



TWW

Issue 57, March 2025

Hi Steve r,

That's a picture of me last month in Park City, Utah, experiencing the coldest weather I've felt in many years. The temperature never rose above freezing! So many layers of clothes! I understand how powerful the anticipation of spring must be for those of you tough folks who live in this environment! 🤖

This has been a very busy month. As I'm writing this month's newsletter, I'm also preparing to give a presentation at WORKBENCHCon in Atlanta about the "power of email marketing" or something like that. It's a little over a week away and I'm already a bit anxious. Public speaking is one of the most common fears people experience and definitely one of mine. Right alongside styrofoam, but that's another story.

Over the years, I've learned to accept this fear by just acknowledging that I will shake, my voice will quiver, and I will stumble over my thoughts. I watched an interview with James Hetfield (Metallica) who said he still gets nervous before every show. His thought was that if you don't get a little nervous, you don't care. That brings me a lot of comfort.

If you're not familiar with the awkwardly named WORKBENCHCon, it's a two-day conference for woodworkers and makers who want to establish themselves in social media. Despite its workbench moniker, it has very little to do with making or building things. It's a lot of YouTubers and influencers talking about things such as Brand Deals, Algorithms, and Affiliate Sales. The value of this event (well, frankly most conferences) is in meeting other people. I've made some wonderful, meaningful friendships there, and it's fun to reconnect with other people I've known for years. The people who I'm drawn to and spend hours chatting with are people who are interesting and do creative, interesting things. We talk about things like art and AI and construction and philosophy and wood grain and furniture design. We don't ruminate on Brand Deals, Algorithms, and Affiliate Sales.

Back in July, WORKBENCHCon asked me if I would be willing to give a presentation on email marketing. Like I've mentioned before, I'm trying to make Yes my default response to most things, so I agreed to tackle this rather dry topic that I actually do have quite a bit of experience with. Plus, they are paying for the trip, so there's that.

As I was about three pages into writing my speech, I decided to scrap the whole thing. I had amassed diagrams and flow charts of sales funnels and lead magnets and, gross... it was making me ill. I was just not excited about the topic I had already agreed to talk about. I am not a marketing guy. What about my free trip!

After a week of internal conflict, I realized what I really want to say about marketing is that building relationships is way more important than chasing sales. The best way to sell handmade crafts, furniture, art, woodworking plans or anything else is to establish trusted relationships. I began to rewrite a presentation that felt palatable by simply talking about the value of storytelling and more importantly, the value of people.

Most of the information in the presentations at any conference is stuff you can easily Google and figure out on your own. They are designed to present a very broad overview of whatever topic they are covering and often come with a sales pitch. People will certainly learn a little about email marketing from my speech, but I hope that their main takeaway is that connecting with real people through a simple newsletter is more meaningful than any social

media post.

Similarly, at a professional conference, actual real human connections will be found at the mixers, cocktail parties, breakfasts, and other social events. If you attend any conference, you *need* to socialize... it's more important than any panel or demonstration. You may consider yourself an introvert or you might feel shy or nervous talking to people you've never met, but challenge yourself to push through it. Introduce yourself to strangers and shake hands. Everyone there *wants* to interact with you. Remember: James Hetfield gets nervous.

After completing my speech and running through it a few times, I'm now really excited to discuss the idea of an "Anti-Marketing Newsletter": this thing you're reading right now which started simply as a way to connect with people during the 2020 lockdown. I include some marketing messages (and even sponsorships) from time to time, but that's not its purpose.

Human connection through written word is irresistible. In this age of ad-fueled, algorithm-driven, short-form video *content*, an email newsletter offers an exchange of ideas you can't get with Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. When I send this newsletter out, I know that everyone who has opted in will receive it. They won't always read it, but that's *their choice*. I don't need to frame it in a way that appeals to a machine, just people. There are no cringe-inducing clickbait titles or thumbnails to fret over, and no analytics to direct my message in order to keep readers "engaged." If readers want to engage with my ideas, they (you) can simply reply to this email. There is none of the noise and chaos present in social media comments, and I actually read your email messages. It feels very personal and represents a return to civility.

