

In The Workshop with Charles Neil

Monthly Newsletter

August 2007

Finish Line

A Real Treat

Several weeks ago Sherri came over and asked if I had ever heard of Michael Dresdner and that he had emailed about doing an interview. I proceeded to tell her who Michael is. I went and got some of his books and said here's Michael. Michael all but invented finishing, this guy broke finishing down into a comprehensive body of work that has become my "Finishing Bible." Michael has penned tons of articles, written four or five books, helped to develop and design finishes. Michael's career spans more than three decades, to put this into a Southern expression, "Michael's the MAN."

In the interview, I found Michael to be quite the gentleman. He tolerated me interviewing him, did his best to keep me on track, it didn't work. The interview was scheduled for one hour, I kept him on the phone for three and he has since tolerated a lot of emails.

Michael forgot yesterday more than most of us will ever know about finishing. I've read pretty much every book I can get on woodwork and finishing. In my finishing classes, Michael Dresdner is suggested reading - and if I may, I suggest them to you. You can find them at Michael's website, www.michaeldresdner.com His website also includes lots of tips and links to some products that work.

I hope Michael got enough in the interview so I don't look like the stammering, blubbing idiot I must have sounded like. Respect is earned, not given, Michael Dresdner has all I

can muster, a true pioneer who brought modern day finishing to the world.

If You Can't Finish — You Can't Build

In the interview with Michael, I told him, I do woodwork so I can finish, he seemed surprised. I am an example of one who learned to finish to a much greater degree than I learned to build.

I remember very distinctly my first time picking up a spray gun at the age of 13 and I've never put it down. My career involved automotive body repair and my niche became the finishing. I love it and still do. Through the early years as I worked in a body shop as a means of making a living, I was always sawing wood and I found that automotive finishing and wood had a great deal of similarities, but that's another story for another day.

The point here is that in both fields, wood and auto, I've watched the same "WAR" ensue. The body repair man vs. the painter and the wood builder vs. the finisher. I've never seen anything cause more trouble than the division of these. I've seen the repair man repair something with filler, leave huge 36 grit scratches and prime over it, the finisher would have a nightmare getting them filled and leveled up to a finishable surface, or see the repair man bolt on a fender and hook up all the wires and stuff and expect the finisher to somehow paint around all that mess and make it look good. I've seen the exact same

thing in the woodshop, just with different material.

With all of this said, I now come to the "Main Thing." I pondered and considered all this and here is what I came up with.

The builder will slap a raised panel in a door full of planer marks and machine marks, burns on the wood, glue it in, and get glue all over.

The finisher will sand or scrape the panel, fully prepping it for finishing and do everything he can to avoid a messy glue up.

The builder will attach a horizontal molding across a vertical panel, air nail it on, get glue all over the corners and never even consider sanding behind it.

The finisher will sand the side and the molding, be very meticulous in his gluing, use as small a fastener as he can, or better yet, learn how to put it on with no visible attachment. Or the finisher might attach the molding with some finishing nails, hand driven, carefully set and then come back with a #2 square drive screw bit, set the nail again using the tip to form a square hole then carefully cut some 1/8" square material to glue into the hole so that when finished it looks like a square peg and no filler needed.

The builder will grab a bunch of wood, glue it up to size and presto - he has a panel, top or whatever.

The finisher - well, he's going to study the grain, flip, flop, turn and twist to get the best match possible. If he's dealing with sap wood, the first thing he's going to do is to try to avoid it entirely, but if he can't he's going to try to put it on the outer edges where it's easier to work with or try to bring it together in one area within the panel where it is confined, but he's certainly going to avoid at all cost

gluing it next to the heart wood where it is the most difficult to deal with.

A builder will attach a shelf into a sliding dovetail or dado, go from the outside, slap some #8 screws in and expect the finisher to make it look good.

The finisher would probably go with the sliding dovetail so no external fasteners are needed, but if that wasn't possible he would probably get some "trim head" screws from McFeely's Square Drive Screw Co. (www.mcfeelys.com) which has a much smaller head and uses a #1 square drive bit. He would drill an approximate 3/32 hole from the outside, insuring he didn't get any tear out and drive the screw and go approximately 3/32" to 1/4" below the surface, of course he would have insured he only had a 1/8" or so dados because he knows it's the "shelf" action of the dado that provides the strength and not so much the depth, so as to insure he had enough "meat" in the side to set the screw well below the surface. He would then allow the screw bit barrel, the part just above the point, to "push" in and form a slightly larger hole and using the same technique as the molding, cut a square strip to use to cut "pegs" to glue and drive in the recess and it will again appear to be "pegged" and no filler needed.

The finisher would also insure that the shelves inside of the case were all sanded prior to assembly to avoid having to try to sand all of those right angels.

I could go on and on but enough is enough - you get the point. Finishing starts the second you pick up the material and must always be in the forefront of your thoughts, it, coupled with an understanding of finishes is what makes finishing a pleasure instead of a nightmare.

In the interview I told Michael that “A good finisher can make a bad woodworker look great but a bad finisher could destroy a masterpiece.” I still stand in amazement at how a woodworker will spend thousands of dollars on tools, equipment and classes to learn how to build something then slop some “stuff” on it and ruin it. “The build is only the 1st half of the story.”

