

Issue 45, March 2024

Hello, friends!

Before you ask, yes, I'm still a little salty about that 49ers Super Bowl loss. Of course, I realize it's nothing more than a multi-billion dollar corporate event performed by hired-gun multi-millionaires who have no particular affinity to the city they represent, but still...Brock Purdy! Amirite?

Also, if you didn't receive last month's newsletter, it's because we had some technical issues. You can read it online [here](#).

February was a challenging month, involving a number of personal matters that came crashing together at once, but there were also many moments of joy. I made new friends, strengthened existing friendships, and began to experience a newfound freedom in matters of art and creativity. It fascinates me how low periods in life can be the catalysts for growth and renewal—the wildfire that leads to a natural reset for the forest. Such is the balance of the universe.

Sticking with my set of January intentions, I freed up time in February

for free time, exploring artistic pursuits that do not rely on pleasing an algorithm. As someone who's nearly 16 years into producing "content," it's been a liberating experience to create something without filming any of the process. Here are a few observations:

1. I find myself having to relearn the personal satisfaction of making art.
2. I have to remind myself that it's okay to produce something for myself.
3. It's difficult for me to create without thinking about how each step will be perceived by others.
4. I'm unlearning my conditioning to always think about a project's overall "narrative" while I'm creating it.
5. If a project isn't going as intended, I can scrap it. This has been a wonderful time of experimentation that the demands of social media don't leave room for.

So far, I've made a couple of simple art pieces out of wood, using engraving and woodburning techniques rather than "building" a project or making something as practical as a coffee table. I'll most likely be sharing those on Patreon. (*Just now I thought of sharing progress pics on Patreon too. No...resist the urge! Set the camera down! Break the "everything is content" habit!*) Anyway, follow me on [Patreon](#) to see *completed* pieces...at some point.

I've also found a renewed interest in photography, which has sparked even more ideas for themed collections of my work. If you follow me on [Instagram](#), I've been sprinkling some of these photos into my story feed.

Last week, I bought an Instax Mini—an instant camera. You know, like a Polaroid. It's completely analog; you just drop in a film cartridge, point, and shoot. There is no screen, USB port, exposure settings, or anything. I presume there is some sort of digital technology under the hood, but from user experience, it's a basic plastic box.

The small viewfinder poses a parallax problem: since you aren't looking through the lens, the framing is always a little off. The film is ISO 800,

which isn't great for bright sunlight, and the flash fires with every shot. I presume it's largely intended for selfies, so it's equipped with a ridiculously tiny curved mirror next to the lens to help position yourself in the frame. (I love this simple solution). The pictures cost about 70 cents each and turn out amazingly horrible compared to the stunning 4K phone resolution we're accustomed to.



Naturally, I love this camera.

With all of the technology stripped away, I take my time to plan each shot before pressing the button. Every photo I take has intention. Despite the irony of calling this an “instant” camera, it takes about 90 seconds for the image to slowly appear on the print, and the anticipation is kind of exciting. There's a grainy quality that is unmistakably *film*, the flash causes backgrounds to fade into mysterious black voids, and the framing is always slightly askew. There's a weird and otherworldly analog look to the images that I find very appealing.

But the best part is that every photo is unique. There isn't even a negative for reproduction. The camera records a single moment in time and produces a physical thing that can't be duplicated. I mean, sure, you can take a picture of it with a phone or scan it, but that's like buying a poster of the Mona Lisa from the gift shop or sharing your boring video

clips of the Imagine Dragons concert you saw last night. You had to be there.



The digital reality of a distorted, analog view of my shop. You had to be there.

In this age of digital perfection, it's healthy to unburden ourselves from expectations of what our work *should* look like, especially when it comes to woodworking. We see beautiful pieces of furniture people make and post on social media and begin to think these are standards that we will never achieve.

Instead, let's embrace the flaws we see in our own woodworking by reminding ourselves that whatever we make is a snapshot of this moment in our life. I used to look at old projects I made with a sense of embarrassment at how bad they were, but I've only recently started to understand that the bulky, out-of-proportion nightstand I made in 1995 is a unique record of myself at that time which can never be duplicated. It was me producing the best work I was capable of and that's beautiful.

By the same token, we need to remind ourselves that the projects we make *right now* represent the best of ourselves. They might seem a bit awkward, but that's what makes them so cool. Allow yourself to be that unique instant photo. 😊

As we march into March, many woodworkers are rediscovering their shops after a cold winter break. Like anything, starting back in on something you haven't done in a while often requires taking a single step. The longer you're away from the gym, the easier sitting on the couch becomes. If you've been trying to take that first step back into your workshop and find yourself sitting and scrolling (maybe reading emails kinda-sorta about woodworking), here's a 12-step program to get you moving.

