



## Issue 47, May 2024

Hello, friends!

Thank you for your kind responses to last month's newsletter. It's always heartening to read your feedback. Surprisingly, I didn't get a single response in Haiku form 😊. I was pleased, however, that a few of you noticed that the title of the April issue had 17 syllables. I will issue your official nerd cards later (haha). Remember, I read all of your notes and responses to this newsletter so if you have anything to share, just reply to this email!

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After an inordinate amount of rain this winter, colorful blossoms are springing up everywhere and California is green as we await the browning to come. I like to stroll through my backyard with a cup of coffee in the early morning and witness rapid change. Volunteer poppies have claimed a bit of ground but will soon disappear, African daisies are shooting bursts of fireworks, and the raised beds have decided to sprout a few onions from the compost, reminding me that I should have planted tomatoes by now. It's a wistful time of year because I know that soon the natural desert landscape will return, muting this fleeting display of color.



*Poppies flexing*

It's not for everyone, but I highly recommend *xeriscaping*; creating a sustainable, low-maintenance yard with indigenous plants. It's incredibly freeing to get rid of a lawn's insatiable demand for attention and resources, and embrace the beauty of the seasonal changes found in your local ecology. It's very grounding, pun intended lol.



*Natural grasses, not lawn*

Change can be as showy as blooming poppies in the spring, or more subtle like the graying of an aging fence or maturation of a landscape over years.

Think back to your first attempt at making a woodworking project and list a few of the ways your woodworking has changed. You've probably upgraded your tools and your skills have improved. Instead of joining two boards with a hammer and nails, you now build projects featuring splined miter joints. You buy rough-cut lumber and mill it into perfectly square boards of whatever thickness you need using a jointer and

planer. Maybe you even design your own furniture now. Yes, you have changed. Everyone will praise your obvious growth as a woodworker. Congratulations, you are a poppy!

But is this growth or just the natural evolution that any maker will experience as we become more familiar with and proficient at our chosen craft?

Moving into a bigger shop or upgrading tools represents change, not necessarily growth. Even skills are things anyone can acquire and collect over time. Growth is related to change but is often more nuanced, less visible, and difficult to measure. We have to define it ourselves.

I'm not trying to split hairs here. It matters because growth is what will sustain us for the long haul and keep us woodworking. *Growth* fuels our souls. *Change* is something we adopt or adapt to.

That's not to say that growth is vague or mystical. Here are five practical ways to think about your growth as a woodworker that no one but you will appreciate:

1. **Growth is moving forward.** Mistakes are great opportunities to flex your creativity. Spend time in your head imagining possible solutions to correct the groove you cut in the wrong position or the boards that don't join squarely. Maybe walk away from the project and look at it with fresh eyes in the morning. When you come up with a fix, you'll feel proud and possibly a bit amused by it. How would you have handled the problem on your first project? Probably with frustration and a step backward or by starting over. Approach everything by thinking forward. Problems don't subtract from a project, they just add an additional step. The next time you solve a problem, take the time to acknowledge how clever you are.
2. **Growth is not defined by the difficulty or complexity of your projects.** Any woodworking project is simply a set of small steps. There is nothing preventing a new woodworker with basic skills

from tackling a huge project; I've seen many newbies build armoires or dressers quite well, simply by following plans. It's similar to cooking. You can make a decent Biryani (I love Indian food!) just by taking your time and following directions, but think about how a master chef can combine two ingredients—water and flour—to create pasta like you've never experienced. Let's say you made a simple charcuterie board a year ago. If you make it again today, there's a strong likelihood it will look no different to most people, but to you, it will be noticeably more sophisticated because you have grown more confident in refining the individual steps.

- 3. Growth is being unapologetic about your work, no matter your skill level.** As our skills, techniques, and tools change, it's tempting to look back at our earlier projects with a bit of embarrassment. They fit together horribly. They're clunky and crude. We are so much better now. We don't even want anyone to see them. If people comment on an end table we made five years ago, we feel the need to point out its flaws and how much we dislike it: *"I need you to understand that I have grown since then and am much better now!"*

Think back to how you felt when you built that end table five years ago. I'll bet you were elated to bring it into the house. You showed it off to everyone. You were proud. That version of you was beautiful, so don't disparage the person you were. Being the best version of yourself *right now*, while embracing how you've changed is a more honest indicator of growth.