It's also fascinating to see how many Gen Z folks are eschewing social media in favor of human connections. It feels like a rebellion against their parents' starry-eyed promises of *social networking*, a bygone term that has degraded into *social media*, which is more about churning out *content* rather than making connections. My twenty-something YouTuber friend [CJ the X](#) deleted all of his social media accounts in favor of human connection. He communicates with his audience through email, earns a comfortable living on Patreon, and advocates a [return to Web 1.5](#) where people are intentional about the online material they post and consume.

Last year CJ asked me to make him a “phone lock box,” a beautifully ornate wooden container where guests to dinner parties or other get-togethers are required to deposit their phones. Think of the anxiety people will feel for a few hours without scrolling! Imagine the freedom.

It occurred to me how naturally, perhaps unconsciously, CJ connected woodworking to offline human interaction. He didn’t want any old box he could buy, he wanted a custom, *ornate* box. The box would become a ritual, reflected in its unique nature.

Woodworking is a way of manifesting this freedom from scrolling. Nothing you make can be copied and pasted. Sure, photos can be shared, but that’s an unreasonable facsimile. The things we build out of wood are meant to be interacted with by real people in the real world... old-school *sharing*. If you build an end table for your living room, its real-world view count will be far less than what Instagram can offer for an image of that same table. But if you spill your wine on the real table, I guarantee you will interact with it.

Update. The conference just wrapped up and the presentation went well. For those of you who attended, thank you! It was lovely meeting you. Thanks for allowing me to discuss my little world of anti-marketing and how much more important people are than sales. ❤️

—Steve

Monthly Project Feature

Spring is in the air! (Ignore that snow you see.) Look for tiny signs of spring wherever you can. Spot the first dandelion or simply notice how much happier the sun’s angle is. 😊 When you’re ready to ease yourself out of hibernation, consider building this amazingly simple garden bench. All you need are some 2x4s. Paint it a bright color and make your own sign of spring!



YouTube Predictions & More

Chad and I recently (well, a month ago) had a conversation with one of my best friends, [JJ McCullough](#), about a variety of topics including TikTok, the Broligarchy, and the importance of authenticity. If you have 39 minutes, it's worth a watch!



Reader Mail

“Thank you for sharing your knowledge. I'm following you now for a few years and I like that you are still showcasing simple woodworking for beginners. You haven't given in to sponsor given 3D printers and CNC machines. Too many start out as basic woodworking channel just to become a channel filled with machinery a beginner can't afford.

Here is my latest project made of pallet wood. It's a Tensegrity side table. I love the mechanics of it and how it plays with your mind. I don't have a big workshop – it's just 2m by 4m and no table saw (might get one this or next year, need to find out where to park it). So all projects are a challenge in the small space.

Keep up your woodworking style and mentoring.”

– Oliver



“OMG Oliver, I can never wrap my brain around those Tensegrity tables. I prefer to think that they are mostly held up by magic.” — Steve

“Hi Steve,

I enjoyed your recent post about the quick-fix toilet job at your art studio. I think we've all been there and done that – multiple times – as homeowners or as neighborhood handymen.

The inner “gadgetry” in the tank bowl has a few variations, but they work on very similar principles. So, if we feel competent with simple tools – and remember to RTFM – it isn't rocket science, though it can become “wet work” if we forget to shut off the water before beginning the operation.

And – your point about woodworking is on point. You have taught a generation – or more – how to begin and how to methodically grow in knowhow and skills – using a few tools. I think you deserve a national medal for your woodworking series during the Covid Shutdown. You kept many of us from staring at the wall like Rodrigue's “Blue Dog.”

Thanks!”

