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Nashville, Tennessee 37206

## OCTOBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

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## *The Cumberland Furniture Guild's Fall Meeting*

will be on Saturday, October 17th, 2009 from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. at  
Watkins College of Art and Design in Nashville, Tennessee.

*The program at this meeting will be a Seminar for Artists, Artisans, and Craftspeople entitled "Intellectual Property for Craft Artists" co-sponsored by the Cumberland Furniture Guild and the Volunteer Lawyers and Professionals for the Arts (VLPA) and led by attorney Jon Rose.*

Jon is a VLPA lawyer from the prestigious Nashville firm Bradley, Arant, Boult, & Cummings. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School and focuses his practice on intellectual property litigation and other commercial law. *'In Marketing Crafts and Visual Arts it's written that, "The real challenge for artisans and visual artists is not just to produce and market winning new products that cater to changing consumer tastes, but also to prevent — or, if unable to prevent, to deal effectively with — unfair competition or theft of their creative ideas." This seminar is intended specifically to help familiarize craft artists with trademark, copyright, patent and other intellectual property concepts — ultimately making the "real challenge" for artisans easy to navigate.'*

**Volunteer Lawyers & Professionals for the Arts (VLPA)**, a cornerstone program of the Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville, provides pro bono legal assistance and education to low-income artists of all disciplines, as well as legal and business services to emerging non-profit arts organizations located in the greater Nashville area.

**This seminar is free for CFG members, but we are being asked to RSVP by Fri., Oct. 16th to [vlpa@abcnashville.org](mailto:vlpa@abcnashville.org) or 615-743-3055 so they can get an idea of attendance. This should be a great opportunity to network with others in the greater craft community in town, since this event is also being promoted to the membership of TACA, and through Watkins College and VLPA.**

**Directions to Watkins College:** From I-65 on the North side of Nashville, take exit 85 for 8th Avenue/U.S. Highway 41 Alt toward State Capital/Metro Center Blvd., Turn North on Metro Center Blvd. School is 8/10ths of a mile on Right. *The meeting is in the main auditorium.*

## Letter From The President

By Alf Sharp

A long past memory recently resurfaced, and got me thinking about how various ones of us approach our craft. Safe to say, the first quality we all bring to our work is a passion for the activity. Without a surpassing enthusiasm for the shop environment, and the work we get to do there, there's little reason for any of us to pursue this craft. Certainly any of us could make better, and more predictable incomes doing other jobs that demand less commitment. But beyond that, our approaches to what we do can vary.

The reminiscence that spurred this philosophizing was of one of the most harrowing days I've spent in the shop. The project was a contemporary executive's desk, somewhat in the "California round-over" style. The lumber was some spectacularly figured 8/4 koa—very pricey. The design consisted of a large (approximately 40" x 80") top joined with a front-to-back miter at either end to slab sides going to the floor. The grain followed up from the floor, over the top, and down the other side. The two slab sides were connected by a short privacy panel dovetailed into either side. The structurally important miters were to be positioned and strengthened with staggered cross-joint splines, 3/4" thick by 4" long perpendicular to the faces of the miters. Altogether a fairly simple design, right? I thought so.

I had an assistant at the time. We assembled the dovetailed cross-bar to the two sides, and inserted the splines, using yellow glue. They were an appropriately snug fit, but slid to the bottom of their slots, thanks to pressure-relief grooves. We glued up the miter faces and slots on the top, and offered it up to the sides assembly. The dovetailed cross-piece didn't allow much wiggle room to get the splines engaged into their slots, but with a little grunting and levering, we got that done and started driving the top down to close up the miters. Everything went fairly well until there was about a 1/8" gap left on either end. Then no amount of reasonable clamping and pounding would effect any more movement. The splines (and the walls of the slots) had swelled under the influence of the water in the glue, and if we didn't figure something out fast, the glue was going to set, and there would be no salvaging the situation. I'm sure that at that moment, to the fly on the wall, we looked like two guys auditioning for the Keystone Cops, frenzied expressions on our faces, spinning on one foot after another, grasping for a solution. I told my assistant

to put as much pressure as possible on all the clamps, while I ran to the garage and grabbed a small and a large sledge hammer. Holding protective cauls with one hand, swinging the heavy hammers with the other, we pounded on those miters like John Henry losing to the machine. It was working, but progress was miniscule, and we were pounding with all our might, repeatedly stopping to retighten the clamps, sweating and cursing and bellowing commands and directions. The fly on the wall must have been laughing hard enough to jeopardize his grip. Finally we got a feeble indication of glue squeeze-out all along the joint, and we both literally fell gasping to the floor. I sent my assistant home for the remainder of the day, with pay. I felt like I had just been the first man to break the sound barrier, or that I'd just slayed the dragon and won the princess' hand.

Perhaps an interesting enough story by itself, but it also reveals one of the serious down-sides to my chosen manner of work, which is custom commission—each new project likely sharing nothing with the previous one. If I'd chosen to make another desk like the one just described, I would have anticipated the problem and devised a solution in advance. With each



Photo by Eric Flora

*Although not the frenzied glue-up described in this story, this picture of a Queen Anne love seat depicts a successful but very uncooperative assembly! When you use clamps to clamp clamps so that your clamps will not . . . oh, well, you get the idea.*

desk made after that, I would work more efficiently, and hence, more profitably. This is the kind of reasoning that leads inexorably to mass production. In my case though, long before we'd reached the mass production level, I'd be suffering from terminal boredom.

