



## Issue 34, April 2023

Hi Steve R,

I recently attended Workbenchcon, a conference that, despite its awkward name, isn't about workbenches. In fact, it has very little to do with woodworking or making things; it's a show for (*cue sinister music*) Influencers. That would be an awesome horror film: ***The Influencer***.

The best part about this conference was getting to meet many of you who read this newsletter, watch my videos, or are Weekend Woodworker members. Thank you so much for chatting! I was surprised how many of you mentioned this newsletter and wanted to talk about the recent topics we've discussed.

Those conversations about our personal connections to woodworking and the things we make were the most meaningful and memorable discussions I had all weekend. WAY more interesting than talking about crafting clickbait thumbnails and gaming the YouTube algorithm. Honestly, listening to people going on about "growing their brand" is exhausting. 😊

(I have a funny story about influencers at that conference [here](#).)

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Are you a completionist? I don't mean having an overriding compulsion to collect the entire discography of Donny & Marie Osmond, I'm talking about completing woodworking projects.

Or do you have ***completion anxiety***?

If you have several projects under construction in your shop, maybe even one that you

haven't touched in 6 months, you are far from alone. It's quite common and normal for woodworkers to have two or more projects going at the same time. Based on 15 years of talking to people about this, I would estimate 50-60% of us work this way.

Having multiple projects in the shop *can* be an efficient way to get things made. While you're waiting for glue to dry, you don't waste time with dumb things like scrolling through Netflix, mowing the lawn, fixing that leaky roof, or eating. No! You switch gears and start cutting wood for your other project. You might not even require sleep. You are a woodworking beast.

More likely, you have a couple of partially-built projects in your shop but value things like spending time with your family and you understand the responsibilities that come with home ownership. Olivia and Caleb need a ride to pickleball practice, and those squeaky doors ain't gonna get any less annoying if you keep ignoring them. At some point, you may feel a little *completion anxiety* when it comes to your woodworking.

It's important to note that there's nothing wrong with having several projects in your shop at the same time; it's only a problem when it becomes a problem. If it doesn't bother you, or you have established a workflow that allows you to continually churn out projects, great! But if you have a partially-built china cabinet that's been sitting in the corner of the shop for most of the year and it tears at your soul every time you look at it, it is a problem.

About 20 years ago, I decided to restore an antique chest of drawers (or is it a dresser?) while I was in the middle of making a cabinet for my DVD collection (today, that cabinet is filled with streaming services). I was also in the phase of making picture frames for Every Frickin' Photo in the house. I thought the restoration project would be a fun, challenging, and interesting little diversion for a couple of weekends.

Have you ever tried to restore a 400-year-old dresser? You haven't? Well, that's because **you're not an insane person!** The turned legs were rotten, the cherry wood needed replacing in multiple areas, the drawers were falling apart, the runners had been "repaired" about 30 times too many over the years, and the knobs were missing. But it was made by a family member and somehow I ended up with the burden of hauling this monstrosity around throughout my life.

Naturally, like any enthusiastic, naive, furniture restoration newbie, I quickly disassembled the entire dresser (or is it a chest of drawers?) and its drawers in a couple of days. Piece of cake! I mean, it's basically just reverse woodworking. It was at this point I decided I should probably learn a little more about restoration.

Oh, wait. Furniture restoration is a whole thing. There are rules and pitfalls. You need to respect the original pieces while being mindful of the replacements. A lot of people told me not to even touch it because "You'll ruin its value!" I fell down a rabbit hole of wood identification, turning techniques, period-accurate hardware, and color-matching dyes for replacement parts. I learned about escutcheons (if you know, you know). After a few weekends of very careful, slow, and considered progress, my wide-eyed zeal had waned. I was concerned that I would ruin everything with one ill-considered chisel strike on a

dovetail repair. I began spending more time working on my other projects.

Soon, I stopped working on it altogether, leaving the carcass to take up valuable space on my shop floor with disassembled drawers and other parts stacked on top. I was overwhelmed. I kept telling myself I would get back to it, and the more I looked at it, the more anxiety I felt. This poor chest/dresser looked like it belonged in a bonfire.