- 4. Growth is noting the things you're good at while humbly admitting the areas you need to improve.** At some point in your woodworking journey, you'll reach a point where you feel like you aren't making things at the level you think you should. This is mostly brought on by comparison, the thief of joy. Don't allow social media or anyone else to shape how you think about your own work. There is no "should" when it comes to any art or craft. Your experiences and the path you are on are unique. (Besides, most people on social media are just flexing for clicks lol.) You will

discover sticking points in your craft and areas you want to improve, but do so because you are curious about them rather than thinking there's a roadmap you must follow and milestones to reach. Balance this by assessing the things you're especially good at and know that you'll be adding to that list as you grow. Appreciate the beauty and skill of people with less experience than you, as well as those with more.

**5. Growth is defining success beyond the finished project.** This is a central theme to my entire woodworking philosophy. If you're new to this newsletter or my vibe, listen up: *woodworking is only partially about building things*. Sure, when you discover woodworking, you probably just think it's fun to produce things with your hands. You may have an innate, burning desire to simply create. That's great, but is creation enough? What's the goal? Would you be content to build a project, and then take it apart? Would you write a poem and then delete it? Of course not, the completed project represents a physical record of your hand and mind. So it's only natural that we use our projects as a measure of our growth.

Each new creation is certainly a success story to be appreciated, but a deeper way of viewing success is finding meaning in the process of building that project. What was your energy and enthusiasm like while you were in the shop? Did you call upon a trick you learned to make a cleaner cross-cut? Were you so engaged at times that you lost track of time? Did you savor the process and tiny accomplishments? Were you thinking less about the finished piece and more about experiencing the present moment? If you felt any of these things, you are beginning to look at success in ways that only you can define. And that's the difference between a maturing landscape and a springtime poppy.

—Steve

*P.S. If you enjoy movies, I've been writing reviews for new horror films at*

Shade Studios. If you're interested (I know this will appeal to only a handful of you) [check them out here!](#)

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## **Springtime Planter Box**

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Speaking of growing, how about building this planter box for your deck or patio? The idea behind this is that you don't have to go shopping for any special-sized pots to set inside. A regular 5-gallon bucket, widely available at hardware stores and home centers, will work perfectly. Just drill a couple of holes in the bottom for drainage. [Download plans to build your own!](#)



## **Drillbit Case**

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Here's another fun weekend project to help take you one more step towards shop organization! I designed this case to be large enough to store a ridiculous amount of drill bits lol. If you don't think you have a lot of bits right now, just wait a few years! [Download plans here.](#)



**Special offer from Kreg:**  
**\$50 discount for newsletter readers!**

*I'm so happy to have Kreg joining us this month! Many of you will know they've been a supporter of Woodworking for Mere Mortals for more than a decade. They make solid, practical tools at reasonable prices...something I'm all about. I've personally used this saw track*

and it works great! [Please take a moment to check it out here](#) and save 50 bucks! —Steve



**Kreg**

## SAVE \$50 ON THIS CROWD-PLEASING CUTTING SYSTEM

Rated 5 stars for its reliability, precision cutting, and user-friendly features, the Kreg® Adaptive Cutting System Saw + Guide Track Kit is the game-changing tool for making straight, smooth, splinter-free cuts in solid wood and sheet goods.

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— DAN S.

### [The Kreg Tool Adaptive Cutting System Saw + Guide Track Kit](#)

revolutionizes woodworking with its precision and versatility. This system offers unparalleled accuracy, making it ideal for both beginners and seasoned craftsmen. The guide track ensures straight, clean cuts every time, eliminating the need for clamps or measuring tools. Its adaptable design allows for seamless adjustments, accommodating various materials and cutting angles effortlessly. With its intuitive setup, users can quickly master intricate cuts without sacrificing quality or safety. The ergonomic design reduces strain and fatigue, promoting comfortable, prolonged use. Whether tackling large-scale

projects or intricate detailing, the Adaptive Cutting System excels in delivering consistent results with minimal effort. Its efficiency saves time and material, maximizing productivity while minimizing waste. Invest in the Kreg Tool Adaptive Cutting System Saw + Guide Track Kit, now available at an **unbeatable price of \$349.99 (\$50 off)!**

