



## Issue 62, August 2025

Hi Steve R,

Okay, fine. Let's talk about AI.

Are you surprised that AI is creeping into the woodshop? It's already here, generating designs in Fusion 360, turning rough sketches into clean models with Shapr3D, and optimizing CNC toolpaths for speed and less waste. Some platforms can even build 3D models from photos or text descriptions, while cutlist tools squeeze every inch from your sheet goods. Safety is evolving, too, with vision-based systems that predict accidents before they happen. And soon you'll point your phone at your scrap bin and watch AI suggest a project, complete with plans. (I swear, if it suggests a charcuterie board...)

Rick Beato [recently demonstrated](#) how fairly easily he created music using AI, complete with a made-up musician, song lyrics, and full song in minutes. I imagine most people would casually listen to it, see the musician's photo, and think it's legit. Honestly, "Eli Mercer" sounds like any number of American Idol contestants: familiar, technically valid, pleasing to the ears, and completely safe. AI can copy perfection, but can't copy soul. Similarly, [Velvet Sundown](#) has been making headlines with over a million monthly listeners on Spotify, existing only as an AI-generated band.

How do you feel about this? Scared? Excited? Do you experience a knee-jerk reaction to anything labeled "AI"? Everywhere I look, I see panic: *Will AI replace artists? Is this the end of creativity?*

Here's the thing: AI won't kill creativity. It will kill *safe* creativity. And that's good news for anyone who cares about art and craft. Art is always reactionary and reinvents itself in ways that affirm our humanity.

## **There are no "robot overlords"**

This is hardly the first time creators thought the sky was falling. ("But this time it's different!" lol) Like I mentioned last month, when photography was invented in the 1800s, painters stopped trying to compete with realism, and Impressionism was born. And soon after, Expressionists depicted how the world *felt* rather than how it looked, something machines can't do.



I remember when Photoshop came out and the resentment many photographers had towards anyone who used it. "You don't even have to know how to use a camera anymore!" Same thing happened when digital cameras began to emerge.

When factories began mass-producing furniture during the Industrial Revolution, woodworkers' answer was soul. The Arts & Crafts movement celebrated visible joinery, natural materials, and imperfections... things machines couldn't replicate. Ironically, today those machines allow any regular person to build handmade furniture in their garage as a hobby.



In the 1970s, music had become overly polished, highly produced, and corporate. It was safe. Punk exploded as a reaction with three chords, raw energy, and songs that were held together with safety pins.

Over and over, we see the same pattern: technology or culture raises the bar for "perfection," and creative people respond by blowing up the definition of what matters. When machines take over tasks, artists reclaim meaning, emotion, and process. It's beautiful.

## **A culture of beauty**

Today, social media has turned art and craft into an attention economy and given consumers a myopic view of what "good" art is. The things that get elevated and promoted are the highly produced pieces. The perfect epoxy river table. Hyperrealistic pencil drawings. Sculptures that look exactly like the real subjects they depict. The comments in these videos and posts are predictable and banal. "This is great!" "You have amazing

talent!" "So beautiful." "Now *this* is real art!" We have been trained to equate technical skills with artistic value. We only want to admire art if it's pretty. Social media has supplied us with an endless stream of art that looks... nice. When perfection becomes expected, humanity becomes unexpected.

Also, please stop using the word "good" to describe any type of art. Ask what it makes you feel.

Creative people need to stop trying to please everyone and chasing trends. Interesting and challenging art can exist within existing cultural systems.

Andy Warhol commented on consumerist culture by hijacking its icons. The Sex Pistols rejected 24 track studio recording. In 2004, the movie *Saw* reclaimed the visceral fear that '80s and '90s popcorn horror films had sanitized for mass consumption. These were all reactions to a culture obsessed with control, order, authority, and polish. Sound familiar?

## **What this means for makers**

It's not about whether you can cut the tightest dovetail or make an intricate table. Machines can do that. It's about *why* you made it. It's about the imperfections you choose to leave because they tell a story. It's about designing something that carries your fingerprints, your humor, your grief, your anger, your politics.

AI is a tool that we shouldn't just ignore. Let machines handle the work that you don't find fulfilling. I use a tablesaw because the thought of sawing a sheet of plywood with a handsaw isn't the least bit appealing to me. But remember, handsaws have never disappeared. If that's your vibe, go for it.

Or explore ways to use the tech in your work. I've been making [woodburned artwork](#) for over a year now that incorporates AI in ways I never expected. Here's my process: I imagine a scene I want to illustrate. Then I use a combination of generative AI, stock photos, personal snapshots, poses of myself, faces of friends, and hand drawings to essentially create a collage in Photoshop. I take this image and sketch it onto plywood. Finally, I use traditional pyrographic tools and torches to burn the scene into the grain of the wood. I make a short video of the burning, record a voiceover, and add AI generated background music. Is this "AI art"? I dunno. Do the tools matter?

