



In the Workshop with Charles Neil

Monthly Newsletter

No. 4

October 2007

A New Season

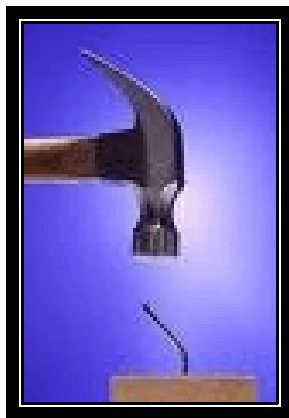
Welcome to all of our new subscribers!

Not so much wood stuff but more woodworker stuff, just some thoughts of a couple of ol' woodworkers, working together and thinking out loud.

I also would like to thank Matthew from Toronto Canada for the great new graphic header he designed and sent to me to use in my newsletters. Thanks Matthew!

All About Me

The other day we had a board meeting, Bob and me were walking through the shop carrying some boards and Sherri came in and said, "You know you still need to do that self-bio that you have promised to write for some of these guys who have emailed, a lot of people have read what others have written, but they want to read it in your own words." Bob chimed in and said, "You really need to do that." I wish these words could convey that Wisconsin drawl, so I agreed to do it.



I am much like a nail, sharp on one end and a might dull on the other and I am prone to get

bent out of shape now and then. According to some of my friends, I need a good hit on the head with a hammer now and then too! There ya go, my bio.

Bob & Charles' Neil Box Shop

Many of you already know that Bob Kloes, loaded up his car and came for a visit to Virginia. The past ten days has been a lot of fun, and a lot of work. We have filmed a lot and after he leaves tomorrow Sherri will begin the processing of the film, getting it onto the DVD sets. If you haven't checked out the short clips put on youtube.com over the past 10 days, they are there and ready to be watched. I do wish that there was time to put it all on there for free, but not possible, so the DVD sets will be ready to go in about two weeks, last chance to order the set will be October 4th. These DVDs are a one-time shot so order now to make sure you get yours. You can get more information at www.antiquesbuiltdaily.com/bobandneil.htm.

So You're a Good Woodworker?

Okay then, make a barrel!

You're a good turner, then make a toothpick!

My point being that you are never too good to learn more.

I was looking through Traditional Woodworker Catalog that arrived the other day and saw that they have the complete series on "Nora Hall." Whether you carve or not, to watch this young lady of about 75 young years old (as close as I can figure) carve is something worth watching and worth every dime you invest. I have her series and she's unbelievable. I learn something new every time I watch her - it really is a must have in your woodworking library. If you aren't on their mailing list, you can go online to www.traditionalwoodworker.com.

Mr. Neil - Brilliant Furniture Maker!

The week before Bob arrived I had been trying to get a couple corner cabinets done and I was rockin' along, now, I build corner cabinets a little different. I do the cases and put small glue blocks on the outer corners of the shelves and use them to "screw" the face frames on. The reason for doing it this way is that most of my corner cabinets have painted interiors, usually hand planed, and by separating the face frames from the case I can finish the face frames and case separately. Finish the back side of the face frame and when attached I have nice clean, crisp lines between painted and finished parts.

So, I am moving along, everything doing well. I take the face frames in the finish room, finish all the back sides, when dry, I bring them out, put the walnut face on and it looked great. Then I went to the ash one, Did you know that the big mark on the left side of the 1/2" line is different than the right side, well it is. I know. I was a 1/4" too narrow. I had transposed 29

5/8 for 29 3/8. So I got to cut it all apart. Recut the horizontal members to 29 5/8", re-mortise and refinish the back side. My only, and I mean only saving grace was that I hadn't made the doors yet. I guess I used the wrong end of the nail.

What's Your Story?

This is new for us and we hope you enjoy and will participate. We asked a long time friend and DVD analyzer to start us off with his story, read and enjoy.

"Oh WOODn't I?"

by Tom Tieffenbacher/AKA DocSavage 45

Was asked to write a "Food for Thought" column by Charles. It has to be about wood. But it is also about our experiences with wood and what is around it.

There are many paths to the same place, Charles is on his, and even "Norm" Abrams has a tale to tell. We are all different and all the same. We each have a story about wood. I'd like to hear about yours.

Where do I start? I am ending a 30 year career as a psychologist. I like the work with the kids, but



it's not exciting anymore. (Way too much paperwork) I am going back and forward. Wood and working with wood has been important and satisfying.

