



Issue 58, April 2025

Hi Steve R,

After meeting so many lovely and interesting people at WORKBENCHcon (Google Docs just suggested “workbench con” lol), I spent a week at [South by Southwest](#), an enormous film and music festival in Austin. I’d never been to Austin before and I enjoyed the city; it seems to have a vibe a little like San Francisco. ✨ The people I met at both of these events were so creative and inspiring! I felt invigorated (and exhausted) when I finally returned home.

I met such an interesting mix of people, including a costume designer, a food blogger, a wedding dress model, a film buyer, a specialty travel agent (yeah, that still exists), a beer hall owner who knows everything about beer, just to name a few.

One of the most common questions we ask and get asked when meeting someone new is, “So what do you do?”

Of course we all know that at the core of that question is, “How do you earn a living?” Or perhaps less intrusively, “How do you spend at least a third of your life?” We tend to define ourselves by our jobs above all else, even though we are so much more. I wonder if pre-industrial people would be puzzled by the question?

If you asked a caveman what he does, he’d probably say something like, “Grog hunt mammoth,” which is probably the equivalent of today’s, “I’m in tech.”

When I met one of my new neighbors a few months ago, that was his response. The tech part, not the hunting mammoth part lol. (Although, that would be a super cool reply.) Knowing full well I would become glassy-eyed, I went ahead and asked him to tell me more. He told me about the start-up he was helping create, something to do with finance or an app or something, I guess. I'm still not sure. I get why it's simply easier to say, "I'm in tech," so the conversation can move on to something more accessible. It's smart. As it turned out, he's really into music and attending live shows, a passion we share. I'm now making a conscious effort to avoid leading with a query about a person's income source as a social icebreaker.

For years, when asked, "What do you do?" I would read the room and answer either "woodworker" or "YouTuber" depending on the demographic (age) of the person asking. These days, I have a broader range of answers, so I tend to tailor my answer to fit the *vibe*. Over the past year, I've found that people tend to respond with the greatest curiosity to, "[film critic](#)," which allows me to explain that I don't really *criticize* movies to find faults in them, but rather to celebrate the art of cinema. (Especially low-budget schlock films 😄) This naturally lends itself to spirited discussions about favorite movies, something almost everyone can enjoy sharing.

I also like telling people [I make art](#), which opens up plenty of fascinating discussion. I've never met anyone who isn't at least a little interested in art. Neither of these things earns income, but they fulfill passions. I like to call these my "real" jobs. (An artist friend of mine likes to call his paid job as a bartender his "fake job.")



Real jobs: art, woodworking, movies

We've built a culture that treats paid work as inherently more legitimate than unpaid passion. It's strange how the things we often value most, like our art, our music, and the objects we craft with our hands, are the very things we feel we have to apologize for unless they turn a profit. We've been conditioned to believe that if something doesn't earn income, it doesn't "count." Whenever I mention my writing or my art, I'm frequently asked if I make any money from them, or what my plans are to monetize them. As if the natural progression from passion is income. But maybe what counts most is what brings us alive.

Likewise, woodworking is a passion which has never earned me any income, but it's difficult to discuss without YouTube entering the chat. And that invariably shifts the conversation into an impromptu interview about my experience as a YouTuber, something I'm not particularly passionate about. I don't mind talking about YouTube and social media, but I feel like that's my "job" which I find far less interesting than building stuff out of wood.



Fake job

Identity isn't fixed, it evolves. The labels we wear change as our interests shift and our passions deepen. A few years ago, I wouldn't have called myself an artist. Now it feels like the truest answer, because it's about much more than the actual art I produce. Who knows what title will feel right next year. Writer? Mentor? Maybe that's the joy of it; we're all unfinished stories.

All of this got me thinking about how we talk about ourselves. Not just to others, but to ourselves. How we construct identity, how we perform it, and how easily we allow it to be smooshed into a single dimension.

We tend to downplay the things that bring us joy, especially if they don't pay the bills. We call them "hobbies," as if that word somehow makes them less meaningful. Even if you only get to spend an hour on the weekends in your garage, studio, or creative space, that hour matters. It becomes a ritual. A way to reclaim your time and your imagination. It's a piece of your identity that deserves as much acknowledgement as your job, your

responsibilities, and all the other roles you play. It's part of who you are. It's one of the ways you move through the world with curiosity and creativity.

