) and a reclaimed wood storage chest (bottom)



out. There is real work that can be accomplished in that time. On the flip side, going out to the shop just to go is typically a waste of time. Quality is definitely more important than either quantity or frequency. The impediments to getting things done in the shop are frequently not motivation related. Glue drying time, clamp shortages, and repairing mis-steps frequently brought sessions to an abrupt halt. On which point working on one project at a time limits the ability to keep moving once you hit a hard stop. If I had several projects going with the necessary space and equipment, I could have moved from one to another. Shop space usually limits how many projects can be underway at any given time. High heat and humidity are not conducive to long session involving physical work. Even doing 'light' activities, took its toll quickly. And of course, family is more important than shop time.

Follow Ron on Instagram @oopswoodworker.



Handmade Opportunities

Searching for candidates, *Plimsoll Productions* aims to find Britain's Best Woodworker

In the forthcoming competition series, Mel Giedroyc will introduce some of the country's most talented craftspeople, as they battle it out to be crowned Britain's Best Woodworker. As *Quercus* readers know from QM10, Misti Leitz 'won' the competition in 2021. She, as others, showed how wood isn't just good - it's magnificent, and in skilful hands it can be transformed into the most spectacular of objects. The next series will celebrate the beauty of the raw material and the craftsmanship of those who are good at working with it.

Mel Giedroyc rules the workshop as each week, the woodworkers will compete against each other with a big build that supersedes the skills they've honed at home and a surprise challenge that tests their core skills. The woodworkers will fight hammer and nail, building wonderful works of wood in just two days that combine epic scale with fine craftsmanship and cutting-edge design. But they'll have to impress the judges to remain in the competition, which is produced by Plimsoll Productions.

The casting team are looking for applicants now, with filming set to take place in Spring and Summer this year, and want to speak with absolutely anyone who has a passion for wood. The competition is open to anyone in the UK over the age of 18.

If you're interested, please email the team for an application form at wood@plimsollproductions.com. Any personal details sent to us or given to us over the phone or email will be treated in accordance with data protection law. By supplying this information, you acknowledge that your personal information may be used in connection with the programme in accordance with our privacy policy. <https://plimsollproductions.com/privacy-policy/>.



Misti (left) in the summerhouse that won her the 2021 series of *Handmade Britain's Best Woodworker*. Judges Helen Welch (left) and Alex de Rijke (right) with presenter Mel Giedroyc

Forthcoming Events

Classic Hand Tools and Westonbirt Woodworks are combining great strengths in staging an event from 17th-19th June at Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire, England. Tickets are through the main Westonbirt entrance, paid on the day at the normal admission rate. Sawmill demo, sharpening, pole lathes, Windsor chairmaking, fine hand-tools for sale, and much more. Details classichandtools.co.uk. You'll find a similar, but rather larger, rather more colourful range of people and features, in Suffolk from 14th-15th May, at *Weird & Wonderful Wood* (right). Tickets cost £12 for adults and children (who will love it) for £6. Details weirdandwonderfulwood.co.uk.



PHOTOS CHANNEL 4/PLIMSOLL

The Taming of the Screw

Is there still a place for using the flat head screwdriver, asks *Shrenik Savla-Shah* with fond memories

I grew up in my grandfather's hardware shop, stocking shelves and serving customers. We sold building materials and tools to the trades as well as DIY customers. By the time I was 10 years old, my curious mind had begun to question why tools were designed the way they were. One such tool was the flat head screwdriver.

There are several different terms thrown at what these are called. In England they were once referred to as "turnscrews" ("tournevis" in French) and in Germany as a "Schraubendreher" (screw-turner). I may joke that some would refer to them as paint can openers. Now you find them commonly referred to as a flat head screwdriver. Does it even make sense? The screw head isn't flat!

Thinking back to fond memories of filling drawers with Nettlefolds screws as a young boy, I remember that I used to ask my grandfather: Why would one even use a flat head screw? Why would one bother when other screw types such as Philips and Pozidrive are available? Well of course, they weren't when flat head screws were most common! One might even expect that flat head screws would be redundant by now. The reality is that they mostly are. Once a fixture on every door hinge, lock and in furniture, they are



now significantly less common. These days on construction sites you are almost only likely to find a flat head screw being used by an electrician to secure electrical faceplates to the wall. The fact is that flat head screws just don't work well with the powered tools they use on site. No wonder they came up with other types of screws...

Poorly fitting

Flat head screwdrivers and their screws of course have one inherent flaw, a poorly fitting screwdriver can cause

the screwdriver to slip, and "cam-out", damaging the piece you are carefully trying to assemble. This was ever so evident when I first tried to use a Stanley "Yankee" screwdriver, the type you pump up and down. While they are brilliant when they work well, they can also cause even more damage than when hand turning a screw when it slips. Have you ever tried putting a flat head screwdriver bit in a drill to turn a screw? I have, and it was even worse! Again... no wonder they came up with other types of screws!

Reading through the Marples 1928 price list (available digitally from TATHS), A large variety of turnscrews were once offered: London Pattern, Cabinet, Spindle, Round Blade, Electrician's, Pianoforte Makers', Perfect-Pattern, Engineers'/Motor, Pocket and Sewing Machine, Midget/Lock... They even made flat head bits to fit in a brace. A huge variety, and many more makers offered all of these around the world.

The turnscrews available in those days could be "resharpened", filed to be brought back to shape and perfectly engage in the slot of the screw to turn it without any damage. If you have used one that fits well in a screw you will understand the beauty of using one. Of course, flat head screwdrivers are still available, with hardened and often tipped ends that are not designed to be sharpened and used for a lifetime.

I love an old turnscrew. Why? Well, I can reshape and maintain it myself. I can modify it easily to work for something unusual if required (like split nuts on a saw). Modern flat head screwdrivers just aren't the same. When disassembling old furniture or re-hanging doors, modern flat head screwdrivers just don't fit right. They chew up the screw and cause damage, requiring an otherwise perfectly serviceable screw to be replaced.

While the days of new flat head screws may be numbered, I sense they still have a purpose. To me, in woodworking there is nothing more satisfying than a line of perfectly clocked flat heads screws when putting a project together at the end. It's suffice to say that my turnscrews are safe in my workshop, and will turn many more screws in my lifetime.

Follow Shrenik Savla-Shah on Instagram at @s.savla.shah. On Thursdays at 8.30pm you can find him on Bench.Talk.101.



Some Historic Scrumping

In the Scottish Highlands, *Thomas Banks* recounts how spoons led to the history of kuksas

I grew up in the North East of England in a little ex-mining town called Birtley. My Grandad was a carpenter and although he was in a wheelchair my whole life, he was still able to show me how to use a saw and hammer properly. It was enough to give me confidence to pick up a tool and give things a go.

I was inspired, aged 10, by Ray Mears on TV, and my friends and I would escape Birtley where there was only getting into trouble for kids. Four miles away were Beamish Woods where we would make camps, light fires and whittle things with our penknives. One camping trip I forgot a spoon so decided to make one myself, having never before done anything more than sharpening a stick. I was amazed by what I had created. It looked like a caveman had made it with his teeth, but the main thing was that it worked.

I then went to University in Bangor, North Wales and didn't do anything with wood until my first job, working as a wildlife surveyor in Dorset at Lulworth Cove. Things stepped up a notch when a kind friend bought me my first Gransfors Bruks Wildlife Hatchet for a birthday. I knew of these axes and knew how expensive they are, so it encouraged me to return to woodwork. I ended up getting a bit wood-drunk, making walking sticks, spoons and jewellery. The thing about conservation work is that it doesn't pay well so your friends and family end up suffering bad presents. Now, however, I could source my material for free and spend time making unique things as gifts. I started to improve my skills in this period



of low-income work as I had spare time and access to resources.

A few years later I accepted a job offer in the Scottish Highlands doing the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland. A fantastic job, wandering through the woods all day, using a sign-written Forestry Commission vehicle. It was the perfect cover for scrumping wood. They even gave us a Japanese Silky Big Boy saw in case we needed to cut trees off the track! I didn't use the Silky to clear tracks, but instead for liberating some birch burrs, which I read the Sami people used for making their

stunning kuksa cups. My first awareness of a kuksa was a colleague in Northern Ireland showing me one from a friend got her. I examined it in my hands for half an hour, marking down the dimensions and trying to understand how I could make myself a wooden cup.

My forestry job was coming to an end after a few years and I was desperate to stay in the Highlands. The only skill I had was my woodwork. So I thought I would pay for a table at a local chainsaw carving competition and see if the public would buy something I had made. Turns out they did. It is one thing your friends saying nice things about what you make, but quite another when strangers buy them.

It gave me the confidence to try and make a living as a woodworker. I started selling things and also teaching people through basic carving courses. I found I loved teaching. Since my first kuksas from the birch burrs I have been obsessed with making cups and they are the main item I sell, and the most common course I teach in the little piece of oak woods I rent on an estate near Aviemore.

New career

A few years into my new career an archeologist friend asked if I would like to go to the National Museum of Scotland to view some wooden pieces and see if I could shed some light on how I thought they were made. This was another turning point in my making career. I picked up a very fine wooden cup made 2000 years ago from oak. It had a delicate drinking lip, a ring for a handle, fluted walls and was kolrossed on the outside. I had never heard of a Scottish wooden kuksa, but wanted to make a version myself. This is from where the cups I make now have come. It's great when people make things unique to their area; like going to a particular part of Sweden to see the Dala horses made.

At present I'm making end-grain cups and goblets. I do these all by hand with an axe and twca-cam. I never really got into lathe work. Perhaps that will be my retirement plan, but for now I love the speed of seeing a cup quickly appear with the axe. Not sure what I will be making in the future but I'm sure there will always be some sort of drinking vessel being created.



End-grain Kuksa cup
in spalted birch

Follow @woodentom1 on Instagram and/or visit woodentom.com



Leaves painted and pressed (above) on to cups to transfer their patterns. Gin goblet (right) mortice and tenoned with the Veritas tenon cutter



Roughed out Kuksas with the axe (above) and a Pictish boar mug with deer antler (right) for the tusks and charred outer



Bows and Curves in French

Preparing herself to design an unnecessary cabinet, *Barbara Roberts* makes her own drawing tools

Why do we have these hobbies and why do we do the silly things that we do? John F. Kennedy knew why. We choose to do things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard. Overcoming the difficulties and stretching the limits of our skills and capabilities is massively rewarding. One of the key success factors of *homo sapiens* is that we people get satisfaction from doing the work before it's absolutely necessary: like finding or planting food before we are hungry or building a shelter before a storm hits. Now that most of us don't have to struggle to fulfill basic needs, we have time and energy for silly things like music, art, collecting butterflies or building furniture that don't have a purpose.

I like to build two kinds of things: functional and totally unnecessary. Functional stuff like a new terrace deck, I usually build quickly and roughly. Every time I use the thing I enjoy the feeling of accomplishment. The unnecessary projects need to be challenging. I've noticed that moderately easy doesn't do it for me anymore. I had to take a step back and contemplate this hobby and what I want to do next. I realised that every time I design something I am held back sub-consciously by the skill set that I have.

Making a list

To overcome this I decided to design a piece of furniture that would incorporate all kinds of features that I like but don't know how to make. I started by making a list: secret compartments with mechanics, multi-axis curved forms, tiny drawers, sculpted forms, metal and wood joined together,



difficult joinery... So I sat down and started drawing. It took me a while to break free from flat surfaces, straight lines and 90° angles. I even made myself a bunch of drawing bows and french curves so that I wouldn't be limited by my drawing set. The cabinet that I designed is called Willy and I will be building it for the next couple months.

So that this article wouldn't be a total waste of paper, here's a few tips and tricks. Drawing-bows are easy to make. Choose any kind of

straight-grain flexible wood (oak, ash, pine, almost whatever) and rip a 1/8-1/4in piece. Thin for short bows and thicker for longer bows. Then you need a piece of non-flexible string or rope that is fastened at the ends of the wood strip so that the length of the rope and hence the curvature of the bow can be adjusted. I tried different locking mechanisms for the rope and noticed that a block of wood with three holes in it works well. I saw this method on Wood by Wright YouTube video. Drill a hole on

both ends of the bow. Make a permanent fastening on the other end and run the thread through two holes in the locking block and then through the bow hole and then fasten the end of the string to the locking block. Now you can adjust the curvature by moving the locking block.

And here's how you can make French curves. Search the Internet for French curve templates. Print out templates in different sizes with a laser printer. Then take a piece of 1/8in MDF, birch ply, plastic or whatever you like and stick the printout on the board and saw the piece with a fretsaw and finish the edges with files or sandpaper sticks. What I like to do is I put the printout upside down on the wood and hold the paper in place with a few pieces of masking tape. Then I take a piece of cloth and put some acetone on it and dab the paper with it. Acetone will dissolve the ink and transfer it on the board. It's easier to follow the lines with a fretsaw this way.

For the design is I first drew 1:10 scale pictures of the cabinet free-hand. Then I made a full-scale drawing with a laptop and tried different proportions. I didn't have access to an A0 printer so I drew the whole cabinet on cardboard in full scale and refined the size and shapes using the drawing bows and French curves. A full-scale mock-up turned out to be necessary since I made quite a few changes after seeing the actual size of the cabinet and all the details. I have no idea how to make this cabinet but I'm sure I'll figure it all out somehow. I might fail miserably but at least then I know I reached the limits of my skills.

Watch out for developments at [@barbiewoodshop](#).

Busy Hands

Paul Boyer shares a lifetime woodworking journey

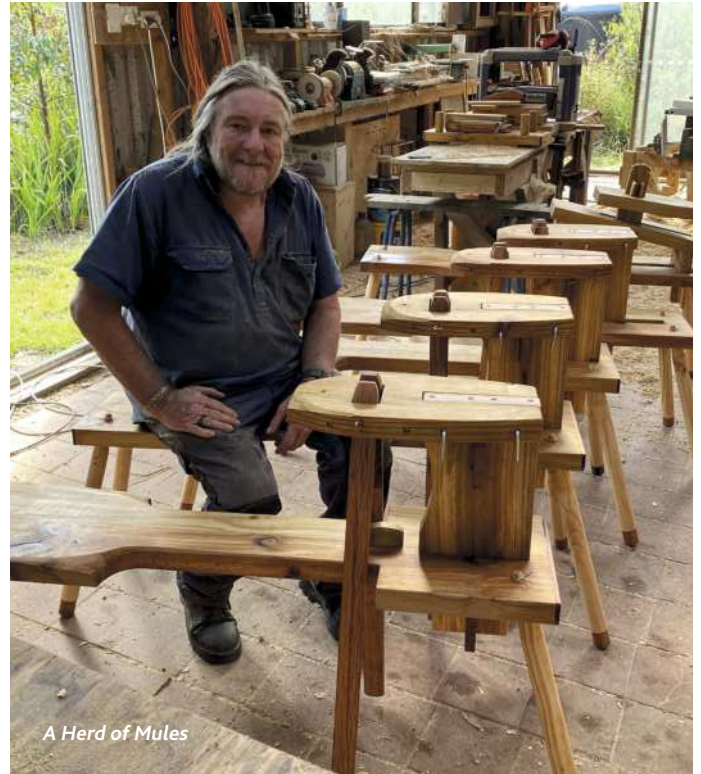
I haven't always carved spoons, same as I haven't always lived in an off-grid house in a clearing on the edge of a national park. Before 2005 I had spent the whole of my working life in the steel industry in Wollongong, NSW, going slowly crazy. When the company wanted to down-size I took the Golden Handshake and ran south until there was very little south left, at least in NSW. I ended up in a beautiful valley near the tiny village of Towamba, and have stayed.

As for spoons, well, I've always had what Mum used to call 'busy hands'. I would bash bits of wood about in my Dad's shed and wanted to do the same again, so I built myself a workshop and filled it with tools, but a run-in with the 'black dog' in 2011 left my workshop empty and my tools either rusty or gathering dust. It wasn't until 2016 that things started looking up again. I met my new wife Rachel, and I also met the amazingly talented Jeff Donne, aka 'The Spoonsmith', at a First Aid course I was running and learned that he was a spoon carving teacher. Until then I had no idea that spooncarving was even a thing and when Jeff explained further my hands started itching. It took me three carving

courses, heaps of YouTube clips and nearly 12 months in the workshop but I finally got to grips with making a spoon I wasn't ashamed of.

You would think a spoon is a simple thing to carve, a bowl with a handle, Yes?. Well, No, not a spoon carved with an axe and straight knife and hook knife. It is a 3D shape composed of curved surfaces and intersecting edges all arranged into a graceful and above all functional utensil. It's like drawing with edges and painting with shadow and all the time the carver is juggling sharp tools within a whisper of his or her fingers. I am also constantly assessing grain strength and direction.

This is a big part of why I chose to carve spoons; it's not easy. The other part is the history. In 2011 in a Danish bog the 'Amose Spoon' was unearthed. It was still in the last pot in which it had been used, and has been dated to the late Neolithic period of 4000 BC. As soon as I saw a picture of it I could tell it had a deep crank. This allows food retrieval from a deep bowl and this spoon had also been made from a crook (where branch meets trunk on the tree) which made this a strong spoon too. It had been carved with stone



tools as metal ones were far in the future, the wheel hadn't been invented, yet people were carving spoons and using the same techniques I was, way back in the Stone Age.

Spooncarving does not have a big history in Australia and hardly anyone makes tools for spooncarving. Maybe it's because Aussie timbers can be really hard on the carvers and their tools. This is why I sharpen my tools all the time. I never hone above 2000 grit and a 'shaving' sharp edge lasts two minutes on a piece of Banksia, and that's a fairly soft wood here, so I don't waste

time on an edge that won't last. I recently saw a post by a fellow woodcarver who lives in the Northern Hemisphere who hadn't sharpened his tools in ages and thought they could do with some attention.

So here I am living where mobile reception is a new thing and tar on the dirt road to the coast is the stuff of dreams. The rabbit hole that is spooncarving is still leading me deeper with no end in sight. To make my life a little easier I re-designed and made myself an old-fashioned vice called funnily enough a 'spoon mule'. It packs down in a few seconds and needs no tools so it is portable to take to markets and demonstrations. The spooncarvers of the world got wind of this and I am now making spoon mules, shave horses, kuksa cows, bowl mules, and pole lathes, all of which fold down for easy transport. When I can, I carve spoons, kuksas, bowls, and maybe fan birds in the near future. My name is Paul, and thanks for the chat.

