



## Issue 40, October 2023

Hi Steve r,

Year after year, Halloween valiantly draws a line in the sand as the single stronghold preventing Christmas from encroaching any earlier into the year than November 1st. Of course, it's never entirely successful, but honestly, there's something magical when Costco brazenly sets up ceramic nativity sets alongside plastic witches' cauldrons in September.

At this very moment, it's an overcast, blustery afternoon, prompting Cobra's first seasonal race to his "Inclement Weather Platform." It's a particular platform he retreats to when the weather is even the slightest bit disagreeable and the wind dares to tousle his fur. Cats don't spend much time reflecting on the small joys of crisp air lol.



*Cobra on the Inclement Weather Platform.  
(Who remembers this from Lockdown Woodworking?)*

There's a certain romance to the shifting emotions many of us feel in early Autumn. We are still teased with warm days, yet the energy of summer is over. We might even feel a bit of melancholy reminiscing about lawn chairs and fireworks from a mere three months ago. On the other hand, we might begin to feel a budding excitement for the warm, festive glow of the holidays on the horizon.

A couple of years ago, I spent some time in Aspen in early October, marveling at those over-achieving party trees that the town's named for. Aspen trees have a fairly short burst of spectacular beauty before calling it quits for the winter. An entire forest of shimmering gold is a breathtaking display of nature's cycles of growth and rest.



### *Show-offs*

Many woodworkers are entering their busiest, most productive period of the year: Holiday decorations, Christmas gifts (and even more for those who sell their crafts). Before diving headfirst, it's worth reflecting on the woodworker's own cycle of growth and rest.

Woodworking begins with a single seed of curiosity. Maybe a craftsperson at a street fair caught your attention or you randomly stumbled upon a TikTok video of someone making a table. This early period is a fragile fleeting moment for most people. You may watch a few woodworking videos on YouTube and give up because it seems too hard or too expensive. For any number of reasons, most seeds will never sprout.

If you're determined, though, you might begin to spread roots and soak up more knowledge about the basics of woodworking—maybe even buy a few tools! This “sapling period” is still quite tenuous and can be easily trampled by discouragement when your initial attempt at making a simple project goes awry. Everything is new; buying and transporting lumber is challenging in unexpected ways, a miter saw is louder than you thought, damn there's a lot of sawdust, and how are you supposed to clamp a board with one hand holding the pieces together? Your first real-world, hands-on woodworking experience is so much different than the short, polished videos you've been watching.

Even fewer people have the resolve to persevere through adversity and allow their roots to truly develop, but if your hobby has matured this far, it's likely to flourish. Your branches will spread; you'll learn new skills, try new techniques, and continue to grow into a strong, confident woodworker. Yet you'll always need to weather storms and droughts, failed projects, creative blocks and the need to adapt to unexpected adversity. The key to growing and staying healthy is to respect the importance of rest.

In today's world, where people are obsessed with the need to #hustle, it's easy to forget that growth also needs periods of dormancy. We need downtime to reflect on what we've learned, the skills we've acquired, and the possibilities for the future. Embracing periods of rest not only fosters our personal growth but also rekindles our creative spirit, allowing us to approach projects with renewed vision and vigor. So even if it's just for a week or two before the hectic holiday season, let your leaves fall.



*Preparing for rest*

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Speaking of beginnings, I did something rare and amazing recently—I bought a new tool. If you’ve been reading this newsletter for any length of time, you’ll know that much of my woodworking is guided by a single

principle: intentionality. This principle is reflected in my choice of tools. Many years ago, I realized that my sense of fulfillment in woodworking wasn't bound to the assortment of tools I possessed.

I've often called this approach "minimalism" but I believe that "intentionalism" captures it more aptly. My aim isn't merely to have as few tools as possible. Rather, I strive to be very deliberate and intentional about everything that enters my shop, be it tools, hardware, or lumber. In doing so, I hope to curb unnecessary waste and consumption while gaining a deeper connection to the process of woodworking and the items I create. I've been developing this into a fully-fledged, integrated woodworking philosophy that I'll share with you in a forthcoming newsletter.