Woodworking, like any act of creation, is a practice that asks us to slow down, to listen, to shape something tangible in an increasingly intangible world. That's a way of being. **A way of living life as a creative, a maker, or an artist.**

So the next time someone asks you what you do, consider saying, "I'm a woodworker." Or "I build things out of wood." Or "I like to make things." Say it with confidence. Say it with joy. Say it like it matters, because it does.

And instead of asking someone else "What do you do?" try asking, "*What do you love doing?*"

There's a quiet power in owning your passions out loud. Not only does it affirm your identity to yourself, it invites others to connect with you on a deeper, more human level. When we're vulnerable enough to introduce ourselves not just by what we *do* but by what we *love*, we open the door for real conversations, real connections, and real inspiration.

What we love isn't a side note — it's the story.

– Steve

Monthly Project Feature

Remember back in December when you were drinking eggnog, looked out your window and told yourself, "Ya know, I should build a new deck. But that's something for springtime me to worry about."

Surprise, spring is here! Hello future you! Time to get outside and work on any projects you've been thinking about for the past few months. [Here's](#) a pretty straightforward way to build a free-floating deck that won't require you to dig holes for pylons or install ledger boards or anything. Let gravity do all the anchoring.



Reader Mail

Lovely post! Yes, human interaction and relationships are what it's all about in life, and heartening to hear it's also a viable alternative to heartless click bait and the endless chase for eyeball views, which I try to avoid too.

We need community now more than ever. We worry too much about scope. One relationship matters. Thanks for a lovely newsletter.

– Emily

Totally, we need real-world connections with flesh and blood people. We need to share our work beyond virtual spaces! —Steve

Hello Steve, I wanted to reach out to you and let you know that I really enjoy your emails. They are entertaining and insightful and I truly look forward to reading them. This latest email covers an area that I discuss with my family and friends which is the value of social media. I do believe social media has a place as long as people realize it is a tool and not a way of life. Your email covered that topic very well and I wanted to thank you. Good luck in your future endeavors.

– Kevin B.

Thanks Kevin, social media needn't be our default way of experiencing the world. Next time you (anyone) is waiting in line for something, take the time to observe the space and the people around you, rather than scrolling. It's hard! But you also might strike up a

conversation. —Steve

Good afternoon Steven,

After building each project in your "Weekend Woodworker" and "Powered Up" courses, I feel so much more capable and empowered to solve everyday problems around the house with my woodworking skills. We recently moved into a new home and the stairs to the garage were just sad. After some measurements and planning I was able to make a much nicer (and sturdier) set of stairs. Problem solved!

Thank you for the excellent courses to start my woodworking journey and keep up the great work! I love the newsletter!

– Jeremy G.

Thank you! It's kinda amazing how knowing just a few basic skills and having a few simple power tools translates to being able to make or repair just about anything. — Steve

Steve,

Good luck with the speech. I'm sure you will do great. You do inspire people to start woodworking. I actually have this poster mounted in my garage.



– Bill K.

OMG!!! GET OUT! I haven't seen one of these since, what, about 2013. I had a lot of fun designing that poster. Haha, I was really leaning into the pallet furniture craze back then!

😄 —Steve

I was inspired by Steve's yard art sculpture project and a thrifted piece I saw at Goodwill, and found myself making a tabletop sculpture from scrap wood and brass rods for my entryway (shown here on a table I made from a Foureyes Furniture plan). I turned pieces of maple, walnut, and Purple Heart for this...it's not special design-wise, but I love it!

Thanks again for sharing your woodworking wisdom and knowledge to help us newbies get started on a rewarding hobby!

– Patricia A.



Yes!!! I love this sculpture! Woodworkers are always looking for ways to do something with scrap lumber. Making art is such a great way to use scraps and to explore your creativity. —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

Spring is also the season for building BMWs! Here's Alfredo L's. This is a great first project for any woodworker. You just need a miter saw and a circular saw. And a drill. Well, some glue too. A framing square would be helpful. You might want to sand it too lol. Don't forget: Free plans are available at basicmobileworkbench.com.



The first project in [The Weekend Woodworker course](#) is the California Casual Side Table. There are so many options for painting or finishing it. Here's a beautiful pair made by Don G. Love the contrasting plugs.



Finally, I want to mention George K., who built the Mobile Miter Saw Station, one of the most popular projects in my [Weekend Workshop course](#). This thing improves miter saw cuts so much! It supports long boards and its wings fold down so it can be easily tucked away into a corner of your space. It's got a drawer for stop blocks and other accessories, and a space for a bucket to easily toss cut-off scraps into.





(Here's what mine looks like in its working position.)

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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