



## Issue 42, December 2023

Hi Steve R,

Put on some **Christmas music**, grab a **cup of coffee**, and settle in for a few minutes because once again, it's time for the...

### **Annual Notes From the Shop** **Holiday Extravaganza!**



Last year, we kicked off the celebration with some seasonal anti-jokes. This year, I pulled up a dad joke website and mixed them up to create some postmodern, existential...

**~~ Dad Jokes with the Wrong Punchlines ~~**  
*(I think these are **definite** improvements.)*

**Why shouldn't you trust snowmen?**  
*You need to lighten up.*

**Who says "Oh, oh, oh?"**  
*Mary Christmas.*

**What should you expect at the end of Christmas Day?**

*The retail store.*

**What did one Christmas tree say to the other?**

*You smell carrots, too?*

**What did Santa say when his sleigh broke down?**

*It's too far to walk.*



## **Projecting Appreciation**

When I was seventeen, I worked at an old-school, two-screen cinema. It was a dream job for a kid obsessed with movies. I sold tickets and concessions and cleaned up after every show.

While the movies were playing, there wasn't a lot to do, so I often climbed upstairs to the small projection booth and held lengthy conversations with the projectionist—a grizzled old fellow named Gabe, who had been showing movies for over 30 years. He was a stocky semi-pro boxer in his younger days, but now wore dark-rimmed glasses and sported a bushy gray mustache. He always brought a brown bag lunch. The funny thing was, he didn't particularly like movies and rarely watched anything he showed. He was a technician.

