

Issue 27, September 2022

Hi Steve R,

Welcome back to *Notes from the Shop*, your monthly opportunity to pause for a few minutes of woodworking inspiration and information.

It's very satisfying to see how many of you take the time to read this award winning* publication, and it's even more rewarding to read your feedback on whatever it was I yammered on about each month. Anytime you have something to say, feel free to just hit the reply button and know that an actual human is reading your note. Nothing about this newsletter is automated by robots. Plus, it's written by me, an actual human without a CNC** machine in his shop.

Now that you know how this works, I want to feature your woodworking tips in an upcoming newsletter. This is hardly an original idea for a newsletter; old woodworking magazines always had a section featuring reader tips and tricks. As I recall, they mostly involved cutting pieces of PVC pipe to hold things, using jars to hold things, or shaping empty peanut butter containers to hold PVC pieces or something like that. I'm sure there were more, and I think the readers who got featured would win a prize, like a Popular Woodworking drill bit or something, but my memory is a little fuzzy on that part.

Will this feature be different in *my* newsletter? Yes, because there will be no prizes, imagined or not. (And please, no wagering.) It'll have a witty name like, "READER TIPS". Oh! And there will be a specific prompt rather than any ol' open-ended tips request. Or better yet, I probably won't even be asking for tips each month. I'm much more interested in stories. Yes! I like that better. So forget about READER TIPS. Instead, let's call this new feature, **READER STORIES**. Scroll down to see this new addition in its own little feature section. Now, let me tell you how to store pipe clamps in PVC*** pipes.

Simplicity is a topic I've spoken about many times in this newsletter. It's been the foundation of my philosophy on woodworking for quite some time. It might seem counterintuitive, but simplicity is something that is best discovered through experience and confidence. I've also come to believe that design simplicity and restraint are signs of sophistication and a more refined understanding of the art or craft in which it's expressed.

At some point when you were a toddler, you probably got a box of 24 crayons and it's likely you used all the colors in a single work of art. (Except white, unless you were one of those fancy lads who had access to black construction paper.) Color restraint was practiced when a restaurant supplied a free 4-pack of those weird waxy crayons to color the paper menu with. Still, we worked with the tools available and used them all. Then one day you went to a friend's house (probably that same fancy lad) who had a brand new box of 64 crayons! Must. Try. Them. All.

But as your coloring career advanced, say by first or second grade, you began selecting the colors that were appropriate for the drawing you were creating. You were finding that restraint could lead to more sophisticated-looking art.

I find this to be the case with all crafts and at any age. As we begin a new hobby, we tend to think that the true showcase of what we've learned is best displayed by employing as many techniques and ornamentation as possible. Leaving aside the potential garishness of such an approach, *your skills are best tested and displayed in your simplest pieces*. This may seem counterintuitive, but bells and whistles can hide a lot. I might not notice your gappy dovetails because I'm distracted by your hand-carved fleur-de-lis and purpleheart inlay.

After you've been woodworking for a while you'll come to appreciate the beauty of a continuous grain surrounding a box, the satisfaction of a perfectly fitting miter joint, or the appeal of a lid that makes a slight pop when removed.

I've recently become a fan of Florian Gadsby, a potter who makes and sells thousands of handmade cups, mugs, bowls, and jars, and documents it all on his [YouTube channel](#). He is, without question, a master at his craft. Watching him throw a lump of clay on a wheel and shape it into a cup is captivating.

But it's Florian's simple style that I find so appealing, for instance, a coffee mug with straight sides and a handle. What's so special about that?

The beauty is in the details. He shapes the rim in such a way that the inside allows liquid to pour properly while the outer side is rounded to be comfortable against the drinker's lips. The base of the cup is slightly chamfered to cast a small shadow and make the mug appear lighter. The handle is attached in such a way that it seems to grow out of the side of the mug, which also strengthens the stress point where cheap mugs fail. He shapes the

handle to accommodate two fingers comfortably without the knuckles touching the hot side of the cup. The glaze creates a modest, earthy green that's timeless.

If you're looking for your next woodworking challenge, consider revisiting a project you've made before. But this time focus on its simplicity, proportion, function, and form.

Let's say an end table. You don't need to add a motorized lift. You don't need to select a color of epoxy. You don't need to add speakers or a wireless charger. It doesn't necessarily need drawers. You don't have to use the most exotic wood you can find.



The Simple Box

Instead, try making a small, functional end table with a top and four legs. Spend time selecting the wood for the top based on its grain and how it flows. (I've seen exquisite furniture made exclusively from pine.) Take your time edge joining the perfect pieces so the top looks like one wide, beautiful piece of lumber. Try making the legs unadorned, but with a graceful taper that balances the visual weight of the top. Think about how you want to join the legs so they will be firmly attached. Round over the top and the underside edges so it's comfortable to move the table. Smooth every imperfection and apply an oil finish. You just made a timeless piece of furniture that anyone can admire and you can feel more confident with your skills.

If you want your woodworking to improve, focus on the fundamentals.

Have a great month!

