



P.O. Box 68343
Nashville, Tennessee 37206

OCTOBER 2011 NEWSLETTER

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The Cumberland Furniture Guild's Fall Meeting

**will be on Saturday, November 12th, 2011 from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m. at
LeQuire Gallery, 4304 Charlotte Avenue in Nashville, Tennessee 37209.**

**This meeting will include a presentation by noted Sculptor Alan LeQuire,
Elections for CFG Board positions and SLIDE WARS!**

←—————→

Directions to LeQuire Gallery From I-40 on the West side of Nashville:

If heading West on I-40 take EXIT 205 for 46th Ave. N. Merge onto Delaware Ave. Turn Left onto 46th Ave. N. Take 2nd Left onto Charlotte Ave. LeQuire Gallery will be on Left just past 44th Ave.

If heading East on I-40 take exit 205 for 51st Ave. N., 46th Ave. N. Merge onto Alabama Ave. Turn Right onto 51st Ave. N. Take 1st Left onto Charlotte Ave. LeQuire Gallery will be on Left just past 44th Ave.

If you need help or directions the day of the meeting please call Dale McCloud at (615) 513-1924

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Editor - Worth Squire - editor@cumberlandfurnitureguild.org; Contributing Editor Scott Thompson;

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Letter From The President

By Alf Sharp

The Shoes of Toshio Odate

One of the best things about events such as the Furniture Society conferences, or the recent Woodworking in America show and seminar, is the beery late-evening bull-sessions that inevitably break out in nearby watering holes. I stumbled into one of these during the aforementioned WIA - 12 or 15 merry woodworkers dominating a large corner of a nice little pub across the street from the host hotel. By the time I got there, several rounds had clearly already been consumed, and the discussion was loud and impassioned. Brian Boggs had the soap box and was exhorting everyone else toward a more socially conscious agenda for the woodworking community. I sat down and listened for a little while. It was very easy to imagine this being the equivalent to Hemingway and his cronies in Havana, or Toulouse-Lautrec and the boys in a less-than-savory establishment in 19th Century Paris. Great fun.

I know it's hard for you to imagine, but there came a point when I felt compelled to comment. I was reminded, by some of the assertions being made, of a keynote speech Toshio Odate made to the Furniture Society conference a few years ago, and felt that it really bore on the discussion at hand. After reliving and relating that moment to those assembled there, I thought it worthy of sharing with you as well.

I won't bother to introduce Toshio Odate to you. He is not only an internationally known sculptor, but a classically trained Japanese joiner. The auditorium where this talk took place was well situated – the stage tended to be high relative to most of the audience. Toshio sits alone, slightly elevated, at a simple table at the front of the stage, in a soft spotlight that obscured everything else behind him (this guy does know his theater). On the table are a couple of shoes of the hush-puppy variety.

Odate's expression is grave, reminiscent of a shogun warrior looking over a dubious class of novices. He waits until everyone is settled and then announces something like, "These two shoes look identical, but they're not." (Everything related from this point is far from verbatim, but the essence is true.)

He picks up one shoe and says, "This shoe is craftsmanship." He picks up the other and says, "This shoe is art." He speaks in staccato bursts, in the gruff yet consoling manner of a Zen master with a favored but clueless apprentice.

He describes the elevated position of a craftsperson in traditional Japanese culture – he/she spends years learning and perfecting his craft. He has a compelling obligation to society – to do his work as well and as honestly as he possibly can. To provide shoddy goods, or second-rate work would be unspeakably shameful. In the case of the shoemaker, his customers rely on him for comfortable, supportive, and long-lasting footwear. It ought to be pleasant to look at as well. The entire community is elevated when every craftsperson provides goods of sublime quality and spirit. In turn, the community owes high respect and a good standard of living to those who provide such pleasing items to live and work with. Japan, after all, regularly declares its master craftsmen "National Treasures".

I wish I could remember all his words, because without an abundance of them, Toshio also thoroughly condemns our overly mechanized and throw-away culture.