It sat for about six months until I couldn't take it any longer. I hunkered down with determination, motivated not by the desire to restore this into a beautiful dresser as I had intended, but to just get the damn thing out of my shop. I put all other projects on hold and slapped the thing back together, shaping the replacement pieces and adding the restored hardware. I applied a finish and was done. It worked and it looked okay. Not great, but okay. My heart wasn't in it. I am still disappointed with myself for not giving this piece of furniture the royal, meticulous treatment I envisioned at the start. Today, it sits in my wife's craft room filled with blankets and stuff. I don't like it and I don't like looking at it. It's a reminder of my inadequacies.



*The behemoth chest of drawers (dresser) taking up space in the craft room.*

**Why do we do this to ourselves? Here are 3 main reasons we take on multiple projects at a time:**

**1) We get excited about what we want to tackle next.** I see this frequently with people new to woodworking. After you've built a couple of projects and feel pretty confident with the basics, a world of possibilities opens up to you. There are a million different things you'd like to make for your home and so many people you want to make gifts for. You download some plans for your next project and can't

wait to get started, so you dive in. The project you're currently working on just doesn't hold that same level of excitement.

**2) We want to please other people.** Being caring and sensitive are positive personality traits. So when a friend asks us if we can make a picture frame, or a family member asks if we could make them a simple storage crate, we take on the project. Similarly, we may feel the need to make Christmas gifts for everyone we know.

**3) We are perfectionists.** Fear of failure can halt all kinds of plans and projects. We might hit a snag while building and our brains tell us it's safer to stop working on something if we feel we can't complete it perfectly. "I need time to think about this." We set it aside and start a new project we feel more confident about. On the plus side, at least we start projects. Perfectionism can prevent us from even starting a project.

Recognizing any of these traits, or a combination of all three in yourself, is the first step to overcoming completion anxiety. It's not a character flaw, and don't dismiss it as simple procrastination. Look deep to find the source of your anxiety.

Sometimes looking at that half-completed jewelry box is just plain daunting because we know what it's supposed to look like when it's done, but that seems so distant right now. Remember, every single step of that project is doable, so avoid looking at the big picture. Instead, break down your tasks into smaller parts. Set a schedule, even if it's just a couple of tasks a day. Keep moving forward. It might seem like it's adding extra stress, but once you have a schedule, set a due date.

Or...

This may be a hot take, but if you started a project months ago and you're just not feeling enthused about it anymore, it's okay to scrap it. Take it apart and use that wood for something that excites you. Nobody's going to revoke your Woodworker card. There's nothing wrong with cutting your losses. Like my dresser/chest restoration, working on something you're not into can lead to disappointing results. You're supposed to be doing this hobby because it's fun and rewarding. Regain that space in your shop and free yourself from anxiety!

By the way, if you want to build some confidence, check out my [Weekend Woodworker course](#). It's structured step-by-step so you **will complete every project**. In the end, you'll have a solid foundation in woodworking and even get a certificate of completion! How's that for alleviating completion anxiety?!

— Steve

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**PSA: Do you send in those tool registration cards?**

I recently heard from a number of you about [DeWalt recalling more than 1.2 million miter saws](#) because of a faulty safety guard. If you have one of these saws, please get the free repair kit.



Moreover, this is a good opportunity to remind you of the importance of sending in those registration cards (or using the online form) that comes with your tool purchases. Most of us tend to toss out those things along with the rest of the packaging material, but those registrations are important if the manufacturer needs to contact you about a safety recall or other issue.

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## **Weekend Shop Project**

Here's a project that definitely won't sit around half-built in your shop. I have no doubt you can make this in a weekend—probably an afternoon for many of you! This shop stool/barstool is made with inexpensive 2x3 studs. You can make it as fancy as you want, and maybe even make a group of them for a patio bar set.

[You can download the free plans here.](#)



## Heads up! The WTS podcast is now CREATIVE CULTURE

One of the best things about producing a podcast is that I can tinker with it in ways that would not be possible on YouTube. Like changing the name.



A couple of years ago I started my podcast as a way to alleviate some of the pandemic monotony by talking to my woodworker friends. In a very short time, the show grew as I became interested in hearing the stories of all sorts of creative people; artists, authors, musicians, comedians, filmmakers, and more. For a long time, I've been exploring the idea of a name that better reflects what the podcast is about, so I finally decided to just go for it and change the name to ***Creative Culture***.

