



P.O. Box 68343
Nashville, Tennessee 37206

MAY 2012 NEWSLETTER

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The Cumberland Furniture Guild's Spring Meeting

will be on Saturday, May 19th, 2012 from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. at the Shop of Windsor chair maker Greg Pennington in Hendersonville, Tennessee.



Greg will demonstrate wood-riving, steam-bending, tool sharpening, turning and other techniques he commonly uses in his Middle Tennessee furniture shop.

Directions to Greg's Shop:

From I-65 on the North side of Nashville Take I-65 N toward Louisville to exit 182, Vietnam Veterans Blvd. (TN 386).

In 8.7 miles take **Exit 8, Saundersville Rd. Turn Left** at end of exit ramp.

In 2.3 miles look for 1739 on the left at the stone mailbox.

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

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. www.cumberlandfurnitureguild.org

Thanks to the many 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

The Value of Objectivity

Lately I've been ruminating on the conflict between being content with a job-well-done, or worse, a job not-so-well-done, versus the often uncomfortable drive to improve in one's skills, execution, and design acumen.

Without wanting to sound too pedantic, this is really a crucial issue among serious craftspeople, whatever their medium. Recognizing that furniture makers rarely make enough money at what we do to say that our career choice is driven by economics, job satisfaction is a major reason we continue to practice our craft. Does each of us obtain greater satisfaction from simply doing what we know how to do well, or do we see each new project as an opportunity to stretch our skills and explore new territories? What if our personal level of satisfaction falls short of the standards of excellence normally expected in our craft? Do I go ahead and put a defective (perhaps only in my own eyes) item out there, or do I relegate it to the scrap pile? How can we really know the quality of a piece of work unless our colleagues offer kind but honest criticism? So many questions, so little brain.

For years I've struggled with a common comment when fellow woodworkers introduce me to their work, typically saying, "Now, I know this is isn't up to your standard, but..." My response has always been, "Don't even say that - we're all on a spectrum of achievement, ya-da ya-da ya-da". Lately though, I wonder if sometimes I should have spent more time urging them to recognize they had vistas yet to achieve, whether in craftsmanship, or design sense, or both.

There's an older gentleman who displays his furniture regularly at local crafts fairs, no one in our guild, mind you. To be generous, his work is mundane, and it hasn't improved a bit over the past 10 years or so. We're talking about uber-simple occasional tables with square legs, an ovolo-routed molding on their outermost arris, and flat tops with an identical routed molding, marginally sanded. There will be dozens of identical tables, in admittedly nice hardwoods, standing rank outside his booth space. He's always so pleased to be able to display his work, and clearly loves the time spent making these items. He's happy in his work - fulfilled. I can't imagine who buys them.

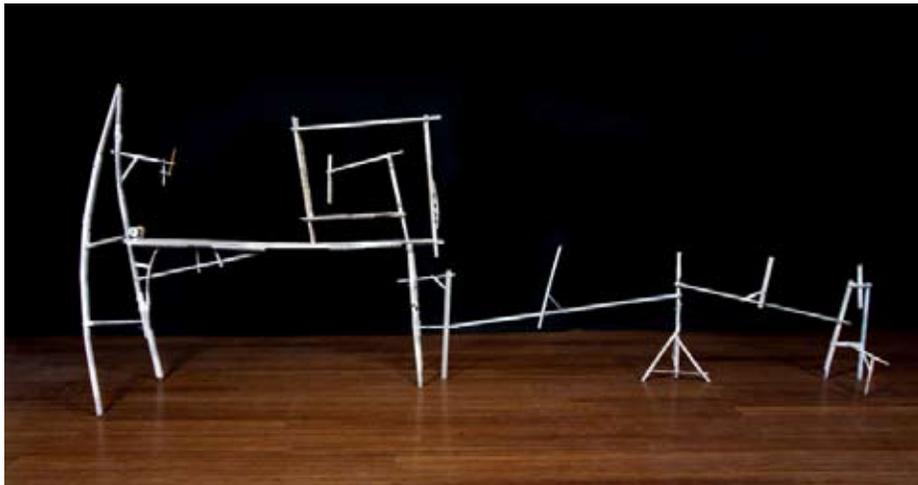
There's a prominent poster on the wall at the Marc Adams School of Woodworking, penned by John Economacki, the legendary creative force behind Bridge City Tool Works. It says something like "Bad design is an assault on the eyes. Who gave you permission to produce such visual pollution?" Part of me wants to say "Right on, Bro!", where another part of me wants to say "Who gives you the right to be so arrogantly judgmental?"

