



P.O. Box 68343
Nashville, Tennessee 37206

DECEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

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The Cumberland Furniture Guild's Fall Meeting

will be on Sunday, December 7th, 2008 from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. at the Woodcraft Store in Franklin, Tennessee. This meeting will include a panel discussion entitled "Workshop Essentials: Dos and Don'ts of Setting Up a Small Shop."

The panel will include Woodcraft owner and guild member David Sapp, Windsor Chair Maker Greg Pennington, and Guild President Alf Sharp, and will be moderated by the always moderate Scott Thompson. There will be refreshments available and a discretely hidden television for those unable not to monitor the Titans Game.

Directions to the meeting

The Woodcraft Store is located at 209 South Royal Oaks Blvd., in Watson Glen Plaza, Franklin, Tennessee.

The phone there is (615) 599-9638.

Go to Exit #65 on I-65 South of Nashville. This is Highway 96. Go west (toward Franklin) on 96 one block to South Royal Oaks Boulevard. Turn South (Left) on South Royal Oaks Blvd. and the Watson Glen Plaza is on your right. Woodcraft is in Suite #164 between K-Mart and Goody's.

The CFG Newsletter is published quarterly by The Cumberland Furniture Guild, P.O. Box 68343, Nashville, Tennessee 37206

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Layout & Design - Worth Squire. We are a 501(c)(3) tax exempt non-profit organization.

Thanks to all of the people who volunteer their time, without whom there would be no Guild and no newsletter.

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Letter From The President

By Alf Sharp

I've just returned from *Popular Woodworking's* conference in Berea, Kentucky—Woodworking in America. It was fascinating—more as a study in human dynamics than in woodworking, though it was good there too. Mitch Roberson has written a more thorough review for this issue of the newsletter, but reflecting on the nature of this conference has caused me to ruminate on the “ole boy network” phenomenon. This tendency most of us seem to succumb to at one time or another manifests itself in numerous ways: “cliquishness”, “the IN crowd”, exclusive fraternities and sororities, men's clubs, country clubs, etc.

Though hardly pernicious there, this phenomenon was on display at the WiA conference. The theme and thrust of the program was the exclusive use of hand tools in virtually every aspect of woodworking, along with presentations and a (drool-inducing) tradeshow by most of the fine hand-tool makers in North America. The attendance consisted largely of experts and zealous acolytes in this intense little realm of woodworking. They all knew each other, and many of the participants clearly followed the glitterati of this realm – Frank Klaus, Mike Dunbar, Roy Underhill, Tom Lie-Nielsen – around like Dead-Heads used to follow Jerry Garcia. They (and, I must confess, I also) reveled in dissecting at great length the minutiae of secondary bevels, A2 versus O2 steel, and terms such as “fleem”, a term that even a tool nerd like myself had never heard before. (Fleem apparently refers to some kind of ratio between the sharpening angle and the set of hand-saw teeth.) This was definitely a brotherhood.

Now I don't mean to imply that people were cold, or reluctant to engage someone they didn't already know; they weren't. But there was definitely for me a sense of tunnel vision, and a palpable group disdain for those who chose to sully their shop experience with any electrical assistance beyond perhaps lighting.

That's ok; it's a free country and they aren't hurting anybody. I learned some very interesting stuff, enjoyed myself, made some new acquaintances and will probably go back next time they have one. The reason I bring it up at all is that we have here, in the CFG, an organization that could certainly fall prey to the same dynamic if we don't collectively resist it. I'm not referring to hand-tool worship (or machine-tool for that matter), and I don't think we're particularly guilty of cliquishness now. But without continued diligence to avoid categorizing techniques, and mediums, and skill-levels, as acceptable or inferior, or even just not interesting, we will be limiting our potential membership and influence in the community. Yes, of course we are a furniture guild, and that imposes certain reasonable limits, but furniture in one way or another is a huge part of everyone's life. Interestingly, most such guilds and societies form themselves around a medium, such as glass, or pottery, or fiber; but the CFG, and the Furniture Society, ally themselves with the finished product, irrespective of the medium. This fact allows us to remain very inclusive, and encouraging of innovation, novelty, and participation by people who are not makers or designers.

If remaining inclusive in this way seems to you to be an attractive policy, then it falls on each of us to continue to do several things. First, personally strive to keep an open mind, finding reasons to welcome new ideas rather than recoil from them. Second, each of us should take it upon ourselves to be ambassadors for the CFG. This would include welcoming and getting to know newly interested individuals, and also being alert to recommend the guild to anyone you encounter in our region who might benefit from

joining us. If they show interest, offer to accompany them to their first meeting, and then introduce them around. My impression is that most of us do these things very well now, and so I say “Well done”. The only concern is that, without consciously reminding ourselves of this goal, we might slowly succumb to the very human tendency to become an exclusive club. -Alf ♦

Report from the Woodworking in America Conference

By Mitch Roberson

I just returned from the Woodworking in America Conference in Berea, Kentucky. The event, held at historic Berea College, was sponsored by *Popular Woodworking* and *Woodworking Magazine*. Approximately 400 people attended lectures and hands-on sessions by top-drawer woodworkers such as Frank Klausz and top toolmakers such as Thomas Lie-Nielsen and Robin Lee.

The focus of the conference was on hand tools, and that was reflected in every session I attended. The presenters ranged from traditionalists such as Roy Underhill (from the PBS series “The Woodwright's Shop”) and Adam Cherubini, to futurists such as John Economaki and Robin Lee, designers who are pushing the limits of hand tool technology. Both of these groups promoted hand tools for those times when they are better than power tools and as a way to distinguish one's work.



