



Issue 29, November 2022

Hi Steve R,

With Halloween behind us, we can now set our sights on gift projects such as MICROJIG MAKER OF THE GRR-RIPPER. WORK SAFER, WORK SMARTER.

Okay, I guess that Microjig Interruption bit doesn't quite play out the same in written form as it [does on video](#), but I'm pleased to have [Microjig](#) back on board, this time as a sponsor of this newsletter. It's like catching up with an old friend. A friend who's yellow and green with weird grippy stuff for skin. Be sure to keep an eye out later in the newsletter for a special **exclusive offer** for *Notes From the Shop* readers.

Or is it *Notes From Steve*?

Well, dear readers, here's a bit of inside info. When I decided to create this newsletter over two years ago, we had many long, late-night discussions in smoke-filled underground rooms brainstorming all sorts of clever names for it. And the crème de la crème...the absolute best we came up with was "Notes From the Shop." At least that's how I remember it going down.

And with that settled, I just needed to buy a domain so that people could easily sign up. Have I ever mentioned that I'm a bit of a domain hoarder? I just bought one last week in fact, for a future project that's all hush-hush right now, but that I'll be talking about soon on [Steve Ramsey Plus](#), my second channel that used to be called Mere Minutes. (I'll bet there are some of you who remember that phase of my online life. "I miss the old Steve!") But wouldn't you know it, notesfromtheshop[.]com was taken. And I'm not about to pay a thousand bucks or whatever to some nerd who owns it just for this little monthly dog and pony show.

However, notesfromsteve.com was available so I bought that instead. My memory is a little hazy on the details, but I'm sure we had some sort of tension-filled, high-level discussion about simply naming this newsletter "Notes From Steve." I mean, it makes sense; we would eliminate a word and the sign-up domain would match the newsletter name, but here we are. Life just happens the way it wants.

But you're here for woodworking. Let's chat about design.

At some point in your woodworking adventures, you're probably going to want to design your own projects. If you've only recently begun your hobby, this might seem like a far-off possibility. I mean, you have to learn some 3D drawing software, right?

For years I've been a proponent of learning Sketchup to design woodworking projects. It saves time and money when you have a full set of measured drawings to follow in the shop, but I'm starting to think my preaching may be performing a disservice to some people.

Last week I got a DM from a guy who was a bit frustrated trying to learn Fusion 360 to design what sounds like a set of really cool, funky, children's bedroom furniture, asking if he should try Sketchup instead. I looked at some of his projects and he certainly has building skills so I gave him some radical advice; just start building. I felt like he was being held back and having his ideas constrained by software.

These days we think of "designing" as the *process of conveying ideas in a readable format before building the project*. That's an important definition if you want other people to build your projects exactly as you imagine, but hobbyists are usually more interested in building one-off projects for themselves. Designing isn't synonymous with drawing.

A more useful way to think about design is seeing it as the *process of turning original ideas into a real thing*. It's like anything else in woodworking: nobody cares about which tools you used to complete your project.

With this definition, we can use any design tools, to any extent, at any point in the process of building a project. Turning your ideas into reality is largely dependent on your actual experience building projects. An expert at Sketchup might design a beautifully ornate Queen Anne dresser, but have no way of actually building it. It's possible that those drawings might not even be practical without understanding how wood behaves or the limitations of available tools.

It's perfectly reasonable to have a design for a project in your head and start building with no plans. Or perhaps you just need a pencil sketch with the overall dimensions. Maybe there is a specific element that you need to work out on paper before committing it to wood. Design is a process that doesn't have to start in front of a computer, or even involve a computer at all.

Last week I built a serving tray without drawing any plans. I haven't done this in a long

time but I wanted to test out this line of reasoning about design and challenge myself. My experience was a mixed bag. I spent an inordinate amount of time staring at boards and trying to envision what I wanted the tray to look like and I made a couple of mistakes that I probably would have avoided with detailed plans. A couple of the features (the handles) could have been more refined with a three-dimensional preview. It took me much longer to build, but mostly it was a fun experience and I got to spend more time in the shop. I've made a few trays in the past, so I was able to draw on those experiences and apply techniques from other projects to build this. I was able to foresee potential pitfalls and avoid many of them simply because I've made a gazillion projects. My enjoyment might have been different if this were one of my first projects, but then again, I would have designed it within my existing skill set.

People have been designing and building furniture for thousands of years without Fusion 360, Sketchup, or a computer. Your ability to design a project is largely a product of your experience in the real world, building real projects. [I still believe learning Sketchup](#) is extremely valuable. It's a great tool for helping to visualize your ideas, but don't assume that it's needed for design. And, for Pete's sake, don't NOT build something because you don't have Sketchup or any other design tool. There's nothing wrong with just heading out to the shop and winging it. You'll learn a lot by trial and error and it can be a fun experience.

Have a great month!

Steve

FitFinder 1/2 Gauge

Find the center of stock instantly.