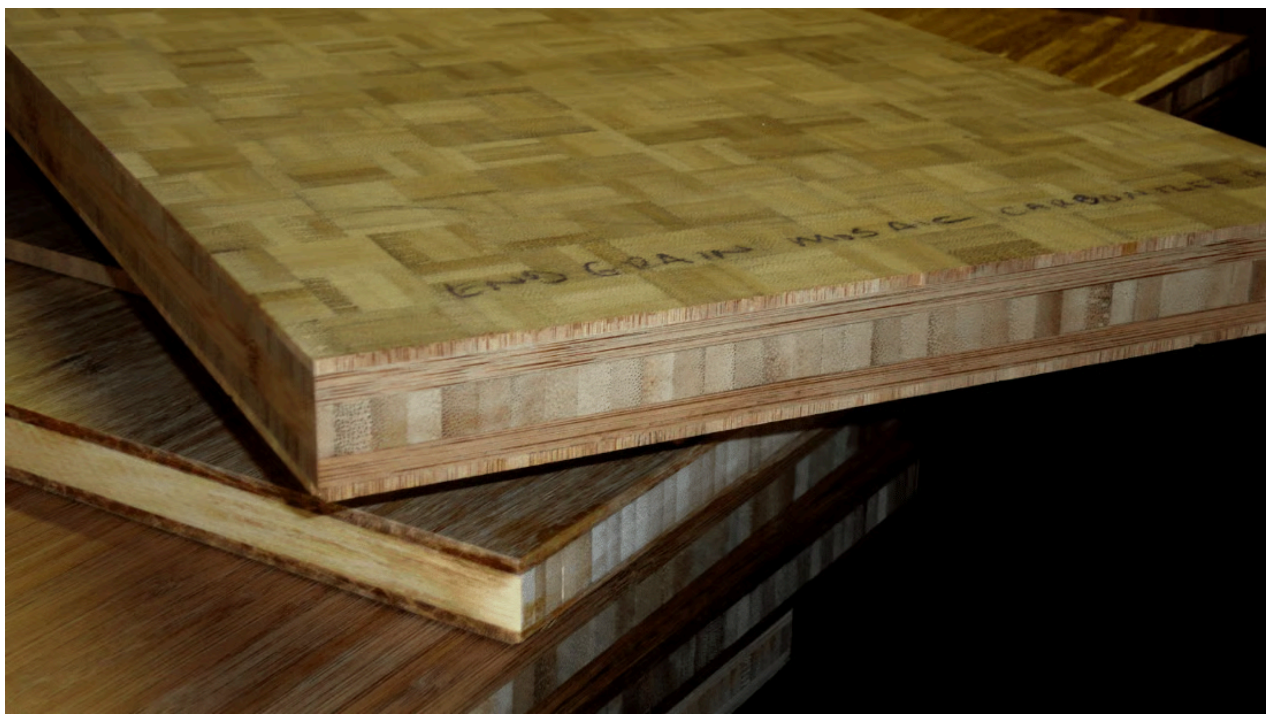
## Can bamboo replace paper? How about wood?

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I ran across [this video](#) the other day about the many uses of bamboo, but they never mentioned it as a building material beyond using the stalks as scaffolding. 12 years ago, a viewer sent me some bamboo plywood. It was an interesting material to work with and came in all different styles. It did take a little finesse if I recall, since it's a grass and much more fibrous than wood, but it's a beautiful material nonetheless. One of the projects I made was this banana stand.



*Bananas last longer if they are stored this way*



*Bamboo plywood*

But anyway, the future of bamboo seems very promising. Check out [the video](#) and let me know if you have any thoughts. It's pretty interesting to see how it's harvested and transformed into paper and other products.

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## **Creative Culture Conversations**

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It's been a fun month on the podcast with two very different interviews!

**The Art of Cocktails:** First, I talked to mixologist and professional bartender [Leandro Di Monriva](#) about the art of mixing cocktails and what it takes to be a bartender. We chatted about everything from things that annoy bartenders to the tools of the trade.



If you've been thinking about setting up a home bar, Leandro shares tips including the spirits you'll want to have on hand, the tools you'll need, and the types of glassware. And yes, we learn if James Bond was correct in ordering a martini "shaken, not stirred" or if that's nonsense!

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Why Does Every Big Name in Metal Talk to Elliott Fullam? Next, I had a fun conversation with [Elliot Fullam](#), a multi-talented artist who began his career at age nine. From interviewing rock legends to acting in horror films and crafting his own music, Elliot's journey is as diverse as it is fascinating.

We explore the unique blend of horror and metal, discuss the evolution of media production, and share personal stories of meeting icons like James Hetfield. Whether you're a horror movie fan, a metal enthusiast, or a creative soul, you need to listen to this episode! 😊



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

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## Reader Mail

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*I heard from some of you regarding U.S. laws that might be going into effect requiring flesh-sensing technology on table saws. There seems to be a lot of strong opinions, both pro and con. One thing I want to point out is that most of the articles about tablesaw safety often cite a very large number of “tablesaw injuries” without differentiating the types of injuries. Yes, flesh-sensing technology has a proven track record for preventing loss of fingers, and that’s fantastic, but the majority of injuries occur from kickback, something this technology won’t prevent. As a reminder, kickback is no joke and can send you to the emergency room.*

*Please remember to always use a riving knife on your saw and observe all safety practices. Watch this video on [The Table Saw Golden Rule](#) BEFORE turning on a table saw. —Steve*

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“Great read, as usual. As far as the government mandating further safety requirements for table saws, I must say I absolutely do NOT

support that.