More Finish Stuff

One of the biggest problems in finishing is the misrepresentation of what is in the can. “Tung Oil” is usually oil-varnish, pure oils convince you you’re doing “the safe thing” while providing no protection whatsoever and food safe stuff, you can buy at the local drug store for fractions of the cost, but other than keeping the wood wet, they do pretty much nothing either.

A good finish must do two things.

1. It must cure to a solid form and not remain soft.
2. It must form a film.

The list is endless, again I suggest you get Michael’s books and become educated so you can identify what you’re using by the ingredients and pay little attention to the label or name, they are MISLEADING.

Balancing Wood

No, not a See-Saw!

Try this, lay a slice of bread flat on the counter and leave it out overnight. The next morning you will find it has “cupped” upward. Why? It dried out, but a more correct term would be that it reduced its moisture content, but only on one side causing it to shrink and thus

“cup.” Now place a slice of bread in a toaster where both sides are “dried” at an equal rate, it will stay much flatter, of course a toaster has grills inside to support it while it dries. In wood we call those grills stickering, you know those sticks that we put between the pile of boards to allow equal air movement.

Just like that bread, wood has cells, thus it absorbs moisture and releases it with humidity changes. Build a piece in a humid shop on the East coast, ship it to Arizona and if you haven’t allowed for shrinkage, you’re probably gonna have a problem. It’s simple, add moisture it swells, remove moisture it shrinks.

I went through all of that to say one thing, when finishing, you need to finish bottoms, undersides and unexposed areas in order to “balance” the moisture movement on all sides or you may wind up with the piece of bread on the counter.

I’ve seen professionals leave under sides and insides unfinished “so the wood could breathe.” I dislike having someone pee on my leg and tell me it’s raining.

Woodworker Focus

Some time back I ran into Bob Kloes via email. We seemed to hit it off, we have exchanged some late evening emails where spelling didn’t matter and have now become friends. I have found Bob to have a good sense of humor and a true passion for woodwork.

I have seen Bob’s work and I like it. I questioned Bob about his figured lumber and found he sells it so check out Bob’s website and his lumber (www.bobkloes.com) I know I’ve found a great source, hope you will too. So without further ado, here is Bob’s story from his own hand.

My Wonderful Life

by Bob Kloes

Everyone wants a dream job. I have mine. I build furniture for a living. What could possibly be better than that? I have been doing it full time since 1997. I started back in 1980 after buying an old home. I needed to make some pieces for our home but had no idea what to do. I went to the library and got every book and magazine I could find about woodworking. I started going to flea markets searching for tools. I tried things, just to learn. Lucky for me, I have a great wife. She has stood by me all these years of learning, buying and getting better at my craft. Much of the time, family life was put to the side so I could continue to learn. Very selfish on my part, I know.



I started full-time after quitting my job at an insurance company after 23 years. I was spending as much time building furniture for a small custom shop as I was working full time at the insurance company. I have been blessed to stay busy all these years. I love furniture from the late 1700's to the early part of the 1800's. Some of my favorite is the Pennsylvania German style.

I have also been selling figured lumber for the last few years. I work with a few select mills and loggers to find some great lumber. I select it all myself. 95% of my lumber comes from right here in Wisconsin. I also buy Bird's Eye maple from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

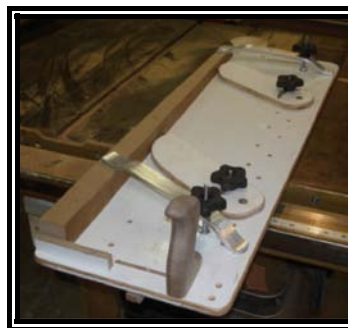
I love to experiment with finishes. I use dyes and glazes in a lot of my work. I also do old painted and distressed finishes. Nothing

pleases me more than to have a customer come into the shop and see a piece that they think is 200 years old when I made it last week!

I enjoy using old woodworking machines and hand tools. I have and use more than 300 molding planes. I think both hand and power tools are to be used building good furniture. I have strong opinions about most things. My wife always says think before speaking. I know I have to work on that! Thanks for listening, and stop by if you ever come this way.

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Pro-Am EZ Taper Jig



Taper jig is going strong! Check out our website to see feedback from those who have purchased an EZ Jig and have taken it for a spin!

Smart Tails

Smart Tails will be released the first of September, I was hoping everything would be in order to release it to you in the newsletter but that didn't work out. I'll be sending subscribers information about them before I go public, so if you haven't subscribed, do so soon.

The Weather Report

It's been hotter than a "June Bride" here in Virginia and from your emails, everywhere else too so the weather report is &%*!@&(\$)
HOT!

My World

This past month I was ill the first two weeks, flu or something, "I was sicker than a "Bad Hay" fed mule, it wasn't pretty but I got over it.

I finished another of the Bombe's (we did 4) and am building some pretty wild contemporary stuff. Two in particular are way out of the box. As I was recovering, I did some youtube.com stuff which Sherri is now getting up. Started working on and planning my classes for Fall and of course, wrote this Newsletter.

Keep Sawing
Be Safe!