You can follow Paul Boyer on Instagram @paulboyer65



Carving the back of a blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) kitchen spoon (left) and a pair of hickory wattle (*Acacia faciformis*) eating spoons, tangential cut, bark down (above)

Passing a Chairman's Baton

Reflective, *Nick Gibbs* celebrates the worldwide significance of John Brown's *Little Green Book*

John Brown came into my life, and into the lives of woodworking readers worldwide, in Autumn 1993. Of course, that's not entirely true and it's self-congratulatory to forget that he'd never have been writing columns for us were it not for having written and published *Welsh Stick Chairs*, nor would his columns have been read with such respect had it not been for his *Little Green Book*. We'd launched *Good Woodworking* magazine at the end of 1992, and already it was making an impact on the market, but Future Publishing, for whom I founded and edited the title, were passionate about making magazines better and better. One day my boss, Kevin Cox, suggested *Good Wood* might benefit from a crusty craftsman to give it some gravitas. Painfully, I had to acknowledge he was right, and I began a search for the right person. It is Kevin we should thank.

I never like poaching writers from another magazine, preferring to build people up from scratch. I recalled, a few days later, a review of an odd little book called *Welsh Stick Chairs* in one of my last issues editing *The Woodworker*. I'd commissioned an article about the author, who worked without electricity in Wales. He was called John Brown, or at least so we thought. He was actually born Grahame Eynon, changing his name twice over the years. I don't recall ever referring to him as JB, in fact it came as a surprise when I discovered recently that this abbreviation is now so commonly used.

Picked up

I hot-footed it down to Wales in my Golf Caddy pick-up to meet John and discuss the possibility that he might write a column for a magazine he had never seen. He'd expected me to arrive in a BMW, and was impressed by the rawness of my steed. We sat down in his little kitchen and drank lots of tea, and started a conversation that was to last for 15 years, on and off. I'll never forget the night he and I debated who should have the top bunk, sharing a room after a long evening with his son Henry eating, drinking and listening to live music in a small cottage in the Preseli Hills. On that first afternoon at his table, John gave me a wooden carving of a bird in flight, made, he said, by a prisoner in jail. Years later, at his memorial, I met the carver, who John claimed had been interned during



The Troubles in Ireland. It might well have been so, but according to friends and relatives at the gathering, John preferred, in that familiar style, not to let the truth get in the way of a good story. Give him his due, John had plenty of good stories to tell, and he did the telling well.

Design a workshop

I can't recall how easily I persuaded John Brown to start writing. As for all new columnists I have employed, I would have advised him to start as if he'd been contributing for some time. "It is not often that craftsmen have the opportunity to design their own workshop," were his first words, written with a manual typewriter on the thin paper that became so familiar, always held together with (green string) treasury tags. "Usually they [craftsmen] work in buildings that were meant for other things, from garages to cowsheds, and from garden sheds to disused warehouses. At last I have the chance to reverse this trend, at least for myself." Reading those sentences, I knew we had discovered something special, and someone who listened as readily as he exclaimed.

He had clocked my tip to fill his writing with capital letters and numbers. When I receive an article from a new contributor I immediately scan the words for proper

nouns: names of products, of people, of places; and for figures to show dates, quantities, weights and measures and prices. That is where facts lie. The rest is just opinion.

Having recently re-married and moved into a new home, John Brown was midway through building his latest workshop, having taken time off chairmaking for that purpose. Though he wrote diaries and letters profusely, he never found writing his column easy, and it was always a bit painful. Beneath the bluster he had a certain insecurity, but his articles became an inspiration to woodworkers the world over. He liked to test people's conviction by challenging them, but would often turn his convictions around afterward, or forget what he had said.

Speaking at the Celebration of his Life at Pantry Fields in June 2008, I had to confess that the flash of inspiration to ask John to write was the best decision I'd ever made as an editor. Despite launching three more woodworking magazines (not to mention one sailing title, one for cross stitchers and another for scrap-bookers) I suspect finding John has had a more lasting impact than anything else I've done for a magazine.

Editors know they have a gem when reader after reader admits to searching first for a particular regular when the next issue drops on their doormat. Such familiarity and such expectations drive sales, and few magazines have the fortune to contrive an editorial opiate or find a columnist as appetising as John Brown, whether or not his Marmite followers cursed or applauded his dogmatic words.

Let's face it, John's regular missives from Wales made *Good Woodworking* Britain's best-selling woodworking magazine. We were inundated at *British Woodworking* (a magazine I later founded) by emails when we announced John's illness. Time and again readers recall opening *Good Woodworking* to find John's pages first, and how they still return to the articles or the memories of inspiration. "John Brown's articles were the very first thing I read when my monthly copy of *Good Woodworking* was delivered," emailed John Clayton from France when he heard about John's poor health in May 2008. "I was an impecunious wannabe woodworker with little in the way of tools and resources. John's no-nonsense, simple and traditional



ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH: VICTOR WILKINS; ILLUSTRATION: LEE JOHN PHILLIPS

hand-tool approach was an inspiration to me. I did my best to follow his ways and my love of woodworking blossomed. I have never forgotten John's firm views and regularly find myself using one or another of the old hand-tools I obtained as a result of reading his articles."

Fans overseas tempted John to run a couple of courses for a dozen or so potential chairmakers at Drew Langsner's Country Workshops in North Carolina. Each time he made a chair of his own, alongside students, but was unhappy with the chair he built on the first course. He asked Drew to destroy it with an axe, which of course was never done. According to Drew: "For the second course John brought a full-arm chair, with his characteristic dark finish, knocked down in a box. This was assembled before the class. It was left at Country Workshops as a gift, and part of our small collection of seating. Not many people do that."

A passion for Wales

Though he was in Wales when we met, and was born there, John had lived all around Britain. He'd been in the Merchant Navy (jumping ship in Australia for a girl) and the RAF (in which he flew the very dangerous Vampires, very fast). For a while he was a boatbuilder in Falmouth, though he'd started married life in Cambridgeshire, having been demoted by the RAF for marrying Frances Parker without permission. They had six children (Ieuan, Katy, Michael, Henry and twins Maria and Matthew). When the marriage fell apart and his boatbuilding business collapsed, he moved to Pembrokehire, having first had a farm in Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire. He spent a few early years as a child in Caerphilly and the Rhondda, but for most of his childhood he was in South East London and Kent. Since leaving the RAF John had led a nomadic existence, living in a tent and on a boat, but back in Wales in the late 1970s he went to visit John Seymour, the author of books on self-sufficiency.

About this time John decided he would dedicate his life to making Welsh country chairs, which he described as stick chairs. He married John Seymour's daughter Annie, and they lived together at Pantry Fields near Newport in a pair of railway carriages, which had previously been used for transporting bananas. The small carriages were 8ft apart, joined by a little corridor, and both their children, Badger and Molly, were born there. In October 1984 he helped with the launch by the National Trust of John Seymour's book, *The Forgotten Arts*. That month he gave a demonstration of chairmaking at Guild, the well-known Arts & Crafts design shop in Bristol. In the *Bristol Evening Post* of that time there was a short piece praising



John's chairs for children, made beautifully "with as much love as I can muster." In June 1985 he was one of 27 craftspeople to exhibit at the inaugural National Trust Craft Fair, and one can only assume that the next few years were filled with events and ideas and demos that fuelled John's enthusiasm for chairmaking. He sold all his chairs at a gallery in Newport, refusing to produce them by commission. I remember the torture he endured producing a set of six dining chairs to order, declaring he would never do that again, and customers could only buy what he had already made. He hated the idea of using measurements or templates to make a chair, and so each was unique.

Seminal book

In the late 1980s John decided to write his



book, *Welsh Stick Chairs*, alongside other ideas. His notes were so far-reaching that it is hard now to distinguish one writing ambition from another, merging his love of making chairs and his fascination with self-sufficiency. Presumably influenced by John Seymour, he explored changing attitudes to sustainability, scribbling down "environomics" as a New Age word. Ultimately, he wrote, printed and had published the book that was to make his name, *Welsh Stick Chairs*. The timing is hard to fathom, except that the first copies were out at the beginning of April 1990, weeks after I first heard his name. "I have been given your name by Ashley Iles," I wrote to him on 2nd March that year. "He says you make wonderful chairs. Could you send some photographs?" A week later I had a review copy of his new book and within a few days I had sent our freelance photographer, David Askham, to take pictures and write an article. Then I left *The Woodworker* and forgot John Brown and his chairs.

From the day we met in 1993, we enjoyed a brilliant working relationship, speaking for hours on the phone and exchanging long letters. His were typed on an old manual typewriter, and were usually full of thoughts and recommendations. In a box of correspondence, I have found a few torn pieces of notebooks, with John's suggested reading, including the poem *Lines Written for a School Declamation* by David Everett (1769-1813); the biography, *Hermit of Peking*, of the Chinese scholar Sir Edmund Backhouse; and David Yallop's novel *To the Ends of the Earth*. If only I could recall the chats that sparked these scribbles, which also included the *Berlin Diaries (1940-45)* of Marie Vassiltchikov. Perhaps I'd be reminded by reading the books now, and perhaps even hear the strident, kind, waspish voice I relished at the height of our friendship. Actually, since writing this as a Preface for *Good Work* I've bought them all, but only found the last of them worth reading to hear John's voice.

It wasn't always easy. I'm told, but can't verify, that John Brown declared I wasn't permitted to change a word he wrote. Certainly, at one point we had a stand-off because we had made an unauthorised alteration or were getting shirty about a deadline or something, and I found myself in the crossfire between John and our fiery production editor, Claire. John hadn't embraced the new era of political correctness with any great enthusiasm, and though he was respectful and kind generally, he could be harsh at times. Our relationship was often tested by working together, but I soon left to do other publishing jobs and then our friendship really began to develop. He came to stay with my wife, Tina, and



Chris Schwarz

The author who picked up the baton

It's astonishing that someone you've never met can change the course of your life. But that's exactly what John Brown did with his columns in *Good Woodworking* magazine in the late 1990s. His so-called "primitive" Welsh stick chairs launched my obsession with hand-made vernacular chairs. And today, every stick chair I make has a little bit of JB's DNA in it. But JB's influence on me runs deeper than just a chair form. His style of writing – blunt and muscular – convinced me that woodworking writing did not have to be

dry, wan and namby-pamby. It could entertain, enlighten or even enrage. As a result, in the 1990s I stopped caring if my writing made people angry. I decided to speak my mind – right or wrong – and I am a better writer and happier person as a result.

As a result of researching John Brown's life, I have met many members of his circle of family and friends. Chris Williams, who worked with JB, has become a close friend. Plus I have had the great pleasure of meeting Matty, David and Annie Sears, Molly Brown, Dai Seymour and so many other warm and knowledgeable people. Finally, because of John Brown, I got to visit Wales, which is the most beautiful place I have ever set foot.

Truly, my life would have been much

different if I hadn't one day glanced at a British magazine and said: "What the hell is this? Who publishes a recipe for bacon in a woodworking magazine?" (*Good Woodworking* Issue 25)

A lot of JB's techniques and lessons remain in my work. The most significant is how he made his sticks. Instead of splitting them out from green wood and shaving them with a drawknife and shavehorse, John sawed his sticks on the bandsaw to get dead-straight grain. Then he shaved them round using handplanes at a regular woodworking bench. Like JB (and most woodworkers), I make both casework and chairs. So being able to use the same tool kit for both tasks saves space and a lot of tool maintenance as well.

me for my *Good Woodworking* leaving-do in 1996, and afterwards he sent me a photographic chronicle of our weekend, recording my attempts to launch home-made rockets and nicknaming me Werner von Gibbs. It remains one of my most prized possessions. On the birth that year of our eldest daughter, Lara, John sent a Newcastle United babygrow. He had been following Kevin Keegan's exciting tenure at St James Park, but was really, I'm told, a lifelong Charlton supporter.

John and I had an idea to launch a new type of magazine, aimed at readers only interested in hand-tools. We wanted to call it *Quercus*, modelled on the cult journals for gardeners and cooks, *Hortus* and *Convivium*. I still have a bulging folder of letters and notes between the two of us. As ever, he favoured narrow and deep rather than wide and shallow. "In assembling material and writing an Editor's Introduction I become more and more uncertain, not about the viability of the mag, but where to aim it," he wrote to me on a postcard. "If we try to cast the net too wide we might miss all our targets. Buckshot versus bullet." Our ideas grew rapidly just after the end of my *Good Woodworking* editorship in 1996. John even announced the approaching launch in Country Workshops' annual newsletter: "*Quercus* will have a high content on hand tools and techniques, chair history and the Zen of woodworking. It will be more like a journal than a magazine. I shall look for contributors who have something new to say, or want to get something off their chest." Ironically, since John's concluding comment was that "it's bound to be a success because the competition is so poor," *Fine Woodworking* magazine asked how to subscribe.

"We have numerous organisations which preserve buildings, like the National Trust, but they require money to be spent on bricks and mortar," John wrote. "Skills and knowledge are ignored. We have no National Living Monument grants as exist in Japan, where a craftsman, a stone waller or a blacksmith, at a certain time in his life is awarded such an honour and a pension... in other words the promotion and elevation of traditional skills, so that they don't die out." Noting work by Mike Abbott and Gudron Leitz in the UK, John sensed a new approach for craft skills, which was fulfilled later by the creation of the Heritage Crafts Association. "There is change afoot," he concluded, "and we must be in on the act."

Searching for a voice

He forever searched for a voice. "Perhaps there's a need for an organisation like the Soil Association, with a 'Good Work' symbol," he wrote in his essay of that name. "My grandmother had a theory



that the heartbeat hasn't altered since the beginning of time, and that the pace of life should be regulated by this fact." In 'Good Work' [which we plan to publish next issue] he quotes the philosophies of notables such as Ernst Freidrich 'Fritz' Schumacher, Norman Potter, Aldo Leopold and Eric Gill, but his writing continually returns to the workshop, to machines and hand tools and to wood. If only he had interviewed potters, bakers and candlestick makers, and discussed their work. At some stage he wrote an intriguing dialogue, perhaps quoting another author, filed away between pages and pages of publishing plans.



"What was Renoir?"

"He was an artist."

"What do you do?"

"I am a plumber."

"And you?"

"I am a woodworker."

"And you?"

"I am a farmer."

"Wrong! Renoir was a painter. You are all artists."

"Artists are not a special kind of men, but all men are a special kind of artist." [A slight misquote of a saying by Ananda Coomaraswamy.]

Perhaps John Brown found solace in being a big fish in a small pond. He enjoyed styling himself as Chairman Brown, and longed to write a seminal book, all that a budding enthusiast might need to become a Self-Sufficient Woodworker. "Do it exactly my way," he planned to begin, "and use exactly the tools and materials I specify. You must practise regularly (like a piano player), and if you do I can almost guarantee success." In a loose-leaf binder on my desk, his planned book is divided neatly into 16 chapters, with distinctive, neat hand-written notes outlining each section. He writes of an allegorical pair of woodworkers crossing the Atlantic, with an Armani-suited accountant ending up stranded on a desert island with nothing but Mr. Nice Guy's toolkit and a book called *The Self-Sufficient Woodworker*. All ends well, of course, when 'Shakespeare' reveals there never was a shipwreck and the two woodworkers meet again. They become business partners and "live happily ever after" when the ex-accountant marries Mr Nice Guy's daughter.

The Anarchist Woodworker

In keeping with his later columns in *Good Woodworking*, John also had plans to name the book *The Anarchist Woodworker*. David Sears, his nephew, who is married to John's second wife Annie, has found that John went public in *Good Woodworking* Issue 36, Autumn 1997, when his column was entitled "I am an Anarchist". The magazine's editor then, Phil Davy, remembers John on the GW stand at an Axminster Tools show in Shepton Mallet. "Although smoking was not permitted, that didn't stop John. He took his Anarchist toolbox along, but kept the lid firmly closed for the entire show." Previously John had written a similar proposal for *The New Age Carpenter* as well as *The Self-Sufficient Woodworker*. As ever, he returned to his perpetual bugbear that the advertising of machinery determines magazine content. Perhaps that is why he refused me altering his columns. "The editors of magazines," he wrote, "cannot be indifferent of course to the interests of their advertisers, and therefore the editorial matter in these

Kenneth Kortemeier

John Brown's first apprentice writes for the first time publicly about his six-month spell in Wales in 1997

I met JB when I was 29-years-old in 1995 at Country Workshops [run by Drew Langsner in North Carolina] where I was the summer intern. In that role my responsibilities included helping the guest instructors prepare for their workshops, but once the classes started I was treated as a regular paying student, apart from emptying the privy.

I was curious about building chairs without electricity. I came to Country Workshops because of this passion. I learned from JB that it was possible to make chairs this way and to support oneself and a simple lifestyle through handwork and chairmaking. The 12 days I spent with him at CW were not enough. I asked John if he would accept an apprentice. He said yes, but the timing was bad and he would be in touch if things changed. Upon receiving an invitation from JB, in the Fall of 1997 I arrived in Wales at his home, and left in the Spring 1998 six months later.

When I departed Wales, I felt inspired to make a go of it with a simple lifestyle and chairmaking on my own by hand in the way I had learned from his example. He said "woodworking is art not engineering". This idea has stayed with me. At the time, it resonated with my study of sculpture and a fine art education. It is what had drawn me to more sculptural and functional forms of greenwoodworking. I realised chairmaking could be chair-shaped sculpture and not necessarily limited to reproducing traditional forms. Each chair could be unique to itself, not needing to meet any criteria but the maker's eye and their sense of proportion and design.

The modern chairmaker could pay homage to traditional forms and even prefer using the same hand-tools to build chairs but without dogmatically reproducing historic ones. JB would encourage one not to be bound to these historic forms and building processes but to be inspired by them and then to evolve one's own sense of design. To be constantly critical of one's chairs and learn through the process of making them.



John's cat famously came to be nicknamed Gallipoli for being disaster-prone



Though John Brown chose the PU adhesive Balcotan (above). "I liked that JB didn't feel pulled to use traditional hide glue."



While he was working for John, Kenneth Kortemeier learnt how to make stick chairs, and now runs Maine Coast Craft School. "While I was there I bought a second-hand 1965 Moulton bicycle. I used it to see the area and took it back with me to the States." The bed was to be part of John's Anarchist Woodworker book



journals echoes that philosophy.” He wrote all-but identical proposals for the books, and in one listed enchanting alternative titles in Latin, including *quae nocent docent* (things that hurt, teach)..

Our aims to launch the hand-tool magazine *Quercus* faltered when I was tempted by broader publishing ambitions, and our paths diverged. We lost touch for about five years. When I went back to relaunch *Good Woodworking* in 2005 I knew it was futile trying to coerce John out of his self-imposed retirement. He hadn’t done any woodwork for a few years, having moved to Carmarthen to take a degree in fine art. I visited his flat there, and we went out to see a concert. Later we discussed him writing for *British Woodworking* when that was launched in 2007, but he then had a crisis of confidence and realised he had nothing more to say. He wasn’t well, and was increasingly reclusive.

