



P.O. Box 68343
Nashville, Tennessee 37206

FEBRUARY 2011 NEWSLETTER

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The Cumberland Furniture Guild's Winter Meeting

will be on Saturday, February 19th, 2011 from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. at

Brown View Forge, workshop of Artist Blacksmith Joe Brown

in Readyville, Tennessee, near Murfreesboro.

This meeting will include a demonstration of iron-working techniques by Joe as well as discussion of the use of wrought iron in furniture, and his recent collaboration with Guild member Alf Sharp.

Directions to Brown View Forge, 3538 Cripple Creek Road, Readyville, Tennessee:

Take I-24 East toward Chattanooga Go past all of the Murfreesboro exits and get off at **Exit 89** (the Buchanan exit.) At the end of the exit ramp **turn left** (if coming West on 24, turn Right). Travel about 1/3 mile and you will come to a stop sign. **Turn right onto Hwy 41**. Travel about 2 miles and you will come to the top of a hill and you will **turn left onto Big Springs Road**. This road is 5 miles long and at the end is a stop sign. **Go straight across** and the road name changes to Cripple Creek Road. **Continue straight for 1.5 miles** and our house and shop are on the right. There is a green steel mail box on the left with 3538 on it. Our house is a log home with a red roof and a gray shop beside it that sits 300 feet off the road. If you cross the bridge you went too far. Our phone number is 615-890-3805.

From Woodbury Highway: Take 70 S East out of Murfreesboro 8 miles and turn Right on Cripple Creek Road. Stay on Cripple Creek Road for approx 3.8 miles and our house is on the left. There is a green steel mailbox with #3538 on the side. Our house is a log home with a red roof and a gray shop beside it that sits 300 feet off the road.

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Letter From The President

By Alf Sharp

Adventures in Woodworking, Cont'

I'm not sure I've ever told the long version of how I came to be the cabinetmaker of choice for The Hermitage. It was definitely not a slam-dunk at first, and is a rather circuitous tale. I hope it will hold some interest, and perhaps instruction for you.

Through no real prior efforts on my part, I had been contacted by John Kiser, a prominent interior designer in Nashville who is one of the foremost experts on early Victorian interiors and



Alf carving one of the 108 panels .

furniture. John, in fact, was the first professor of furniture at O'More College, the position I now hold. John didn't call because I had established any especially strong reputation as a period furniture maker. (This was the early 80's, and I was really just starting to get my feet under me.) John called me because he had heard I was trying to do this, and before O'More, he had taught at UT Nashville, where my father had taught a long-standing series of courses in finance. He loved my father because he had always been kind to John, whereas many had not, his sexual preferences being what they were and society being what it was then.

In any case, John had been engaged by Amon Carter Evans to create the interiors of his recently acquired Rattle and Snap plantation, a famous Italianate ante-bellum home outside Columbia. Evans was underwriting an essentially blank-check restoration of the house. John K. had purchased several high-style gondola chairs and a really fine late-neoclassical dining table. He needed 18 more chairs, and enough extra pedestals and leaves to allow the table to extend to 26 feet long! He wasn't sure I could do it (and frankly neither was I), but out of affection for my father he wanted to give me a chance. In the end, everyone turned out to be thrilled with my work (whew!), and so the stage was set.

John's next assignment was the interiors of the Tennessee State Capitol building, a major renovation and return to original condition throughout. He asked me to do most of the furniture, which I was more than happy to do. During that process I worked closely with Mike Fitts, until recently the state's architect. At one point he mentioned to me that he knew the Hermitage was about to embark on a major restoration. I sure wanted to be a part of that.

I called the Hermitage, and everyone I knew of who was on the board of the Hermitage. And called again . . . and again. My recent history wasn't having much favorable impact on the brain-trust there. They couldn't even remember my name from call to call. Finally I finagled a meeting with the out-of-town "expert" they had retained to oversee the project when he was next in town. (Are you following all this? Do I need to include a chart?)

Almost immediately, upon meeting this man, I felt I had met him before. It didn't take long to remember the circumstances.

Several years earlier, on a family trip to Disney World, we stopped in Macon, Ga. to visit the Hay House (every trip designed to include both "the ridiculous and the sublime"). If you are ever within 100 miles of Macon, you have to see the Hay House. It is the most magnificent, over-the-top example of mid-Victorian architecture to be found outside Newport, Rhode Island, complete with many secret passages and the most ingenious low-tech fire-sprinkler system.