1. Set material height.



Click Here

MICROJIG
FITFINDER

Can we pause for a moment in this design issue to talk about the design of Microjig's FitFinder? You've heard me talk about the beauty and practicality of simplicity time and time again, and this tool exemplifies that.

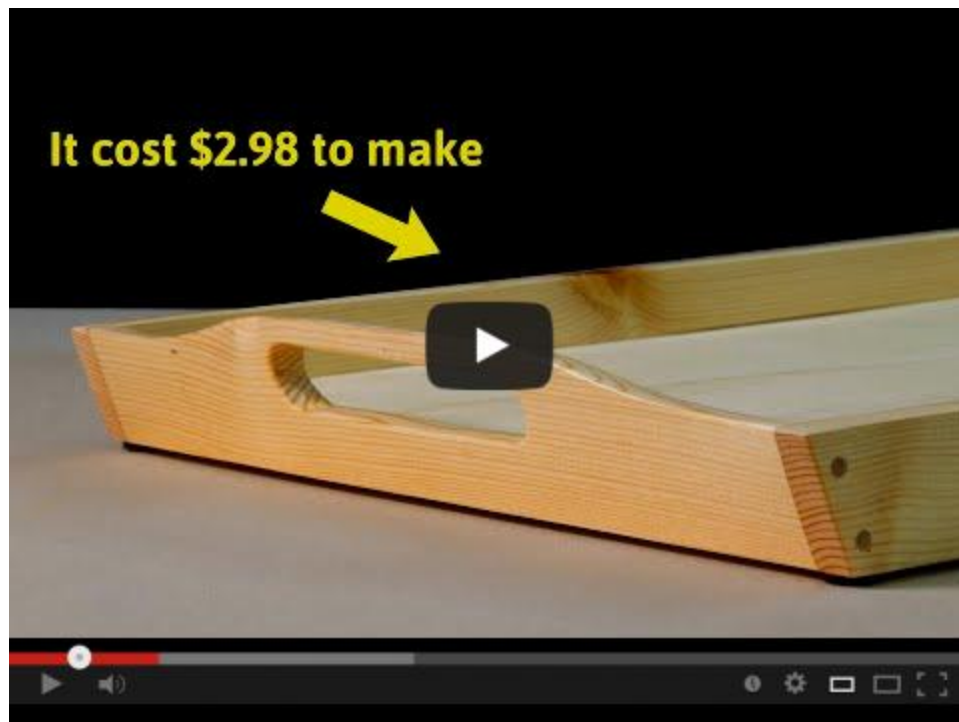
The Fit Finder performs a very specific task: setting a blade or bit to half the thickness of a board. This takes the guesswork (usually a lot of trial and error) out of making perfectly fitting lap joints or even finding the dead center of a dowel. But how elegant is that design!

The best part is that, since you are a loyal reader of *Notes From the Shop*, you get an exclusive deal. [Click here to get 10% off a FitFinder by using my coupon code: FITWWMM.](#)

This offer lasts for seven days, so hurry up!

From Stud to Serving Tray

This was a fun challenge. I made this serving tray using a 2x3 stud from the home center and no plans. Just winging it!



What's New on The WTS Podcast?

I recently had a conversation with Anne-Marie Faiola about soapmaking. She's the CEO of Bramble Berry, a company that supplies soap-making ingredients to over 60,000 DIYers and small businesses. She started the company in 1999 in a 400-square-foot space and today the company has more than 100 employees. Learn about the process of making handmade soap... I even tried my hand at making some! [Listen here](#).



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](#).

Send Me Your Holiday Success Stories!

Next issue is December! I want to hear your Christmas woodworking stories. Tell me about a project you make every year or a particular time you made a cherished gift. Give me the warmest fuzziest you got. What does the holiday season and woodworking mean to you?

Simply reply to this issue and tell me. Feel free to include photos. **Hurry though...I'll need your submissions by November 23!**

This Month's Member Projects

Here are a few of the awesome projects made by course members this month.

TWW Parlor Shoe Cabinet



Design doesn't have to be a complete thing from top to bottom. In fact, most of what we design are variations and modifications to existing designs. Check out how Darren totally tricked out the Parlor Bookcase from [The Weekend Woodworker](#) course.

Wow! He used the basic bones of the plan and created this custom shoe cabinet.

Beautiful Bookcase

For context, I'd like to show off this beautiful version of the same bookcase built by Monalisa (Lisa). My eyes are always drawn to simple, but well-executed construction. (See [last month's newsletter](#).) The wood selection, the miters, everything about this is stunning and timeless.



BMKI

I never, never get tired of seeing all the thousands of [BMW](#)s people have made over the years. But Gabe took his mods to the next level by thinking outside the workbench box and redesigning the BMW to be a Basic Mobile Kitchen Island!

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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For Mere Mortals, 448 Ignacio Blvd. #237, Novato, CA 94949, United States