



Issue 32, February 2023

Hi Steve R,

Thank you for your notes, concerns, and well wishes about the torrential rains we experienced in California during the first couple of weeks of January. Aside from some minor inconveniences and localized flooding, we fared well. In the Bay Area, we don't experience a whole lot of inclement weather, so whenever it rains I try to enjoy the time. Plus, now that it's over, some of our perennials are beginning to bloom, bringing with them a certain amount of optimism.



Late January blooms

Gloomy weather causes me a bit of melancholia and introspection so I told myself this would be a good time to make a couple of (very minor) life improvements. First, I began brewing up a double shot of espresso every afternoon to serve as a “mental reset”, but what I soon discovered is that I wasn't enjoying the break in the way I had imagined. I would either take the beverage to my desk and drink it while answering emails, or I would sit at the table and mindlessly scroll through Instagram. I needed to tweak this routine, so I added a strict **no-distraction rule** to my afternoon coffee break. Now I take my tiny cup filled with espresso into another room with no phone or computer and just sit. I'm

thoroughly enjoying these 10 minutes of daily meditation to just be alone with my thoughts and actually taste each sip of coffee.



The irony of posing for a photo during my “no distractions” coffee break.

Second, I like the romantic imagery of “*curling up with a good book on a rainy day*,” so I made a resolution to read one book a month this year: An actual analog book with words and pages and everything. I haven’t read a novel in at least a decade, probably longer. Sure, I’ve listened to plenty of audiobooks, but that seems like such a different part of the brain to exercise. In order to read, and actually follow the story, I need to be in a quiet room without TV, music, or any other form of distraction. (Thanks, social media...you’ve ruined my attention span!) In reality, I’m the one to blame. I simply got out of practice. Reading is no different than rock climbing, playing guitar, writing, or woodworking. Practice probably won’t make anything *perfect*, but if you want to get better at something or more proficient, you gotta put in the reps.

Think of any activity you’ve gotten really involved in throughout your life. You probably started it simply because it looked fun or useful, but chances are, if you stuck with it, you uncovered deeper motivations. In fact, your initial reasons for beginning may now be secondary, icing on the cake.

Many of the people I’ve talked to start woodworking in a roundabout way, from a place of need: usually in order to save money by repairing things. We buy our first home, money is tight, and we notice that the deck has a beat-up edge, the stair railing is wobbly, there’s a hole in the drywall, and the hinges are broken on a cabinet door. That sort of thing. These seem like pretty DIY-friendly tasks and countless YouTube videos confirm it. To accomplish these tasks, we’re going to Need Some Tools. It all starts with a single screwdriver.

A screwdriver to replace that hinge oughta do. But wait...the home center also has battery-powered drivers. And if you’re going to hang things on the wall, you’re going to need a drill. Ah...they sell both a driver and drill as a pair. I mean, ya might as well get ‘em both, it’s not like you won’t be needing them for more crap that needs fixing.

Circular saws are pretty cheap. You should get one for cutting that replacement board for

the deck. You'll need that for other things too, such as an idea someone had to install a "cute little curio shelf" in the dining room. Sure, you could cut a board with your circular saw, but think how much better a miter saw would work. Tool purchases are now "household investments." If you're going to fix that boring old handrail, why not *improve* it by making something custom, and there's no way you'll be able to rip that board down accurately to the width you want using a circular saw, so you'll need a table saw.

Eventually, you're going to want a) a coffee table or b) a bookcase. Yes, it will definitely be one of these two, I don't know why. You've been more than casually watching woodworking videos on YouTube, picking up terms like chamfer, kerf, and dado, and trying to find reasons to drop them into conversations. "There is just **no way** I'm going to buy one of those cheap flimsy coffee tables sold in boxes and put together with an Allen wrench. Did you know those are made with MDF? I could make my own and **save us money**. Hell, if I had a router I could add a *roman ogee* profile along the edge. Choke on *that* Ikea!"

Congratulations. You're a woodworker. Now the fun really begins. You'll start to build things that you don't strictly "need", like a paper towel holder or a spice rack. You'll make picture frames and gift boxes and you'll spend a lot of time and care building them. You'll stop trying to convince yourself that you're saving money by making things. Fixing things around the house is now a chore that takes away time spent in the woodshop. Your focus is on improving your skills.

At some point, you will begin to add some nuance to how you think about woodworking. Of course, you'll always be excited when starting a new project and thrilled when you complete it (that is always the surface-level goal), but you'll start to notice that your **time spent in the shop** making these things is where your mind goes when you think about woodworking. It's where you wish you were when you're stuck in traffic or attending an office meeting on a Tuesday morning. Like drinking espresso or reading a book, shop time should be time we spend in our heads, without distraction. The outside world does not need to be admitted into our shops. We can challenge ourselves and complete meaningful tasks, all without any doom-scrolling, newsfeeds, or ahem... "content." The completed projects are just icing on the cake.

If you're new to this newsletter, welcome, friends! Not all woodworking is a zen state of mind. Strangely, there's a lot of stuff about sawing boards and gluing things together. If you're looking for a step-by-step, practical approach to learning woodworking, I'd like to suggest [The Weekend Woodworker](#), my online course designed to get you building your first project on your first weekend, no experience necessary. Yeah, you'll also build a bookcase and a coffee table, lol.

And if woodworking is already a state of mind for you, might I suggest [The Weekend Workshop](#) for improving your shop with a whole bunch of practical upgrades and advice to help you turn any space into a Woodworking Sanctuary.

P.S. Don't forget to enter the SawStop sweepstakes for a chance to win their new Compact Table Saw!

SawStop Sweepstakes!



Enter for Your Chance To Win

No purchase necessary to enter or win. Odds of winning depend on eligible entries received. See SawStop.com/CTSsweepstakes for details.