I stayed again with John Brown only a few months before his death, shortly after my launch of *Living Woods* magazine. The new title was filled with the topics and ideas John had raised all those years ago when we debated *Quercus* across pages and pages of letters, not to mention the hours of phone calls that invariably came to an abrupt conclusion when I was “too reasonable”. From the start, I knew *Living Woods* lacked the intense focus John would have wanted. That last evening together, he made it abundantly clear that he considered the content too wide and too frivolous; and he may well have been right. For many years, he and I hurtled through space in a pair of Apollo capsules, hoping to land on Earth together with a big splash, but more probably skittering off the atmosphere, away again to galaxies of our own. During my brief stay we chatted for hours, and he was as generous as ever. He’d gone out specially to buy me supper, though he wasn’t eating much himself, and he was fastidious in making sure I was comfortable in his den of a little flat. As ever he was torn by a desire to please and an ambition to push Tom Wolfe’s “outside of the envelope” (*The Right Stuff*). You could tell he wasn’t well and it was no surprise when he called a few months later to say that he only had weeks to live. “Come down quick,” he urged, “I don’t want you to be visiting a corpse.”

The prognosis proved to be accurate, and I had only one brief hour with him at Haverfordwest Hospital before he died peacefully at his daughter Maria’s house in Dinas Cross. Molly, his youngest daughter, was reportedly reading him emails from woodworkers when he drifted into unconsciousness on Saturday, 31st May, and he died early the next morning. His son Henry and son-in-law Dai made the coffin



themselves and John Brown’s body was cremated without ceremony.

The celebration of John Brown’s life on the side of a hill on a windy, sunny June day in 2008 was a party for family and friends that went on long into the night. I felt honoured to be invited, embraced by his family as a friend and as a representative of woodworkers who John Brown had touched. Whether or not you agreed with his opinions, he was a special, special man. So many people contacted me after his death saying how they had been inspired by him to make a Welsh stick chair. Many added how they still return to torn-out pages of his columns.

More Good Work

His work as a chairmaker has been continued by Chris Williams, author of *Good Work*, in which this article was first published, as the preface. A new edition of John’s classic book, *Welsh Stick Chairs* has been published, with tributes from some of the people John empowered. For many years there has been demand for an edited version of his columns as ‘The Anarchist Woodworker,’ which helped inspire Christopher Schwarz’s book *The Anarchist’s Tool Chest*. Despite my daughter Sasha having transcribed many of John’s columns and scanned his photos, I am ashamed that nothing came of the book I had promised his eldest son Ieuan Einion I would publish. So, it is a great relief to find Chris Williams has done exactly that, and that he, Chris Schwarz and others are

inspiring more woodworkers by running on with John’s baton. I did nothing more than pick the stick from the ground. It is they, in particular, who have run the strongest legs of the relay. *Quercus* has given me new meaning to life, new purpose after a hic-up some years ago, and its success owes much to Lost Art Press for fuelling an appetite for chairmaking.

Real legacies

John Brown’s real legacy is far greater than the techniques of making chairs. Ieuan says that when they were living in Falmouth John was chairman of the Falmouth Youth Orchestra and that the classical and folk worlds are now populated by many of his protégés. He taught people the importance of inspiration, the value of sharing what he’d discovered.

John experienced his fair share of darkness, but through it all he is held in high regard because he survived day by day his way and without compromise. That his memorial ‘service’ was such a happy event is perhaps a reflection that John Brown’s life was well lived, and that, above all, is a lesson he would want us all to remember. John, of course, would surely want the final words, just as he ended his essay on working by hand. “What I have said here is about as fashionable as advising people to sell their car, or take a bus, or even to walk. Real progress can only be spiritual progress. The calm and unhurried atmosphere in my workshop makes enough to pay the bills for a simple life, no more. God bless you, and remember, Good Work.”

Epilogue

Much has happened since I wrote that preface for Chris Williams’ *Good Work* while living on a narrowboat in Oxford. I found the outline for *Quercus* while rifling through a box of letters and cuttings to remind me of my experiences with John. With nothing to do in Lockdown 1.0, I decided to give the magazine a go as a bit of a joke, to see if it could be done for one or maybe two issues. I refused to sell subscriptions, fearful that we wouldn’t be able to fulfill our promises, in keeping with



A recent engraving by Rudy Everts

Chris Williams

The author of *Good Work* recalls meeting John Brown

I never knew his name at the time, other than there was a mythical chairmaker from the western seaboard side of my native homeland of Wales. He made chairs by hand without the aid of electricity and lived in his workshop. In the early 1990s, with some research, I found out that he had written a book called *Welsh Stick Chairs*. It was being sold less than an hour's drive away.

I drove to Newport Pembrokeshire to buy a copy of the book. I later learned that the man I had held the door for on entering the bookshop was John Brown himself. He had just dropped off a box of books for them to sell. The owners were very enthusiastic at my interest, and I was ushered into a side room where they showed me a chair that John had made for them.

The book was a revelation to me. It was so informative on this little-known subject and included a photographic chapter that was truly inspiring. I was hooked on the chairs and the author. I read John's monthly articles in *Good Woodworking* magazine fervently. His writing was great; nothing of the anorak in his articles. And I thought his take on life was so different than the norm.

My day job as a carpenter and joiner was a varied one, but the chairs were deep in my psyche by now, and I dabbled somewhat with them for a few years. Looking back they were poor. I hadn't yet been fueled by the Zen-like teachings which were to come.

Several years later my partner, Claire, and I were in Australia and New Zealand on a gap year/working holiday. I enjoyed the change of scenery and meeting new people but something was missing. There is a word in the Welsh language, 'Hiraeth', which loosely translates to a longing, with a sadness, for an absent something — not homesick. By chance I picked up a copy of *Fine Woodworking* (the Nov./Dec. 1997 issue) in Melbourne in which there was an article on John Brown; a great article [Good Work, hopefully to be published next issue in *Quercus*]. It was at this point that I realised it was time for me to head home to make chairs, and to meet John Brown in person.

It was with some trepidation that I telephoned him. To my surprise, his number was in the phone book. The conversation was a blur; lots of nerves on my side. But it must have gone OK because a few days later I headed west to John's home. I was given clear instructions on the whereabouts of the workshop, but alas I got lost in the wilds of North Pembrokeshire. I eventually found the workshop down a long narrow lane under the shadow of Carn Ingli, which translates to 'Mountain of the Angels'. It was a beautiful landscape of small fields with stone-walled boundaries and small wooded valleys meandering down to the Celtic sea; a landscape that obviously inspired John. The undersides of John's seats were embellished with a simple Celtic cross for which the area is famous.

I was greeted politely but hurriedly by John as he was in the process of gluing up a chair. I watched him work but also took in the hand-tools that were everywhere, neatly placed in various racks and shelves. Photos, paintings and poems also adorned the walls of the workshop. I had truly come across a different type of life, at least one in contrast to my conservative Welsh upbringing. It felt more like a home than the cold and soulless workshops in which I had spent years. I felt at home when I was offered a cup of tea. Two pots later, it was time to leave. I left buzzing after the experience and little did I know then what adventures the next 10 years would bring for both of us. It was far from a happy-ever-after story but one that would change my life profoundly forever.

You can follow Chris on Instagram as @welshchairmaker or visit his website at welshstickchairs.com.



From *Good Work*, Chris using small wedges and blocks of wood to level the chair side to side

John's creed never to take commissions. It was only as QMO1 approached its print deadline and things were getting serious did I come across Rudy Everts' miniature sculptures of Welsh stick chairs on Instagram, a platform I'd never experienced before. We had 250 followers then, and were decidedly fledgling. Discovering Rudy's masterpieces gave me goosebumps as I realised quite how John's pioneering spirit had galvanised a new chairmaking ethos and passion.

The emails of thanks from his original readers of the *Good Woodworking* columns, have been surpassed now by tributes from chairmakers of all hues and abilities who are passing that baton to one another, in a perpetual relay, forever growing in numbers and breadth. So I leave it to a handful of them to pay respects to a man whose writing they may never have read while he was alive, but who has inspired so many to build chair after chair, dreaming not just of Good Work, but Better Work.

Chat chatting

"I first learned about John Brown through his book *Welsh Stick Chairs*," republished by Lost Art Press, writes Rudy Everts, who with Klaus Skrudland has had a Chair Chat on blog.lostartpress.com. "The chairs shown in the book from St Fagan's museum were something completely unlike anything I had seen before. Having read *Good Work* by Christopher Williams made me more familiar with JB's chairs and his life. In my own work, JB's influence comes through mostly in my attitude towards the craft. I love how he describes his workshop having many things in it that you love. My workshop is my favourite place to be.

His chairs look robust, comfortable and well made. His chairs are rooted in tradition but do not slavishly copy the existing historical chairs. As my two favourite chair types are from Wales and Ireland, I try to combine my favourite



Bench being made by chairmaker Phil Shipley

elements from each style into my own chairs. I am greatly inspired by JB's use of larger splay in the undercarriage. Since I am neither Welsh nor Irish, nor do I live even remotely close to these places, my own chairs are not called Welsh stick chairs or Irish hedge chairs, though they show resemblance of both chair styles.

"My arms for instance are captured by the two outer long sticks and there is no full armbow or doubler; a typically Irish thing. I love wider splay so my chairs have a more Welsh-looking undercarriage. The seats I commonly use are 25in by 15in (pretty typical for an Irish Gibson chair) but the back sticks and crest are straight up like a Welsh Stick Chair.

"Even though the above may sound like blasphemy, I feel okay with that because I simply call them Rudy Chairs and don't claim any heritage or tradition. The historic roots may be clear, but we live in the now and that is where we make chairs. My chairs are new chairs with old roots.

"I think it is a beautiful thing that a chair can make somebody change their entire career, yes, even their whole life. Just because of that chair's beauty, John Brown was inspired to make chairs and continued so for the rest of his life."

Phil Shipley, the chairmaker (philshipleychairs.co.uk), was another to pick up my stick and make it a baton. "I first came across him through his monthly articles in *Good Woodworking* magazine which, whether chairmaking related or not, were always an entertaining and informative read. In one article he showed a chair produced by an Irish chairmaker that he had met and I, like John, really liked the design and proportions of this particular chair.

It was similar to John's Cardigan chair but with only a partial arm bow. That article by John has influenced my own designs. Due to a weak back, I struggle with chainsaws and green logs, but this design has meant that I can make a

Windsor/Welsh stick chair with minimal steam-bending. The style is my 'best seller'!

"I use quite a number of jigs when chairmaking (particularly with the ladderbacks) and was getting to a stage when I was designing more and more complicated jigs, and then I purchased John's book *Welsh Stick Chairs* and realised that good chairmaking doesn't actually require some of these devices that I was planning! Very few people notice if the bottom framework is not quite 'spot on'; so long as it looks right. Thanks John for helping me make my chairs by hand."

There are so many more tributes we haven't had space to include. Apologies to all of them for not being able to share their thoughts. Finally Wade Muggleton sums up the influence that *Welsh Stick Chairs* had widely. "In March 1992 *Resurgence* magazine contained an article entitled Good Work by a certain John Brown, such was the passion and enthusiasm with which he made the case for woodworking by hand that I purchased his book *Welsh Stick Chairs*. At that time I had no access to a workshop so read his wonderful book but could only dream of making a chair.

"By 1996 I had access to tools and a bench again and made my first stick back. I could see room for improvement so four more followed shortly. In 1998 I wrote to JB enclosing a few photographs of my efforts and received a nice encouraging reply. Windsor chairs have been produced by the tens of thousands down the years but the Welsh stick back is a rarer beast that possesses a purer, perhaps more rustic embodiment of country furniture and will always to my eye be a more beautiful design. I have made 25 or so stick backs down the years, selling a few and giving a few as presents for weddings, birthdays etc... and still retain a half a dozen in our house, all inspired by JB and his wonderful little book."



Chair made by the Swiss chairmaker Ozan Demirtas, who will be writing about chairmaking soon



Eight-stick chair being made by Klaus Skrudland who has run Chair Chat with Rudy Everts

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The Stick Chair Book

Keen to learn new ways to make chairs, *Nick Gibbs* reads Christopher Schwarz's latest book

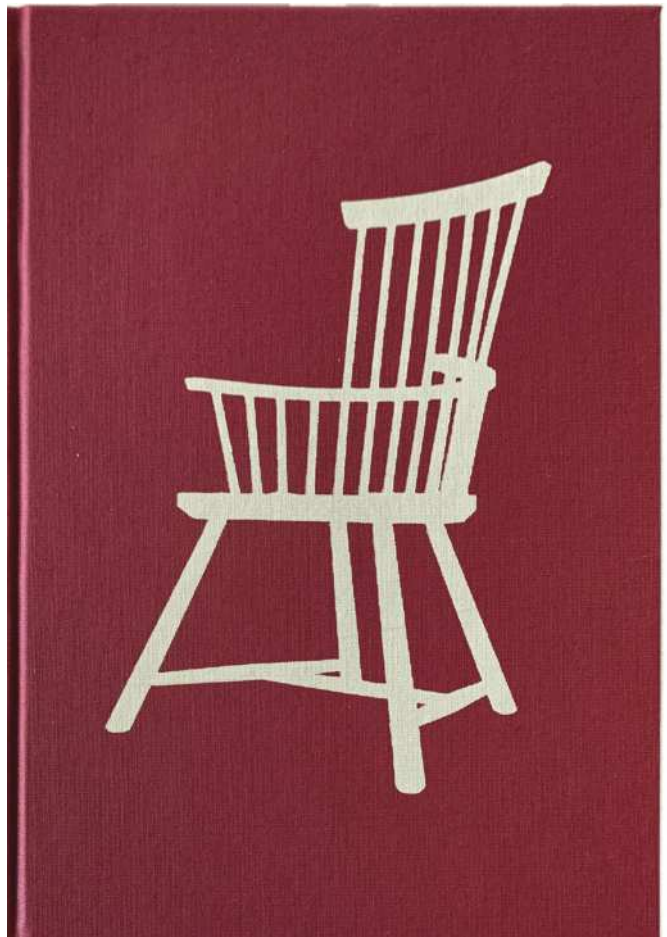
It is no coincidence that we should be paying tribute to John Brown and review Christopher Schwarz's new tome, *The Stick Chair Book* in the same issue. Chris caught John's kite and flew it higher, wider and faster. Had he not seen it fluttering in the clouds then new enthusiasm for chairmaking would never have appeared in the sunlight.

Enough. Just as Chris Williams' book *Good Work* was an evocation of his own techniques, so *The Stick Chair Book* is bible of Chris Schwarz's own designs, techniques and philosophy. Consider it a simulacrum of James Mursell's *The Windsor Chair* and the many other books that offer readers personal approaches to the making of that most significant style of chair. There's nothing new about the stick chair, and now Chris Schwarz has written an ancient and modern manual. The blossoming of this simplistic furniture with contemporary, cheerful illustrations by *Quercus* contributors Lee Phillips (who draws our covers every issue) and Rudy Everts (whose models, engravings and low-relief are shown elsewhere this issue), typify the inventive and considered ways Chris Schwarz makes chairs.

Where to start with *The Stick Chair Book*? Its 6x9in dimensions suggest a pocket-sized friend to hug and to explore in the workshop, at the dining table, in bed, and even on the loo. You can start as strangers, gradually getting to know one another page by consecutive page, or you can dive in randomly, eventually addicted to making stick chairs, each one 'better' or 'different'. That is the beauty of stick chairs. They don't look that difficult to make. Your first one will look good, perhaps quite comfortable and perhaps well made at the time, from whatever wood you have and finished with wax, paint, varnish or what comes to hand. In theory, all you need is a spokeshave, a Workmate or even a kitchen table, a saw, and a cordless drill with a couple of bits. I'd better make one that way to test my assumption.

With that prototype by the fireplace you are ready to flick through the pages of *The Stick Chair Book*, better prepared to make your next one. To get it over and done with, for a book 620 pages long, I was surprised not to find a section dedicated to holding wood. There are chapters early on about tools and timber (the section on choosing wood being published as an extract in the next issue of *Quercus*), but how to keep parts steady is only touched on here and there. There are photos on strategic clamping when inserting pocket-hole screws to assemble an armbow, and there is a very clever jig for setting the back angle. The barbecue skewer attached to a sliding bevel is a particular neat trick. I love the planing cradle, with marks to indicate where each taper should begin, for consistent legs.

Any lack is well balanced by Chris Schwarz's innovative and open-minded approach to making chairs. Amongst many others there's the delightful tip for using soft-jawed pliers to crush tenons a little for a better fit. "When the wet glue hits the tenon," writes



Schwarz, "it will expand, making the joint even better." Which brings us to the debate for and against tapered tenons. Chris shows how he reams the seat mortise to take a tapered tenon. In a neat test, he cuts the reamed hole in half on the bandsaw and uses that to check the fit of the tenon. One of the attractions of making a stick chair, Welsh or otherwise, is the simplicity of fitting the legs. Tapering with a block plane is the obvious choice, but is risky if you are making chairs regularly. A trick when tapering with a plane is to drill a shallow hole at the end of the leg the same diameter as the narrowest diameter of the ream mortise. You aim for edges of that hole, the facets approaching closer and closer to a cone, the angle determined by the starting point of the taper. For more frequent chairmaking Chris

recommends tapering on the lathe or with a tapered rounder, though soon you'll be reading in *Quercus* how the Swiss chairmaker Ozan Demirtas contests the strength and longevity of reamed holes, working harder to drill the straight cylindrical mortise with a 'spotter', but this calls for an assistant or apprentice.

A significant, and novel, chapter is dedicated to Frequently Asked Questions, though such is the value of the book that I wish there was an index.

As might be expected of a book written by Chris Schwarz, *The Stick Chair Book* is as much philosophy as technique, though Chris opens by saying: "I think the trick to learning chairmaking is to learn the trick," relying on 'workshop witchcraft' to "overcome the most complex tasks... in 1998 I thought chairmakers needed the skills of Euclid, Archimedes and Apollonius to make a graceful chair. It turns out that you need only the geometry skills of Boss Hogg, Cooter, Cletus – and me."

Ultimately, Chris turns to the hobbyist as the arbiter of well-made chairs that last. With manufactured furniture in the 18th and 19th Centuries too expensive for the farmer and workers, they relied on their own tools and local wood to make chairs for themselves. "There isn't much written about these amateur chairmakers," Chris writes. And I have to confess that his words "When people encounter stick chairs for the first time, they are sometimes repulsed or confused by them," are embarrassingly redolent for me. I was brought up surrounded by chairs since my parents ran a caning and rushing business in High Wycombe. My father would have rushed the sort of William Morris chair that Chris found to have weak dowelled joints. That said I own two of my Dad's Morris Sussex armchairs, that have survived for having an intricate skeletal structure, but then perhaps that's because that style was designed by the architect, Philip Webb.