—Nf Carnahan

“Thanks for that, I really appreciate your comments. I think DIY stuff remains daunting because these kinds of home repairs aren't something we do on a regular basis. Professional handymen are worth their weight in gold.” — Steve

“Your newsletter this month was rather thought-provoking and did strike a chord with me. Several months ago my wife wanted a shallow (front to back) side board for our dining room. Something “different.” After looking for inspiration (and DIY plans) online, the attached picture is the end result of one of several pictures (no DIY plans) I found for her review and approval. Of course she picked this one where the only thing square was the top. Nothing else. Plus the only dimensions were that the top was 48" wide, 12" deep, 2-1/2" thick, and was 32" off the floor. No other dimensions or angles or anything. Had I still been a beginner I'm sure I would not have even included this to begin with because I would have known there would be no way I could figure it out. Ignorance. Intimidation. Fear.

But with some projects under my belt, I've found that a good portion of a project's enjoyment is figuring out how to build it especially when you don't have any plans to start with. So with a scale, triangles, a compass, ratioing to the very few known dimensions, and multiple mock ups, the attached picture is the finished side board.

Over the course of many months working on this project (I think I completed 2 other projects while trying to figure out the side board project), I can't count how many times falling asleep or waking up that the thought struck me that yesterday's ideas and plan wouldn't work but this new idea or plan would work better. As you said, a learning process, trial and error, growth. Figuring out how to do something the best way you can. Not what any other YouTuber or online woodworker says you should do. But because you've tried multiple ways from multiple sources and have assimilated them into your way that works best for you.

Anyway, thanks for providing the thought-provoking newsletter this month that made me reflect on my own woodworking experiences and for letting me ramble.

Keep up the great work. I love how practical all your projects are.”

—Roger J.



“Thanks Roger. Probably my biggest takeaway from more than a few years of woodworking is that every project will pose challenges: embrace them as part of the process, never as obstacles. (Well, that, and always put the crappy side of the table against the wall.)” — Steve

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.

Member Projects

“Finished the BMW

First project in the books. Straight forward and learned a ton of things.

1) I can't cut a straight line on plywood for the life of me. (after lesson used straight edge)

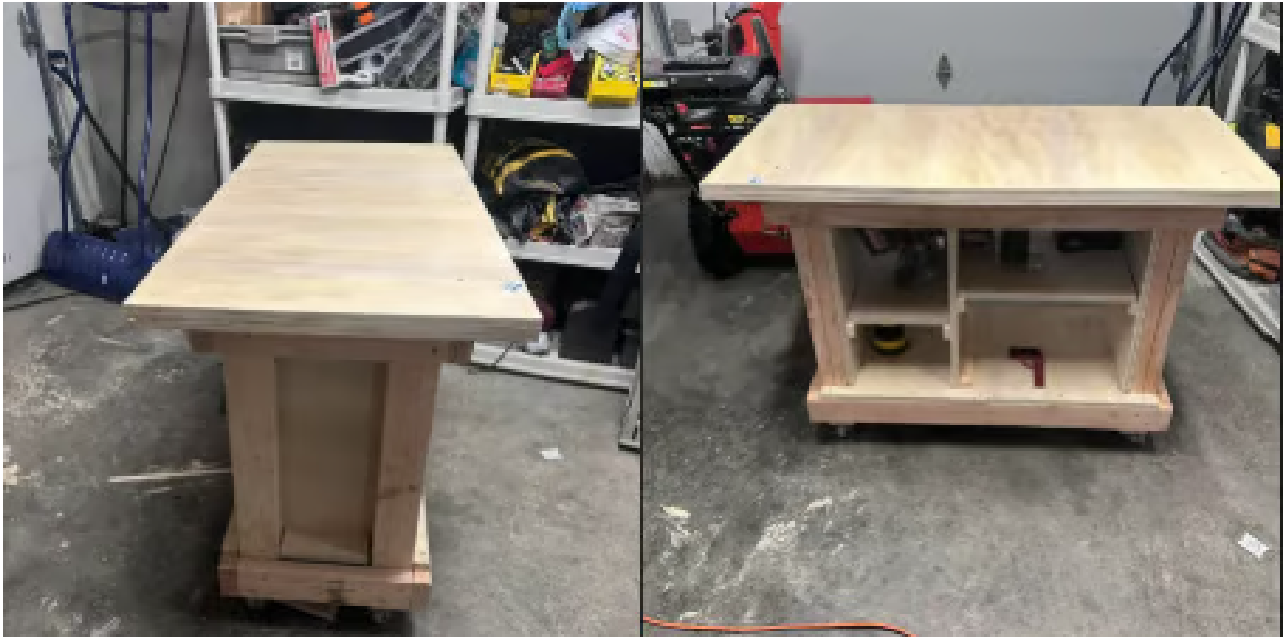
2) GLUE and SCREWS - buy More! Light on glue for lamination of top