1. Start a stopwatch on your phone.
2. Set your phone down in the house. Do not put it in your pocket.
3. Walk into your shop naked. Not literally—you know, just without your phone.
4. (Well okay, if you want to walk naked into your shop, I won't judge.)
5. Clear up the workspaces in your shop. Workbenches and other areas may have become cluttered with OPS (Other People's Stuff) or even YOS (Your Own Stuff) over the past few months. I'm not suggesting you completely straighten up your shop or fully declutter. The goal is to get back to woodworking. This is one of the few times when I heartily recommend sweeping things under the rug. Take everything that doesn't belong—that nutcracker you intended to repair “right after Christmas,” that package of AA batteries that scattered over your workbench, the kids' snow sleds—and...
6. Shove all of that crap into a pile in a corner. Do it now. Defer putting this stuff away until later. Just one big happy pile of disappointment.
7. There. Look at all those workspaces you've reclaimed! I'll bet it only took about 10 minutes, but you don't know for sure because you left your phone in the house.

8. Grab whatever pieces of scrap wood you have; they don't have to match.
9. Cut out 4 equal-sized squares.
10. Glue them or screw them together to form the four sides of a box. Butt joints (hehe) are fine but if you're a fancy lad or lass, knock yourself out making whatever joinery sparks joy.
11. Measure one opening and cut a board to fit. Glue or tack it into place. Sand everything smooth. There, you just made a useful thing. You could make a lid, but there's a lot you can do with an open box.
12. Predict how much time you just spent in the shop, then go back into the house and compare your guess with the stopwatch you set. Did you spend more or less time in your shop than you thought?

Time marches forward (into March?) regardless of what we do. You could've sat in that overstuffed chair for the length of time displayed on that stopwatch, but instead, you spent that same amount of time making a freakin' box! As I get older, I find greater meaning in being more purposeful with my dwindling time. Sure, we all have downtime and there's nothing wrong with scrolling through Instagram to relax, but it's worth reminding ourselves that we have the tools to create things. We need to use them because the clock keeps ticking.

—Steve

Small-space Kitchen Pantry (*Newsletter Discount!*)



I designed this storage cabinet to take up very little space while holding a lot of stuff. I have a very small kitchen and this is a great solution for storing spices and things I don't have any room for elsewhere. I made this with a mix of half-inch and three-quarter-inch plywood, as well as solid cherry for the top and trim.



Get a complete set of detailed plans [here](#)! Use code **MARCH2024** all month long for a **30% discount** on this project.

Creative Culture Conversations

I hope you'll check out the latest episode of Creative Culture! It's a look into historical fashion with the talented [Vasi Birchwood](#), who meticulously crafts her own historical attire and wears it daily.

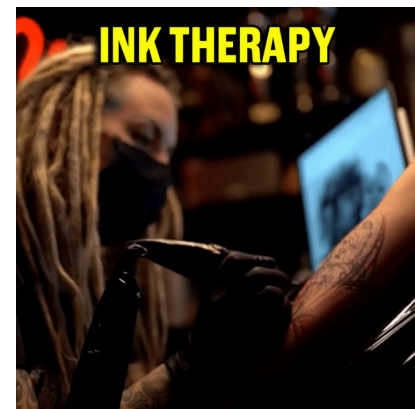
We explored Vasi's journey into hand sewing and her passion for bringing the clothing of the working-class Victorian era—and her Volga Tatar heritage—to life

Moreso, I think you will enjoy her philosophy on life and living intentionally.



Thinking about getting a tattoo? Curious about the process? Wonder why everyone seems to have one these days? What if you get one and regret it? I talked with [Electric Linda](#), a master tattoo artist hailing from Norway, about tattoo art.

With over two decades of experience, Linda brings a rich tapestry of stories, insights, and artistic wisdom to the table. Known for her dynamic and colorful photorealistic tattoos, as well as being a specialist in coverups, Linda has won over 50 international tattoo awards.