I played with wood as a kid, "Borrowing" my dad's tools from his locked toolshed. We didn't heat our home with wood, but we did have these wood fired hotwater heaters. My father use to bring home the scraps from a furniture maker, to burn in the small furnaces that heated our water. He also did the home repairs, like replacing a support beam for our two story back porch, or replacing the decking on that porch.

One day, I got the key from the hiding place and grabbed some tools to build a little woodworking bench. I then made very crude wooden boats to sail at our local park's man made lagoon. "Oops! It's dad, "who gets upset, starts yelling, but calmed down to ask me "what are you doing?" Told him...and expected the worst...to my surprise...he said "Thomas, if I give you your own tools, and show you how to use them, will you stay out of my toolshed?" Of course the clever devious kid that I am said "Yes!"

On his next day off he started to clean out the area in the front of our basement where he had dumped the bags of wood scraps and other lumber. Low and behold there was an actual bench back there, with a vise! He then gave me a cross cut and rip handsaw, a hammer, a square, a manual drill, and my own plane! I'm sure there were others, but the plane stands out as he taught me the use and how to respect the tool. "Never lay a plane on the surface, always lay it on its side, so you won't ruin the blade."

Of course I also wanted him to show me how to use the "power" tools. To which he replied..."Learn how to use the hand tools! You will make smaller mistakes! Later you can use the power tools.

I'm pretty good now, I've worked in construction, electronics, did a stint as a machinist, and decided I didn't want to be another Vietnam Veteran against the war.

Started on a career to help people one at a time, and I became a psychologist. My curiosity, problem solving, creativity, and desire to help motivated my change from a hands-on-thinker/doer to a words and science-thinker/doer.

There is more and more paperwork in the business of health, and we individual practitioners' get less and less. Decided about five years ago to start collecting instructional video's and books by Master Craftsmen (and women) and continue on the small boy boat builder's creativity. This was at the same time I explored neuropsychology, learning disorders, organizational development, adult learning and architecture, which are stories for another time.

Had some fantasies about building furniture to make a living. I went looking for DVD's and books. Did some critiques of what I felt were good learning for people who may be isolated and they do not have a master to ask questions of. That's how I met Charles who was on his journey to teach people in a practical "no nonsense hands on" style. So he is now one of my many masters from whom I can learn subtleties of working with wood.

I will be sitting at my campfire, throwing on another log, sharing ideas, my mistakes in learning, as well as the joy of being a wood butcher trying to become an artisan.

Wood is international, it provides us life on planet earth, it has spirit, and it can teach if we are watching, listening, and saying OHHH? We need wood, especially the source of it, in order to continue our survival.

What's your story?

A Long Drive

Well, Bob leaves tomorrow (Wednesday, October 3). It's about a 16 or 17 hour drive and I'm surely gonna miss him, but at the moment he's sitting here beside me, both of us writing on a tablesaw outfeed as I ask him to share some of his thoughts, so here they are.

Mountains, Bar-B-Q & Mr. Neil

(My Time with Charles Neil)

by Bob Kloes

I don't like heights. That said, driving through mountains is not my favorite thing. But the idea of working with Charles Neil was too big of a chance to miss.

I have emailed and talked with Charles for a few months. He was my type of people. Common man, opinionated, not BASHFUL with thoughts and ideas. He also was a genuine nice guy who will show and tell you how to build beautiful furniture.

My wife Beth and I decided after 30 years to finally take a trip across the Midwest to the Home of 7 Presidents, Virginia. I like driving on flat land. Indiana was nice. So was Ohio. Pennsylvania was getting too tall for me. I was never fond of going 60 miles per hour with a rock wall on one side with "Falling Rocks" signs and a semi on the other, but we made it.

My first sight of Charles was the Sunday nite we arrived. We got into New Market at about 8pm. I called Charles and told him we made it. He was at the shop. We drove down to find him. When I got out of the car it was like meeting a long, lost family member. He was just like my brother. After hugs and quick talk, we unloaded the lumber I brought. Yep, I hauled over 100 bd. Ft of figured lumber to Virginia in the back seat of a Buick. My wife and I joked the whole trip about our "Lumber Wagon."