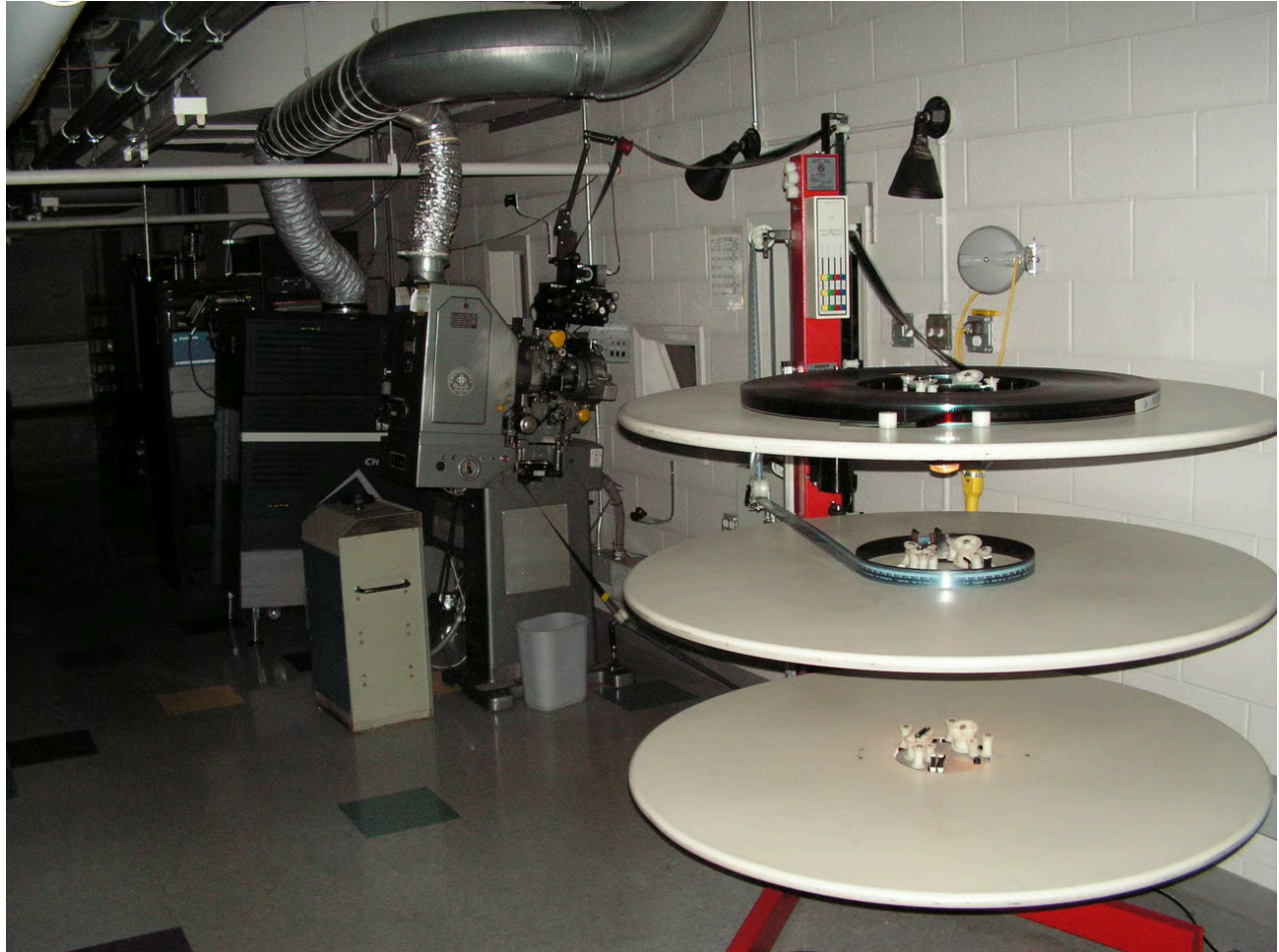


*Many fond memories at this theater*

A projectionist is a bygone career that has almost entirely been replaced by digital feeds eliminating the need for physical reels, but when I was seventeen, Gabe was the coolest guy I knew, with the coolest job. He loved telling tales about working in the grindhouse circuit during the 70s and his stint in grimy adults-only theaters. He enthralled me with recollections of how he was the guy called down to forcibly remove unruly movie-goers.

There was skill in projecting movies and maintaining the equipment that he took pride in. Each week, the feature films would arrive in six to eight canisters which had to be manually spliced together and threaded onto a large horizontal platter that would allow the whole movie to play without human intervention. But the real magic occurred during one-night-only showings of midnight movies when Gabe still had to change reels on the fly at just the right moment to appear seamless to the audience. It was amazing watching him work his craft, keeping a

decade-old, scratched print of *Dr. Butcher, MD* rolling before a rowdy, smokey crowd of kids who weren't really there to see a movie. He was like an unseen DJ providing background entertainment to the masses down below.



*Flatbed projection (Not a pic from my theater)*

His booth was dark and cramped, and I'm pretty sure I was the only visitor he ever received (at least long enough to sit in a little folding metal chair he would set up for me). One entire wall was nothing but industrial steel shelving units packed with years of film equipment, splicers, and tools for maintaining everything. Gabe loved demonstrating the use of these tools and telling stories about how he managed to hobble machinery together to keep everything running in our theater which must've been operating on paper-thin margins. I absorbed everything I could.

Sometimes I would go to the theater on my days off just to catch a free movie, hang out with Gabe, talk tools, and perhaps help him fix something. I would tell him about the ridiculous movies I made with my

friends. One day I brought in my own projector and screened for him a 10-minute epic called *The Case*. It may have been the first movie he had watched in years. He laughed hysterically at a scene where we tossed a dummy off a cliff, even though I didn't intend for it to be funny.



*Christmas at age 16 or 17*

Dayton James, the manager of the theater, was one of the kindest, gentlest souls I have ever known. He was a soft-spoken, dapper gentleman with a pencil mustache who always wore a suit and took great pride in this ramshackle theater. He was the kind of boss who was almost *too* nice, even turning a blind eye to neighborhood kids who would sneak their friends in through the back door behind the screen. "It's okay, let them be", he would say.