For some years, I've been without a bandsaw, and truthfully, I didn't miss it much. I think the main reason I've hesitated to get a new one is because of how fussy they can be. Changing the blade, tensioning, tracking, and adjusting for drift are always such hassles. (But that might just be me.) However, I've been getting the itch to make some small toys and holiday gifts lately: things that require a lot of curvy cuts that are not practical to do with a jigsaw.



*Cutting tight curves.*

I bought [this WEN 9" bandsaw](#). I've used a number of bandsaws over the years, all 14" or larger. (This is the distance between the blade and the column that supports the upper wheel, also called the throat.) Bigger saws are more powerful and capable of cutting through big, dense

pieces of wood, which is especially useful for resawing wide, thick boards into thinner boards. Somehow I got it into my head that this was the *main* reason to own a bandsaw. I can even remember reading articles in woodworking magazines from guys whose (\$10,000) bandsaws were their *primary* shop saws, largely replacing most of the cuts they made on table saws.

In the real world, it typically isn't easy to get good results when resawing wide boards on a consumer-grade, affordable bandsaw. You need to follow a line to make that cut: a fence won't do the job. You need a wide blade and it needs a lot of tension to avoid making a wedge-shaped cut. As a result, you either have a lot of sanding to do or another tool purchase is in your future: a benchtop planer. Resawing was something I avoided more and more, gradually using my 14" bandsaw as a sort of scroll saw.



*Good bandsaw test*

This little 9" saw seems to be exactly what I need. It's great for making tight curves on relatively small pieces of wood like its first project, my [skull candy dispenser](#). (And I'm not trying to sound like an influencer, but for \$150, the price was right!) It takes up very little space and is quiet. This a good example of understanding what I intend to use a new tool for and not overbuying. Anyway, I'll let you know my thoughts after giving it a workout over the coming months.

Have a wonderfully spooky October!

— Steve

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## Special Offer!

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If you'd like to make one or both of the following projects, the plans and cutting templates are available for **20% off** through the end of the month. Use this super secret promo code exclusive for *Notes from the Shop* readers: **NFTSOCT2023**.

Explore the growing library of premium and pay-what-you-can plans at [ShopWWMM](#).

This candy dispenser is such a fun project to make and definitely a great centerpiece for any Halloween party!



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I needed a stand for that new bandsaw, so I made this rolling shop cabinet. It's perfect for any shop and easy to modify if you need it a little taller or shorter. All of the instructions to build this are in the [plans](#).



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## Woodworking before we were even human

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Check out this [interesting archeological discovery!](#)



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## **Creative Culture: Now on YouTube!**

As far as hobbies go, a podcast is a pretty fun one. It's a lot of work, but it gives me the opportunity to talk to some amazing people. And now, if you prefer to watch moving pictures with your podcasts, I'm posting full video versions on the [Creative Culture YouTube channel!](#)



I recently spoke to **Stewart Hicks** about how **architecture** in the urban environment, even city skylines themselves, is unique because it tells stories.

And I pose the question, “Does the U.S. have a unique architectural style besides the hideous McMansion?”

I also had my friend **Alec Watson** on the show to chat about the most unlikely topic: **Pinball!**

We take a deep dive into the fascinating world of pinball. From its roots to modern evolutions, we discuss the art, design, history, and cultural impact of this iconic arcade game. Very fun episode!



Finally, I wanted to give you a heads-up for next week’s episode so you’ll know about it before Halloween. I interviewed **Nina Nesseth**, the author of ***Nightmare Fuel: The Science of Horror Films***. The book delves into the biological and neurological reasons behind why so many of us love to be scared and how horror filmmakers are experts at exploiting our monkey brains to give us cinematic thrill rides. If you like horror films or are simply a science nerd, you’ll love this episode. I was so thrilled to chat with Nina!



*Listen to Creative Culture on all podcast platforms or the [Creative Culture website!](#)*

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## Reader Mail

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“Steve,

The article on mistakes hit home. In two years of total novice work, I’ve learned to enjoy the mistakes, as that is when one has to be most creative. Just like life.

I made this somewhat unique kids Lego table, merging multiple plans. Crude, but kids found it perfect. It’s designed so two kids can work side by side on each top piece.

It has a two-piece, split top, which are slide on-off over divided compartments underneath. Dowel pins were placed through the side rails to lock tops in place when needed. I made it to be table-top, but it could be done as a table, but that was beyond me at this point.”