For almost 20 years, SawStop has been protecting woodworkers with their revolutionary safety system. The technology stops the spinning blade on contact with skin and drops the blade below the table in less than 5 milliseconds. Minimizing what could be a potentially life-altering injury to a mere scratch.

The new 10" Compact Table Saw is the latest addition to the SawStop lineup and is the smallest, most portable saw featuring the SawStop safety system. Packed with features that bring power, precision, cut capacity, and safety to every job site.

Now's your chance to own your own SawStop. [Enter the SawStop 10" Compact Table Saw sweepstakes](#) for your chance to win.

The sweepstakes end on February 28th, 2023. Don't miss your chance to protect yourself. Enter today!

Some things you can't buy

One of the most common comments non-woodworkers leave on small, household project videos is, "It would be a lot easier to just buy that at Walmart for a lot less time and money."

Yes, woodworking takes effort. Sure, it will often cost more to make something than buy something, but as previously discussed, most of us think a little differently about why we make things by hand. However, there are certain things you simply can't buy. Well, you can buy a kitchen drawer organizer, but none of them will work as well and fit as perfectly as one you can make. I've made a number of these over the years.



Oh, I ran across this video the other day I thought you might like, especially if you're a *Lord of the Rings* fan. Here's a guy who built his own hobbit house.



What's new on The WTS

[The WTS Podcast](#) continues to grow and I'm having a blast talking to so many interesting people. I want to thank all of you who are chipping in to make this show possible. If you enjoy the podcast, consider [supporting it over at Patreon!](#) (Membership includes access to the video version of each episode.)



One of my favorite guests is Jason from [Bourbon Moth Woodworking](#). I especially like fanning the flames between him and Cam Anderson at Blacktail Studio, so naturally, we talked about their feud over epoxy river tables. (It's all in fun; these two guys are actually friends.) It's a fast-paced episode that covers a lot of ground. ([Listen here](#))

I also had a chance to talk to Ben Sinclair, hand tool woodworker and bassist for New Zealand rockers, [The Beths](#). I've been a massive fan of theirs for the past several years and I wanted to explore the connection some creative people make with multiple art forms. If you love loud indie music and quiet hand-tool woodworking, you'll want to listen to this episode!



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 Mail

Dear Steve,

I am a big fan of your woodworking. I have learned a lot from your videos and decided to build a simple box. You said in one of your videos that a simple box is the starting point for woodworking. I am attaching a few pictures of the box I built and would like to thank you for your excellent videos. Of course, the diagonal measurement of the box is off by 3mm but overall it's a good first attempt I felt. I used some cheap Mango wood which is available in abundance here in India. Mango wood is prone to bending and warping. So I decided to decoupage the box with cotton handmade fabric with ethnic motifs popular here in India. If you happen to check my mail please let me know your impressions of my effort.

Regards

Liaquath M.



Yup...everyone needs to know how to make a simple box. It's the basis of so many woodworking projects! Love the sliding lid on this. Great job, Liaquath. — Steve

If you'd like to tell me what you've been up to, drop me a line! You can simply reply to this email.

Let's...just not 😬

Last month we talked about how someday artificial intelligence will take over woodworking and make everything for us and we'll just sit around sipping espressos while bowing to our robot overlords. So I was wondering if maybe AI could help out with the newsletter. I asked ChatGPT to write a poem for the newsletter. Make of this what you will.*

“write a short poem about spending quiet time in my woodshop without any outside distractions”

In my wood shop, the world outside
Fades away, with no place to reside,
With sawdust in the air,
And the hum of machines, I repair

My mind, to a state of peace,
Where worries and troubles cease,
With wood in my hands, and tools at the ready,
I lose myself in the present, without any outside distractions, my mind is steady.

The smell of fresh-cut wood,
The sound of the planer, it's like a soothing lullaby, it could
Ease my mind and put me in a trance,
In this quiet space, I find my balance.

The outside world may call,
But in my wood shop, I stand tall,
With my focus and concentration,

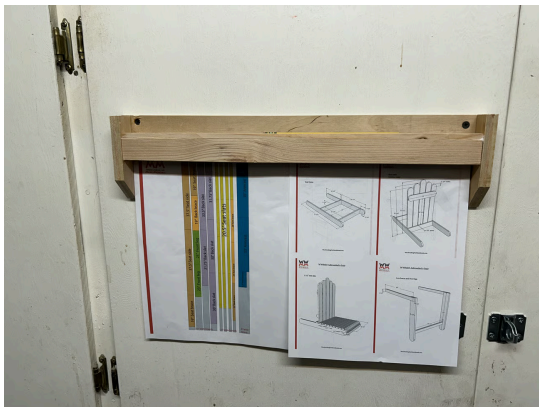
I create, without interruption.

This is where my soul comes alive,
Where I can forget the world outside,
In my wood shop, I am free,
Where quiet time is all I need.

*I promise, this is the one and only time this humble newsletter will ever contain any AI-written content. Besides, one thing my experience on YouTube has taught me is to never say, “*With wood in my hands,*” and not expect every commenter to turn into a 12-year-old boy. 😄

This Month's Member Projects

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



Perfect Plan Holder

Here's an interesting idea emailed in from Matt. This paper holder secures two sheets of paper with a row of marbles in a channel. Slide the sheet in and let gravity hold it in place. Pretty neat!

Accented End Table

[The Weekend Woodworker](#) member, Ken, made this table inspired by my recent [basic table video](#). Beautiful long, tapered legs and inlay accents. 🥰



Not-So-Basic Workbench

I never get tired of seeing your Basic Mobile Workbenches! Here's Christopher's version of the BMW+ from [The Weekend Workshop](#). (If you haven't made a BMW yet, it's a GREAT first woodworking project. [Here are the free plans.](#))

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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