There's no question about the potential harm due to table saw use. I suppose it comes down to a philosophical question, that is, my personal responsibility versus my desire to be protected from danger/harm. No one wants to suffer a serious injury of any kind. But I personally don't want the government to be my protector, except from a foreign combatant! [...] That said, I own a SawStop table saw. [...] I like the saw. It was not inexpensive, but I don't regret it. I am also fortunate that I could afford such an expenditure. Many folks would balk at the price, and I wouldn't blame them.

Would a mandate result in safer saws, and fewer injuries? Probably. Would that mandate result in pricier products? Absolutely. Is it worth it? If it increases the price of a table saw substantially, it's difficult to justify, in my opinion. There are always unintended consequences, such as "McGyver-ing" a product to make it work, or to get around the technology, if/when that becomes our only option. And there's the tech involved. Dependency on technology is not my idea of Utopia!" —Paul S.

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"I just read your latest newsletter where you mentioned the possibility of safer table saws being mandatory here in the U.S. I recently saw the video that James at Stumpy Nubs put out on this exact topic and his viewpoint took into consideration both the positives and negatives.

I, personally, own a SawStop cabinet saw. I have a chronic neurological condition and the possibility that my hands/other body parts could spasm at the most inopportune time necessitates that kind of fail-safe at the table saw.

For that reason, alone, I am all for making saws safer. However, making that technology standard across the industry might be at too high of a cost to the consumers who don't have the disposable income for such purchases, even for contractor or slightly bigger hybrid-type saws. And, with that in mind, the demand for older used saws would very likely

increase, causing their prices to jump much higher as well.

Like James mentioned in his video on this topic, general table saw safety practices, like the use of proper push sticks and blade guards/riving knives, would reduce many of the accidents/injuries that occur in the workshop at the table saw. However, adequate guards/riving knives weren't available or an afterthought on older machines, and even many newer ones simply don't make their use easy. [...]

It is, indeed, a slippery slope this legislation could travel down. I understand the viewpoints of both sides, but much like seat belts and airbags in cars, taking the reins on something like consumer safety might just be what's needed on table saws in the end." —Mike M.

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"Your newsletter this morning reminded me of one of my favorite quotes 'Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication' from the one and only Leonardo da Vinci. Wise words to live by in the shop and in life.

Thanks for the doses of inspiration and for showing me the joys of woodworking!" —Brock B.

*Thanks, Brock! It's amazing how much beauty lies in simplicity. —Steve*

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

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

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"Thank you for your skill, ethics and teaching style. I just retired last summer after working in mental health crisis for nearly thirty years. I'm brand new to woodworking and having a great adventure!

I made a tool cart and then the BMW. I added a drawer and storage pegboard. I recycled the mesh innards from a kitchen faucet we had

replaced and made it my drawer pull. I look forward to starting the patio table next.

Thanks for being there to shepherd me along on this journey. I'm really enjoying the problem-solving and mistakes teaching me how to build."  
—Nancy H.



*Thanks, Nancy! I love your resourcefulness. Clever drawer pull. Looks like you're going to need another tool cart soon! 🙄 —Steve*

“Thank you so much for your kind approach to woodworking. You have been my “go-to” teacher since I became serious about woodworking 9 years ago. I still work full-time as a nurse, but woodworking is my peace and meditation. I’m self-taught with lots of help from YouTube.

I made these bedside tables at a friend’s request. (My first paid gig!) The live edge tops, rails, and stiles are Black Walnut, the drawer fronts are Maple and I used Birch plywood for the sides and back. As I start a project, I say to myself, “You WILL make mistakes and that’s okay!” It takes the pressure off as I work. My stepdad says the difference between a good woodworker and a great woodworker is that the great woodworker knows how to cover their mistakes.

Thank you so much for your wisdom and encouragement for this new-ish woodworker!” —Joy W.



*Beautiful work, Joy. Congrats on your first paid project!*

*So true about making mistakes; they're simply part of the woodworking process. —Steve*

“Steve’s latest plans make a nice project. I used 3/4” cedar for the sides. Turned out so nice, I’m starting a second one. I also used pocket holes.”  
—Ron L.



*Woohoo! Great job, Ron! Thanks for showing off your planter box. It's a fun and easy project! —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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Interested in previous issues of this newsletter? Check them out [here](#). I just realized that this issue kicks off year #3 of this thing!

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