It was a Sunday morning, and it turned out the mansion was closed all day Sunday. But the man that greeted us at the gate to send us away turned out to be the director of the property. Our evident disappointment, plus the presence of three adorable and obviously engaged children, must have softened his heart. He ended up giving us the most marvelous private tour, with all sorts of stuff a typical paying tourist would never see.



Acanthus-carved redwood panels with a photo of the Hermitage column capitals on right.

Photos Worth Squire

But he exacted a certain price. Upon hearing my name and home, his ears perked up and he mentioned Cheekwood. I

acknowledged the link, and he was off. As my father would say, he didn't drop names, he hurled them - for three relentless hours. Now this man was originally from the Hudson River Valley, and he spoke with that kind of affected, nasal, patrician intonation

that is nearly impossible to pull off as sincere. Imagine FDR's "We have no-thing to fee-AH but fee-AH itself". And to hear him tell the stories, he was second, or third, or sixth cousin to every notable name all the way back to when the Dutch bought Manhattan, and he had summ-ahed here and cocktail-pahtied there, and he was only down here in the culture-forsaken South, because he felt a certain noblesse-oblige to help the heathen cast off their abject ignorance. It was actually quite a performance and we all enjoyed it immensely. We laughed all the way to Orlando.

So he was now in charge of the Hermitage project, having in some undisclosed way been dismissed from the Hay House. He didn't remember me and I was very careful *not* to mention Cheekwood. We wafted through the Hermitage, he describing in grand manner all that he thought should be done, and whichever expert he knew intimately that he would impose on to do the work. When I mentioned my interest in doing any or all of the furniture work, he breezily said something close to "Oh, don't-cha-know, you don't have the CV (curriculum vitae, or resume) to be involved in this kind of work. Perhaps I can introduce you to so-and-so who I know, and he might let you apprentice on something." Thus was ended the audience. Except earlier I had also heard him say to one of his entourage, who had pointed out that the Board was not in favor of some procedure, "Oh, I know how to handle Boards. If they don't go along, I'll just have them replaced." (!) Were it not for having heard that, I would have been completely down-cast and put in my place. As it was I determined not to entreat the Hermitage any further, but just wait to see how things would shake out.

Surely enough, in about six months, a fellow named Vic Hood called. He had also been involved in the Tenn. Capitol project, though we had never crossed paths. Vic, for those who don't know him, is an immensely knowledgeable and yet low key expert in early southern architecture, and many other fields as well- and a world-class woodcarver to boot. Also, though originally from Mississippi, he has spent most of his life in Tennessee. He was now

the director of the Hermitage project. I again made the rounds of all the staff, this time with a friendlier reception. Whenever I asked what had happened to Mr. Hudson River Valley, the only response I got was a very theatrical rolling-back of the eyes.

It was agreed that my trial project would be a mantle piece that I've described in other presentations—the one where no power tools whatsoever were to be used. From there it was a steady progression of doing more than was expected, and being accessible. Only within the last few months have I completed my most recent project for the Hermitage—carving all the new acanthus leaf segments for the exterior column capitals, to which a number of our members contributed (thank you so much!)

Where's the instruction in this tale? Undertake to always learn more about the sphere of your interest, and improve in your skills. Use whatever connections you have. Drop a few names of your own. Pursue a job you want with vigor. And never discount the unknown conjunctions which might be hiding in the wings. Excelsior! -Alf ♦

Member News

Just Plane Wood will be exhibiting at the Antiques and Garden Show February 11-13 at the Nashville Convention Center, in downtown Nashville, <http://antiquesandgardenshow.com/home.html> Roger Gramm and crew say "come see us, look at some fine antique furniture, and enjoy a bit of early spring."

Dick Sullivan at Rosewalker Design Project is exhibiting at the Antiques and Garden Show as well. ♦

Workshop Series at Appalachian Center for Craft

The Tennessee Association of Craft Artists (TACA) and the Appalachian Center for Craft present a series of workshops on March 25 and 26 at the Craft Center in Smithville, Tennessee.

On Friday afternoon, Judy Heim will walk you through **Simple Digital Imaging for ZAPplication and CaFE**.