He picks up the other shoe, and begins to describe an art class, wherein the teacher shows a shoe to the students and instructs them to come back in six months with a work of art inspired by the simple

shoe. Six months later, the students return with their typically over-ambitious oeuvres, but one student just presents a shoe identical to the one originally displayed, but for the other foot. At first the instructor is infuriated, but decides to ask why this supposedly mundane effort should be considered a worthy piece of art. The student describes his process: He planted some flax seed and bought a young calf; he apprenticed to a shoemaker and learned the essence of the craft, meanwhile cultivating his flax and raising the calf. At the proper time he slaughtered the calf and harvested the flax. He tanned the leather, and carded, spun and waxed the flax. He learned from a swordmaker to make a steel cutting blade and a needle capable of piercing leather. Carefully measuring the original shoe, he reversed the pattern, and precisely recreated every stitch in his copy. The whole time he's doing this work, he goes shoeless. The instructor is duly impressed, and the student receives the highest grade.

Why? Because this shoe was a reflection on and of, the greater culture, and the interdependence of so many different practitioners that make it all work. By raising and harvesting his raw materials, he highlighted our relation to, and dependance on the natural world. His devotion of six intense months of high-level activity to a product that otherwise might only take a half-day to make demonstrated the artist's obligation to struggle, without assurance of reward, to make a statement that might not then be appreciated by its intended audience. The shoe held a mirror up to society, and applauded the humble craftsman who might never be as celebrated as a successful artist.

Two identical shoes – one craft, one art. The difference was one of essence, not substance. Both required a total commitment from their creators. Each maker had an obligation to his community, and deserved the respect and appreciation of that community. Each object served its worthy purpose, and one wasn't inherently superior to the other.

At this point, Toshio stood and his intensity level rose visibly. He leaned forward over the table and glared at the audience. With the still gruff, but now also insistent tones of an unimpeachable master, he exhorted everyone in the audience to be certain of what was their obligation to the greater good, and never to do less than their very best.

His words were simple, measured, and stunning. He then turned and walked into the dark. The audience was stone silent for a long moment before bursting into raucous applause.

My retelling of this marvelous event is impoverished compared to having been there, a short paraphrasing of much more compelling expressions. But it will hopefully remind us of why we undertake this work that we do, and to always do our best.

Excelsior! -Alf ♦

Guild Elections

Nominations for various Cumberland Furniture Guild board positions will be open until the fall meeting on November 12th. Nominees for elected positions of the Guild are: Alf Sharp, President; Alan Daigre, Coordinating Vice President, Greg Pennington, Programming Vice President; Dale McLoud, Secretary; Rita Kaplan, Treasurer; Worth Squire, Editor; and Peggy Joseph, Advisor. Also nominated for the new position of Member at Large will be Matthew Teague, who is currently Guild Secretary, provided the following change in the bylaws passes.

Proposed Change in the Guild Bylaws

A proposal has been made that there be two new positions added in order to increase participation on the board of the CFG. These two new positions would be called "Members at Large" and would have whatever specific responsibilities the board designates from time to time. We will also vote on this proposal at the next meeting.