I think that first review of *Welsh Stick Chairs* was written by the chairmaker Jack Hill, so when we invited John Brown to write for *Good Woodworking* I had little comprehension of a stick chair. I was innocent and uncertain. "It's like visiting a foreign country where they eat fish for breakfast," writes Chris. Based on chairs from the background of a Tolkien film, he made, for his children aged four and nine, "roughly made" chairs that would later be taken away to college, much to his surprise. "I can't think of a better way to tell my family that I love them."

The *Stick Chair Book* is written by Christopher Schwarz, and published by Lost Art Press. It has 620pp and costs about \$49US at *Tools for Working Wood*, or £45 from *Classic Hand Tools*. Contact LAP for local stockists.



Chris Schwarz riving ash. You can learn how he chooses wood for chairmaking in the next issue of *Quercus*

Woodworking Free

Shrenik Savla-Shah tries out an online school



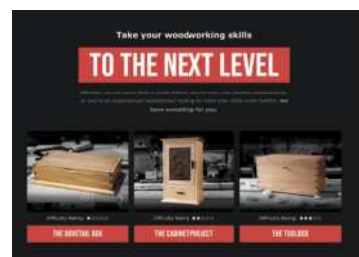
Getting into woodworking as a hobby can sometimes be costly, the tools alone. The Free Online Woodworking School is entirely free for this reason, to make woodworking more accessible. Is it too good to be true? Not at all! The Free Online Woodworking School provides a brilliant resource for woodworkers, beginners and experienced alike. Taught by Matt Estlea, who trained and subsequently taught at Ryecotewood Furniture School, its structured teaching shows the methodology of a trained teacher. The website tells us: "Whether you've never held a chisel before, you've only just started woodworking, or you're an experienced woodworker looking to hone your skills even further, we have something for you."

The school is built across a website and a YouTube channel. It helps you decide which tools you need, how to sharpen them and how to cut all the basic joints. It then takes you through theory, which many courses don't. This is then followed by a series of projects, designed to be done in sequence, ranging from beginner to more advanced levels.

Each course is broken down sensibly, to ensure that students have the information and knowledge they need to conquer each step, beginning with a project overview, followed by a tool list and materials. Each step indicates what you will learn. As well as the tutorials there are the 'Student Series', to watch a fellow student tackling the projects as you would yourself, and capturing some of Matt's 1:1 teaching in the process to help you overcome challenges. I successfully made the cabinet (centre, below).

While the course is free, no attempt has been made to skimp on good quality videos, step-by-step instructions and an easy resource to navigate. The main flaw is that there are hours of content to consume, so you must invest a lot of time in learning the content before you can get started.

The Free Online Woodworking School (freeonlinewoodworkingschool.com) is not too good to be true, it is simply excellent. Matt provides 1-1 advice via social media and email when he can. He makes his return through YouTube ad. revenue, merchandise or the sale of plans from his website. But he refuses to do any product placements so as not to be biased in any way.





Prickly Nut Coppicing

Cut a minimum of $\frac{1}{3}$ acre (0.135 hectare). Any less will not allow enough light in for good-quality regrowth. A larger area is preferable. Leave a few standard trees if they exist, or encourage new ones. A coppice with standards is more diverse than pure coppice. If there are lots of standards, reduce the canopy cover to 10–15%. This will allow enough light to ensure the coppice regenerates well. Leave some standing deadwood for wildlife habitat. Deer will need to be controlled, by fencing or stalking. Increase the stocking rate by replanting or layering.

The Woodland Resource

In an extract from his book *Woodland Craft Handbook*, Ben Law puts coppicing in a woodland context

Wood, a material from trees, grown by the energy of the sun, is the beginning of all crafts and trades. Without wood the blacksmith could not have forged tools, or have handles to hold the tools by. Potters, tanners and glassmakers all needed wood or wood products for their trades.

In fact, our world relied on wood and its uses until the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th Century. The arrival of coke, and then plastics in the 1950s led to the demise of many woodland crafts; their role was now outdated. Why carve a bowl out of wood when one can be moulded in plastic every five seconds on a production line? Our oil-based economy has led us blindly towards a faster, more sterile world where individuality and creativity have been bulldozed for rapid production and economic gain with little consideration for the long-term environmental impact.

Woodland crafts originate from a time of need where the skills of the woodsman ensured a ready supply of material to meet the daily needs of life, whether on the farm or in the home. I am not romanticizing the past. One only has to look at the picture from Herbert Edlin's *Woodland Crafts in Britain*, which I refer to as 'the broken man' because of the extreme difficulty of the task he performs. Woodland crafts fortunately no longer ask us to hollow out the end-grain of elm logs with an auger to make up water pipes. Such jobs, although needing skill, strength and accuracy, clouded lines between creativity & drudgery.

After the Second World War many of the coppiced woodlands in the UK fell into decline and the main supply of the raw materials needed for woodland craft was under



threat. Returning home from the war, many who had previously worked in the woods moved into the construction industry to rebuild damaged cities, leaving the coppice woods neglected.

Those that entered the woods now were coming from a different approach, that of industrial forestry. They were concerned with producing saw logs and

pulpwood predominantly from fast-growing softwoods. The beginnings of this change go back further to the founding of the Forestry Commission in 1919, which was set up to produce more home-grown timber after the First World War. The Forestry Commission has gone a long way towards succeeding in this goal but in doing so has planted a large number of coniferous

monoculture plantations on ancient woodland sites.

Now their policy has changed, and conifer plantations are being removed from ancient woodland sites. In many cases the ground flora seedbank has shown good ability to recover, but in some the acidification and shade of the coniferous plantation have negatively affected the biodiversity of the woodland. The growth of interest in continuous-cover forestry seems to offer the best alternative to producing good-quality timber and moving away from the clearfell plantation regimes that are still the dominant forestry pattern in the UK.

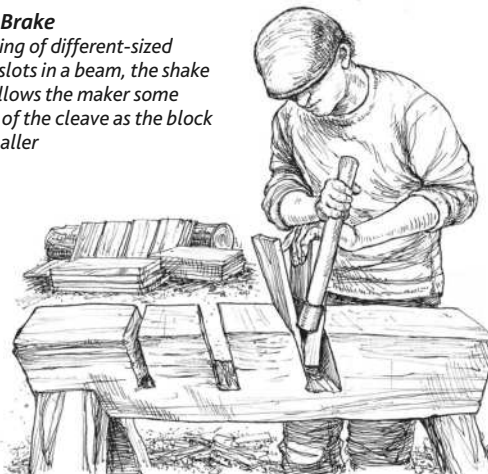
Resurgence

Although there is still much work to do to regenerate our coppice woodlands in the UK, the past 25 years have seen a small shift towards their recovery. Some woods untouched for 40 or 50 years are now being reworked and, as a result, the interest in woodland crafts is growing. Who could have imagined that a spoon maker would have a shop in Hackney Road, London, making handmade spoons? Or that an event called Spoonfest in England would attract a sell-out crowd as keen individuals converge to refine their skills under the guidance of a new generation of spoon makers? These makers are not just confined to the UK, with specialist spoon makers arriving from Sweden and further afield to share their particular style of craft.

Roundwood timber framing is also attracting global interest creating a surge in people wanting to learn the jointing skills. In the US, chair and rustic-furniture makers are on the increase and although they do not have

Shake Brake

Consisting of different-sized angled slots in a beam, the shake brake allows the maker some control of the cleave as the block gets smaller



the historic coppice industry and traditions of the UK, individuals and permaculture designers are planting new coppice woodlands as part of their sustainable designs. The increase in the associated crafts will be a natural progression.

Such is the growth of interest in woodland crafts that the variety and diversity, as well as the skill level, are on the increase. Apprenticeships are returning, established makers are training new recruits and the interest in natural building is increasing the demand for shakes, laths and timber frames. My only concern is that with all the positive enthusiasm for making crafts and working wood, the area still needing the most attention is the management of the raw material itself.

Management

My woodland year begins with cutting the coppice. This process, now ingrained in me, is the start of the management cycle that produces the raw materials for these crafts.

Coppicing is the term used to describe the successional cutting of broadleaf woodland during the dormant winter period. In spring, when the sap rises, the stump (known as the stool) sends up new shoots, which are grown on for a number of years until they reach the desired size. They are then cut again during winter and the process repeats itself. The wood cut from coppice is known as underwood and has for centuries supplied a variety of products and supported a large workforce, from the cutter to coppice merchant and craftsman to purchaser.

Coppiced wood is a valuable crop and when managed well can sustain more people per acre than any of the modern forestry alternatives. It is also a sustainable pattern of management, rarely needing any replanting, so the soil is not disturbed and therefore not subject to the risk of erosion. Nutrients are returned mainly through the annual leaf fall.

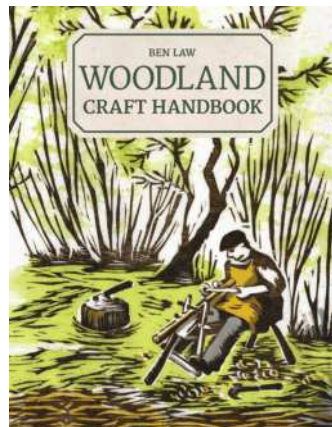
Coppicing creates a cyclical habitat and a unique

ecosystem, and is one of the few patterns of symbiosis known in nature where humans are an important part of the relationship. In a well-managed coppice, the stools are closely spaced, from about 4–6ft (1.2–1.8m) apart and the ground is fully shaded by the leaves and coppice shoots. When it is cut, sunlight pours in, dormant seeds waiting for light emerge and different birds, animals and insect life move into the newly-created habitat. Many rare species such as dormice and types of butterflies depend on the coppicing system.

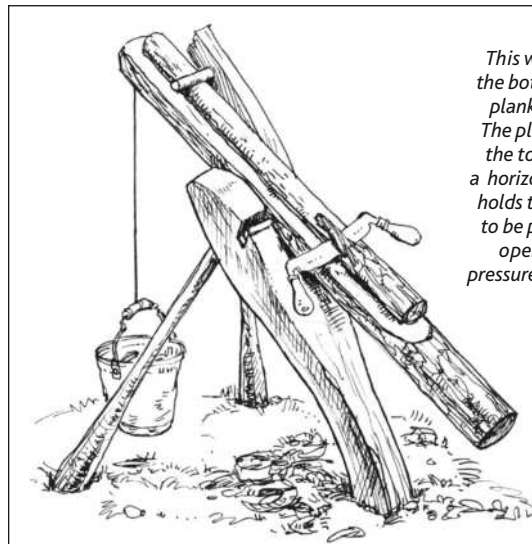
Sweet chestnut

At Prickly Nut Wood the coppice is mainly sweet chestnut; some areas are pure coppice but the majority contain a proportion of standard trees. There are also areas of mixed coppice with standards (large trees growing above the coppice covering a maximum of 15% of the canopy). Oak is the main standard tree with hazel, ash and field maple forming the coppice layer that has been restored from a neglected state and has now re-established a diverse flora. This includes a range of key food plants in the life cycle of many butterflies.

Coppicing is currently undergoing a revival and its value as an important landscape feature for social, ecological and commercial value is at last being seen.



The Woodland Craft Handbook is written by Ben Law and published by GMC. 160pp, RRP £12.99, available online and from all good bookshops



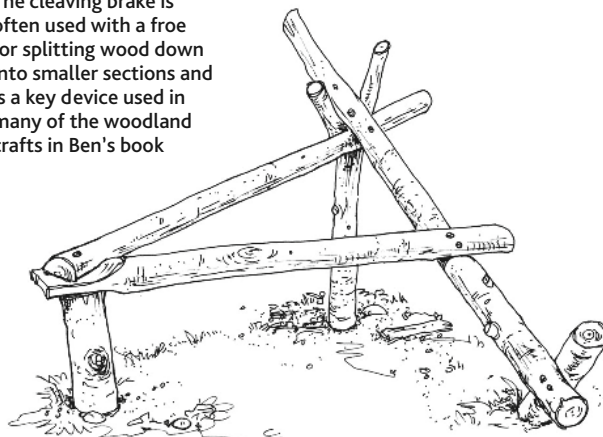
Sussex knee vice

Knee Vice

This works by pushing the bottom of the cleft plank with your knee. The plank is pivoted so the top closes against a horizontal timber and holds the pole in place to be peeled. A weight opens the vice when pressure from your knee is removed

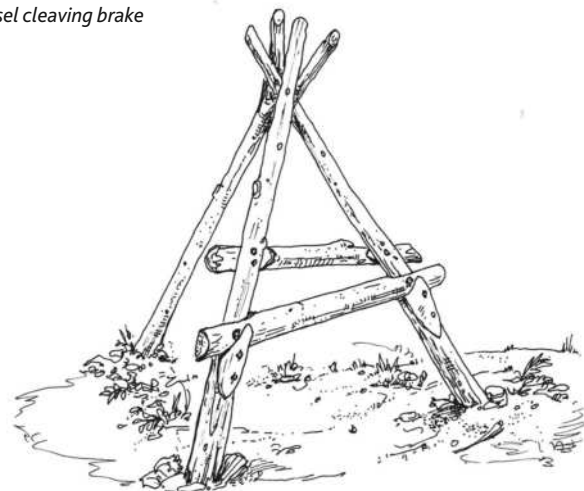
Cleaving Brake

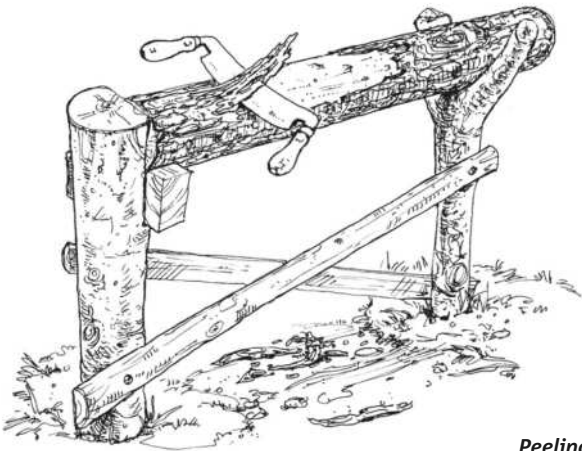
The cleaving brake is often used with a froe for splitting wood down into smaller sections and is a key device used in many of the woodland crafts in Ben's book



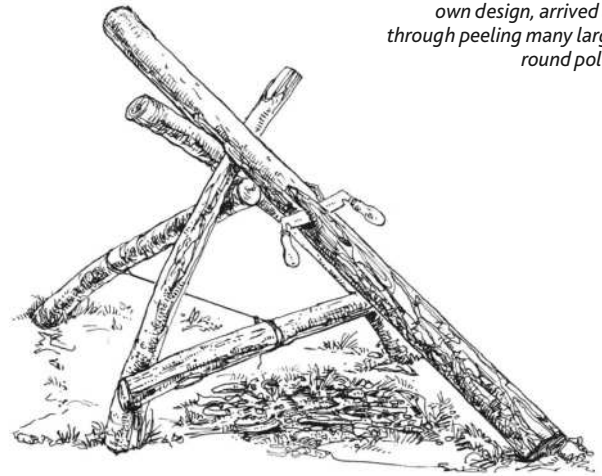
Triangulated cleaving brake

Easel cleaving brake

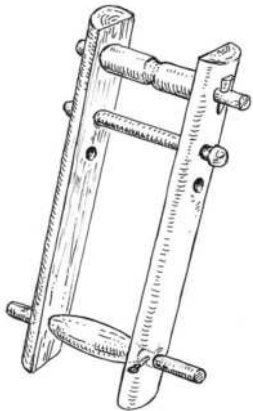




Peeling Jig
A simple but effective peeling jig that can be adjusted to take long poles



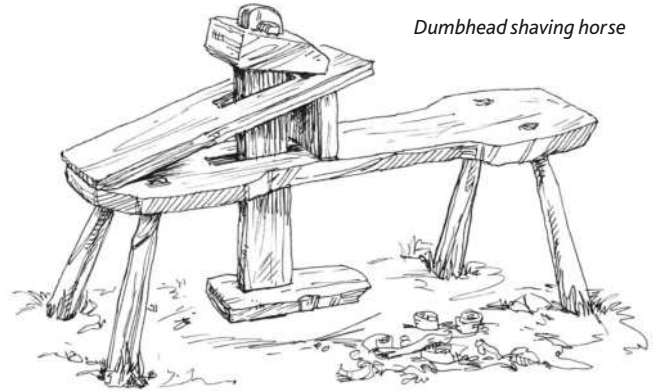
Roundwood Peeler
A simple device of Ben's own design, arrived at through peeling many large round poles



Shaving horse frame



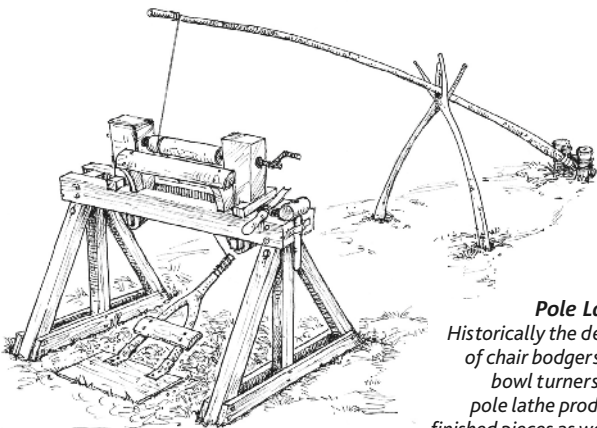
Forked knee vice



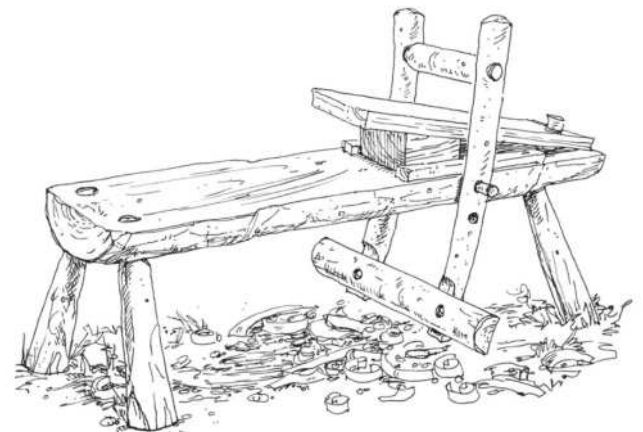
Dumbhead shaving horse

Shaving Horse

This must be the most used woodland craft device. The timber is clamped in a vice by pushing forwards with your legs, and the seated craftsman can use a drawknife to shave down the wood. Many adaptations of the basic model have been developed for different crafts



Pole Lathe
Historically the device of chair bodgers and bowl turners, the pole lathe produces finished pieces as well as components for making larger projects



Classic shaving horse

The Silky Timber Journey

Inspired by the delivery of some strange logs, *Bill Ratcliffe* explores a rare British fruit wood

After the usual Christmas gifts of socks and aftershave, the lull and anti-climax of the New Year arrived. However, my friend Debbie had mentioned a few months prior that she had access to some unknown timber in log form, and asked if I would like it. The price to the owner was some cans of Guinness, which was more than acceptable to me even though I was unaware of the current beer to timber, ml:m³ exchange rate. The logs arrived in early January, and they sparked my thought process and some self-learning. They had been stored at a property for over 20 years. This article is not about scientific identifications of timber. I have seen a lot of machismo or one-upmanship in this area, and I have also, on more than one occasion, seen several 'experts' standing around a piece of furniture debating endlessly about the species. I regularly see auction lots described wrongly, and I have seen people abused on social media for an errant comment about the wrong timber. Not knowing or recognising a timber is nothing to be embarrassed about, particularly in centuries-old furniture affected by light, polished, waxed and so on.