On Saturday, Asheville, N.C. arts consultant Wendy Outland presents **A Disciplined Approach to Pricing Artwork** and **Using the Internet to Increase Sales and Exposure**. \$70 for all three (\$60 for TACA members.) Contact Tim Hintz for registration information at freshchairs@dtccom.net. ♦

Swap & Shop

For Sale: Jet Performax 16-32 belt sander, in/out feed tables, and stand \$450 (gently used). Contact Len Reinhardt (615) 319-4376 or reinhardt3@bellsouth.net

For sale: Ridgid 12" sliding compound miter saw \$250.00. 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 sissy bench top models. Call Scott Thompson at (615) 876-2724. ♦

Cool Tool Review

Not Just the Same Old Grind

By Greg Pennington

I never gave a lot of thought to the ins-and-outs of drilling holes in wood until I started making chairs. We don't ask much from a drill bit other than a clean round hole at the correct size, but sometimes that's a tall order. When making chairs the holes most often must be drilled at an angle. So not only do the holes need to be cut cleanly, but the center spur of the bit must be long enough to direct the bit at angles of 20 degrees or more. Factory made bits like forstner or brad-point bits have very short spurs which allow the sides of the bit to hit first when attempting to drill at severe angles.

An answer to this dilemma came last year while teaching a chair class with Peter Galbert. He showed me how he grinds cheap high speed steel twist bits on a slow speed grinder to create a much longer center spur.

First you have to dress the edge of your grinding wheel as shown to about 35 degrees with a diamond-tipped wheel dresser (Top



Photos Greg Pennington

Left). Mount a fence to the tool rest about 2 degrees off the axis of the wheel so the bit starts to grind in the middle between the tip and side of the bit as shown (above). The side of the wheel forms the point. Increasing the angle of the fence shortens the point. Turn the bit 180 degrees to grind both sides. Then turn the bit 90 degrees from each wing and grind very lightly on the sides of the spur to remove a little material (called the web) which will interfere with a clean cut. Be careful not to damage the wings, though, or you will have to start all over again. Now mount the bit in the drill. If the center spur has run-out then turn the bit 180 degrees (or more) in the chuck until you find the sweet spot where the point of the spur does not wobble. The bit will now cut clean holes at severe angles. One added bonus is that the bit will not blow out through the other side but will leave a clean cut all the way through the wood. Happy drilling! -Greg ♦ (for those of you who don't know, Greg makes excellent Windsor Chairs in Hendersonville, TN. see his Blog at <http://greg-aroundtheshop.blogspot.com/>.)

A silk purse from a sow's ear!

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The Swan Bed

A New Addition to the Tennessee State Museum Collection

By Mike Bell, Curator

This wonderfully-carved, Tennessee walnut bed, referred to as the "Swan Bed" by the family it descended in, was made about 1870. According to the family there was an identical bed made which was lost later in a house fire. The piece was exhibited in the Nashville exhibit "Made in Tennessee: An Exhibition of Early Arts and Crafts" at Cheekwood in 1971. The bed's label at that time stated "Made by Mr. Lucky, Brush Creek, Smith County." According to family history Mr. Lucky was an itinerant Irish craftsman. The initials "DWJ" are carved into the headboard, which make me wonder if "Mr. Lucky" was a nickname for a cabinetmaker with those initials.

Whoever made the bed certainly created a nice example of what I call folk art carving. I love the swans facing opposite directions, which poses the question, was this simply a matter of design, or does it symbolize a married couple who didn't see things "eye-to-eye?" Each piece I acquire for the museum arrives with questions like this, and the people who could answer them have long since gone to that "Antiques Road Show" in the sky. It is fun to speculate on these delicate issues. However, if beds could talk, think of the lawsuits that would occur. Perhaps we

should let these matters rest, like the bed's former occupants.

The headboard has an arched scrolled, hand-carved, pierced crest surrounding the swans. "DWJ" is carved into the wing of the upper swan, which is over an incised "basket" filled with circular small "suns" with rays, stamped into it. These suns are stamped along the whole crest. The stiles have applied split turnings with repeating beads, ring turnings, baluster turnings, and rounded finials. The



The Swan Bed (Photos courtesy the Tennessee State Museum)

headboard is flanked by flat posts with exaggerated spade feet, leaf and vine carvings, and terminate in triangular-shaped finials.

I love pieces like this. They reflect a woodworker's unique ideas of decorative design at a time when the country was reveling in mass-produced furniture with over-the-top Victorian machine-carved surfaces. It's a great addition to the museum collection. —Mike ♦

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