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## JUNE 2011 NEWSLETTER

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***The Cumberland Furniture Guild's Summer Meeting***  
**will be on Saturday, August 6th, 2011 from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. at the shop  
of Guild member Roger Gramm in Nashville, Tennessee.**

←—————→  
**This meeting will include a demonstration of modern veneering  
techniques presented by Roger, as well as a hide-glue  
hammered-veneer demo by Alf Sharp.**

**Put the date of this exciting meeting in your calendar now!**

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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

## Kids in the Wood

I've always been a vigorous advocate of encouraging the next generation of woodworkers.

As I've often related, when I became interested in the craft, it was practically moribund. There were precious few old guys who would share their accumulated knowledge with a neophyte.

Between the ages of about four and twelve, I lived next door to a man who had a workshop in his basement. This workshop, filled with all these mystical benches and power tools – and who knew what other unimaginable delights? – was surrounded by an impenetrable (for a respectable child) hardware cloth barrier from floor to ceiling. His children were my best friends, and on rainy days we'd often play together in their basement outside of that beckoning inner sanctum. I asked once or twice if I could go inside the force field, but was summarily dismissed. In his defense, his primary interest was my safety, but I believe now his concerns were misguided.

Truly, I must confess, that even as a very well behaved child, I was tempted more than once to try to cut through that fence just to look at the tools. I think I tried this once, but that might just be my imagination. I've related in other columns how, as a young adult in search of knowledge about this craft, I was turned away from the shops of older practicing makers. All these experiences engendered in me an intense resolve to always mentor and encourage anyone who wanted to know more about the manual skills.

So then I had children of my own. Obviously, they all had total access to my shop at any time (or almost any time). Anyone who has had children knows how different each one will be, right out of the womb. My oldest son showed little immediate interest in the shop. Thinking (as an ignorant neophyte parent) that any child was a blank page upon which one could inscribe whatever traits and interests were desired, I enforced a certain amount of shop-time on him – some being free-form creative activities, most being clean-up duty. He did indeed learn quite a bit, which he was able to use to his advantage later, whenever employment more to his suiting was not forthcoming. But he didn't care – not at all. One lesson learned (should have been obvious); not everyone has the same innate interests.

My next two, a girl and a boy, loved being in the shop. We home-schooled all our children, so there was plenty of opportunity. Having learned a little from my oldest son, I didn't enforce as much shop-time on the younger two. So when they were in the shop, it was mostly their own choice, but they were in the shop a lot. My daughter loved to pick pieces out of the scrap bin, and glue them together to make interesting shapes. She thrived on symmetry, and has become an accomplished interior designer. She teaches at the same design college where I teach.

Her younger brother loved the machines. He came out of the

womb saying "Vroom-vroom!" Before he could crawl, he was begging his mother to turn on the vacuum cleaner. At approximately the age of 2½ he reached from his mother's arms to press my belt-sander's switch, sending the sander scurrying across the table top. Some tears, but mostly he was proud of himself. He was in the shop whenever he could sneak away.

Soon thereafter I had a small commission for some bed-steps, heavily distressed, and I gave him a hammer and told him to go to town with it. He was about four, and undertook his assignment with the utmost dedication. I praised his resulting work mightily, and told him he had a great future in the custom furniture business.

My next job was a pair of Chinese inspired tables, red-lacquered and polished to a fair-thee-well. I was working in the main room, and heard this bang-bang noise from the next room, where the tables were waiting for the final steps. I ran frantically to the scene to find my son wielding his hammer with the proudest grin, multiple dents

arrayed over all the tables. I freaked, and screamed – at the top of my lungs. He burst into violent tears and ran inside the house to his mother. It took me 15-20 minutes to put all the pieces together in my mind, before bursting into the house to try to apologize to the boy and explain that every job didn't require distressing. Fortunately the trauma didn't completely deter his interests, though now he's more interested in metal than wood. Was it that event? We'll never know. But he is still an obsessive fabricator, and I'm very proud.

Now I have grandchildren. One imagines those times when, having retired from gainful employment, one has hours to lavish on the grandchildren's every fascination, patiently teaching them each skill as needed so they'll always remember those golden days in

Grandpa's shop and spend the rest of their lives cherishing the craft.

Yeah right! To begin with, no professional woodworker ever gets to retire; and if they've done any good in promoting their work, they're busier today than ever before. So now I have two out of four grandchildren who show real interest in spending time in my shop, but often not enough time to entertain them. Yes, I have created a special kid's-height bench with vise for them, and they have a complete child's version of tools, reasonably sharpened, to work with. As much as it pains me, when they're over, and ask, "G-daddy, can we help you in the shop?", sometimes I have to say "No, I'm too busy." But those moments when I can stop and smell the shavings with them are about the best I have known.

Excelsior! -Alf ♦



*The child in all of us unable to resist our own personal version of 'running with scissors'.*

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## Members' Gallery

**Guild Member Dale McCloud** just finished up a demonstration on making Shaker boxes at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville in conjunction with the current Shaker exhibit there. Pictured at left are some of Dale's exquisite creations in maple and birdseye maple, mahogany, and a tray in maple, birdseye maple, and walnut.

The exhibition "Gather up the Fragments— The Andrews Shaker Collection" will be at the Frist through August 21st.

