



Issue 64, October 2025

Hi Steve R,

Early October occupies a brief moment in the year when life is allowed to slow down while we catch our breaths. We have a couple weeks before ramping up for Halloween activities, then immediately dive headlong into the Holiday season which will inundate us with its annual array of anticipation, absurdity, and anxiety. And apparently, alliteration.

Even though most people cite fall as their favorite season, it's this fleeting transitional period that we connect with on a sensual level: the scent of apple cider and sandalwood, the feel of a crisp breeze against the skin, the sight of an entire maple tree suddenly becoming orange, the flavors of pumpkin spice and cinnamon, the sound of migrating geese and leaves crunching beneath our feet. These kinds of markers are irresistible to humans because they remind us of the passage of time, or in a more melancholic sense, give us pause to reflect on mortality. Change is about transformation, in all its different forms.

I recently returned from a transformative ten days at Tiff, the Toronto International Film Festival. A few years ago, I would never have predicted that being a [film critic](#) would become part of my identity, but life is filled with random turns. I'm not unique; most of us are probably living a life much different than what we envisioned when we were in high school. Or even five years ago.



Me & the Shade Studios gang

Lately, I'm fascinated by how the small choices we make can lead down the most unexpected paths, yet we only make these connections in hindsight. For instance, it's easy to say that my love for scary movies as a child has "come full circle". In truth, the opportunity to do this work (it's hardly *work*) wouldn't have occurred without a web of other life choices falling into place: maintenance work, retail work, photography, graphic design, woodworking, YouTube, artwork, not to mention the profound personal and professional relationships I've formed over the years that helped to shape my life's decisions. It's not like I ever set a goal to write movie reviews. The best gift we can offer future versions of ourselves is the willingness to pursue and embrace change *in the present*.

The joy of plodding through life

Expanding on last month's anti-goal-setting (not really) newsletter, it's okay to just plod through life without direction. This isn't laziness or stagnation; plodding implies forward motion, and movement is an indicator of growth and change.

The idea of life-mapping is treated as a virtue from an early age. We harass children with "*what do you want to be when you grow up?*", subtly implying that life decisions are somehow relevant at age 6. Then we expect kids to formalize a life path when they turn 18, having barely even experienced life. And just a few years later the narrative falls apart. It's a disillusioning experience for many twenty-somethings to discover that post-collegiate expectations don't match personal reality. We aren't prepped for the muddling required to navigate the real world.

Here's an alternative: encourage young people (and ourselves) to prioritize *gaining*

experience and collecting experiences. This approach comes with responsibility; it requires actively engaging and participating in life without expectations. It's about giving consideration to opportunities while getting socially involved (in the real world) with other humans.

Write a poem, play guitar, take a dance class, go on a road trip, try rock climbing, make art, learn to weld, or even take up woodworking. You don't have to take any of these things seriously; feel free to ditch any activity without remorse or regret. Many of us still carry the childhood baggage of having our curiosity dismissed as "just a phase". As a result, when we try something new as adults, we feel pressure to make it stick. Like it has to become a permanent, defining feature of our personalities. Instead, allow these to be curiosity-fueled stops on your life's path. Hobby hopping is healthy.

When we open ourselves up to new experiences, we naturally open ourselves up to new ideas. And some of those ideas may lead to places you never imagined. Your future self will thank you.

Woodworking is all about transformation

Woodworking is filled with change. We literally transform raw materials into furniture, which is why most of us begin the craft. Over time, we all begin to understand its internal value and confidence we gain through the act of creation. This can lead to places we never imagined. I've lost track of how many people who have taken my beginning woodworking courses and ended up with new careers in woodworking. Honestly, it's so satisfying to see people who were just getting started a few years ago and are now making furniture way beyond my skill level!

You never know where a single decision to try something new will lead.

OMG physical products. Help!

I'm experiencing this newbie feeling right now with my woodburning journey. In many ways it feels as alien and exciting to me as when I started my YouTube channel in 2008. After more than a year of creating pyrographic art pieces, and months of [building a website](#), I've begun offering prints for sale. I've never sold any physical products before, so this is all new territory. To date, I have sold a total of three prints (lol). I would love to hear any advice from those of you who routinely sell your work. Hit me up with things to avoid and things to try! (Just reply to this email.)

Some people like to see numbers, so here's how my art sales work out if you're curious:

- I sell prints for \$65.
- It costs me \$32 to get one archival giclee print made. I have a local guy who is so talented and is willing to print one-offs. I will not accept low-quality prints and I don't want to maintain an inventory yet.

- Packaging materials cost about \$3 per print.
- Shipping in the US is about \$20.
- I offered free shipping for September.
- That's about \$30 total profit after 18 months of work.
- I'm planning a trip to Hawaii with these profits soon. 😂

Of course the \$10 per print profit doesn't factor in my time and materials to create the original art, or all the costs to maintain and run the website. I think I'll raise the prices to at least \$85 soon, which seems to be more in line with what art prints are going for. We all seem to expect free shipping these days, so I have to consider making that a permanent thing.