Unlike Gabe, Dayton *loved* movies. He was an encyclopedia of film history who adored Technicolor MGM musicals and the grand adventure epics of his youth. We would chat behind the concession stand while popping corn and stocking Thin Mints. He was always amused by my enthusiasm for low-budget horror films and would steer our conversations toward more genteel cinema without ever disparaging my tastes. He opened my eyes to a broader world of classic cinema and smiled curiously at my endless enthusiasm for splatter movies. We had wonderfully disjointed discussions about the exploding head scene in *Scanners* and Judy Garland's singing in *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

One day, Dayton pulled me aside and asked if I would be interested in a maintenance job working for the entire chain of theaters. It entailed being on call for about 20 theaters to repair popcorn machines, soda fountains, broken doors, and basically *any* type of repair a theater might need. I assured him that I had no experience doing any of these things. In his quiet voice, he said, "Gabe told me you have a knack for tools and are good at figuring things out. Plus, you have a van. I've already recommended you for the job."

By this time I was 18, with no real career prospects and this seemed like an incredible opportunity so I met with the guy who would become my boss and he immediately hired me. The very next day would be my last day working in a movie theater. It all happened so quickly. Gabe called me to his little projection sanctuary and gave me a very old set of ratchet wrenches which I kept and used for many years. "I've used these to fix a hundred projectors. I'm sure they'll come in handy in your new job." We shook hands and he sat back down on his folding chair. "Don't be a stranger, Steve, stop by and see me!"

“Of course Gabe, I love this place.”



Although I would show up at that theater occasionally to repair something, I never saw Gabe again. My visits with Dayton became strictly business and we never made time for discussions about our favorite movies. I had responsibilities and a schedule to keep.

I've often thought about the sequence of events that brought together my two passions, movies and working with tools, how those two men changed the course of my life, and how 40 years later I would still be using tools and making short "movies" as a career. I have a feeling Gabe and Dayton were proud of me, each providing their own special guidance during a particularly chaotic time of my life. They were probably happy to see me moving on to something potentially greater. Perhaps they didn't want me to become them, stuck working years in stagnant jobs. Maybe they felt unworthy of my admiration for them and their jobs. I'll never know. Today they are both long gone, but I always wished I had simply thanked them. I'd give anything to go back and visit Gabe's projection booth one more time and sit in his folding chair. I can still smell the oil, steel, and machinery. I can hear the droning of the

projector and see the magical flickering light. I wish I could see Dayton's playful wincing while I ramble on about the finer points of *Driller Killer*.

This time of year, we often hear advice that now is a great time to tell people you love them. While I heartily endorse that practice, it might be even more meaningful to simply tell special people in your life that you appreciate them. And "Thank you."

— Steve



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## Festive Discount on The Weekend Workshop + Bonus Plans!

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For some extra holiday cheer, [The Weekend Workshop](#) is now available for only \$85!

I've just added my Multi-Purpose Mobile Tool Stand to the course (a \$27 value) and from now until December 30th you can get access to 15 space-saving, organization-enhancing projects for the lowest price ever! Treat yourself and check it out!

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## SawStop

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*I'm so happy to have **SawStop** join us in the festivities again this year! As you know, Woodworking for Mere Mortals and The Weekend Woodworker share two core beliefs; that woodworking should be **affordable and safe**. The SawStop Compact Table Saw is the solution to both of these concerns. It's a high-quality saw with flesh-sensing technology for **less than \$1000**. Check it out!*

**Peace, love, and joy to you from SawStop!**

This holiday season, treat those close to you (yourself included!) to the big-in-a-small-package **SawStop Compact Table Saw**. With it, you'll get the **PEACE** of mind that comes with using the world's safest table saw. You'll **LOVE** the performance of a high-quality table saw with big capacities. And the **JOY** of getting all this for less than \$1,000 will keep you feeling happy and blessed for years to come.



The [SawStop Compact Table Saw](#), like all SawStop saws, features revolutionary technology that stops a spinning blade upon contact with skin in less than 5 milliseconds, making sure no life-altering injuries come to pass.