Craftsman Furniture in the 'Boro

By Mike Bell

Curator of Furniture & Popular Culture,
Tennessee State Museum

Arts & Crafts Furnituremaker

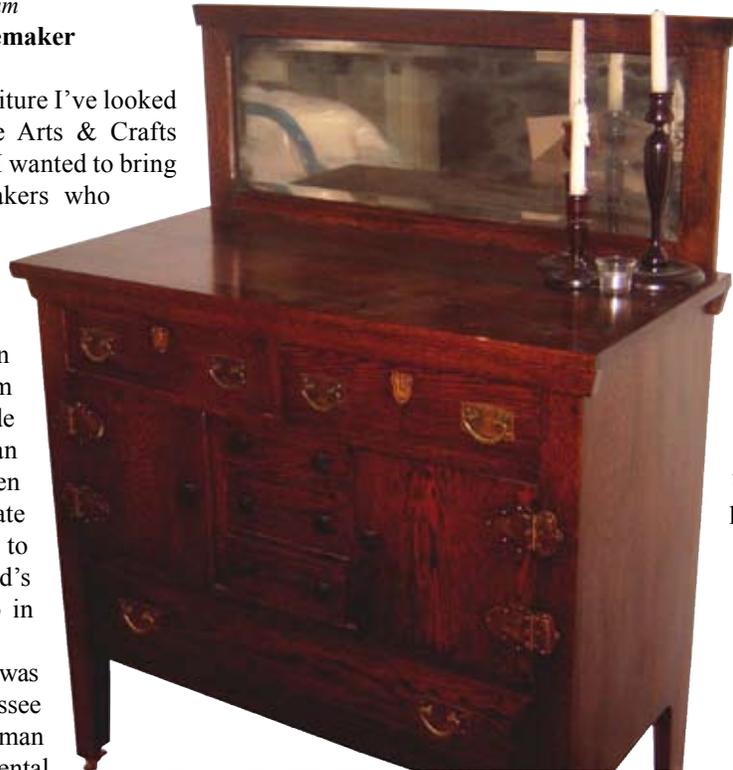
Clark Woodard

As a curator of Tennessee furniture I've looked for early 1900s Tennessee-made Arts & Crafts pieces for years without success. I wanted to bring to light any local furniture makers who were inspired by Gustav Stickley and his contemporaries. However, all the pieces I found were produced out-of-state. And then I met Tom Cowan, an accomplished cabinetmaker from Winchester, Tennessee. Tom made a wonderful reproduction of an 1820s Tennessee cellaret, and then generously donated it to the state museum. He also introduced me to his Great-Uncle Clark Woodard's furniture, made in Murfreesboro in the nineteen-teens.

Clark Woodard was the man I was looking for: that elusive Tennessee cabinetmaker working in the craftsman style. Around 1911 he was instrumental in implementing the industrial arts program at Middle Tennessee State College (now MTSU). It was then a teacher's college where he taught several craft skills, including woodworking, ornamental metalworking, glass work, upholstery, printing, machine shop, and design. His furniture that was handed down in his family illustrates his talent as an accomplished cabinetmaker. As a testament to his teaching skills the 1929 issue of *The Midlander*, the school's yearbook, was dedicated to him. It's a shame that industrial arts aren't taught by more teachers like Woodard nowadays. I fondly remember being introduced to woodworking in high school in the 1960s.

Woodard used white oak and occasionally walnut for his furniture. He also skillfully incorporated art glass, leather upholstery, and decorative metal work into his pieces. I've always admired the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement as a skilled artisan's response to the cheap mass-produced furniture of the Victorian era, which tended to separate the art from the craft of furniture making. Victorian furniture was often over-decorated and made with inferior joinery.

Clark Woodard built a log bungalow in 1918 across the street from MTSU (the first I've seen constructed with logs), which he later filled with his interpretations of Arts & Crafts-styled furniture. His bungalow utilized plans and designs publicized by Stickley in his



Photos courtesy the Tennessee State Museum



Clockwise from bottom left: Relief-carved table with upside down scolded fish; Craftsman-style dresser; Detail of front door; Clark Woodard's Murfreesboro log bungalow; Arts & Crafts clock.

magazine *The Craftsman*. A comparison of pages from the magazine with drawings and photographs of the Woodard house reveals the care with which he carried out the ideas of the magazine. For more information on the house, see "Murfreesboro Craftsman Bungalow: The Expression of an Idea," by David Jutkins of MTSU. The house is still there today.

So now I can add at least one Tennessee craftsman who worked in this more-popular-than-ever Arts and Crafts style—Clark Woodard! —Mike ♦

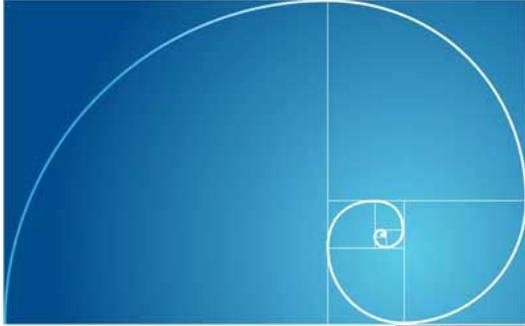


Cool Tool Review

A Golden Rule

By Scott Thompson

Whether you are designing a cabinet, a piece of furniture or a house, a proper relationship between the different elements within the design is essential for a successful project. While the relationship between various elements in a design may vary from designer to designer, there are certain proportions that people have found pleasing over time. One such ratio known as “Phi” (or The Golden Mean, Golden Section, or Golden Ratio) has been acknowledged since the ancient Greeks to be



a useful aid in designing a pleasing form. The mathematics behind this ratio are fairly simple - the long portion is 1.618 times longer than the short portion. This means that “The whole is to the longer part as the longer part is to the shorter part”. Yet this sublimely simple formula can yield quite a complex result - for example, the spirals in a sea shell often follow this ratio when rectangles are applied over the spiral sequence. (see images) Whole books have been written on this subject, and a Google search for “the Golden Ratio” yields over 900,000 returns. This web site will tell you more than you ever wanted to know on the subject: <http://www.goldennumber.net/>.