Wendell Castle, not himself known for his humility or for

encouraging marginal talents, has said "Don't fall in love with your ideas, you'll lose all objectivity." That bit of advice has helped me several times, and yet I fall to my knees in awe of the beauty and inventiveness of the work of groundbreakers like Van Gogh and Thelonius Monk. Neither were recognized for a very long time, and people who should have known better called their work foolish and incomprehensible. They clearly loved their work beyond all objectivity. (Interestingly, both were also well known for inhabiting the margins of sanity, which raises a whole other list of conundrums. Why are we so often entertained or inspired by people with antisocial tendencies? Why are creativity and mental disease so often linked? Well, I won't take those on this time.)

Katie Hudnall's work can only be called avant-guard. I confess to taking some time to become smitten with her stuff, and was fairly vocal about it. She took it all in the most gracious good humor, and just waited for me to get it. One of my biggest objections was the complete lack of technique (I no longer say lack of skill, in her case) she uses in constructing her tenuous fantasies. Of course, one of the things she is doing, like Gary Bennett before her, is poking her thumb in the eye of all the super-precious work that's being done today (well, really ever since the Renaissance, I guess). I know she won't mind my saying that much of her work is not likely to survive for centuries, but that is in itself a commentary

on the fleetingness of everything. What is so wonderful about her work is that she seems to have a direct doorway into her playful subconscious, and doesn't try to filter or refine the results with any kind of rational overlay. But then here we have an example of work that can't be judged by any of the standard expectations of quality or usefulness. While I cherish having her as an active part of the studio furniture scene,



"World's Longest Drawing Table" Katie Hudnall, 2008

the orthodox side of me in this discussion still sometimes questions if the term furniture can be applied here at all. (I know, this is a tired old conversation, and I bring it up only to illustrate the state of confusion I'm in over this whole subject.)

I have no solutions to offer. Perhaps it is the very tension this issue generates that continues to push our craft forward, and to arrive at the "final answer" would be to sound the death knell of the craft. I would, nevertheless, relish having the subject being a regular part of our dialogue. But then again, Scott Braun says, "Oh, let's stop arguing about all this stuff, and just make cool things."

Excelsior -Alf ♦

Call for Entries Announced

"Inspirations and Origins" at The Customs House Museum

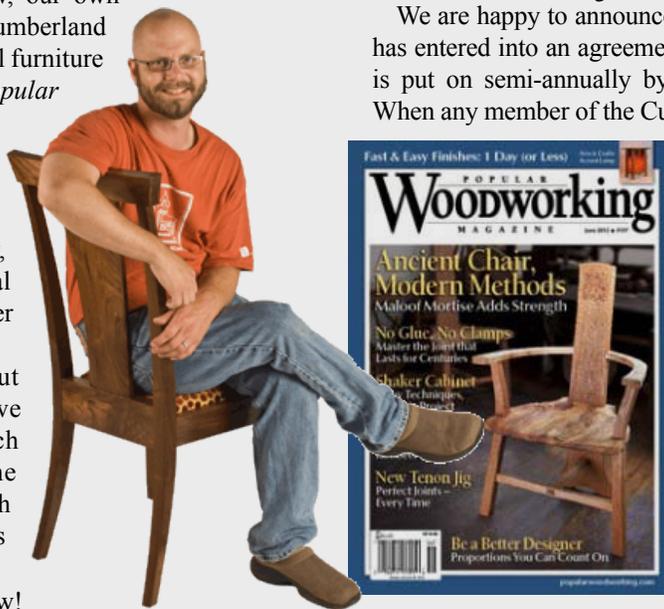
The Exhibitions Committee of the Cumberland Furniture Guild has issued the official Call for Entries for our upcoming Juried Exhibition. "Inspirations and Origins" the biennial exhibition of the Cumberland Furniture Guild will open later this year at the Customs House Museum in Clarksville, Tennessee. Please go to

Popular Woodworking's New Editor

As many of you know by now, our own Matthew Teague, member of the Cumberland Furniture Guild board and noted local furniture maker, is the new editor of *Popular Woodworking Magazine*. Matthew has been an active and important member of the CFG board, and has also been a productive member of the local furniture making community, making and selling his own original designs, and collaborating with other CFG members, as well.