There is an appreciative and grateful feeling you get as a woodworker when someone gifts you the raw materials or tools of your craft. When this is a timber that you rarely encounter or have no reason to normally source, it is more than just a gift. Then consider the growing time and the 20-plus years of careful storage and you feel privileged to have it now. You must use it carefully and feel a heavy burden to do it justice. I will go on to discuss the identification of these timbers later.

The East India Company was established in 1600, under the reign of Elizabeth I, and the effects on the trade from the 'Far East' were to be massive. However, the East India Companies did not only import products from the Far East, they were also the stimulus of ideas, importers of design, craftsmen and new cultures. The V&A Museum research on a lacquered tabletop cabinet, probably made in London c1620, suggested the cabinet was made from tropical eucalyptus wood likely sourced from packing crates used to import other goods from the Far East. This demonstrates the novelty and value Western craftsmen put on materials which, although so common in their countries of



Bill still has a collection of apprentice pieces

origin that they were used for packaging, they were crafted into valued objects in England. Today we can research timbers online, see photographs and read copious amounts of literature. We have a massive choice of timbers, and we can import nearly anything we want, within the law. In contrast, imagine that your job everyday as a 17th Century craftsman was working with your hands using a few selected materials with the same feel, look and smell. Then you get to hold, touch and work on a new timber that you and your peers have not experienced before. This powerful exchange of goods and materials cannot be underestimated.

Materials were a valuable resource and as such were utilised and this is an example of up-cycling around 400 years before the phrase was coined, as a supposed innovation. We are privileged to have this opportunity to experience new

materials but often stick to what we know. Why? Comfort? Laziness? Necessity? Perhaps our local timber merchant has a static or limited range? The saying goes, if you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got. I will freely admit, I do not do this as often as I should or I would like to, but I do try to use a variety of timbers when making new items. Of course, when restoring items, we are often exposed to a variety of species, but it is still focused on the most common timbers. That is why the gift of a different timber is such a valuable one. Perhaps we should try monthly to buy a piece of wood we have never worked with or arrange exchanges with other woodworkers.

So back to my delivery of logs. Identifying timbers is normally more difficult in these situations, as there is less of context, where the tree grew, the



Part of the log delivery (left) deposited in the workshop foyer. Time for a cup of tea... Bill cut a 20mm slice from the end of one log and exposed the vivid colour difference between the oxidised (above) and freshly exposed timber (below)



overall shape, the leaf type and so on. Two of the logs were relatively easy to identify, being laburnum and box. I will touch on the former later. The third, however, was one I have not used despite in hindsight having worked on furniture made using it in parts.

The identification

The first clue was the shape of the logs which suggest a random, unruly-shaped tree. Then secondly the bark was rough and had deep fissures. The heartwood might it be? I decided to cut an inch or so off the end of one log and this told me it was a hard and pretty dense wood. It also exposed some fresh timber, which was so different to the end that had been oxidizing for decades. The fresh timber was a bright golden/yellow colour and that really was the answer as mulberry does darken when exposed to air. This had to be mulberry

(*Morus nigra* or *Morus alba*). With that renewed focus, I was able to read up and see that mulberry bark often has an orange tinge, which was evident on the logs. All these factors confirmed my thoughts and it being black mulberry.

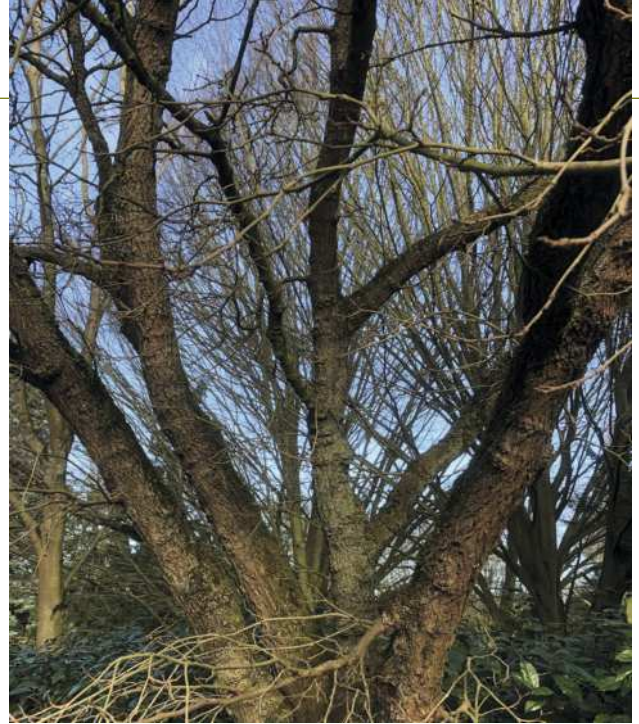
I then had another thought. My Craven Conservation & Restoration workshops are on Barcham Farm near Ely, Cambridgeshire. My landlady, Diana Barcham-Stevens is an amazing lady. She is an inspiration and a force of nature, and has created an environment that embraces nature, and I am privileged to work and create in such a beautiful place. Diana was also the founder of Barcham Trees, which was sold on many years ago and is now Europe's largest tree specialist, growing over 200,000 instant impact trees (including mulberry). They now also hold two Royal Warrants.

I am lucky to have Barcham Trees on

my doorstep and they are in the process of establishing a new 16-acre showcase garden with a new lake, café and facilities. Opposite Diana's home, 50m from my workshop, there is a stunning lake surrounded by a variety of mature trees. The lake was dug out by Diana and her late husband John, and now thrives with wildlife. I often sit on the far bank for my lunch. Diana planted all the trees herself over 40 years ago. I had a chat with her and asked if there is a mulberry tree anywhere on the estate and she told me yes, there was just one in her front garden. I had walked past this tree many times and not noticed it, so I thought I should go and introduce myself. As it was late January, it was a bare tree but sure enough the bark was the same, the orange tinge evident and the shape of the unruly branches similar. This tree is black mulberry and confirmed my timber identification.



Note the orange tinge of the bark of the delivered logs (left). The mulberry tree (right) is close to Bill's workshop, planted by his landlady, Diana, over 40 years ago. Note also the orange tinge to the bark. The mulberry table (below left, from a private collection) is c.1690 is made from solid timber, using small dimension stock no wider than 125mm (5in). The timber samples (below) are part of Bill's timber sample collection with not a mulberry or laburnum sample to be seen, for now at least...



As I said earlier, this article is not about scientific analysis and pore types. I have hundreds of timber samples, including vintage sets from timber merchants, and microscope slide specimens, and no mulberry to be seen. Nor does mulberry feature in many timber-related books but this is no surprise given the scarcity of the tree, its size and it not being seen as a good commercial option. I am now adding mulberry and laburnum to my samples, I may even make a new alternative sample box from them. This lack of detail and the need for learning sent me to the bookshelf.

Furniture history

In relation to furniture, I refer to my favourite and most prized book, the weighty tome, *Woods in British Furniture Making 1400 – 1900* by Dr Adam Bowett. He explains how research shows that black mulberry was introduced to England at Syon House, in 1548, white mulberry somewhat later.

In 1605, James 1 issued an edict offering free seeds to anyone willing to plant mulberry trees for the propagation of silkworms, with limited results, although most of the stately homes in England claim to have a tree dating back to this demand.

The famous diarist of the 17th Century,



John Evelyn, commended the tree “for its Timber, durability, and use the Joyner and Carpenter, and to make Hoops, Bows, Wheels and even Ribs for small Vessels instead of Oak”. The bark was traditionally used to make ropes, and the leaves, as well as the silkworms, also provided feed for cows, sheep and young pigs. Bowett goes on to say that because of its scarcity, and because of the small size and irregular growth of the trees, mulberry wood is not commonly found in British furniture.

The colour of mulberry being a deep brown and its texture being coarse, give it a similar appearance to elm, but darker. An image (above) shows a table c1690 and due to the constraints of the timber size,

the top was made up of five joined boards, none being any wider than 125mm. Some sapwood had also been included, which had then been attacked by worm. I am sure that many pieces of furniture made using mulberry are understandably misidentified when looking at thin boards, but just looking with mulberry as an option in your timber vocabulary will help.

Mulberry is therefore more associated with smaller items of treen. Bowett asserts there are a group of 18th Century objects associated with the black mulberry tree which grew in William Shakespeare's garden at New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. When the tree was cut down in 1759, the timber was sold to a number of local



Very rarely Bill uses a microscope to analyse timber samples and slides, but there are none of mulberry nor laburnum. The Bowett book is not cheap to buy, but then quality items rarely are. It is less than the cost of a decent plane or saw, and you get something very special; years of research and knowledge

Woods in British Furniture-Making 1400–1900

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORICAL DICTIONARY



buyers, among whom was George Cooper (b.1720), a Stratford joiner. Reports suggest Cooper was a “poor joiner of Stratford, whose curiosity excited him to work what little he was able to purchase into toys, such as tea chests, boxes and tobacco stoppers etc... some of which were prettily carved”.

A number of Cooper’s tea chests survive, carved all over with shallow relief decorations in rococo, ‘Chinese’ or ‘Gothick’ styles. At least one is carved with the bust of Shakespeare, and the lids of the canisters are carved with mulberries.

Laburnum is a more common timber and is used in woodturning and I have

turned some myself, however some of the other points still apply. Unlike mulberry, laburnum is listed in many timber books, for example, *Wood Specimens* (H.A. Cox, MA) and in Charles Hayward’s *Woodworker’s Pocket Book*, which in information to size ratio, is the equivalent of an early USB memory stick. The listing in my 1961 Pocket Book states: “Laburnum (*Laburnum anagyroides*) sources: British Isles and Europe generally. Colour: rich olive green. Uses: Almost exclusively for the familiar ‘oysters’ seen on decorative veneers. The grain of the wood is very strong and ungovernable.”

I turn again to Dr Bowett for some key information. Laburnum wood is dense

and moderately heavy, with a coarse, ring porous structure. The heartwood is dark brown with a bronze or greenish cast, sharply divided from the clear yellow sapwood. Laburnum is popularly thought to have been first cultivated in England by John Tradescant in 1596, but its introduction may have been earlier.

This is also a suitable time to talk toxicity. Laburnum provides beautiful yellow flowers for the gardener but the decision to grow it may be influenced by the toxicity of the seed pods which contain cytisine. Working with the timber also has its hazards, as it contains the toxin, and safety precautions should be taken.

The only area of the British Isles where

laburnum has made a significant impact on furniture-making was eastern Scotland, where a distinct and well-documented tradition emerged in the 18th Century. As early as c.1735, the Earl of Haddington noted its potential as a furniture-making timber: "The timber is very hard, and of a Bright Yellow, with Dark Purple Veins. Was it large enough to be sawn into planks, it would make charming tables."

The largest surviving collection of Scottish laburnum furniture is at Blair Castle, Perthshire, where it was assembled prior to the First World War by Lord James Murray (later the 9th Duke of Atholl). He wrote: "This furniture was all made in Perthshire and Angus. It was the custom for the smaller lairds to have their furniture made by local cabinetmakers in imitation of the Chippendale and Adams furniture procured from London by the wealthier landlords. Mahogany not being procurable they used the local laburnum of which the centre core is very hard and almost as dark as mahogany."

The fashion for laburnum furniture seems to have waned by about 1830, possibly due to a change in public taste, or the wider availability of imported exotics such as mahogany and Brazilian rosewood. In England, laburnum was generally regarded as a purely ornamental tree, although several commentators remarked on its fitness for many purposes, including furniture-making.

Bowett has researched the reports of laburnum being widely used for 'oyster' veneers, where the branches are crosscut at angles to give oval-shaped pieces of timber, which combined with the grain rings, resemble oyster shells. However, his research contradicts these reports, he explains that towards the end of the 19th Century connoisseurs of antique furniture created a cult of laburnum wood furniture which appears to have been based on the misidentification of woods used on late 17th Century cabinets.

Laburnum is frequently cited as one of the woods used in 'oyster' veneering and parquetry, an example of which was previously mentioned from the *Woodworker's Pocket Book*. These assertions are, however, unsupported by microscopic analysis. All pieces so far examined have proved to be olive wood, kingwood, or cocus wood, and at the time of Bowett's writing, no references to laburnum wood furniture had been found in inventories or bills of the period.

In fact, here is a quote from the introduction to the book, *Wood Specimens*, by John Evelyn (I have amended some of the old English): "Since it is certain and demonstrable that all art and artisans whatsoever must fail and cease, if there were no timber and wood in a nation, (for



he that shall take his pen, and begin to set down what art, mystery or trade belonging any way to human life, could be maintained and exercised without wood, will quickly find that I speak no paradox). I say when this shall be well considered it will appear better be without gold than without timber."

Having looked at how imported tropical timbers had an impact in Britain centuries ago, it is then interesting to see how rarer more 'exotic' timbers like laburnum and mulberry were grown in Britain from 1500s and found a niche as alternatives to some more expensive timbers being imported in the 16th Century onwards.

The start of the journey

This timber donation prompted me to do some fresh reading, writing, and handling of timber I had not used for many years, or in the case of mulberry, not at all. Experiencing a timber, the weight, smell, feel, hardness, colour, bark and other characteristics is such an invaluable way to expand your timber repertoire. Buying timber as a plank/board is one thing but going back to identify the tree is so much more fulfilling. Otherwise, we are like some children who eat food but have no idea how it grows or where it comes from. Depending on our specialisms, we probably have a limited menu of timbers we use, ash, oak, beech, walnut, cherry, pine and so on, some woodturners may use laburnum and mulberry regularly though. I challenge you to seek out some new timbers and research them, just as I challenge myself. Link up with fellow woodworkers and swap some timber. I always encourage my students to use different timbers as they progress.

Woodworkers often say it is good to include a new technique or tool with



The laburnum chair (left) is c.1740. This one is of a set at Newhailes, near Edinburgh (National Trust of Scotland). The tea chest, c.1760 (above) is also mulberry, made by George Cooper of Stratford-upon-Avon, England, from a private collection. One of a pair of Windsor chairs (below), c.1770 is laburnum, and made for Keir House Perthshire. The seats are sycamore



each project, well the same can apply to timbers. This gift gave me the raw material, the learning opportunity and eventually the objects I will make. This gift keeps giving and I have made a resolution to spend more time out of the workshop in my surroundings, focusing on where my materials come from and to look much more closely.

For me, this is as much about the journey that wood can take the woodworker on, as it is of the journey of timber and trees over the centuries.

References: Woods in British Furniture Making 1400–1900, by Dr Adam Bowett (2012); Woodworker's Pocket Book (1961 Reprint), by Charles Hayward; Wood Specimens by HA Cox, MA.

Visit Bill at cravenconservation.co.uk or follow him on Instagram @cravenconservation.

Plane Box

Bill Ratcliffe sets his young example

Simple task, just make a box for a LN102 block plane, after all, a box is a box is a box. Then you consider you want your box to be different and most box designs have been made already. This is not about reinventing the box, it is about practising your skills, demonstrating your abilities and the fun of making. Woodworking is about enjoying the process, being creative and continuing to learn.

So, what box should I make? *Quercus* made me aware of some styles already being made so they were out. Then I thought, I am a furniture restorer as well as a maker, there is also a tradition of making apprentice pieces and this is, after all, to support the YWW2022 Initiative. I decided on making the box based on a 17th century six-plank chest, many of which were often quite crudely adorned with studded decoration to show the owners initials and often the year of marriage. I could adapt that to say 'LN102' and the appropriate wood for this type of chest is oak, very apt for *Quercus* too. Decision made and the choice reflects my profession and my passion for historic furniture.

Lower compartment

The box is approximately 155mm long x 95mm high x 52mm deep, approx. 5mm thick stock. There is a lower compartment for blade storage, accessed when the plane is removed. The box was assembled using fish glue, the structural studs are copper rose-head type, and the finish is shellac, reflecting materials I use every day in restoration. The box is made to fit the plane, so it does not slide around when moved. The box now sits on my workbench and makes me smile. Hopefully, it will inspire some ideas for the entrants or at least make them smile too.

How will competition entrants make their work stand out or add to their design? Having written in this edition about expanding timber choices, perhaps that is worth considering. Also, does your box say something about you? Does it do the job and fulfill the brief? The box does not have to be over-complicated. The reward is in the making.

To learn more about the Young Woodworker of the Year 2022 competition visit quercusmagazine.com/young-woodworker or follow @youngwoodworkeroftheyear.



Chests like these often had the owner's initials displayed in studs, often done quite crudely, but the personalisation showed how the object was valued. The chest started as a prototype (below left) but ended up a completed box made from offcuts, done between other workshop commitments. Very few tools are required, and you can look up images of historic chests to decide on shapes. They are also great projects that can develop full-scale



SHARPENING & FETTLING Honed

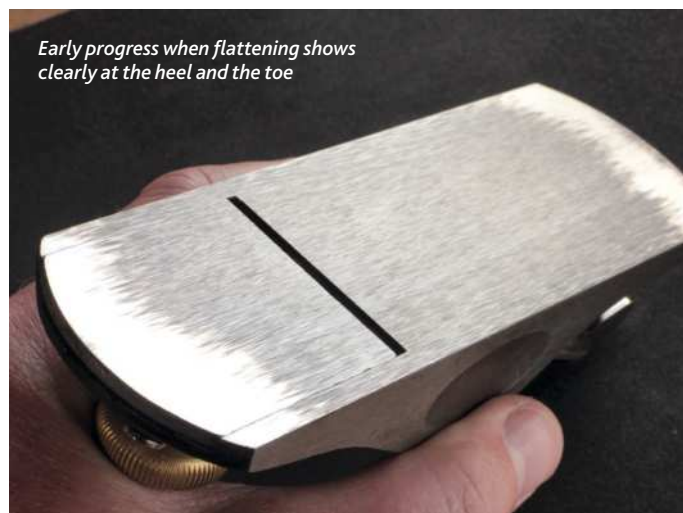
Flat for Purpose

Robin Gates experiments with frugal remedies for planes with problem soles

In a moment of idle curiosity I laid my engineer's square along the sole of a new Stanley 9½ block plane and received an unpleasant surprise. Holding the plane and square up to the sky I was greeted by a thin smile of daylight peeping between the two, all the way from toe to heel. At first I suspected the square, which I had dropped on more than one occasion, but the square proved itself true as the day it left Moore & Wright's Sheffield factory 50 years before. Sad to say, this plane's sole proved to be as hollow as a soup spoon.