So for this “Cool Tool”, I would like to look at a ruler designed to help furniture

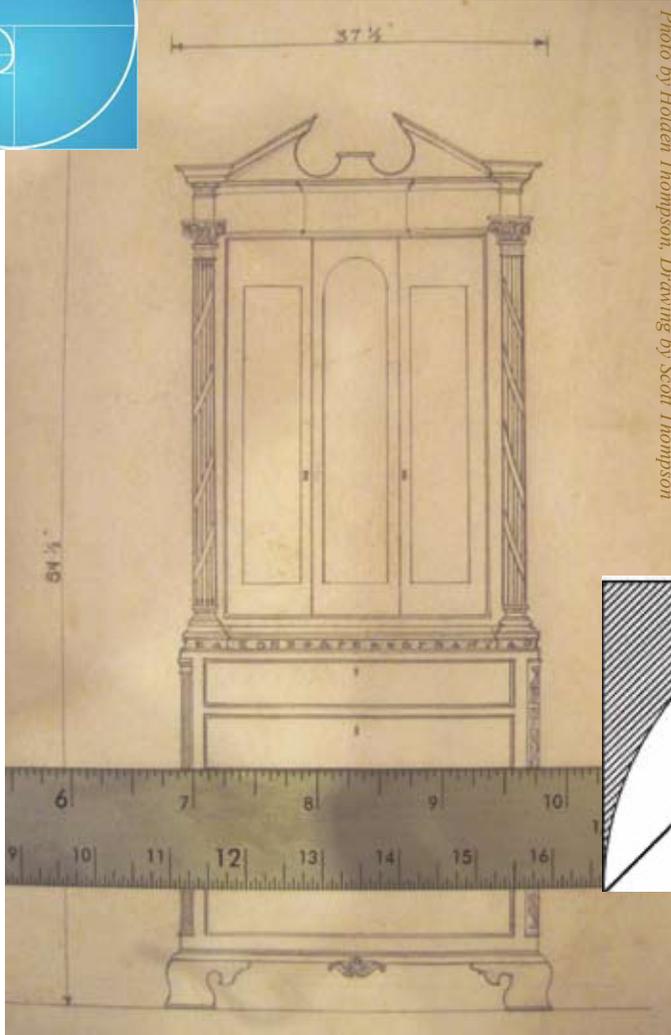


Photo by Holden Thompson. Drawing by Scott Thompson

Phi Ruler across a design incorporating the Golden Section.

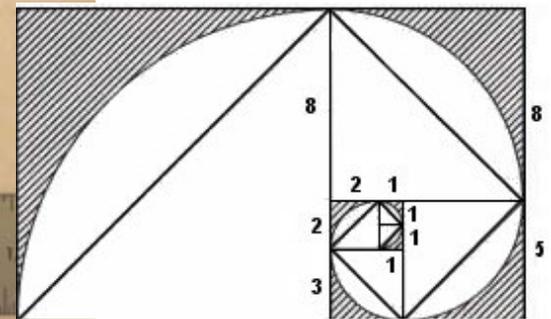
Support the Arts!

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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 on how to get yours.

makers (or architects or builders) during the design process. It references The Golden Ratio for laying out the different dimensions within a design. The Phi ruler helps simplify the application of this ratio in a variety of design applications. The ruler has a dual scale on each side, with the top scale in normal one inch graduations and the bottom scale in “Phi-graduations.” For example, if you knew that a table top needed to be a certain width to fit into a room, but you were unsure of what length would be a pleasing measurement, you could start with the known width and use the Phi Ruler to increase that dimension by 1.618 without any math. The other side of the ruler lets you decrease by Phi when the longer side is known in the layout equation. The rulers are available in lengths from 6 inches to 36 inches from Lee Valley Tools. For those of us



who like to simplify the math involved in the design process, this is truly a cool tool. So get on out there and do unto your designs! –Scott ♦



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