In between sessions, there was a marketplace with booths from all the major toolmakers, including Lie-Nielsen, Lee Valley/Veritas, Ron Hock, Clark & Williams and others. It was great to be able to see, for example, the entire line of Lie-Nielsen products in one place, set up and ready to be put through their paces.

The highlights for me were being able to try out a Holtey smoothing plane, watching Frank Klausz cut dovetails, hearing Brian Boggs discuss harvesting chair parts from logs, and watching Roy Underhill be Roy Underhill.

The event, which sold out in a matter of days, was such a success that I heard there was a similar event being considered for next year and possibly more following that. I'm sure next year's event, wherever it is, will sell out quickly. If you are interested in attending, I recommend that you go to www.woodworkinginamerica.com and sign up on their newsletter list to receive a notice about future events. -Mitch
Guild member Mitch Roberson writes the blog *Furniture at furniture.blogspot.com*. ♦

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Photos by Mitch Roberson

Pictured are Chris Schwarz (Editor of Popular Woodworking) and toolmakers Robin Lee, Konrad Sauer, John Economaki and Thomas Lie-Nielsen. The wooden planes at left are from Clark & Williams.

Member News

Guild member Martha Berry has been teaching a furniture making class at Watkins College of Art and Design. She won't be teaching the same class in the spring term but will be doing some Saturday workshops on cabinet construction and bookshelf construction. If you want to know more, call Martha at (615) 255-6809.

Guild members Kim Winkle, Graham Campbell, and Alf Sharp all had work accepted into the upcoming Lark Book entitled *500 Tables*. Kim also had work accepted into *CraftForms International Contemporary Crafts Exhibit* in Wayne, PA., and also had work accepted into the *National Contemporary Crafts Exhibition* held at ArtSpace in Raleigh, NC. Both shows end first of the year. Kim is also a 2009 *NICHE* finalist in the painted wood category.

Guild member Greg Pennington will be assisting Curtis Buchanan with a continuous arm Windsor chair class May 25-30 at Kelly Mehler's School of Woodworking. As of today they still have a couple of openings. This is a great atmosphere to spend a week with the nation's best Windsor

chair instructor. For more info call Greg at 615-264-3578.

Guild member Craig Nutt exhibited a loveseat titled "Burning" in *A Perfect Marriage: Wood and Color* at the SOFA Expo Chicago in November. Craig also has work in *Traditions/Innovation: American Masterpieces of Southern Craft and Traditional Art* at the Knoxville Museum of Art through January 11, 2009. Also *Craig Nutt: Wood Transformed* opens at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin January 24 and continues through March 29, 2009. ♦



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The Cumberland Furniture Guild Exhibit at The Tennessee State Museum

By Mike Bell

“All things come to those who wait,” and after what seemed like years (actually it was years), the State Museum finally displayed the Guild’s exhibit *“Arms, Legs, Feet, Heart and Soul: The Cumberland Furniture Guild Explores the Anatomy of Furniture.”*

I would have preferred the exhibit stay at the museum much longer, but hey, I’m not complaining. I was thrilled to walk out into the gallery and view so many spectacular examples of studio furniture made by living, local Tennesseans. Most furniture I’ve put on exhibit for the past twenty years was made by cabinetmakers who had gone to that great cabinet shop in the sky by 1850.

Of course we had some logistical problems with the guild’s exhibit, like when the freight elevator broke down during installation and pieces had to be carried down the long staircase to the gallery. What timing! Of course that would never happen if we were setting up a teaspoon exhibit. And then there was the misguided visitor who pulled off some hardware when he tried to open a drawer on Alf’s sideboard—alright, that was me—but I did glue it back on. (Alf hadn’t finished the drawer interiors and had the drawer fronts wedged shut for the exhibit).

But by and by, the exhibit went up and the opening was



Photos of Mike Bell pieces ©Old Sturbridge Village.



Photos above and left by John Lucas



1770s Chippendale Chair by Mike Bell (far L) alongside Worth Squire’s Tree Chippendale Chair.

a great success! I loved what the Tennessean said about the show, that “The State Museum is at its best when it has exhibits like this.”

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank all the Guild members who helped make the exhibit happen. You all went way beyond the call of duty by making your own risers, loading your pieces in and out, writing labels, and creating the catalog. It was a joy for me to display such a wonderful assortment of contemporary furniture to museum visitors, who often complemented the show.

I’m also happy to report the state museum recently acquired a “Tree Chippendale Chair” made by Worth Squire and a “Sheraton chest of drawers (lowboy)” made by Jim Horne, which are great additions to the museum’s furniture collection. I enjoy exhibiting pieces like this alongside their traditional prototypes which were made by 18th and 19th century craftsmen. However, the 1770s Boston, Chippendale chair and the early 1800s Sheraton bureau pictured here with the Guild’s pieces, were actually antique reproductions I made at Old Sturbridge Village in the 1970s. I used them because the Tennessee State Museum doesn’t have these particular early forms in the collection.

The museum also owns pieces made by Guild members Alf Sharp, Craig Nutt, Scott Thompson, Graham Campbell, Brad Sells, Tom Fuhrman, and Kimberly Winkle. Our studio furniture collection is growing, demonstrating that the traditions of meticulous handwork, precision joinery, and innovative design are currently alive and well in Middle Tennessee. -Mike

Guild member Mike Bell is the Curator of Furniture and Popular Culture at the Tennessee State Museum ♦

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Catalogs Are Still Available

A really nice catalog of the Cumberland Furniture Guild’s current touring exhibition *“Arms, Legs, Feet, Heart and Soul—The Cumberland Furniture Guild Explores the Anatomy of Furniture”* with beautiful color plates of each piece in the show, is available for purchase. You can get copies at our next meeting or, to purchase a copy by mail, please send a check or money order for \$30 plus \$5 shipping and handling per copy, to:

The Cumberland Furniture Guild
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