If you haven't checked out *Popular Woodworking* in a while, we recommend it as a really top-notch journal which, while catering to the "popular" is also intelligent enough for really serious furniture makers and woodworkers among us.

Congratulations, Matthew!



Woodworking in America Conference & the CFG

We are happy to announce that the Cumberland Furniture Guild has entered into an agreement with the WWIA Conference, which is put on semi-annually by the folks at *Popular Woodworking*. When any member of the Cumberland Furniture Guild registers for the 3 day WWIA conference as a CFG member the Conference will donate \$50 of their registration to the Cumberland Furniture Guild. The mechanics of this are still in process, but the conference is not until October, so we will send out the particulars to the guild membership via email as well as in the next newsletter once we get closer to the date. If you are just chomping at the bit to register, email us at info@cumberlandfurnitureguild.org and we will connect you up with the right method.

A Lesson on Wrought Iron Nails

By Mike Bell

Curator of Furniture & Popular Culture at
the Tennessee State Museum

In the rolling hills of Central Massachusetts lies Old Sturbridge Village, a living history museum where I used to

collection of period furniture, from William and Mary of the early 1700s to Empire pieces of the 1830s. I was like a kid in a candy store. With each piece I'd make an isometric drawing and then make a reproduction in the cabinet shop with hand tools, doing any turned elements on a foot treadle lathe. My twelve-year-old son and I still visit Sturbridge and stay at my friend Roger's 1790

farmhouse nearby. The house sits on a ridge overlooking his beautifully-kept fields, and has been in his family since it was built. The interior has some great wainscoting. Also, you can follow a wire that starts out with a pull-handle outside the front door, then continues on inside the house on a series of metal pulleys around corners, through the parlor, and winds up above the home's central fireplace, where it is attached to an iron bell. I still marvel at this original 1790 door bell at Roger's house. And it still works! On our visits



Photo: Mike Bell

1790s wrought iron doorbell in situ near Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts

work in period costume making antique furniture reproductions. They let me pick out any piece I wanted from their incredible

we play a lot of Irish fiddle music, cook a bunch of barbecue, and usually have a ball. While there, Roger lets my son Jacob

“Lesson on Wrought Nails” *Continued from Page 3*

ride with him in his backhoe doing the odd bit of farm work. One year they flew a kite from Rog’s golf cart on a windless day

1790”. It was a hot, humid day made even more unbearable by the roaring charcoal fire Lenny was using to hand-forge hundreds of wrought iron nails to be sold at the gift shop.



Photo: Mike Bell

Mike’s Son Jacob Bell watches the Old Sturbridge Village Blacksmith forging hand-wrought nails.

He slowly turned and faced the accusatory soul standing in front of him. What would he say to this doubting Thomas from New Jersey who was watching “history come alive” at Old Sturbridge Village? There was a hush. Then I noticed Lenny squinting as he threw the historic question at the man in a loud voice, “What’dya think they *glued* Christ to the cross?”

I really thought he’d lose his job after that. After all it could be the Museum Director’s brother standing there. Thankfully it all calmed down when the man’s wife said “C’mon George let’s go home, I’ll show you what a hammer looks like!” **–Mike ♦**

in the upper hayfield, sort of modern-day Ben Franklins in reverse.

Seeing my old living-history museum buddies it’s always fun retelling our war stories from working summer days in the 1790s –oops, I mean 1970s– when ten thousand visitors asked us the same three questions: “What are you making? How much does it cost? Where’s the bathroom?”

My favorite saga is the one in which Lenny, the blacksmith, dealt with a man doubting the authenticity of what was he was making at his forge in the museum’s blacksmith shop. First came the familiar “What are you making?” “A nail,” Lenny replied. The man then yelled to the surprised crowd of on-looking tourists: “Oh c’mon, they didn’t have nails in

“Call for Entries” *Continued from Page 2*

www.cumberlandfurnitureguild.org where you will find a link to the full call for entries on our home page.

This juried exhibition of recent works, new work, or works in progress is intended to look into what inspires a unique piece of furniture. What is the story behind the creation? Alongside all of the accepted pieces, a description or image (or the physical inspiration itself if small enough) will be displayed on the wall in order to give those viewing the furniture pieces a glimpse into their story – and hopefully all our stories. This is a great chance to exhibit our work in a really nice venue in the fifth largest city in the state.

The deadline for submissions is June 18, 2012, so let’s get to work!





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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 on how to get yours.