Weighing just 68 pounds, the CTS can be easily carried, loaded in a truck, van, or trailer, or stored on its side when not in use. Although compact, this saw packs a robust motor, 24-1/2" of rip capacity, micro-adjustable blade tilting, and onboard storage for all included accessories.

[Learn more here!](#)



## Holiday Movies for Every Taste

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Sure, you might be a woodworking powerhouse in the shop this December cranking out holiday gifts. (*Who even are you???*) But let's face it, after driving home in the dark after a long day at the office, you might not have the energy to step into a cold workshop.

Even your weekends seem to be filled with activities or social demands from family or friends, making woodworking a back-burner activity. You know what? That's perfectly fine. In fact, December is probably the *best* time to just take a break from woodworking, especially if you're the type who imposes your own pressure to produce.

January is right around the corner and there's plenty of ways to ease yourself back into the shop. We'll discuss them in the next issue. But for now, you have my complete approval to just curl up with a movie. Here are some of my recommendations that will appeal to a variety of tastes:

- Yes, I know there's a tired debate about whether or not ***Die Hard*** is a Christmas movie, but it's absolutely the movie I kick off the season with. Comedy, action, and a heartwarming story of friendship over a walkie-talkie. Yippee Ki-Yay! Plus, Hans Gruber is one of the great villains of cinema.



- Most rom-coms are weighted on the side of the rom, but ***Elf***, starring Will Ferrell and Zooey Deschanel, leans in on the com. It's a sweet blend of laugh-out-loud comedy with a cute romance. It's

hard to imagine anyone walking away from this movie and not feeling uplifted.

- Do you like musicals? Do you like zombies? Well, **[Anna and the Apocalypse](#)** is a charming little film with very catchy tunes and fun dance numbers. It's filled with typical zombie tropes, cartoonish characters and Anna uses a decorative catty cane to fight the undead. All-in-all, a delightful movie with likable characters and a bit of an unexpected ending.



- If you're feeling the need for a little more rom than com, I recently watched **[The Holiday](#)**, starring Cameron Diaz, Kate Winslet, Jude Law, and Jack Black in an unexpectedly restrained, romantic role. A very simple story about navigating relationships. Look for a funny scene with Jack Black in a video store with a Dustin Hoffman cameo.
- Finally, if you're the type who enjoys completely over-the-top, absolutely ridiculous Christmas mayhem, **[Christmas Bloody Christmas](#)** is what you need. This just came out last year and features buckets of blood and an evil, ax-wielding ROBO SANTA! Very niche movie and naturally, *I love it.* 🎬



## All Woodworking Plans Are 30% off!

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How ya doing so far? Still with me? I kinda think that this point in the newsletter would be a good time to include something else related to woodworking lol. If you are still gettin' it done in the shop (no pressure, remember) and looking for a fairly quick project that won't break the bank, give this toy truck a try.

Toddlers really like simple, open-ended toys that allow for imaginative play. This modular system is as basic and old-school as it gets. And you can make it from just a single 2x4. [Watch my new video here!](#)



If you'd like to make this or any other project, please take advantage of my Holiday Special at ShopWWMM. Now through the end of the month, **all premium plans are 30% off!**

Just head over to [ShopWWMM.com](https://ShopWWMM.com) and use promo code **HOLIDAY2023** at checkout!



**Creative Culture Conversations**

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Apparently, December is a busy time for emergency rooms with the spike directly attributable to the holidays. I recently had a conversation with Scott Dixon from [Everyday Home Repairs](#) talking about safety, and what kinds of potential hazards to look out for.



Check it out and find out if all those lights you're installing are safe!



I also had a fun time talking to Jenna Whiting from [Chainsaw Jenna](#), a prolific sculptor whose tool of choice is the chainsaw. We talked about her carving career and how she approaches the beautiful and amazing works of art she creates.

She also talks about the performative nature of chainsaw carving and the various saws she uses. This is an inspirational episode for any creative person who is trying to find meaning in their art as well as people needing a nudge to start their own business.