— Laird M.

*Lego unleashes creativity in so many woodworkers as there are countless fun ways to address this storage need! — Steve*

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“Hi Steve,

Just to say I love receiving your monthly newsletters and sitting down with a coffee to soak up the inspiration they impart. Ditto with your YouTube channels, from which I’ve learned and continue to learn heaps.

Thanks, and keep it coming!”

— Dermot A. (An Irishman living in Australia)

*That’s honestly been my goal with the newsletter... Something readable during a cup of coffee. You may recall my rant-not-rant about properly enjoying coffee earlier in the year lol. — Steve*

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“Hello,

Thank you for sharing these ideas. There are moments when “something” takes our hand or mind to other places and when we “return” we see something that was not supposed to be. In these moments I think, smiling, of the wonderful wabi-sabi philosophy—

nothing is perfect. And I tell myself, once again, that there is beauty in imperfection.”

— Valentin

*Love this.* — Steve

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“Hi Steve,

This was a fantastic email. You are a gifted writer/communicator, but more than that, you are very relatable. I am grateful for your calling to help us mere mortals!

I’m a newbie and very flawed WW with perfectionist-ingrained tendencies, and this email arrived just as I needed to hear your encouragement from a place of exceptional experience. I’m retired and want to embrace WW as a relaxing hobby, and you are the voice of reason in my head when I screw something up, which is pretty much every day at this point LOL. Your encouragement is available to us all 24/7, and on-demand! That’s a superpower, Steve.

Thanks for sharing your passion that is so real and palpable through all your forms of media.”

— Barb S.

*Thanks, Barb. Accepting our flaws is the first step to being proud of our accomplishments!* — Steve

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“I love and appreciate your comments about the mistakes we make doing woodworking (or anything, for that matter) being a part of life. Hopefully, we can learn from these mistakes, but they are inevitable.

The other day I was cutting baseboard moulding (their choice) to make

a frame for a twin headboard—simple 45-degree miter cuts. I cut the two vertical pieces—no problem, but then I cut the two horizontal pieces with the angles backward. A rookie mistake, but a costly one in terms of time and money (they had to drive a ways to get a new 8' piece). Then, just yesterday, I made the hole for a wooden dowel too tight, and the wood split as I tried to force it through the too-tight hole—the same scenario you described in this email.

Keep up the good work!! I love your down-to-earth style.”

— Larry B.

*I'm still salty about my dowel mishap last month. 🙄* — Steve

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

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## **Reader Projects**

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“After more weeks than I would care to admit, finally completed the Home Hardware Store. Just need to clear some wall space... and get it mounted. Lessons from this project... Measure twice, check twice and measure again. Don't rush, take breaks.” — Brad K.



*The Home Hardware Store is probably the most ambitious project in [The Weekend Workshop](#) course. It's not difficult... just, just... OMG, the drawers! — Steve*

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“I took your Weekend Woodworker course 2 years ago and have loved everything I’ve built. I’ve been promising my spouse a bar cabinet for about a year so I figured it was time to get it done. I found some old wood at a yard sale that they salvaged from the side of a house. It was painted black so I didn’t know what was underneath. That was the best surprise of all!

This is my first project without a pattern. I went very slow and worked carefully and I love how it turned out!” — Amy H.



*Built with no plan? Whoa, you're a natural. Stunning work! — Steve*

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“Long time viewer, started woodworking last summer. Made this cat scratcher/armrest table for my mom last weekend. Despite its flaws the cat loves it AND it covers up the spot he'd been scratching on the couch.” — Matt



*What a great solution! Once cats find a particular place to scratch, they're relentless. — Steve*

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“Always glad to read your newsletter as it’s so relatable! I’m a different person since I discovered your videos and classes. I would have never

attempted such a feat without all the training from your course projects.

So I thought I'd send you a pic of a recent project. My wife had been asking me about making her an entryway bench. I saw an end table similar to this in a store and thought, "I could make something like that as a bench." It was my first project in which I used Sketch-up to model beforehand and used a friend's planer to prepare the rough-cut hard maple. I am pretty proud of how it turned out." — Randy



*You know you're a woodworker when you see something at a store and your first reaction is, "Pfft, I could totally make that!" — Steve*

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***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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