Hopefully, now podcast browsers will get a clearer idea of what the show is about. If you haven't listened to *Creative Culture*, or you haven't listened in a while, check it out every other Friday on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), or any other podcast app. Or visit the ***Creative Culture website*** at [creativeculturepod.com](http://creativeculturepod.com).

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Recently, I had **Ethan James** on the show to talk about the shortage of skilled workers in the U.S. The number of tradespeople who are about to retire is alarming, considering we are doing very little to encourage new people to learn a trade. It's predicted that in 5 years, this will begin to show signs of becoming a crisis. Finding a plumber, electrician, or carpenter is going to get even more difficult than it already is. There are some programs in the works to address this problem and Ethan discusses them. **The bottom line is if you're a young person thinking about learning a trade, there is no better time than now.** [Listen to the full episode.](#)



On a lighter note, I spent an hour with decluttering and organizing expert, **Cas Aarsen**, talking about strategies for **tidying up our workshops**. The key is understanding *why* we feel the need to keep every little screw and rusty old tool we happen upon. [Listen to this episode](#) for some tips and advice for addressing a messy shop.



## Lego Table Saw

Well, this is pretty fun!



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## Reader Mail: The Cursive Controversy

[\(Read last month's issue here\)](#)

Hi Steve,

I love the sound of the bookshop. We have something similar here in Brisbane, Australia. It boasts having 1 million books in stock at all times—all of them secondhand with quite a large proportion of rare and collectible editions.

I do however lament the loss of cursive writing. Especially the effect its absence has had on the ability of younger people to focus. That style of writing required some degree of thought before pen was put to paper. It was necessary to actually think about what you were going to say, more particularly if you only had a limited space to write in: remember the old [aerograms](#)? They still exist apparently, at least that is what the woman at the local post office told me.

There is also a body of evidence which suggests that the use of the pen in cursive writing generated some very specific and useful neural pathways, involving concentration, developing thoughts as well as thinking processes. I learned to type at 60 words a minute. But to this day, if I am stuck on what I want to say/write I always go back to pen and paper.

So, I say bring back cursive writing in all of its glory and brain-improving benefits.

Cheers from Australia,  
Kevin

*There seems to be a recent interest in handwritten journals, probably for the reasons you wisely point out. — Steve*

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Hi Steve,

Your latest newsletter resonates. In grade 1 (or 2?) I was amongst the last to receive my pen—a “carrot” used to reward neat handwriting.

I printed all my college exams, and only use cursive to sign my name. It's very likely genetic—my adult son's scrawl is intelligible only to him.

Speaking of whom, we had lunch with him this weekend at a local bookstore/restaurant, seemingly unfazed by the e-world.

Cheers,  
Richard

*I have one cursive signature that I use for legal documents only. Anyplace else that asks for a signature, I draw a line or make an X. No joke! — Steve*

***Thoughts on this month's newsletter? Drop me a line by simply replying to this email.***

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## Reader Projects

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Hey Steve,

I wanted to share the gift project I worked on for Christmas. Several months ago I acquired some Ash and Mahogany and thought those two combinations would make some great mallets. I did a search on your YouTube channel and found the [video you did 10 years ago](#) on making a cool wooden mallet aka “Thor's Hammer.”

I made one for my brother-in-law, son-in-law, and soon-to-be son-in-law. After a few attempts, I finally felt good enough about my efforts to give them away...plus I was running out of time as Christmas was quickly approaching. Anyway, they were well received and appreciated. I know you did this video long ago, but it still inspires us novice woodworkers today.

Thanks for what you do!  
Joe



## Harmony Shoe Rack

An early project in [The Weekend Woodworker](#) is the Harmony Garden Bench. Darin took the design to another level and made a shoe rack! (Still harmonious!)



## Beefed-Up Basic Bench

Yes, of course it's a BMW, the project that launched thousands of new woodworking obsessions! Here's Mikey's version.

(Free plans are available [here](#).)

***Have you made something you want over a quarter million people to see in next month's newsletter? Just hit reply and send me a pic.***

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