Already I'd experienced giggles, one being that the lever cap had been thickly coated in black paint where it contacted the blade, and another being a surplus piece of steel projecting into the mouth. Both these problems were sorted by filing, but still my confidence in Stanley's quality control had taken a knock. (There was yet worse to come when the screw sheared off the adjustable toe, but that's another story.) From the moment of wrestling this tool from its torturous plastic packaging I had been less than impressed by the standard of finish. Ironically, it had been the sole streaked bold as driving rain by the wheels of factory grinding which had first caught my eye, but I'd assumed – wrongly – this indicated flatness even though not pretty.

Viewed as a family, handplane soles come in all shapes, with a relative minority conforming to the geometer's



Early progress when flattening shows clearly at the heel and the toe

idea of a flat plane where a line joining any two points lies entirely on the surface. My motley collection of compass, spar, coopering, and moulding planes compose a sole-scape as bumpy as the Brecon Beacons. Not to mention the ups and downs of the concave and convex soles of spokeshaves, chair devils and the rest.

A plane's body is essentially a jig, bedding the blade at the desired angle and presenting

it through a reference surface of the desired shape, and for a 9½ block plane that shape is essentially shapeless, flat as the proverbial pancake, not a steel banana. Still, you live and learn, and now I understood why this plane had seemed to need so much blade projection to make its finest shaving. When set at a mere glimmer of steel it wasn't even touching the wood. And when the blade was protruding far enough to cut, the hollow sole in that

critical area ahead of the blade wasn't pressing down on the fibres so they were being torn as much as cut.

The first requirement for flattening a plane's sole is a rigidly flat support for the abrasive, which my battle-scarred bench decidedly was not. Perusal of the tool catalogue threw up a wide range of lapping plates, ranging from a piece of phenolic board at £20 up to some diamond-encrusted wonder plate for ten times that amount. With ambition spiralling out of control, and the best abrasives and lapping powders piled onto my basket, I jolted myself back to reality: the plane itself had cost less than £50. What did I have lying about the shed that was flat enough? Answer: an MDF cupboard door which, besides being free, had the advantage of a much larger working area than the proprietary plates. As a bonus, the decorative channel routed around it would catch the steel swarf and spent grit. If you don't have such a door to hand just visit your local tip: a stack of them is dumped every time someone refits their kitchen.

Before putting the sole to the abrasive I fitted the blade so that any distortion caused by tightening the lever cap would be taken into account, albeit with the edge safely withdrawn inside the mouth. Regarding the abrasive, I began with the coarsest sheet (80 grit) out of a packet of cheap decorator's wet or dry papers from the local hardware store. As long as I didn't push the plane too



Tapping an emery sheet to remove swarf and grit

Robin Gates, England



Flattening in progress with emery cloth (left). The Spiers infill sole (above) scored by a hard life, and restored to factory flatness (right)



forcefully there was sufficient grip between board and paper that I didn't need to glue the sheet down. And inking the sole to gauge progress wasn't necessary because contact areas quickly became obvious, showing up as shining summits against a darker grey.

Seeing those gleaming areas of steel appear so soon at toe and heel I thought I'd have this job finished before morning coffee, but then progress slowed as though

time itself were grinding to a halt. Dousing the sheet with WD40 seemed to improve the abrasive's bite, or perhaps that was only wishful thinking. As the coarse sheets expired so I turned to finer grits but now I was achieving little more than polishing the high spots. For a while I almost lost sight of what I was trying to achieve while persisting with this futile effort; a veritable donkey doing donkey-work. My mind wandered into history, I

thought of workers down the ages obliged to struggle with inadequate tools, grinding their lives away for the sake of a few pence saved on the balance sheet of some heartless boss. I dreamed of an industrial revolution, a machine that would free me from this drudgery. Fortunately my wife, Omi, appeared with a mug of tea at that point, reminding me that this is only a hobby and rescued me from madness.

Suitably refreshed I returned to the hardware store in search of better abrasives and found what I needed in Blackspur's 'Sharpness' emery cloth: one sheet each of coarse (60 grit), medium (100 grit) and fine (180 grit) for less than the price of a coffee. The cutting material of emery cloth is aluminium oxide electro-coated to a heavy twill cloth, both tougher and aggressive. In fact the 60 grit's hunger for steel proved voracious, rapidly

turning the sheet from rose to grey. To re-whet the emery's appetite I needed only to tap it on its side for the swarf to fall away; a quick and tidy operation compared to washing out a sheet of wet or dry.

But that isn't to say the job was easy: smoothing more than a smidgen of steel with emery cloth is frustratingly slow compared to smoothing wood. Yes, I could now see the abraded areas growing but the more they grew so their combined resistance increased in proportion, my diminishing force was spread more thinly, and thoughts of belt sanders and angle grinders crept up.

By early evening there remained a solitary patch beneath the lever cap's tightening screw stubbornly refusing to meet the abrasive. For every thousandth of an inch of progress here it seemed I had to remove a ton of steel from the surrounding area.

Flatness shines from end to end for the Stanley 9½



Had I been more sensible, I needn't have worried since this area of the sole has negligible influence on the work of the blade, but you know how it is, after investing so much effort in a project you're reluctant to compromise. Having come this far I felt driven to achieve at least 100% flatness.

Job done, and with arms turned to jelly, I reflected on the wisdom of all those who invest in a Lie-Nielsen that's good to go straight from the box! Next day however, with its edge honed to virtual invisibility and that troubled sole now flat as a field of mercury, the 'inexpensive' (depending how you define that word) Stanley turned out a shaving or two that may even have pleased Leonard Bailey.

Dreaming Spiers

Since that gritty baptism in the cult of the flat sole I have developed my approach and reaped on-going benefits in the restoration of other planes, one being a battle-scarred infill smoother from a Scottish marque I'd long fantasised: Spiers of Ayr.

As a time-served cabinet maker Stewart Spiers was well qualified to design a good handplane and the products of his small premises in River Terrace, Ayr proved highly influential. In the 1900s when a joiner made 40 shillings a week, a plane

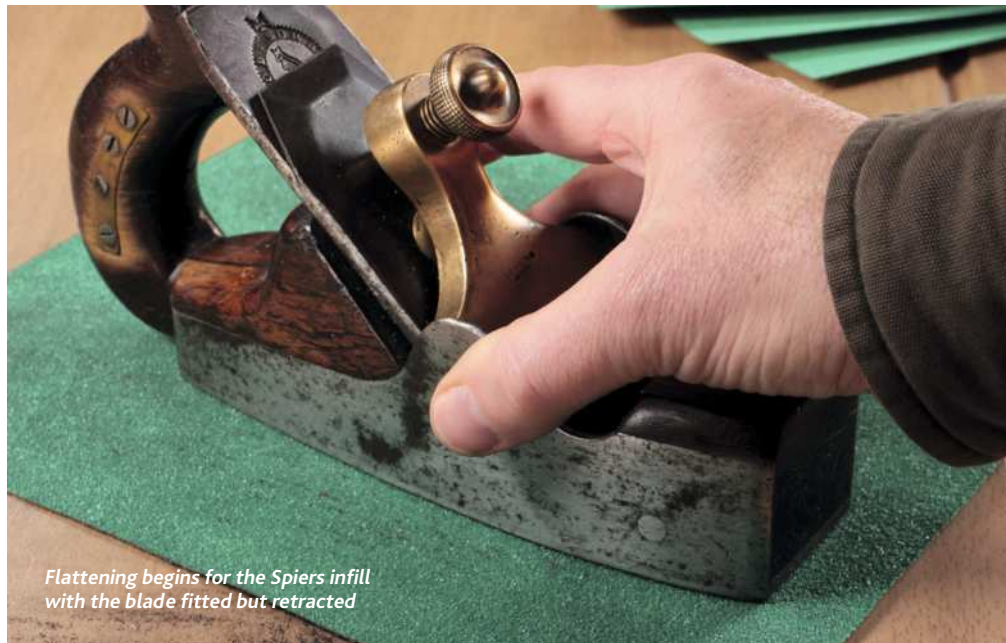
of this quality, with body of dovetailed steel plates and Brazilian rosewood infill, cost 21 shillings, six times the cost of a plain wooden smoother. With that in mind, imagine the owner's feelings when this plane suffered a knock and its most alluring feature, that graceful rear handle with shapely rearward-pointing spur, snapped off. But they were not to be defeated. With inlaid brass plates they effected a repair every bit as elegant as it is solid, returning their valued plane to service, and ensuring it would be working a century later. Aside from

practical necessity, the repair added character to an already beautiful tool, and it discouraged the collectors enough that I managed to acquire it at very modest cost.

To my way of thinking these old infill smoothers are a paradigm of form and functionality, with the heavy bronze lever cap and its decorative knurled screw, the blade thick as a bar of chocolate, and the sheer weight of the thing lending authority to its work. And despite the knocks the sole of this old campaigner put the new Stanley to shame with its

flatness, marked only by the scrapes of a hard life. Working through the grades of abrasive paper restored its satin sheen in no time.

Encouraged by results I spent more time experimenting with technique, finding benefit in changing direction instead of shunting the plane relentlessly along one axis of the abrasive. This exposes the sole to fresh cutting edges, and as one set of striations disappears beneath another at a different angle it also provides an indicator of progress. The important thing is to maintain even pressure, and beware of



Flattening begins for the Spiers infill with the blade fitted but retracted



Planing flatness into the Preston's hollow sole with a Stanley No. 4



Freshly exposed quarter-sawn beech has a pinkish hue from the boat-shaped Preston smoother (above). Torchlight shows between the Preston wood's sole and the try-square





Removing the gubbins from the glass plate of the bathroom scales (above), being used as a flat surface for sharpening a Stanley No. 4 iron using fine abrasive



working one end of the sole more than the other. If any bias is detected then I suggest reversing the plane, alternating toe-first and heel-first pushing.

Workaday woody

A later spell of flattening revealed one of the many virtues of the humble workaday woody, in this instance an Edward Preston coffin smoother made at The Whittall Works in Birmingham around 1900. Fitted with a 'cast steel brass nutted double iron' it originally cost three shillings and ninepence which, using the Bank of England's inflation calculator, would be around £21 today. An old woody that's served its time doesn't come down the years without the odd knock or bruise, and this Preston was no exception. The wedge bore splintery evidence of the hammer as did the heel marked by numerous 'half-crowns', but there were no splits, only the dark patina of ageing and a spot of green paint hinting wider workshop activities of a former keeper.

Investigation with a try-square and torch showed up a shadowy depression worn in the sole in that troublesome area adjacent to the mouth. The sole was also gouged, perhaps from encounters with buried nails. Had this been a metal plane I'd have faced a long day

on the emery cloth, but being all of quarter-sawn beech the sole was quickly sorted using, guess what, another plane, the Stanley No.4 which my Dad bought new around 1960. Gripping the shapely stock of the coffin smoother had me flummoxed for a while but a couple of G-cramps did the trick, one to grip the plane at toe and heel, the other to hold the first cramp to the bench. Soon the years of ingrained grime gave way to the pinkish hue of a pristine beechwood surface that was flat enough to exclude all light between it and the try-square. Of course every time you plane a woody's sole the mouth is enlarged just a little. An older smoother in my shed had been worked so hard and flattened so often that a previous owner inserted a graving piece to restore the original gap. While the cupboard door has proved a winner for levelling soles I sought something more manageable for the smaller work of sharpening old plane irons and also levelling the leading edge of a backing iron where it tightens against the iron's upper surface. If iron and backing iron don't meet properly then shavings will lodge in the gaps, the mouth clogs and planing comes to a halt. Often the stuck shavings snap off rather than pull out,

so you find yourself removing the wedge and dismantling the double iron to extract the fibres, then setting the plane up again from scratch.

Scary sharp scales

The solution came to me as I was sorting through the under-stairs cupboard and put my hand on the old bathroom scales. Although not working I'd hung onto these glass scales because, well, you never know when broken stuff will be useful for something; and here was the proof. You couldn't find a more conveniently specified material for 'scary sharp'

sharpening. The glass plate typically bears up to 180 kg, which is more than sufficient margin for the force used in sharpening plane blades, chisels and the like. The plate is of a generous size and ground safely smooth around the edges. If perchance your New Year diet has foundered on the rocks of temptation, I'd suggest sacrificing your scales in the noble cause of tool maintenance. Or you'll find any amount of them in charity shops at this time of year. Strip away the electrical gubbins and you'll be ready for work.



Tuning the try-plane's backing iron eased the flow of shavings

Telling Stone from Stone

Guiding us through sharpening media, *Richard Wile* starts by looking at oilstones and diamond stones

Historically woodworkers did not have much of a choice for media to sharpen their tools.

In those pre-global trade times, craftspeople would use local natural stones quarried for just that purpose well into the modern day, perhaps as late as the '60s. The quality and availability of those natural stones began to diminish and this spawned the development of man-made sharpening stones of various types. Today we are fortunate that quality sharpening media choices exist in a variety of forms, from powders, pastes and sheet goods, to plates and stones. Many options exist, and it is not surprising that as woodworkers we are often confused about the choices we have to sharpen our tools. I think it is important to point out that when used properly, every one of these options will sharpen your tools, so we should use other criteria to make our choice.

There are many factors to consider along with cost: how quickly they sharpen, can I manage the mess, what about maintenance and storage? Many woodworkers undergo a sharpening journey as they learn more, and 'hone' their sharpening skills and understanding. Of course, without a proper method to sharpen one's tools, no media choice will satisfy. One of the key tenets of sharpening is repeatability, with the ability to achieve the correct angle and micro-bevel every time being critical. In my experience, using a honing guide is the quickest and simplest way to get the blade to the stone properly. Using a guide eliminates the need for special techniques or muscle-memory training necessary for a freehand technique.



Oilstones

Oilstones are the traditional sharpening media that many old-school woodworkers would recognise. Traditionally these would have been natural stones, like Arkansas or Hard Arkansas, cut from the native rock and ground flat. Today oilstones can either be man-made or cut from natural stone.

Oilstones are not graded by grit numbers but rather defined by grades based upon how tightly the particles are bonded into the rock. The tighter the bond, the harder the stone and the finer the cut. For example, with Arkansas stones the grades are based

upon the hardness of the stone and progress from soft, or roughly equivalent to medium grit in other media, to hard, which equates to a fine grit in other media. Very hard is the equivalent of an extra-fine grit. Oilstones wear much more slowly than other media but are not as aggressive as waterstones or diamonds so they take longer to get to sharp. Because they wear so slowly, oilstones rarely need to be flattened, providing a no-fuss option for many sharpening needs.

Lubricants

Oilstones need an oil as a lubricant to carry the filings or swarf away from sharpening and stop the stone from glazing. Honing oil is the best choice for new stones, while others use a light mineral oil or kerosene as the lubricant.

Some man-made stones are able to use water as a lubricant, but



Man-made stones (above) are available in a small range of grits, from coarse, medium to fine. A coarse/fine combination stone is an excellent choice. Natural stones (right) are graded by the hardness of the particles, the harder the particles, the finer the grit



once oil has been used on a stone, water is no longer effective. Though oilstones are famously low maintenance, they do not require any special storage and rarely need to be flattened, and the oil lubricant ensures there is no risk of freezing.

Diamond stones

Diamond sharpening stones are an alternative to traditional options that are, of course, not stones at all. The premium quality diamond sharpening types use monocrystalline diamonds, which are highly fracture resistant; meaning they do not break down and keep their cutting ability longer, and are bonded to a flat substrate. They cut more aggressively than polycrystalline diamonds, will fracture less, and last much longer; as monocrystalline stones wear down in time. Manufacturers will list the type of diamonds in their stones, with price as your guide, the stones using monocrystalline stones will be more expensive.

There are two major types of diamond bench stones for sharpening edge tools, those mounted to a plastic substrate and those mounted to a steel plate. While both formats are very flat, the steel plates provide a more solid and stable surface. Both options provide an excellent surface for most sharpening needs and will provide years of use in most woodworking shops. Diamonds are also available in sheet form that can be affixed to a flat surface such as glass or granite to use as sharpening media.

Diamond stones are simple to use and keep clean, requiring only some water to provide lubrication and carry away the filings. The perforations on the bench stones collect the filings and keep it from accumulating on the surface, requiring less water flushing than the diamond plates. Diamond stones can be used dry, however they will need regular cleaning to remove build-up of filings and to avoid the cutting surface glazing over.

Many woodworkers, including myself, use a diamond plate to flatten water and ceramic stones. It also doubles as a grinding option when I need to grind a new primary bevel on a blade. Because coarse water and ceramic stones in the 200-300 range

wear very quickly when grinding, they require frequent flattening. Using a diamond plate eliminates this step. This multi-purpose use for a coarse diamond plate makes it an easy choice when developing your own sharpening workflow.

What do I choose?

When we ask for advice on sharpening we are often bombarded with choices made by others that they are fully invested in. “This is the best”, “the only choice to use”, don’t use anything but...” are examples of the less than helpful advice we often get. Every woodworker has taken a different path to get to where they are today in their choices based upon their type of woodworking and the sharpening needs dictated by their needs.

Key things to consider when weighing the options beyond the obvious one of cost is where they will be used and what they will be used for. For a shop with lots of planes with wide blades, a larger size stone makes life easier and a shop without access to water or with high humidity may want a method that does not use too much water. Portability may be an issue where transporting several large stones often may be cumbersome or damaging to the stones. Regardless of the choice, the right one for you is the one that gets the job done, with the least fuss and the best results, in the least amount of time – in your situation.

Explore all the options, try out what you can and enjoy your journey to find the sharpening solution that works best for you, until you are ready for the next evolution. As woodworkers we are constantly on a journey to achieve that elusive goal of the perfect edge.

Woodworking for all his adult life in Nova Scotia, Canada, Richard has built furniture from most genres, acoustic musical instruments, and is now building a canoe. As a tool designer and writer Richard has done extensive research in the sharpening field, recently publishing his first book on the subject, A Sharpening Handbook. Instagram: @rdwile.



Look for monocrystalline diamond stones for the longest life. With diamond bench stones available in a full range of grits, they cover the gamut of sharpening needs

Routing for Real by Hand

Planning to release a kit to make a wooden router plane, *Paul Sellers* discusses this unsung tool

A part from Bench Planes and Saw Sharpening, the chapter of Paul Sellers' book *Essential Woodworking Hand Tools* with most pages is dedicated to Router Planes. Considered by many as the insignificant granny's tooth, this maligned tool has enjoyed a renaissance since Paul rediscovered its value and lauded its qualities on his blog, on video and on his Woodworking Masterclasses. He has been developing a wooden-bodied router plane of his own, and on YouTube or in Woodworking Masterclasses he shows how to make one yourself. Now he is assembling the parts, estimating the costs, ready to offer home toolmakers a kit to make this most versatile hand-tool. Last issue Paul discussed his life as a furniture-maker, teacher, author and film star, and now perched by his bench, we ask him why he loves the router plane so much.