*Reminder: full video episodes of Creative Culture are [now available on YouTube!](#)*



## Reader Mail

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*Are you considering making any resolutions for 2024? What are some of your goals? Let me hear from you! **Just reply to this newsletter.***

I got a LOT of responses in regards to last month's issue and my thoughts about being more intentional when buying tools.

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“Today’s email is excellent. You are dead nuts on about what you said. And perfectly timed. (Now I can throw away HD’s Black Friday flyer. Big big smile.) Thank you!!!!” — Matt Stahlmann

*Resist the flyer influence lol — Steve*

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“Steve—thanks so much for posting this, I’m trying to pare down now and it really does get a bit emotional! One of my three older brothers actually made his own lathe (he was a millwright and a something engineer pardon my memory) but anyway, I would have loved to have this passed down to me. I never really knew what happened to his tools, I think they went to auction. Anyway, he painted that lathe an awful colour of green—fond memories. I did get a lot of my father’s tools and I made them wood display backers and they hang on the garage wall (a rusty old large adjustable wrench and a manual old hand drill that has a wheel that spins when you turn it—it still works and is a nice red colour, you can see I like colours too!

For a female, I’ve done an awful lot with the tools that I have but it’s mostly building walls, a pass-through, a finished basement, a deck and railings; you get the picture. I’m so proud of what I have managed to do—and what I’m still doing at 63.

I would really like to finish up ‘the building mode’ and get to finish things I like doing. I have a new router and two projects that require its use, but I want to try my hand at making boxes with plain edges and alternately with a routed edge finish, cabinets, fancy edges on coffee tables, side tables etc. Building mode dictates I have to finish outside and clear my spot for the car in winter, and we’ve already had our first snowfall. (Port Hope, Ontario, Canada). During this winter, I’ll be finishing up the build of a Murphy bed, finishing off the pass-through with a live edge piece of wood (I hope). Then I’ll be in catch-up mode, just like everyone else for

a change, door and trim painting and rooms of course, and maybe even get back to furniture refinishing.

I would have loved my brother's lathe! You have said to start woodworking by making a simple box—so I'm going back to the beginning this winter, Steve!

As always, stay safe and take care.” — Nina

*That handmade lathe sounds amazing. I suspect you would love turning on a lathe. I think it's the most artistic form of woodworking. Be sure to send pics of the box you make! — Steve*

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“I really enjoyed this newsletter...lots of words to live by! I am going to disagree with the purpose of some tools, though.

I too, still have my dad's Shopsmith. I am 70 now and still remember him using it. It's 'vintage', manufactured in the early 50s. I am not using it...a little afraid to. I'm sure the wiring all needs to be redone after all these years, but it still serves a purpose in my life. Just maybe not the original purpose. When I see it, even in my storage unit, there is a huge flood of memories. It makes me feel good! And I think that's a wonderful purpose. It's a tangible thing that my dad has touched and treasured and used to create all kinds of things.

I agree that it being used for woodworking again would be ideal, and it will....after I'm gone. Please don't think that we can have only memories and not some 'stuff'. It's ok! So maybe just keep some of your dad's 'stuff' and the storage unit. Going to mine is like visiting old friends. I get a lot more enjoyment from that than spending a zillion dollars to visit Disneyland or attend a Taylor Swift concert!! LOL” — Cheryl B

*What? You're not a Swifty? It's certainly valuable to spend time reflecting on our material possessions and it sounds like you have.*

— Steve

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“Steve—One of your best newsletters ever! Especially your link to Cara Nicole and your AI spoof! Trick or Treat. Back to woodworking!” — DJ

*I'm glad you watched that Cara Nicole video. Her channel is great. Check out her recent video on [How Discounts Keep You Poor](#). Just in time for the holiday buying frenzy. — Steve*

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“I have been really enjoying your newsletters. I can almost hear your voice when I read them as if you were reading them aloud. This one really struck a chord with me. Another of my hobbies is making handmade greeting cards, scrapbook pages and the like. Basically, anything involving pretty paper. There is a joke among paper crafters that buying tools and supplies is its own hobby, separate from actually making things! And of course, there's always organizing said tools & supplies. That joke is not always far from the truth.