Circling back to Rick's video, I predict we are entering an era of music with rough edges, lack of autotune, and lo-fi wavering beats as musicians experiment with methods to express themselves in ways that are uniquely human. But I also feel like this will include interesting usage of AI elements.

BTW if you like human music, support human musicians by going to live performances. Indie bands at local venues are affordable and more enjoyable than any \$1000 arena

spectacle.

I think that we are in the awkward stage of AI. I suspect that we will eventually incorporate it into our lives in all kinds of ways that feel perfectly natural and will look back on this period with a sort of Y2K amusement. Many of us will use it in our woodworking and other creative endeavors, not to create an entire project (bleh), but in ways that allow us to focus on what we are trying to express.

I choose to be optimistic about the future of making and creating. Technology is demanding that we dig deeper into the meaning of what we produce. Play with the technology and allow yourself to explore. You can't compete with perfection, so don't set your goal to become a machine.

—Steve

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## Monthly Project Feature

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### The myth of "fine woodworking" and joinery



Woodworkers love to define themselves by the tools they use or the level of skills they've acquired. Is there a litmus test to being a "fine woodworker"? Are you measured and judged by your technique? Maybe it's time to stop trying to define the enjoyment we get from woodworking. Here's a video I made.

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## Reader Mail

Dried mystery fluids? OH NASTY! Anyway, you always write insightful, funny newsletters and I look forward to reading them.

I hate to bring up your dad, but mine is 91 and is in the beginning stage of dementia. He has built anything and everything! Grandfather clocks, hutches, dry sinks, cabinets, shelves, etc. I used to help him some, but wasn't a lot of help; I was young with not much strength. But I am now into building smaller stuff; boxes, birdhouses, rolling pins, etc. I'm in the learning stage now. I'll get to the bigger stuff eventually.

Anyway, keep writing and building. I'll follow you.  
Thank you sir!

Ed Bogan

*Keep learning! You'll get to that bigger stuff. Just remember: It's not the size of the project, it's more about what you do with your wood. There. I made a dad joke. —Steve*

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Yeah boyeeeee!!! I have been following you for some years, Steve, and appreciate your blog and approach to creativity, wood working and being an artist. Keep up the great work! I live in Yucaipa, California, with my wife. I am an art teacher at a high school and love it despite some treacherous moments with teens which seem to occur less and less the more experienced and cooler I get. I recently finished this shed and the reason for it (partly) is to house the stuff I'll use to build a patio cover or pergola or whatever they are exactly called. Would love to show you once it gets there, but first is the prep phase where I will stain and notch the wood and level the area just under the post bases (kind of scared but it seems straightforward enough). Anyways, appreciate your company on this journey! Happy July!

Regards,  
Gaston



*Great looking shed, Gaston! I imagine being a high school art teacher is both stressful and rewarding. But really, between you and me, those are the coolest kids in the school, right? —Steve*

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Hi Steve,

Your newsletters are the best. Funny, inspirational and a really great read. I get a number of newsletters from other woodworking sources and while they're interesting, most seem

to lack that personal touch. Reading yours is like me and you hanging out in the shop discussing our next project.

As you requested, attached is my latest project. My wife wanted a shoe rack for the bottom of our stairs so we can try to keep our new upstairs carpet clean. This was a simple and fun weekend project, but more importantly, the Mrs. loves it!

Keep up the great work!  
Paul D.



*Thanks, Paul! I'm glad you enjoy the newsletter. I am always perplexed how I somehow manage to get this together once a month. I love the look of that shoe rack! I'm such a sucker for simple designs without adornment. Let the wood be the star of the show! I like how the top shelf is under the top rail rather than resting on top, too.*  
—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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Hey there, new Weekend Woodworker here, check out my sweet BMW. Mistakes were made, but I'm loving the end result. Can't put a price on this beauty! –Helen



*OMG this is a STATEMENT workbench! I love it so much! —Steve*

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Made the BMW plus. Challenged myself to use only scrap wood from my garage. So nothing matches. And the dimensions are slightly different from the plans. A lot of patchwork. I will add one more layer that is level and smooth on the top. So happy with everything I learned in the process. —Malini



*This is so inspirational! People always wonder what to do with scrap lumber. Well, anything! Ain't no AI making this. —Steve*

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I have some work I need to do to make my tiny, barely one car, garage more functional.

First: I need to take down that weird shelf that does nothing. I have to use a ladder to access it, so storing larger/heavy items is out of the question for me. Next, I need to get some insulation on the walls since it's like the seventh level of hell in there right now and cold as all get out in the winter, which is cutting out so much working time. Finally, I want to get OSB on the walls and paint them white.

First time attempting an insulation project! –Catherine



*I love seeing how people transform one-car garages into multi-use spaces. Remember... it's an ongoing process that will never be done. Good luck in Dante's Inferno shop! — 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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