Photo by John Lucas



## Made in Appalachia

By Mike Bell

Curator of Furniture, Tennessee State Museum

I've spent a good part of my adult life looking at spectacular examples of American-made furniture, from colonial Queen Anne highboys to the varied studio furniture being made today. I still marvel at the decorative inlays and rich carvings of period furniture, and it's exciting to witness the evolving innovative styles of contemporary pieces.

However, I was profoundly moved while visiting the Museum of Appalachia a few weeks ago when I saw the "Children of Appalachia" exhibit, on permanent display. What initially caught my eye was a child's chair made from an orange crate that was cut down and then painted blue. My first thought was "Wow, what a strange idea for a chair." Reading the label explained a lot. Sam Hitchcock, the chair's maker, was a sharecropper who was born on Cherry Creek in Putnam County. There was no date on the chair, but I assume it was made during the Great Depression. According to Howard Hitchcock, one of Sam's sixteen children, "We was raised poor. We didn't know anybody who was poorer than we was. They was sixteen of us children . . . and we didn't have any furniture to speak of, and when daddy made this little chair from an orange crate, us kids would nearly fight over who'd get to set in it . . . We started working as soon as we was big enough to hold a hoe or a pitch fork."

Besides making me count my blessings, the history of this antique armchair with its lower storage compartment made me look at furniture design from a whole different perspective.

Decorative? Not really, but this plain, humble chair was treasured and fought over by Hitchcock's flock of children. It got me to thinking about what it was like growing up in a large pioneer family in a one-room cabin in Tennessee during the early 1800s. An era when rustic furniture was fashioned out of the material at hand, logs, with an ax, saw, and maybe a froe or a drawknife. Of course at this time cabinetmakers in Charleston and Baltimore had access to the 1793 edition of "The Cabinetmaker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book" by Thomas Sheraton, who probably never heard

of an orange crate.

The homemade tricycle pictured here was also interesting. It was made by Hiram Sharp in one of East Tennessee's most remote areas of the Cumberland Mountains, near the village of Norma in Scott County. A jack of all trades, Hiram served his neighbors as dentist, barber, undertaker, musical instrument maker, clock and gun repairman, as well as a farmer and logger. He also made toys for the children who visited him. He made the tricycle from scrap materials he found around his place for his son Don, and you know, it looks pretty cool.

Museum of Appalachia is in Clinton, Tennessee, North-West of Knoxville

I believe what these humble folks show us with their works and their stories is if you can't get store-bought furniture or toys, you can use your hands and your God-given creativity to create something, like a gift for someone you care about. It's not Thomas Sheraton mind you, but it's wonderful none the less.—Mike ♦



Photos courtesy the Tennessee State Museum

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## Swap & Shop

**For sale:** Ridgid 12" sliding compound miter saw \$250.00.

Also approx. 200 BF of air dried, 4/4, rough sawn red oak felled in Nashville tornado. Call Roger (615) 500-6246.

**For Sale:** Powermatic Model 400 Hollow Chisel Mortiser, bits, and cone sharpeners. Tilting table, HEAVY DUTY. Created back when they still knew how to make a real machine, this isn't one of those lightweight bench top models. Call Scott at (615) 876-2724. ♦

## Cool Tool Review

### Different Turnings in the Road

By Scott Thompson

I do not consider myself an accomplished "turner" by any definition of the words. I certainly enjoy turning and maybe someday, by logging a lot more time on the lathe, I will become one. However, I just purchased a turning tool to create some small turned parts for a desk, and this tool made me almost feel like a real woodturner. The "Bedan" is simple in form—shaped like a mortising chisel—but is perfect for accomplishing complex tasks on the lathe.

Five years ago, while I was at the Furniture Society Conference in Philadelphia, renowned French woodturner Jean-Francois Escoulen did a turning demonstration using a tool that I had never seen before, called a Bedan. With a strong French accent he explained to the small crowd around his lathe how he was able to turn intricate and tiny details with only one tool. I was impressed with the efficiency of one tool and stunned by the detailed work he did with it. (He also demonstrated an eccentric chuck that he had developed called a "ball and socket chuck" to do off-center turning.)

The tool is used with the bevel side up (most of the time) and is an excellent way to step down in a turning to a particular diameter. The leading corners of the Bedan can be used to quickly and precisely cut convex shapes. It reminds me of using a Skew tool - except that I felt like I had more control while making the convex shapes. This may be an example of several roads leading to the same town (or several tools leading to the same shape), but if you are slightly dissatisfied with the skew or the gouge on the lathe, then consider the Bedan.

For more information, please see the following website: [www.escoulen.com/ang/pages/outils.html](http://www.escoulen.com/ang/pages/outils.html) Happy Turning! Scott ♦



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The bedan working at what it does best—shaping beads and round-overs.

Photo: Holden Thompson

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## Guild Elections

### Nominations Open at Summer Meeting

Nominations for various Cumberland Furniture Guild board positions will be made at the Summer meeting in August. Elected positions of the Guild are: President, Coordinating Vice President, Programming Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Editor, and Advisor. Meetings of the CFG board are open to all members and other interested parties. Anyone with questions about the nominating process, or wishing to be placed on the list to be notified about upcoming board meetings should call Dale McLoud at (615) 513-1924.