Did apprentices once have a router plane?
I had what they called at the time 'an old granny's tooth', with a plough plane iron.

In the chapter about router planes you write: "The first time I ever encountered a router plane I somehow sensed that it was on its way out." So what?
It was the age of the power router. Nobody had seen a power router really. And I remember a man coming into the workshop and all the men were standing around leaning on the bench while this rep came in and said: "I want to show you what this power router will do." It took him 45 minutes to set up the power router to recess a hinge. And then the man I was

working with, George, said: "Let me show you something, son." He took out a chisel and he took out a hinge and he took out a mallet, and I think it was in under a minute he had the hinge recessed perfectly. And he said: "Why would we buy that?" But of course they were skilled men. The ability to do it was there. We were only recessing one or three hinges. This was designed for recessing 1000 hinges, and you'd get the same every time. That's what the difference was.

Was George using a router plane?
No. It was all straight off the chisel. The thing about a hinge is the flap is not technically supposed to be level. It is supposed to slope away from the leading edge. The leading edge on the door face and the jamb face is supposed to set the depth according to the gap between the two flaps. If you want a 1mm gap, and the gap between the two flaps is 3mm or 2mm, then you only recess for that one flap and you work out the distance you want. Once it's gone in, you actually slope it away. You never want the faces to be parallel or equal to one another. Now we tend to do it equal, but that's more for looks. If you look at old doors they were always sloping away from the leading edge, deeper towards the back. Nothing will catch that way. It's a bit like under-cutting a shoulder or something. I try to advise people not to do that because it develops a bad habit."

In those days powered routers had a fixed base, not sprung.
Yes. You set the depth and you ran it in and

you ran it out. It wasn't the same entity it is today, with slow start and no kick. We still have to face the reality that that was the way the woodworking industry went for a long time. It's only very recently that you see hand-tool woodworking, and I put myself right at the front of that really. For me it started in America, with a movement of a handful of people, four or five people, at woodworking shows, and maybe I am one of them.

Did they use router planes for anything?
No. I think the only time they really used router planes was for recessing hardware but not hinges. They'd use them for all kinds of big things, especially in boatbuilding for round anchor holes and things like that. Mostly, 99% of the time it was for just a dado.

That was presumably the granny's tooth, as a waste removal tool rather than a skimming tool.
I think that's probably true. The really best woodworking was done over 250 years ago. You look at some of the old tools men made for their own use: the Ultimatum brace, all the different planes. I'm the one who took it to routing the faces of tenons. And of course people have copied that.

What about as a substitute plough plane?
You could make it work as a plough plane, but I don't think it's very practical. If these router planes had been readily available I would never have made this [the wooden version]. It is an answer to a need. Plough planes you can still get relatively cheaply. If that changes and plough planes are no longer readily available at a decent price, then you'll come back to us and we'll be coming up with something. They have gone up in price, but I got one recently for £13.

You see quite a lot of combination planes.
Yes, but they go for a premium price because of the nostalgia thing. You get a range of cutters and you think they're going to do everything. People love to own them, but they were the biggest load of rubbish. If you limited them for what they really did well, which was ploughing and rebating, they were great planes. They had moulding plane cutters on them and that was the downfall. It gave the impression that it would replace the 350 moulding planes you had. It wouldn't because it



A recent prototype wooden router plane



didn't have any fore part of the sole that stopped the grain from lifting. And you can't go in both directions.

The Stanley router plane has a depth stop.

Yes but nobody ever uses them. They always get lost. It is to bridge the gap, but it also aligns the plane if you are cleaning up the bottom or a groove. If you have a dado and you don't want to butt into the side, you put this bar down. I'm going to put a depth stop on mine.

Why?

Because sometimes people want repeat cuts. They want to go down incrementally.

Like a sprung power router, which has a series of stops.

Yes, you can pre-set it. I'm inventing things all the time on this. It's coming together, but I have to know when to stop. That's the problem.

Is that as much about need as you wanting to improve?

When I developed this [the Sellers wooden router plane] I didn't know what the depth of cut was with a half revolution or a quarter revolution. Now a full revolution is close to but not quite a millimetre. The problem was not that one revolution is 1mm, that's not the issue. The issue is the angle at which it [the blade] is going in. If you increase it to 55° then it's going to be a shorter millimetre distance. You could probably work it out so that one revolution equals 1mm, but that might be too steep, but I'm not prepared to go to that level.

What about the bed and the bevel angle?

The bevel is immaterial on this kind of



plane. It's only material when you have a top bevel. So long as you have 7° on the underside it is going to cut.

But you've got quite a lot of relief on yours.
Yes it's 25°.

And you'd never produced something like the shoe?

Exactly. That's what makes it so much easier to make. You can get the more modern-looking ones when the blade is flat, going in perpendicular with a shoe at the bottom and that does the cutting, like the Stanley router. I could make one, and I've done all the paperwork, but this one is so simple. And we had a lot of difficulty explaining how to sharpen the shoe. You have to have that underside perfectly flat.

So the router plane is a symbol of woodworking by hand?

That's why I kept that for the real woodworking campaign. I use the phrase

fairly frequently, and the real woodworking campaign has been about for the last 25 years. It's about lifestyle of woodworking. I want people to see this even if they are software developers. I'm hoping we will have a generation of really top notch specialist woodworkers who are software developers and the like.

So you'd say it is the unsung tool of woodworking?

I have four or five routers hanging up behind me. There's a very limited number of those Preston routers in the world since I started promoting them for a slightly different use. Even the Stanley ones now are selling for £150 up to £200. When I started using them in videos, it was not for routing dados. It was for trimming tenons and doing a million other things. Then people suddenly went: "Oh that's how he gets those perfect and that's how he gets this and that done". And they just started going up [in price]. I bought one for £10 on eBay about 10 years ago. I've got the best router planes that are manufactured. I've got the Lie-Nielsen, I've got Veritas I've got all of them. I think my own one works better than any of them. It's infinitely variable. I can take it up a 1,000th of an inch and it doesn't move and it doesn't rattle and shake. It is absolutely the best router plane.

Only time will tell when we make one ourselves, either from our own parts or with your kit.

As well as YouTube videos, by registering at woodworkingmasterclasses.com you can access drawings and stay in touch to learn about the availability of a kit.



A few of the router planes that hang behind Paul's bench

The Iron Router

Robin Gates debates metal v wood

Woodworkers are rarely more divided than when discussing the relative merits of wood and metal planes, and it's a deep-seated division. Let's forget for the moment that metal planes were around in Roman times, and focus instead on the long tradition of wooden planes in Europe being ousted relatively recently in favour of cast iron. As might be expected, established craftsmen who'd served their time using warm-bodied planes of home-grown beech were suspicious of the newfangled metal planes but those starting out were more easily persuaded by the technical advances on offer.

The ubiquitous router is a good example of how changes have divided opinion. The tool began as a simple wooden stock pierced by a near-vertical blade, commonly known as an 'old woman's tooth' and it scraped as much as cut its groove. Then in 1884 Stanley launched a cast iron router plane, the No.71, almost unrecognisable from its primitive ancestor. In place of smoothly contoured wood the 71 presented an essentially flat plate with a wide throat giving improved visibility of the work in progress and – perhaps its most significant feature – a cranked cutter.

Grooved post

The cutter sliding in a grooved post, locked by a collar and thumb screw instead of a wedge, was more easily and precisely adjusted than its ancestor which required the deft touch of a hammer, while its bevelled edge cut with the delicacy of a paring chisel. The old guard remained protective of its warm wooden routers, but the iron tool's improved precision and consistent results earned the 71 a place in every go-ahead joiner's kit. It found applications in cutting grooves and dados, stopped housings, recesses and more. Wily shops with access to their own foundries – shipyards, especially – turned out bronze knock-offs by the score using the Stanley 71 as their pattern!

This Stanley original from the 1890s shows the 71 in its simplest embodiment, before it gained screw adjustment, a depth gauge, and a fence, yet its essential configuration with central cutter, sole plate and bulbous handles is recognisable in today's powered router.

In the 1930s Record began making their own version of the 71 which only ceased production in 1980, while Stanley soldiered on against the swelling tide of power tools until 1993. But a new wave of enthusiasm for hand-tools has prompted both Veritas and Lie-Nielsen to launch their own interpretations of this plane, updated for modern tastes in hand-tool woodworking, with even a miniature version in the Veritas portfolio of premium kit.



The Stanley 71 router plane cuts all the way to the stop of a stopped housing (above), and offers better visibility than earlier wooden-bodied routers. Working a housing with the 1/2in cutter (left)



The plane can be angled slightly for a cleaner shearing cut (above left) and to reach close against shoulders. Honing is best done freehand with the shank of the cutter overhanging the oilstone (above). Cranked cutters don't fit honing guides. The original Stanley 71 with arched open throat (left) works well on wide surfaces but can be prone to pitching forwards if not adequately supported. A later model with closed throat proved more stable

Carving Textured Bowls

New contributor, *Matt Day*, looks at ways to make carved objects even more tactile

I have been woodworking since 2010, but carved my first bowl while on summer vacation in 2017. I broke away from the family for two half-day private lessons and went home with a small, shallow bowl that still holds my wallet and keys each night. For that piece, and quite a few of the bowls that followed, 'texture' was whatever the surface looked like when the bowl-making endeavour wore me down enough to call the piece done.

A few years, and a few dozen bowls later, I started to look at the exteriors of my bowls and see them as a canvas. I wanted to play a bit, to explore both the look, but also the tactile feel of my pieces. What has resulted is a bit of an obsession with texture and pattern. I'll share some thoughts on my approach, including both the handwork and design processes.

Tools

Whenever I have seen professional carvers, they always seem to have immense tool rolls with dozens of gouges and chisels. The space on my tool wall and in my budget just didn't allow for that, so I chose carefully and started with three gouges. Even now, my collection has only grown to seven. And if you want just to experiment with texture (not carve a bowl), having only two tools will give you many options. For this ultra-slim kit, pick a 60° V-tool and a steep gouge (an 8 or 9 sweep). Carving gouges are classified by the curvature (sweep) and width of the cutting edge. Choose widths that are suited to the scale of pieces you have in mind. My most common pieces are meal-sized bowls, so I have a 7mm V-tool and a 13mm, 9 sweep gouge. Let's explore what's possible with just these two tools.

Technique

If you're comfortable with hand-tool woodworking, texturing surfaces is not hard to learn. Grain direction is the crucial factor, as always. As with a plane or chisel, working across the grain will be easiest to cut, but hardest to achieve a clean finished surface. As you plan your design, it is important to keep this in mind and not set a goal that's beyond attainment.

Many carvers incorporate a mallet into their technique, but for surface texturing, I work with hand pressure. My dominant hand generates the power, grasping the handle with thumb towards the sky. My



non-dominant hand steers, with palm on the workpiece and fingers wrapped around the tool's steel. For very fine work, I'll flip my bottom hand with knuckles on the work surface and thumb around the steel. Your aim is to enter and exit the cut smoothly; envision a plane touching down and then taking flight again. Avoid shoveling into the wood like you might dig in the garden. You are aiming to generate most of the power with your body, not your hands. Get up above your work and lean over to push the chisel along. Use your knees, hips, and shoulders as much, or even more, than your hands and wrists.

Going back to our two tools, consider all the different building blocks they can generate. With the gouge, you can make short strokes and uniformly overlap each row to create something akin to fish scales. You can make long flutes, that either taper in width or stay straight. You can vary and mix the direction and length of your cuts and begin to get a pattern that seems to move. With the V-tool, you can draw shapes, lay down outlines,

cross hatch, or even achieve something that looks like a sketch artist shading a drawing. Play around on a sample board and get the hang of a few building blocks with each tool.

You're aiming for a consistent pattern, not perfection. The small variations and irregularities of hand work give life and feeling to the finished piece in a way a router, jig, or CNC never could.

Design

I try to always stay open to inspiration for a new pattern. I look to nature, pottery, conversations with other woodworkers, and social media. Find a little nugget of an idea that excites you and think about it; longer and deeper than you might normally.

Many people find sketching a useful way to refine an idea, but it has never really worked for me. I need to get the idea out through a gouge, not a pencil. The best approach I have found is to develop a test piece to experiment on. Make something small, that you can build without too much time commitment. For me, it's my dessert bowls; but it could be a small box, a little cutting board, or anything you can make easily and confidently. Then decorate it with your carved idea. The first one probably won't be exactly what you pictured in your mind, but that's OK. Pick it apart, show it to others, explore what works and what fell short. Then try again... and again. Some of my patterns took a dozen iterations to really come to maturity. Iteration must be easy and quick for it to really work.

When a concept or pattern is mature, I'll take some notes down in my notebook and produce batches of that pattern from time to time. I then take these fully developed concepts and look for new ways to apply them. A pattern from a dessert bowl may get larger and show up on a serving platter. I may combine two elements for a large display bowl: one pattern on the end-grain and another on the sides. This is when things can really get exciting.

I hope this has given you the needed nudge to get a carving tool (or two) and decorate those flat surfaces. And remember, if you don't like the result, you can always plane it off.

Matt Day lives outside Boston, MA. Follow @mattdaywoodworks or visit mattdaywoodworks.com.



Small pieces (top) like these hand-sized bowls allow for lots of iteration and exploration of new ideas. While Matt uses a mallet for the shaping of bowls overall, the final textures are done by hand pressure (left). The same tool can create a surprising array of patterns. Here sample boards from a V-tool (above) and a 13/9 gouge (right) show what can be done with direction, length and depth of stroke



A Workshop Felt Good

From East Sussex in England *Henrie van Rooij* tells the story of his new workshop



Henrie in the doorway of his new workshop, built in beautiful Sussex countryside

After several rewarding decades of woodwork teaching to small groups of young persons with learning and other disabilities. It was time to retire from being a tutor at a small Camphill Community in East Sussex. I still want to make use of all my accumulated woodworking skills, and for that reason I undertook various projects for the community. A large oak linen storage cupboard, and also an area of decking to the back of a house, were among those projects.

Then I helped to develop suitable products for our recent Social Enterprise initiative. All well and good, but I began to feel that a completely new direction would be healthy. I did enjoy an intensive summer of turning bowls, and even selling some of those in a nice local gallery. But I realised I was slowly running out of steam in a workshop where I spent so many happy years. Just looking round me, and remembering more of the past than was good for myself or my colleagues, made me feel stuck.

Thankfully, the new *Quercus* magazine helped me out of my dilemma. The wish for designing and making beautiful things out of wood has never left me. Neither the enjoyment of tinkering with tools. Sharpening and fettling are as enjoyable as ever. It was the quiet, and dare I say quirky style of Robin Gates's articles,

which made things clear for me. As the Autumn (Nov./Dec. 2020) drew in, I decided that what I needed was not to hang on to the large well-equipped workshop, but a completely new start, in a small workshop, and doing things in different ways. And hopefully rediscover some of my creativity.

Which shed to choose? This process took me a while. The shed had to be of nice quality, not too big, not too small. As I am very tall, there needed to be enough headroom too! And it had to be affordable. There are some other sheds here on the premises, and I visited them on a regular basis, armed with measuring tape. I did a lot of muttering to myself in the process. I measured our existing workbenches, to figure out how much elbow space I would need just to be able to work, etc. Once I knew I was looking for a space of about 3X4m, the search was on. It was good that I took so much time over visiting, re-visiting, and discovering yet more websites with sheds. Slowly, out of the bewildering offer of sizes, models, prices and build qualities, some order started to arise. I wanted something of a chalet style of construction. A traditional shiplap shed is cheaper, but then there will be much more work lining and insulating walls etc. In the end I chose a 'Chloe' shed from TuinDeco, (tuin.co.uk) which happens to be a



It is a good idea to put protection in those places which can get wet, but which you cannot reach with your brush later, like around a door opening (left). The kit after removing all the wrapping (above). Begin by sorting the parts you need first, to make sure they go in the right places, in the right order. Follow the instructions



Installing the 15mm tongue and groove roof boards. The long and thin nails provided when in beautifully, without bending, and have good grip. Beginnings of the base construction (right). The green stains are an end-grain protector called End Coat from Osmose

Dutch company I had never heard of before. Luckily, I got it before the Brexit import problems started to bite! As a tongue in cheek reference to Nick's 'le Shack', I was going to call my workshop 'le Chalet'. But in daily life I have reverted to 'the shed', which is maybe just as well!

My parcel arrived in the evening of 8th Feb. 2021. The lorry had come straight from Dover, and this was his first delivery. The shed kit was neatly wrapped, with the packs of bitumen roofing felt on top. They give you various types and colours to choose from.

One thing to bear in mind is the fact that this type of shed does not come with a floor. Which is just as well, because then you can construct a base and floor exactly to your own needs. I decided to put my shed on a sturdy wooden frame lifted off the ground with adjustable plastic supports, which were also available, and not too expensive from Tuin. Each pad is rated to carry 1.5 tons, I am using 14 of them, so that should do. And like this the loads are nicely distributed. It was then a simple



process of embedding some concrete paving slabs in the ground, on some sand or ballast. The supports could be placed straight on those, and the wooden base frame could be constructed. I used sawn treated timbers 175mm x 47mm. Make sure to get category 3 treatment, at least for the exposed timbers. Choosing those timbers can be a confusing business. A good merchant will give you advice. With just a few of the adjustable feet in place



The 3-4-5 triangle in use. I pegged out the outline of the shed with some string (above). This helped with positioning of the shed and with placing the concrete slabs for the frame supports later. The doorframe fixed up square (right)



it is easier to achieve a level frame. Take your time, and check and check again. Any change you make in one place, can have a knock-on effect somewhere else! To keep your saw cut accurately square, it helps a lot to check the saw angle often. Many others would use an electric chop saw, but I like doing this by hand.

Constructing this base was fairly straight forward. A good spirit level, tape measure and square are essential. Some saw-horses to keep the timber off the ground, and help with your working position when measuring and sawing. For sawing, use the tool or machine you are comfortable with. For squareness of the base I employed the old fashioned method of measuring the length of the diagonals. As long as your timbers are all cut to accurate length, this way should ensure an accurately square base frame when both diagonals are of equal length. From some scrap pieces I also knocked up a triangle with lengths proportioned: 3-4-5. This will give you a very accurate 90 degree angle, as you probably remember from learning about Pythagoras in school! Such a triangle can be bought ready made from builder's merchants. But why spend money on something you only use for one job? And making one is more fun too!