So I'm off to another project that is just as likely to pose one of those completely unanticipated dilemmas, and the associated adrenaline rush, and ultimately the sense of pride of successful completion that is as good as money. In the wonderful movie, "Never Cry Wolf", the protagonist is riding reluctantly on a bush plane in Alaska in the winter with a slightly maniacal pilot played by Brian Denehy. They're flying in a blizzard when suddenly the plane's engine sputters and dies. Denehy curses, and says it's the stupid fuel line that's always coming loose. He hands our dumbfounded hero the controls to the plane, and promptly climbs out of the window of the plane and disappears into the blizzard while the powerless plane is plummeting toward the ground. After a couple of minutes, he scrambles back inside the window, hits the start button, the engine fires, and he pulls the plane hard out of its dive. Then he turns toward our hero, and with the most devilish grin says,

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“Don’t it just make you feel ALIVE!” I understood completely.

David Pye, in his seminal book, “The Nature and Art of Workmanship”, discusses the difference between the workmanship of certainty, and the workmanship of risk. An example of the workmanship of certainty would be metal machining, where, once the setup is properly made, the outcome is essentially guaranteed. Woodworking, on the other hand, is primarily the workmanship of risk, where, at any moment, a slip of the hand by the craftsperson could ruin the entire piece. This is obviously more true of one-of-a-kind work in which the craftsperson is constantly skating on the edge of disaster, and less so in the case of production set-ups. Limited production in the small shop environment is somewhere in between. Sadly, unlike many other business circumstances, the adage “The higher the risk, the higher the reward” is not so often true in studio furniture making. Limited production arrangements, where procedures can be

acquiesced to my psyche’s need for constant novelty. I couldn’t in good conscience recommend this path to a novice furniture maker looking for guidance and inspiration. But every now and then you see that spark in the eyes of some young supplicant, and realize this one is not going to be happy doing anything else. Then all you can do is welcome him or her to this fascinating little realm of dubious sanity. -Alf ♦

Photo by Greg Pennington



Greg’s Barn, Raised. Note the Pine Bough at the peak to honor the trees used.

## Member News

**CFG Members David Knudtson and Dale McLoud** both had pieces in the Artscapes 2009 fundraising auction at the Knoxville Museum of Art after the CFG Exhibition closed. Kudos to both of them for participating in support of that great venue!

**Guild Board Members Alf Sharp and Worth Squire** are both in a really nice new book entitled “**Studio Furniture—Today’s Leading Woodworkers**” by Tina Skinner (Schiffer Books, 2009 ISBN # 9780764332876)

**Guild Member Greg Pennington** will be assisting Peter Galbert at Kelly Mehler’s school March 1st through 6th, 2010, building the continuous arm Windsor chair. Greg also says: “Thanks to all those who helped with the barn raising which made everything go together with ease.” See photo above.



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honed and perfected, are much more likely to generate profits. The conundrum for most of us independently minded enough to venture into this occupation is that such arrangements aren’t very challenging.

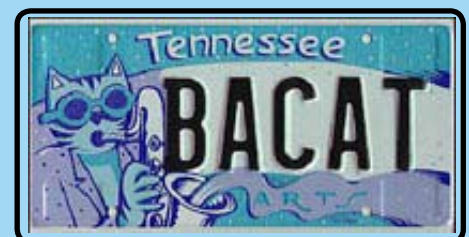
Even within the large umbrella of bespoke furniture making there are specialties where constant practice of a specific skill makes the craftsperson very efficient, and his or her work exceptionally fine. Marquetry, Windsor chair making, and carving are examples, and, if one is especially accomplished, can be more lucrative. Yet the dedicated marquetarian won’t experience the joy of turning a sleek leg on the lathe; and the specialty carver will miss the satisfaction of fashioning intricate dovetails.

I’ve come to terms with this conundrum, and

## Support the Arts!

Support the Tennessee Arts with this special license plate. The plate is only \$25 more than a regular plate and the proceeds go to all the programs and services of the Tennessee Arts Commission.

The Cumberland Furniture Guild has received generous support from the TAC, so let’s support what they do! Go to <http://www.tennessee.gov/revenue/vehicle/licenseplates/misc/mostpop.htm> for more information.



## Cool Tool Review

### A Tapered Peg in a Tapered Hole

By Scott Thompson

In this brief article, I would like to look at a matched set of tools for making a tapered leg fit into a tapered hole. These tools are often used in Windsor chairs or other situations in which a leg is inserted into a solid seat. The two tools are known as a "rounder" (or tenoner) for the chair leg and a "tapered reamer" for the seat. All joinery in furniture making depends on fitting the end of one part to a properly sized joint in another part - for example a mortise and tenon (with some glue) can join the stiles and rails of a cabinet face frame together. What is unique about a tapered leg inserted into a tapered hole in a chair seat is that the more you sit on the seat, the more it forces the joint together - or tightens it.

This concept is so simple and sublime, I think it is worth examining. With four hand tools (a draw knife,



Scott's son Holden hammering a wedge into the tapered through-tenon of a Windsor chair seat (above)

Photos by Scott Thompson

a brace and bit, and the reamer and the rounder), you can solidly join a chair seat to its legs for many, many years. The key to executing this joinery well is the matched tapered reamer for the chair seat and a tenoner (or rounder) for the chair legs. Fortunately for us all, this simple and effective joint is available to everyone and has not been patented by a huge European machinery company. There is no need to glue this joint, but often a wedge is inserted in the end of the leg after it has been fit to the seat to lock the two together. The reamer shown in this photo was made by Elia Bizzarri in North Carolina. -Scott ♦

The tapered reamer in its native habitat (Below)



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