I have been suffering from tendonitis for the past several weeks, & the wrist brace I have to wear has put the kibosh on woodworking for the time being. (Hard - & dangerous - to wield wood & power tools with a fairly inflexible wrist.) Thankfully it is only temporary! So tonight I sat down with your newsletter & lived a little vicariously, “listening” to you reading it. I totally agree with your assessment of analyzing what we need & how we work BEFORE shelling out the big bucks for that shiny new tool. I've applied that philosophy for a while with paper crafting, so it's not hard for me to extend it to woodworking.

Thank you for sharing your insights. Hope you have a wonderful day!”  
— Andrea D

*Thanks, Andrea, It's much more common to experience regret after buying an item rather than regret for not buying an item. — Steve*

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“I really like your emails. You have a unique, quirky sense of humor, plus you make a lot of sense. I have a small shop that’s hard to move around in and would love to have a cabinet saw, new hand tools, and a floor model bandsaw, but I can only afford to buy when I absolutely have to have it. I save a lot of money that way. So, I make use of what I have on hand. I also learned how to make do with what I have. I believe that’s how I learn, by making mistakes. It makes me a better woodworker. More expensive tools don't make a better woodworker, learning with what you have does.

Take care and keep sending your newsletters; I enjoy them.” — Ed B

*Exactly. The enjoyment of woodworking is rarely tied to the money spent on tools. —Steve*

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“My dad passed away last December. I, too, have tools in my garage (his old garage) that he left me that I am loath to give up. A big ‘ol band saw, a Ryobi scroll saw, etc. I am only 3 years into my woodworking hobby, so I don’t know if I need them yet. I really want to try them at least a couple of times first!

But, I’m grateful for this email to remind me that if I don’t need them, giving or selling them to someone who will use them will honor Dad more than having them sit and collect dust in his/my garage. You’re making me cry, Steve! But it’s a good, grateful cry.

Thanks for these thoughtful emails.” — Kat S

*The guy who bought my dad’s old lathe was so excited to tell me the plans he had for it. That would make my dad happier than me keeping it unused in a storage unit. — Steve*