Steve

** not award-winning*

*** lol just trolling the CNC overlords*

**** shoutout to the PVC community*

Help out by taking this survey!

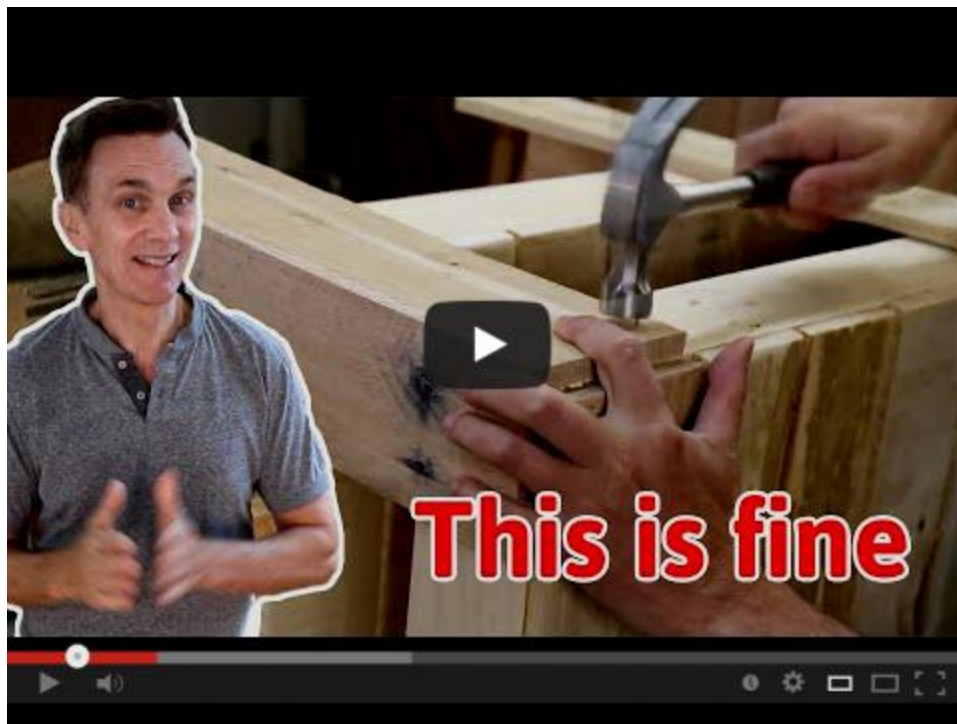
I'm working on a new project and would love to hear about your woodworking experiences so I can develop new offerings that are appealing to you.

If you're interested in contributing, please follow this link: [Quick woodworking survey](#)

It will only take a few minutes and your input is greatly appreciated!

Things I wish I knew when I started woodworking

One of the best things about woodworking is the element of discovery. It's a hobby filled with challenges to overcome and problems to solve. And while this is part of the process, there are a few things that would have saved me some unnecessary struggles, frustration, and self-doubt.



What's new on The WTS Podcast?

Recently on [The WTS Podcast](#) I had a conversation with the ultimate DIY family, [The Adams family](#). The entire family literally makes feature films themselves. They write the scripts, take turns operating the camera, act in the films, edit them, compose and perform the soundtracks, and build their own sets. This is such an inspirational story for anyone with an independent spirit.





I also had a fun chat with Grady Hillhouse from Practical Engineering about [construction myths](#). Does it seem like guys working on road construction projects are “just standing around?” Well of course this is untrue, but Grady gets into the reasons why this myth persists. And I brought up a few woodworking myths that need busting!

Be sure to check out The WTS Podcast every other Friday on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), or any other podcast app. Or visit the [WTS website](#).

Reader Stories

Here it is, the Reader Stories section mentioned in the opening note! If you'd like to contribute, just reply to this email. Keep in mind if we use your story, we'll include your full name.

This month's question:

We've all done plenty of dumb things (hopefully nothing that's led to injury!) and I've certainly had my share. I remember one time when my table saw blade suddenly became very dull. Or at least that's what I thought. It just didn't want to cut through anything without a struggle. I actually managed to cut a few boards, complete with horrible burn marks before I realized I had the blade in backward. 🙄

So tell me your story! **What's one of the dumbest things you've done while woodworking?**

This Month's Member Projects

Here are a few of the awesome projects made by members of [The Weekend Woodworker](#) and [The Weekend Workshop](#).



Child-friendly Customizations

I love seeing how members customize course projects or use skills they learned in the course to build projects that fit their needs. Martin did just that when he built this children's bookcase for his twin granddaughters. Well done!

Sleek Nightstands

Good things come to those who...power through and finish a project no matter how long it takes. Matt's beautiful nightstands built with black limba and walnut exemplify that motto. Even though they took longer to finish than he wanted, they look fabulous! So sleek!



Wonderful Walnut Table

Speaking of sleek, check out Braxton's solid walnut table complete with dowel joinery and inlaid c-channel. I particularly love seeing the grain pop. Nice work!

Thanks for reading,

- Steve

P.S. If you are new this month, you can read last month's issue of Notes From the Shop [here](#).

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