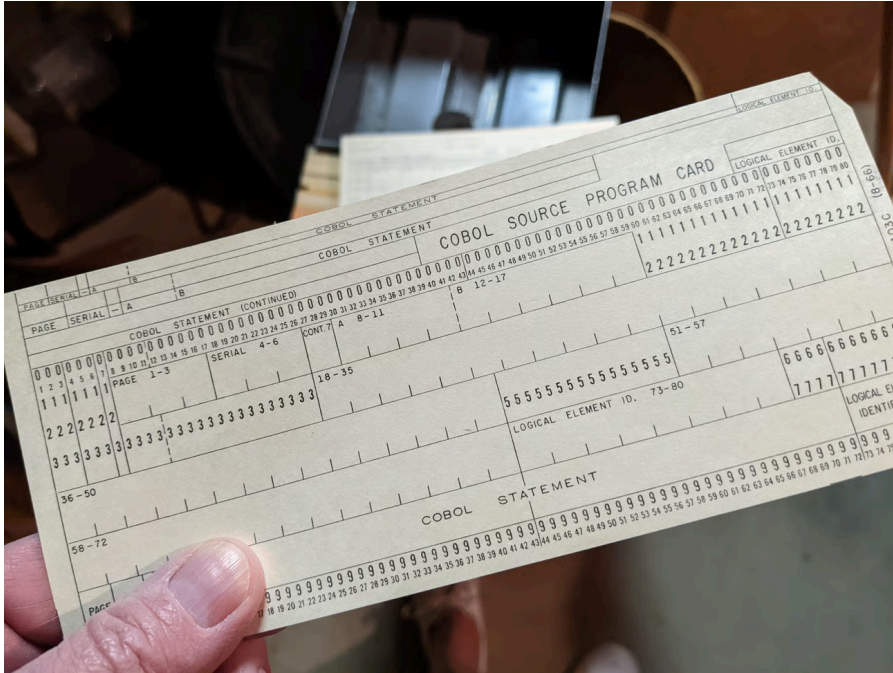
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Reader Mail

“Wow, you hit me in memory lane with your dad. I started programming in the 1960s with punch cards. And that green bar tractor feed paper. My daughter’s school loved me. We had a ton of that available from

work so lots of kids drew their hearts out on that leftover paper.” —Ed F.

Oh yeah, punch cards. I remember bringing those to school for making flash cards. —Steve



I found a stack of these in my dad's workshop

“Just wanted to say thanks for sharing those memories of your dad. I got a little emotional reading it, it was really heartwarming. I want my kids to think of me fondly like this, to feel supremely loved by me in spite of my brokenness and imperfection.

I have followed your channel for a long time and learned so much from your videos, but I also appreciate these personal reflections. They mean a lot.” —Brian H.

When I was a kid, my dad snapped at me once to leave him alone when I offered to help with something he was building. I must've caught him at a bad time. I don't remember the incident, but it weighed on him enough to apologize to me 30 years later. None of us know what we're doing as parents. —Steve

“I wouldn’t normally respond to a Newsletter, but the story about your dad and his influence on your passion for woodworking touched me, and made me think of my father, who passed away a couple of years ago.

My dad worked in sales, marketing, and advertising in the pharmaceutical business, but his passion was Rally Car Racing. Naturally, he was always making repairs and improvements and my brother and I got to “help”, even at a young age. Moreover, being in a one-salary household meant he needed to fix things when they broke.

He was analytical like your dad, and we learned how to take apart lamps, appliances, and other household items to repair them and put them back together. I will be 60 years old this year and I have learned most of the trades (basic construction, electrical, plumbing, drywall) in addition to anything to do with wood. I hope I am an inspiration to my kids too. Keep up the good work. You are adept at explaining and are a good presenter.” —Steve G.

It’s fascinating how much insight we gain from our parents that we don’t even realize until we’re much older and can reflect on it. —Steve

“I had a good laugh when I saw the dot matrix paper in your recent newsletter. I STILL have a partial box of it in my garage. It is the perfect paper to doodle out an idea, check my math or draw out a scale drawing of my current project when it just doesn’t seem to be working out right.

I’ve had to save it from the trash a couple of times over the years as the wife has tried to declutter our lives. Thanks for the newsletters and videos. They have both been inspirations to me.” —Chris M.

I wonder if programmers 40 years ago would have even imagined that we would still be using those reams of paper in 2024! —Steve

What You're Working On

"I finished the Weekend Woodworker course a few months ago. I guess I should post some photos in the FB group now that I'm on it. I'm also a couple of projects into the Workshop course. Here are four that I've completed so far. Just put the wheels on the multi-purpose mobile tool stand.

I really enjoy your courses and, perhaps more importantly, your approach to the whole garage woodworker universe." —Stephen W.



Wow! I feel like I'm looking at my own shop! Great job on all these projects! —Steve

"Finished finishing the parlor bookcase, scaled to 26" x 18". Giving to a friend. As noted in a previous post, I decided to paint. They wanted a bright color so that's what they got! The shelves are supported with the metal pins that IKEA shelves come with.

I'm officially done with the course! But I'm not going away." —Bob S.



Congratulations on completing The Weekend Woodworker. I love brightly-painted furniture! —Steve

“The Half Lap Handi-Carts are done and in use. This is my third project between the two Weekend Woodworker courses.” —J.D



The Half-lap Handi Cart may be my favorite project ever! —Steve

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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