*Christmas at age 4. What a weird turtleneck.*

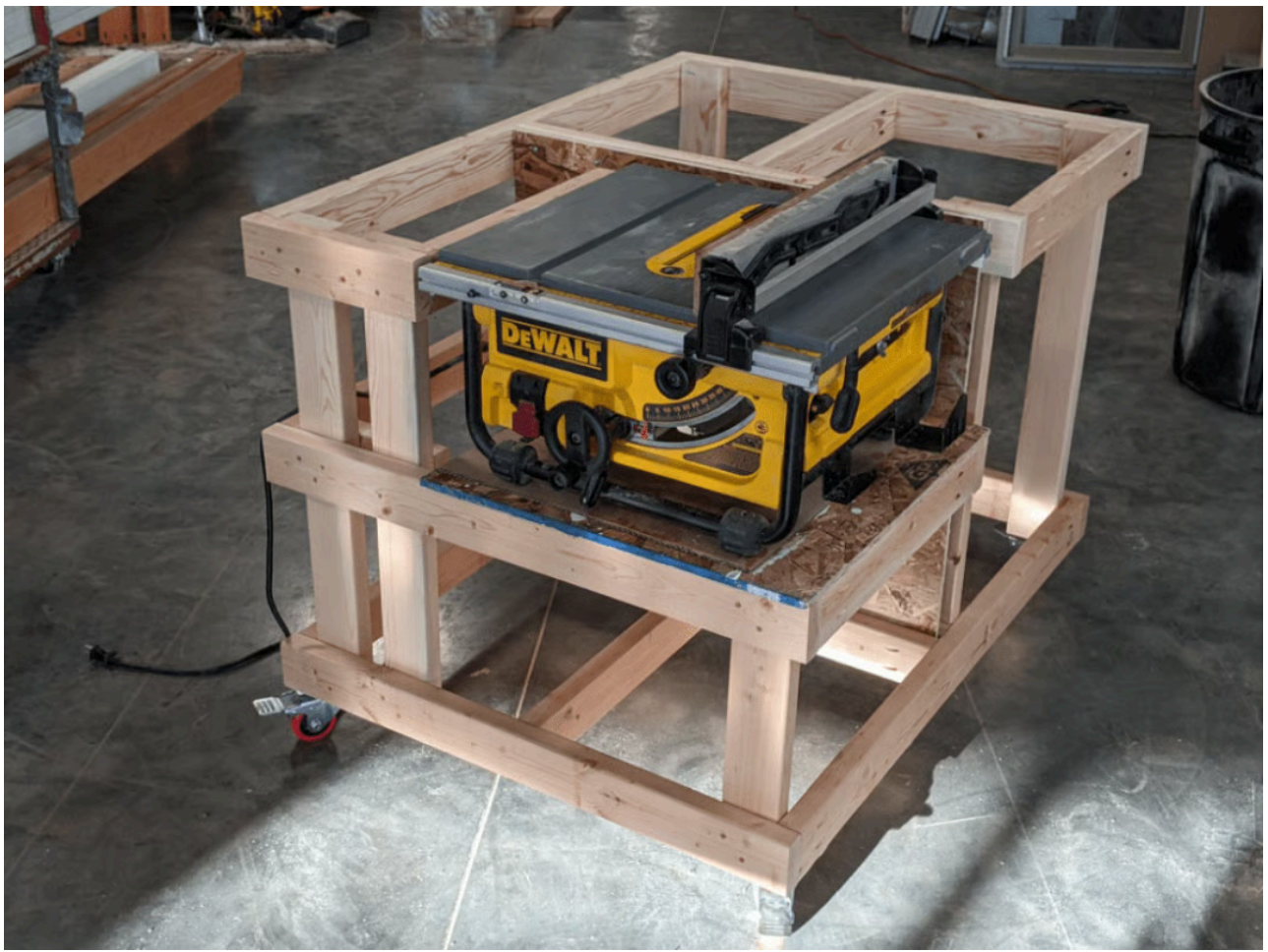


*Thoughts on this month's newsletter? Got a story to tell? Just want to say hi? Drop me a line by simply replying to this email.*

## **What you're working on**

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First, I wanted to share this table saw station from Daniel because it's not finished: he still needs to attach some plywood for the top and shelves. There's so much value to seeing the actual framing of this project that you wouldn't appreciate with a completed workstation. By examining this construction, you'll be able to build any kind of shop stand or workbench.



If you live in a place where you have a wood-burning fireplace, you're probably all set for the winter, but you might want to consider building this wood storage shed next spring! And can we take a moment to appreciate Andrew's wood stacking skills?



Like I've said time and time again, almost every project is just a variation on a box or a table. Learn to make boxes! There is no limit to the amazing ways you can make small boxes. I like small boxes. Yes, small boxes are good. Here's a really cool small box from Matthew with an Alice in Wonderland white rabbit on top.



***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!***



**Thank you!**

As we wrap up the year, I wanted to thank you for taking the time to read *Notes from the Shop* each month and for being a part of this woodworking community. When I started this newsletter a couple of years ago, I had no idea that it would become such an important part of my life. I thoroughly enjoy writing an essay every month and sharing some of my thoughts with you.

But more importantly, this newsletter has become a form of therapy for me due to the interaction I receive from you. 😊 I am always inspired and encouraged by your heartfelt stories about how this creative hobby has affected your lives. Keep those stories and feedback coming! Send me anything just by replying to this email. Have a wonderful holiday season and we'll meet up again in 2024!

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