Here you see that 3-4-5 triangle in action, while I was setting out a rectangle using sticks and some string. This rectangle gave me a better idea of the actual position, and provided guidance for positioning those concrete slabs for the 'foundations'.

Joist hangers

The floor beams (45x200mm.) were spaced at about 40cm intervals, and fixed between the outer frame parts with a combination of joist hangers, and some 15 cm screws for good measure. The double beams at the ends of the frame will help to support the ends of the flooring sheets, they would be 'floating', otherwise. I used good 15 cm wood screws for this. The result was a very strong frame! My new Bosch 18V drill driver never slowed down while putting those screws in. As I had some spare wood, I also put some noggins in between the beams.

The shed people recommend laying the actual floor after the shed has been constructed. I was planning to use double thickness 18mm OSB sheets for the floor. (Moisture resistant grade oriented strand board is very strong, relatively cheap, and looks nice in my view. I reckoned that in order to lay those large sheets I would need a lot of elbow space, and therefore I laid the floor before erecting the structure. Think very carefully about your measurements beforehand! Work out or find out exact interior dimensions, and give yourself an extra centimetre of margin all around. I was relieved to see it all worked out. Those sheets were laid in such a way that the boards are 90° to each other. Where a sheet-edge ended up without support, I made up some supporting

noggins between the beams. This makes those edges much stronger. Those two layers of sheeting also help greatly in spreading any loads on the floor, and this avoids heavy stresses concentrated in a small point. Maybe I have over engineered this, but at least I know that this floor will not fail me. Two layers should also give at least a little insulation.

I realise that in the heat of the moment I forgot to take any pictures of sheeting the floor. But it is not a complicated process, apart from working accurately. It was really not hard to trim all the parts to size with a hand saw. You do not need a machine for this, as those sheets are easy and fast to saw. And with all those base frame beams in place, there is ideal support for the sheets.

Construction

Constructing the actual shed was a matter of following the very good online guidance carefully. As a precaution I braced the door frame to be absolutely square. Later this proved to be a good idea because when the doors went in everything fitted perfectly. Including the sliding bolts and the door lock! I used a large roofing or framing square for this. Wonderful tools. Robust, accurate, and not expensive, all qualities which I like! Veritas do a very useful bolt-on fence for these squares, which then gives you a large try square, which adds to the versatility of these tools.

It is a good idea to use some wood treatment in the areas which can get wet, but which are not reachable for your paintbrush once the construction is complete. Here I am doing this around the bottom of the door opening.

Once you get to this stage, everything just clicks together, and it all happens very fast. Make sure to step back from time to time, and check that everything stays properly vertical and square. I know the places where I did not have my eye on the ball!

It is important to protect the wood from our very damp climate. I used the same stuff I painted the log house with in which I live: Osmo Wax wood stain. It is not the cheapest, but it has worked very well on our house. It needs to be brushed on quite thinly, and you need at least two coats. A bit laborious, but the effort is rewarded with a long-lasting finish. I did enjoy the building process. The hours of painting not so much. Still, I had a lot of fun even before I could do some actual woodworking.



The whole thing goes together like Lego, and ready for roofing (right)



The Edge

TOOLS & TOOLMAKERS

A Person Make Knife

Ethan Sincox, The Kilted Woodworker, picks up a new bog oak marking knife

I recently took delivery of a custom marking knife made by Kevin Groenke, proprietor of Personmakeobject.com! It is made of bog oak (of course) and brass and uses replacement blades from Swann-Morton and Xacto. Kevin is very up-front about the fact that he did not come up with the original design for the blade-holding hardware, but his fit and finish is impeccable, and he has made some improvements to the design that makes it uniquely his.

Except for the commercially-made blades, Kevin makes all of the parts in-house, machining the solid brass hardware on a pair of small Unimat lathes and making the handles using an assortment of power-tools and hand-tools. He offers a variety of handle shapes, including a cigar-style, a RetroX style that mimics a vintage X-acto design, a straight hexagonal style, and a tapered hexagonal style. I asked Kevin to make mine with whatever design he thought was best and would work best with the bog oak I'd sent him. He decided on the tapered hexagonal style, which offers Kevin's enhancement of storing the hex key in the end of the knife. This option includes a hex key with a grain-matched handle as well as one made of brass.

Completed knives

Kevin offers a couple of different options for purchasing his knives. He currently sells completed knives through his website and his Etsy store. On his website, he offers customers the ability to request a knife made to order, where they can select



the handle style and type of wood. He also occasionally makes a batch of kits, which allow customers to make their own handle with one of his hardware kits. The hardware kits are not always available, though you can get on a notify list on his website. In a recent post on Instagram, Kevin indicated that he is likely going to move away from selling completed knives and do more made-to-order knives as demand increases.

Of course, when I got mine, I had to



Ethan strikes a line working on his boxwood and bog oak 'Young Woodworker of the Year' example (left). The knife comes with a variety of blades so you can get right to work

immediately go down to the shop and put it to work. I used it to trim the excess paper from the jacket I printed for my latest book from Lost Art Press, *The Stick Chair Book*.

Then I used it to mark a change I wanted to make to my bog oak box for *Quercus* magazine's Young Woodworker of the Year Competition. I love how good this knife feels in my hands. It has good balance and weight and its shape stands out in my lamp-base tray of often-used tools, which is good because I'm going to be reaching for it a lot in the future!

The marking knives start at \$69 and go up to \$124. Kevin Groenke, proprietor of PersonMakeObject, can be reached by Instagram @personmakeobject, on Etsy at www.etsy.com/shop/PersonMakeObject. Visit the website personmakeobject.com. Follow Ethan @thekiltedwoodworker or visit thekiltedwoodworker.com.



Making Me a Drawknife...

Italian craftsman *Ben Bartalesi* recalls how a passion for tools became a toolmaking obsession



I have always been fascinated by tools, especially hand-tools, as far back as I can remember. Living in Italy's countryside I had the chance growing up to see many people who knew how to use tools in their trade. Not that long ago, every little village in Tuscany had at least a blacksmith and a cabinetmaker, maybe even a cobbler, and many people knew how to do more than one trade. By the time I came about most villages had lost inhabitants to the city, and mine is left with only nine, but those beautiful old dusty shops still remain as a monument to that era.

Most of my neighbours are now retired but they still have improvised machine shops in the basement. One is a retired mechanic, and even builds his own tractors, and my other neighbours are very ingenious farmers who make all their own food and farming implements.

So I have always been exposed to the make-it-yourself attitude that has really shaped the way I live.

Toolmaking journey

These surroundings along with the support of those around me always kept me curious and interested in trying to make anything I could. Before becoming interested in toolmaking though, I was interested in woodworking, especially greenwoodworking and I slowly started acquiring tools from thrift shops and eBay. But, we all know that one never has enough tools.

As I became enamoured with more specialised and harder-to-find tools that idea of making yourself what you need became more and more prominent in my mind. So I started gathering things needed to forge and made my first carving knife. That was such a fantastic



Ben in his workshop (top left). The 'Fossil edition' drawknife (top), with bog oak handles, with detail of the handles (above)

experience that I quickly discovered I liked toolmaking more than woodworking itself.

I started trying to make every tool I could and eventually it was the turn of the drawknife and after a few pieces flying in the scrap bin it swiftly became my favourite tool both to make and to use.

It is a tool that combines the finesse of a knife and the immediacy and power of an axe. What's not to love? Such a useful and versatile tool for most woodworking and an iconic one for many trades. It was quick to fascinate me.

Now the thing is, I often get obsessed by random things and they captivate me so much I need to explore them as much as I can. So began the long journey, of which I am only at the beginning, of trying to make the best drawknife I possibly can.

I started buying vintage drawknives of different makes, to discover what works best in my opinion. Studying ease of use and sharpening, handle make and angle, bevel up and bevel down options. I then started making my own versions, testing what I had found worked for me.

I settled on a 120-130mm cutting edge adding at least 50mm to each side making sure it would clear shavehorses and be able to work wider pieces of wood. The edge length, although on the smaller side, is plenty for most jobs (must be sharp! of course). I've found most of the times I reach for the drawknife it's for smaller section pieces of wood or rounds, working the corner of two meeting facets shaved off to create a third wider one. Making legs, axe handles, shrinkpot bottoms, planing or chamfering small boards,



Benjamin Bartalesi Drawknives, Italy



Forging a drawknife on the flypress (right). Sheaths are important working with sharp tools!



Forged knives before grinding (above). All Benjamin's drawknives are protected by a leather sheath (right). The underside of a knife (below)





The peened tang holds the handle in place (left) over a coin washer. A forged surface texture (above), and the completed knife over a hand-stitched sheath (right). Drawknives normalizing after forging (below)



making round tenons, and make more.

The handles are designed around my preferred grip with clear influence from the French short oval handles. I like to use the drawknife with the handle in my palm and my index finger and thumb on the tangs. Smaller oval or conical handles are very comfortable to hold in the palm, using the swell of the handle as a stop to pull the drawknife towards you. Pushing with the top of your palm on the handle or raising it with your last three fingers then steers the knife in and out of the wood.

Most of the drawknives I make are made to be used bevel down, and I find this tool excels as you can just as easily make flat and curved surfaces. The same is not always true with a bevel-up version. In the latter you are using the wide flat surface facing the wood with the bevel facing outwards. The large width of

steel touching the wood makes it very hard to steer away from long flat cuts into smooth curves although excellent for straight work.

Forged hollow

I also like to add a large forged or ground hollow on the flat of my drawknives for ease of sharpening, reducing the surface in contact with the stone. On the bevel I find a convex micro-bevel is my go-to for most work. It is easily changed for different wood species, fast sharpening and works well in tight curves.

After establishing what I think are the essential functional criteria I delved into my guilty pleasure: excessive ornamentation and overthinking. As I made iterations of the design it became clear that this is the perfect platform to incorporate and explore the more 'philosophic' aspects of craft and design.

I wanted all parts of the process to be visible and intentional! Colour hues from tempering back the tangs, hammer marks from forging, even the grit pattern from grinding, hopefully combining everything in an elegant way. Adding small but significant to me details that make each knife unique and relevant to my background and surroundings.

To develop this concept I started collaborating with one of the most talented craftspeople I know: pipemaker Arcangelo Ambrosi. His exquisitely intricate carvings are so incredible I was very happy when he agreed to make simple handles for the drawknives. His expertise enriches the aesthetic of the tool, adding layers to its story.

At the end of the day I would like for each tool that exits the shop to be able to tell its story clearly, to hold a meaning that goes further than its ability to work. The way we romantically

look at old tools wondering about the hands that touched them every day, the shop they belonged to and the stories that layer over the object. I want my tools to tell their story right out of the box.

For this reason, if I can continue to make tools in the future I hope to be able to incorporate more crafts into my process through meaningful and relevant collaborations and be able to tell more stories through tools.

Follow Ben @bartalesiben.



Handling Pipes

Benjamin asks Arcangelos Ambrosi for handles



Arcangelo Ambrosi lives and works in Puglia, in the south of Italy. I was very happy when he agreed to make simple handles for the drawknives (below). His expertise enriches the aesthetic of the tool, adding layers to its story. About his works he says: "My purpose is, of course, to achieve the highest standards a refined pipe should comply with, but also to transform its identity through sculpture, with bizarre and surreal experiments."

You can follow Arcangelo on Instagram [@arcangelo_ambrosi](#) or visit his website [arcangelo-ambrosi.com](#)



The Veiled Pipe in briar



This Is Not a Pipe in briar



Locomotive Pipe in briar

Short Blade Sharpening

Veritas has designed a honing guide to control sharpening of short blades from spokeshaves, etc...

One of the most awkward blades to sharpen has the least to hold. As we discussed last issue, there are plenty of honing guides that clamp from the side, Veritas having launched their new model as a rival to the Lie-Nielsen, the Trend and the old Eclipse and its clones. Now the Canadians have designed a jig, which may not help sharpening chisels, but is remarkably versatile for much else beside.

The Veritas Short-Blade Honing Guide is designed essentially for spokeshave blades, but can be used in so many other ways. "A frequent challenge faced by sharpeners of all skill levels," Veritas say, "is the safe and accurate honing of small and short blades. Spokeshave, small block plane and palm plane blades are too small for most guides." Their new option is a solution, crude versions of which have been published as tips in magazines for years.

Blades of up to 25/8in wide fit between the adjustable fingers that hold the blade in place. Any such blades, and those much narrower, are easily aligned with the included registration jig for 25° and 30°. The kit comes with a shim so that the blade can be raised a fraction to make it easy to add a micro-bevel. And the registration plate is set for blades 1/8in, 3/16in, or 1/4in thick. It will be interesting to see how these settings work, and whether doing it by eye will be just as effective. And the bed of the jig is marked with lines and has a 'fence' either side which may or may not be the best way to square the blade with the stone. Time will tell in our workshop.

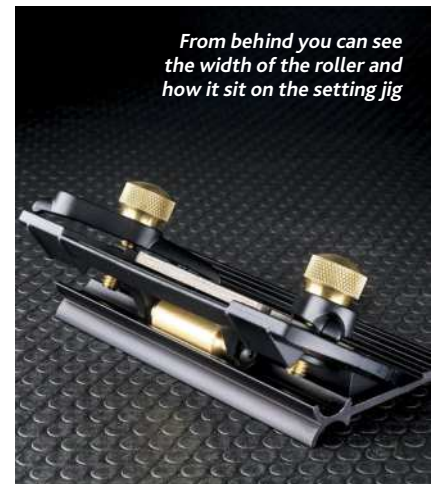
Veritas Short-Blade Honing Guide (05M09.30) costs from £50 in the UK and \$60 in the US.



The blade is held in place with two adjustable 'fingers', tightened with the knurled knobs



The new Veritas guide comes with a registration plate for setting 30° or 25° bevels, with a shim for honing a micro-bevel



From behind you can see the width of the roller and how it sit on the setting jig



The primary function of the Short-Blade Honing Guide is for sharpening spokeshave blades



The guide is designed for longer blades, shorter blades and skewed blades

Good Old Surformers

Appreciating the value of an old favourite, *Robin Gates* remembers the classic 'disposable' Surform

The woodworker's essential kit of saws, planes, drills and chisels has stayed remarkably constant for centuries, with instances of a new hand-tool outliving its initial fanfare proving rare. The spiral ratchet screwdriver is one exception, and the Surform another. This abrading and cutting tool has been around the workshop since the 1950s, having lived up to Stanley's early claim for a 'SURface FORMing tool of 1001 uses'.

The novel feature of a Surform is the hardened steel blade pierced by hundreds of D-shaped holes set in corrugated rows at 35° to the tool's long axis. The straight edge of each D is sharpened like a chisel. Although it may look like a file with handles (the Surform blade has appeared in several shapes and sizes) it is effectively a multitude of tiny planes producing heaps of fine shavings - like a cheese grater.

Similar to a bench plane

Invented by Christopher Booth of Firth-Brown Tools in Sheffield, the Surform was subsequently produced in Pontypridd, Wales by Simmonds Aerocessories who made the 10in (25cm) alloy-bodied example with beech handles pictured here. This type has similar configuration to a No.4 bench plane but, at 275g, weighs only as much as a 10in (25cm) file so you can use it for long periods without fatigue. Stanley acquired the Surform in the late 1950s and introduced new variants such as the handy 111A block plane seen here in typically livid 1970s livery.

The Surform is a user-friendly tool for shaping all manner of rustic and finer work, and equally at home with solid and man-made materials. However, Stanley's early recommendation of using a Surform 'for trimming asbestos' has been dropped!

Unlike a bench plane the Surform requires no setting up, and it resists clogging despite taking an aggressive cut, quickly achieving a smooth and well-rounded result. On wood it leaves a surface textured like corduroy which can be finished with sandpaper or a scraper. When the blade is worn out you simply unscrew a clip at one end and fit a new one - or not. Only recently I discovered almost by accident that a dull blade can be sharpened and re-used. Of particular interest to Welsh stick chair makers, it isn't widely known that the Surform was a favourite tool of John Brown. JB used it while making one chair's ash arm bow, and once said: "I cut the arm to length and, placing it in the vice, rough shape it with a Surform."



Surform 111A block plane rounding an edge (above), and filled with those familiar thin shavings (left). The block plane and plane (below). There is something nostalgic and even goose-bumpy about the shredded balls that fall from a Surform, especially if the 111A is the first woodworking tool you were given [NG]!



Making a Square Measure

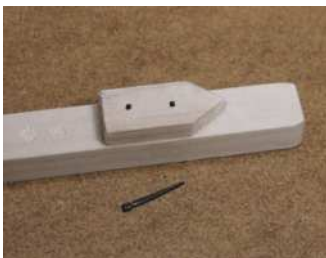
Canadian woodworker, *Charles Mak*, makes a couple of square-checking tools, by hand

Fine cabinet work starts with stock that is flat and true, and it ends with a case that is straight and square. Woodworkers have choices of squares available to check an assembled piece for square, such as a small square for small boxes, a combination square for medium pieces and a large framing square for the larger cases. However, for a large carcass, several factors can cause it to be out of square during assembly while waiting for the glue to cure. For example, a square itself may not be accurately square. Even a good square may cover only part of the reference faces, but not the whole reference lengths to give an accurate reading. Lastly, excessive clamping may bend and distort the work, affecting the square checking.

Instead of checking two adjacent sides for square, many cabinetmakers choose to use the diagonals of a case as the basis for checking squareness. To measure the diagonals, the tape measure is the most common tool used. But other forms of fixtures exist to measure diagonals.



The diagonal squares (top) and pinch sticks (below) are made from scraps. Saw or chisel one end of the block (left). The pinch stick, an adjustable pair of strips with pointed ends, is easy to make. I made mine using a tongue & groove joinery, cut with a plough plane. Start by preparing a board wide enough for the plough's fence to register against. Cut the tongue on one edge and plough the matching groove on the opposite edge. To provide added registration and control, use the plane with an auxiliary fence (below right). In the final step, saw out the strips, and bevel one end of the strips into a pointed tip (below left). To use the pinch stick extend it till the ends slip into the diagonal corners. Then use it to check the opposite diagonal



The second squaring fixture I use is the diagonal square, a clever idea of James Gauntlett, a retired joiner from England. It is just a batten of the desired length with a chisel-edge block nailed or glued to its underside near one end (above). To check squareness, rest the batten diagonally on the edge of the assembly, and mark the first

diagonal measurement on the strip with a line (right). Then do the same on the opposite corners. If the two lines coincide, the work is square. If out of square, mark a centre line between the two lines, and place the batten in the longer diagonal. Shift the clamps or use a clamp to shorten the long diagonal to bring the corner to the centre mark. Unlike the pinch stick or tape measure, Gauntlett's fixture dispenses with the need to re-measure and compare both diagonals after each adjustment of the clamping. That is a time-saver in a stressful glue-up



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