



## Issue 56, February 2025

Hi Steve r,

I am not a handyman. I don't enjoy home improvement projects like laying tile or pouring concrete. The end result always looks crooked and wonky, and I'm certain future homeowners will judge me. Installing a new light fixture inevitably comes with some weird complication that teaches me how junction boxes were different 70 years ago. Upgrading a sink faucet should be simple, but I always remind myself it'll take twice as long as I plan — and I'll end up twice as wet when I'm done. But the absolute worst is the “drop everything and deal with this now” type of problem. My brain simply isn't wired to descend smoothly — or happily — into DIY hell.

I have a live/work space in San Francisco where I work on art and hang out a couple of days a week. Last Saturday, I planned to quickly drop off some things and head out to visit art galleries and a creepy shop that sells bones and oddities. But as soon as I opened the door, I heard water running in the bathroom.

It was the toilet, which had probably been running nonstop for three days. I tried jiggling the handle — the foolproof repair for most toilet issues — but

this time, it did nothing. Clearly, this required actual attention. The kind that made me sit backward on the toilet, straddle the tank, remove the ceramic lid, and marvel at toilet technology. I reached into the water (perfectly clean, of course, but still unsettling to slosh around in) and started re-familiarizing myself with the toilet's inner workings. To my surprise, it didn't have a ballcock (teehee) but one of those newer, ball-less float systems.

The thought crossed my mind to simply turn off the water supply and deal with it later, but I decided to be responsible and scrap my afternoon plans. My track record with plumbing repairs prepared me for hours of frustration. I ran to the hardware store and picked up the one valve assembly they had. (Are these universal now?) It looked nothing like the one in my tank, and the cashier's warning — "These aren't returnable" — only added to my doubt. It felt like he was saying, "You really look like a guy who doesn't know what he's doing."

Back at the studio, I drained the tank — mostly onto the floor — and removed the old water fill valve assembly thing. The rubber seal was crumbling, and a broken piece of plastic lay at the bottom of the tank. I guessed this might have had something to do with the problem. Much to my surprise and delight, the new valve assembly screwed easily into place, and I reconnected the water supply.

Wait, what? This took only half an hour! No leaks! The toilet flushed! The water stopped running! And my day wasn't ruined after all — I could still enjoy my plans.

I took a moment to revel in my DIY prowess and wondered why I felt so much anxiety about this repair. Reflecting on it, I realized I've replaced toilet tank parts at least a half-dozen times in my life. It's one of the simplest plumbing repairs any homeowner can make. The way a toilet works — with gravity — is quite elegant: there's not much to it.

Fear is often rooted in ignorance, and ignorance can lead to avoidance. I don't want to hate the natural challenges of homeownership. Instead, I want to be more intentional each time I face a "crisis," paying closer attention to what I'm doing and committing it to memory. Too often, I focus solely on completing the task, relegating the practical knowledge to short-term memory, as if I'll never need it again.

A professional plumber could have fixed that toilet in minutes, knowing all the tricks to avoid mess and frustration. For them, it's second nature. But this experience reminded me of the comments I get from people who say I "make woodworking look easy." Well, it is — once you understand the basics: cut wood, shape wood, assemble wood.

For beginners, woodworking can feel intimidating. Every project seems filled with unknowns and the potential for failure. The fear of messing up can be paralyzing. But over time, that fear fades as you gain familiarity.

Woodworking is a process of trial, error, and growth. The beauty of it lies in approaching challenges with curiosity and patience. And if you don't enjoy it, you can stop. No pressure. No water leaking onto the floor.

Next time you're in your workshop, embrace the process — even if it feels messy or awkward. Each project teaches you something valuable — not just about the craft, but about your resilience and creativity.

—Steve

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## **Unlock Your Potential: Take Your Woodworking Skills to the Next Level!**

Whether you're just starting out or you're an experienced woodworker eager to refine your craft, we have the perfect course for you. Explore our woodworking courses tailored to every skill level:

[The Weekend Woodworker](#) is a six-week online course that walks you through creating beautiful, practical projects for your home, office, or patio — all in just a weekend. Perfect for beginners or those looking to refine their skills, you'll build confidence as you complete impressive projects that don't look like typical beginner work.

[The Weekend Workshop](#) course helps woodworkers of all skill levels transform any space into an organized workshop. It includes 15 space-saving projects that will help you stay organized and make the most of every inch of your workshop. With layout tips and detailed plans, you'll turn your workspace into a dream shop that works as hard as you do. Whether you have a small shared garage or a spacious workshop, this course will

guide you in organizing and redesigning your space so you'll love spending time there.

[Powered Up](#) takes your woodworking skills to the next level with 5 impressive, larger projects. It's designed to shorten the learning curve, helping you create stunning, professional-quality pieces by hand.

Don't miss the chance to join our thriving community of woodworking enthusiasts and start building your dreams today! Explore our courses and take the first step toward becoming the woodworker you've always wanted to be!

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## Monthly Project Feature

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I've made a lot of picture frames over the years. It's the one kind of woodworking project that is actually cheaper to make than to buy. (Have you seen the prices of custom picture frames?) Plus you can make them so much nicer and sturdier than store-bought ones, which all seem to be stapled together. My philosophy when making frames is to keep them simple and let the artwork shine. Here's a frame I recently made that shows some techniques you might want to try, including splines added to the miters to provide extra strength.



# Reader Mail

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“Steve, here's something that I made for my wife. When the seat of our fabric swing ripped out I decided to make my wife one out of cedar. Was my first time making a swing.” —David R.



*"There's something so charming about porch swings. I'm always reminded of the ["Rise Against" song](#), which turns 20 this year (!) Great job on the swing!" — Steve*

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“A bit of trend chasing I guess, but here is my new dining table I made from cherry and 1 billion strips of cut-up skateboards. Method entirely stolen from @wobydesign.

Keep on doing what you're doing, it's a net good to the world!” — Stuart T.



*"Ben's (wobydesign) designs are so iconic. He would love this!" —Steve*

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"Love your channel.  
I live in Aotearoa NZ. People call us 'Kiwi's.  
I built the deck and the two side tables.  
Much respect, Steve." —Steve C.



*"OMG these are adorable!" — Steve*

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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.

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## **Member Projects**

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"Another fun project done, complete with Bluetooth functionality"  
—Salvatore M.



*"That's so clever! I love seeing how people can shape Bluetooth speakers."  
— Steve*

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"My daughter got me a bandsaw for my birthday and I have been building the multi-purpose mobile tool stand from the Weekend Workshop course to be its permanent home. I took advantage of today's warm weather to finish the cart and set up the bandsaw. Now I just need to learn how to use a bandsaw" —Joanna T.



*"Oh cool! I'm glad you made that stand. It's so useful. I love having my bandsaw on it and rolling it out when I need it. Just dive in...you'll love the saw!" — Steve*

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“Finished the Sonoma Vineyard coffee table just in time for the holidays! With a young toddler at home (and food crumbs everywhere), I opted to skip the shadow line but then struggled to get a perfect fit with my panel. Fortunately, my troubleshooting led to a nice walnut inlay that I think gives some character to the table!” —Milind N.



*"Good call on the shadow line. The walnut inlay looks great." — 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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