But it's a start, and I find it an enjoyable way to stave off dementia. I'm not in any rush, and I have no expectations or unrealistic goals. I'm content to just see where it leads. For now, I want to continue adding content to the website and perhaps it will find its audience. Marketing will be a necessity at some point, hopefully not too much in the form of advertising, but who knows. And based on my three sales, I'm learning that my shipping and delivery logistics will need improvement.

Currently, I'm working on a set of hyper-local San Francisco-related woodburnings that I hope to sell in a local gallery a few blocks from my studio. I met the guy who runs the

place a few months ago and was inspired by his energy and enthusiasm. Change begins with a conversation. BTW don't worry, I am not abandoning woodworking or YouTube!



A Season for Change

As the air cools, the shadows get longer, and lattes become inundated with pumpkin spice, I keep thinking about how nature handles change. The trees don't cling to their leaves, or question whether they're dropping them the right way. They simply let go when the time is right.

Maybe that's the lesson of this season: to release the pressure to know where it's all heading and trust that it all leads to fresh growth. Whether we're starting a business, taking up a new hobby, or just trying to make sense of what's next, transformation doesn't always announce itself.

If you're in a season of uncertainty, or standing at the edge of something unfamiliar, take comfort in knowing that change doesn't demand a plan, and no experience is necessary. It only asks that you stay curious, stay kind to yourself, and keep plodding forward.

Trust the autumn, and believe that somewhere, new roots are forming beneath the surface.

Wishing you a relaxing October and a slashing Halloween! 🍁 🖋️

—Steve

P.S. [Please check out my woodburning website](#) and those \$65 prints here! I'm kinda proud to have made this site by fumbling around with it.

And you can also [read my movie reviews here](#). I'm trying to get 100 written by March so I can officially skew the Rotten Tomatoes ratings with my 6-10 system lol.

The Twisted Toymaker



It's always unfortunate that Halloween falls at the end of the month and this newsletter comes out at the beginning of the month. I don't even know what this year's Halloween special will be about yet! At any rate, here's a blast from the past. [My Halloween video from 2016](#). Wait, 9 years ago? Can that be? Yikes.

Let me know your woodworking tips

I hope you enjoyed the first month of weekly woodworking tips! I'm kinda testing this out to see if it resonates with readers. In case you missed it, every Tuesday I'm sending out woodworking tips in a cleverly titled email called "**Tips Tuesday**". Let me know if you enjoy these fun-sized blasts of woodworking. Basically, they are the opposite of Notes for the Shop and can be read without the commitment required for this monthly word salad. And they are **actually about woodworking**. 😊

If you have any clever/amazing/mindblowing woodworking tricks or tips, let me know! Just reply to this email and maybe I'll include them on Tuesday!

Do you have a small woodworking business?

In my essay, I asked for any advice you have for selling actual products from a website. That got me thinking: if you are selling your woodworking or art, maybe this newsletter can help. Send me the link, details or whatever you want me to know so I can possibly

feature your business in this newsletter. This isn't a call for sponsors and I'm not looking for ads or sales pitches. **Just tell me *why you love what you do* and your inspiring story.** And of course, where we can buy your creations. Just reply to this email!

Reader Mail

Thanks for all your feedback on September's issue regarding goals and lifestyles!

Damn Steve, this one hit me right in the feels!

It's funny, this has been the very thing I've been struggling with, this idea of identity and roles. I switched job functions at work and what I do now...there's no title, it's sort of herding cats and pushing things across the finish line. I myself was shocked at the discomfort I felt when people would ask what I do...such a simple, innocuous question and yet it weirdly freaked me out. I'm not sure that I know the best way to answer or even think about it, but your take on disparate parts of an identity and framing some of the broader pieces as a lifestyle resonates.

I'll have to think about it but it felt...relieving? ... to know that others have struggled with it and come out on the other side better for it.

In any event, thanks for the kind words that felt like they were tailored for me, I appreciate it. Looking forward to whatever you put out, woodworking or not, lol. Thanks,

Ryan

Yes! We all have tons of things we "do". I find it very empowering to read the room and reveal whichever one feels appropriate. We are far more than our primary income source. — Steve

Thanks for this week's newsletter, Steve.

It's a great message to send to everyone, and parallels how I have tried to think about all the interests I have (several of which dovetail with one another -- music/guitar, electronics, woodworking --> building amplifiers), and some of which are completely unrelated (yoga, photography).

Not feeling like I **have to make progress**, but feeling like I **want to engage in my interests** is an important shift, and feels healthier for body and mind than being shackled to arbitrary "commitments to self."

I miss your weekly videos, but I 100% support your decision to balance your life in a way that's better for your well-being.

Thanks for everything you've done for the community, and for helping me move my life in a direction that is more meaningful to me.

Bob Silverstein

Totally! We can live with all of our various interests integrated. It's healthier to think about prioritizing personal fulfillment rather than arbitrary commitments and goals. —Steve

Hi Steve,

One line from your leading essay stood out to me: critics telling you to "just stick to woodworking." None of us are just any one thing, but instead a combination of many things. You listed some of yours and I resonated with your acknowledgement that they're all part of you. I like that you're understanding the *continuum* of your whole self and where it overlaps.