and it shows. Screws fixed this first time project.

3) DUST. It's everywhere! Did I mention my wife hates it?

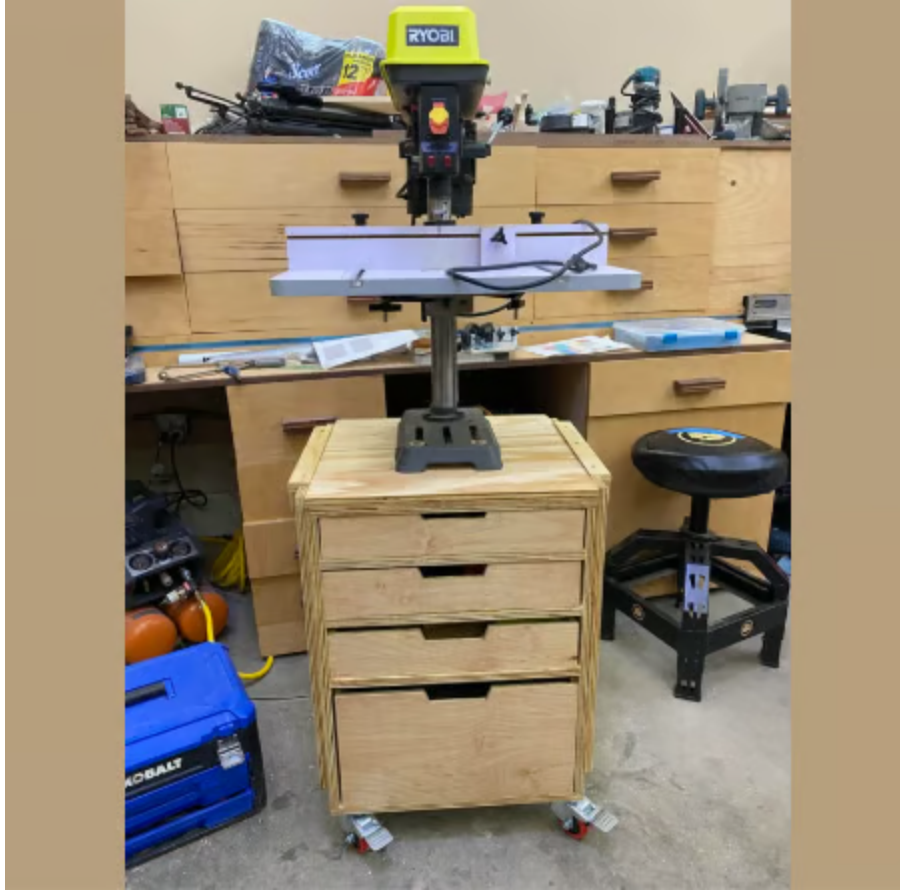
End of it all...I'm hooked and charging on to project one (or is it two?).

Wife is now "suggesting" projects which is awesome." —Dave C.



“Drill press cart done. April Wilkerson design from several years ago.”

—Nik B.



“Just finished this shelf, used cedar and pine and added a storage box on the bottom.” —Isaac T.



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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