One of my first jobs out of school, I was asked what I wanted to specialize in, and it struck me that specialization is a limiting practice rather than a developmental one; I was being asked to set aside large parts of the field I was in just so I could claim to own some small part. I rejected specialization then, and I still reject it today. I have gained specific skills in different areas, but I will always aspire to be a generalist.

When it comes to our hobbies and interests, I feel like there's a lot of pressure to compartmentalize and then specialize in them rather than exploring what's out there on the borders of our selves. Thank you for the reminder to continue pushing for a holistic view of my self, and I hope you feel more contentment, fulfillment, and authenticity in the way you're walking your path in life.

Best,
Joshua

OMG I love that quote: "Specialization is a limiting practice rather than a developmental one." I'm filing that away. — 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



Peter T Cormack ▸ The Weekend Woodworker Private Community

August 20 at 9:34 AM · 🌐

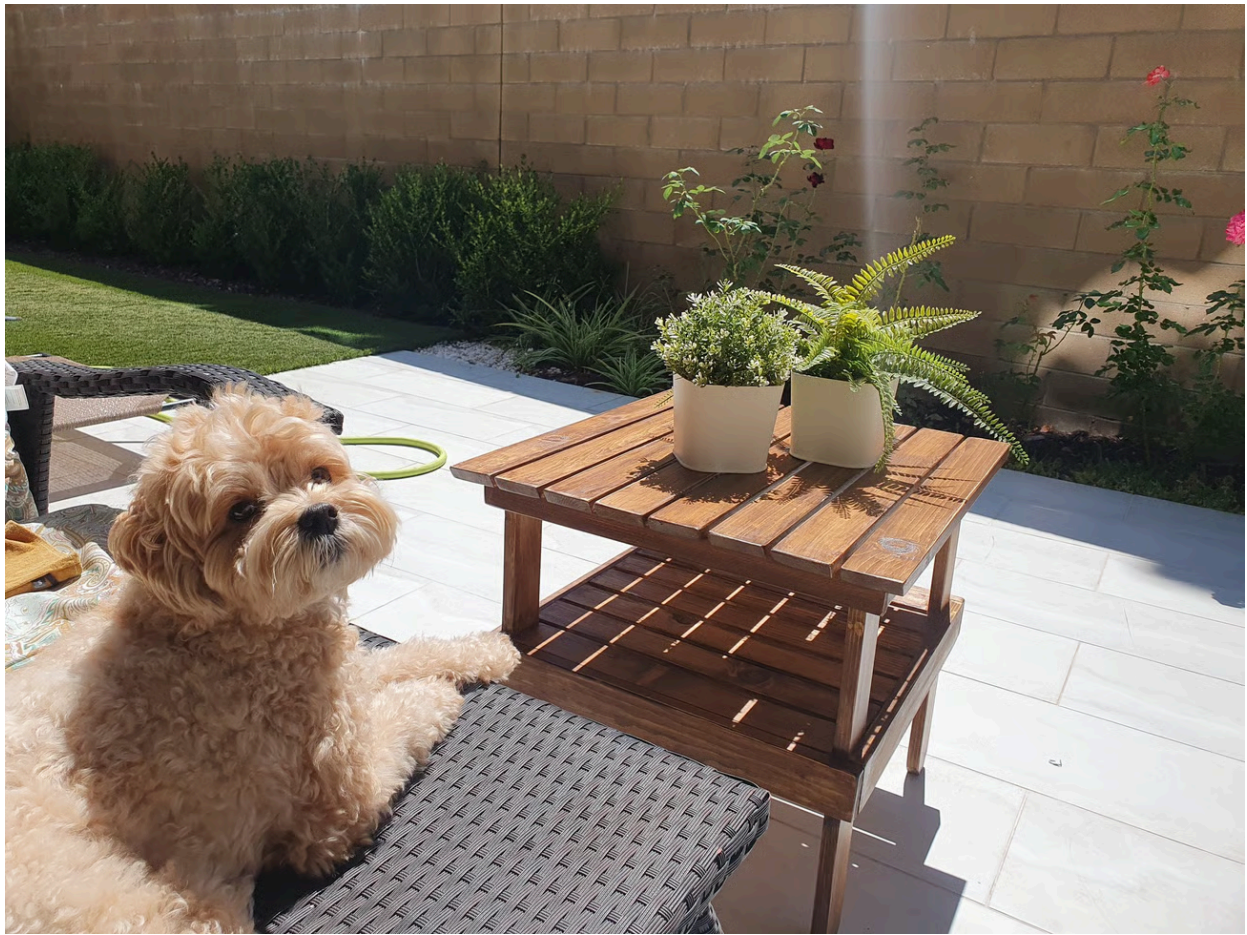


Loving the course! Made my first 3 projects (including the bench). Takes a lot longer than I'd like, and I'm not as precise as I'd prefer, but I think they came out usable, and I learned a lot! Also got a lot of experience using a hand plane to smooth out the bench (some pieces were a whole 1/8 inch proud). Good times!



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