Working with Charles over the next week was the greatest thing for me as a furniture maker I could have done. Now, as a father and husband, I cannot say it was better than my wedding day or the birth of our children, but it was the absolute best thing if you want to learn about woodworking. I believe I have found some of the finest people I have ever met. Charles and his family and friends. Every one was great. My wife and I have found "Family" 1000 miles from home.

My time in the shop just flew by. We worked together for 9 days in a row, seemed like minutes. Knowledge was freely shared, laughter was common and skills were honed. I cannot say enough about the time together. It was wonderful. I am hating the thought of leaving but it is tempered with the idea of coming back soon. Yes, the fear of going through the mountains is not any thing to make it hard to return. My wife and I are already planning when we can get back. The times together with Charles, his family, Sherri, Sam and Ed and everyone else was the BEST!

One more thing. The food in Virginia was some of the best we ever had. The home cooked meals were the best and as a person from "the home of the hamburger," I thought the Bar-B-Q from the Barbecue Ranch changed me from burgers to bar-b-q. Make sure you try the fried pickles!

My thanks to Charles and Sherri for making this a true trip of a lifetime.

Craftsman Profile

David Fisher Fisher Forge

I love hand forged hardware and as stated, I like people who take enough pride in their work to take it to an art form. David Fisher is such an artisan. I have his work here in my shop, I'm using it and to say I'm impressed is an understatement. I've never seen finer work and I've seen a lot of it. David defines the term "artist" So I am delighted to present to you, Mr. David Fisher.

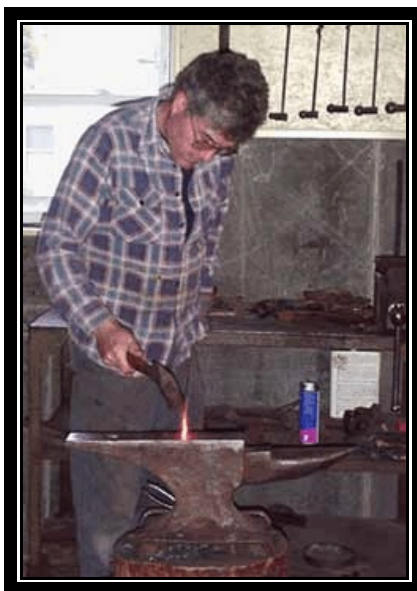
Fisher Forge is a custom Blacksmithing and Ornamental Metal Shop. They specialize in: Antique Reproductions and Hardware, Restoration Work, Custom Railings and Gates and Furniture.

Fisher Forge was founded by David Fisher in 1992. Dave began forging in 1987 as a hobby when restoring his old farmhouse and replacing the missing crane in the walk-in fireplace. Since then, Fisher Forge has grown to include a wide variety of products including antique lamp reproductions, kitchen utensils, cabinet, furniture and door hardware, railings, replacement antique car parts and just about any hand-forged item you may require.

David serves on the Board of Directors of PABA (Pennsylvania Artist Blacksmith's Association), currently as Vice President and previously six years as a board member. He is also a member of ABANA (Artist Blacksmith's Association of North America). David is also a juried member of the Pennsylvania and Reading/Berks Guild of Craftsmen. He has been selected to be in Early American Life Magazine's Directory of

Traditional Crafters and he was inducted into the Hamburg Fine Arts Hall of Fame.

David has been making and shipping hardware all over the United States and Canada. His hardware has graced furniture and kitchen cabinets that have been pictured in many different publications. His hardware has even appeared on the White House Christmas Tree, on a miniature blanket chest ornament. In 2005 David was commissioned to make hardware for the Universal Studios theme park in Florida. Hardware orders range in size from one pair to over 50 pair.



Fisher Forge
David W. Fisher
www.fisherforge.com

The Finish Line

General Finishes - I really don't quite know where to start. One of my favorite things in life is to find good

people doing good products with a lot of pride in what they do.

General Finishes have perfected a finish line that far surpasses anyone else – It is that simple. I may not know a lot of things, but after 40+ years of finishing, I know finishes, and these guys are the cream of the crop.

I don't want to keep beating the drum so if I may suggest to you to simply get a small sample of whatever you like and give it a try, they are available through Woodcraft and I think Rockler or you can go to www.generalfinishes.com to find out where you can buy it near you.

I am working on a second finishing DVD and it features the General Line, simply because they are the best I've found. Good stuff and good people. One of my major objectives with youtube and this newsletter is to offer a medium by which "The Little" guys and gals can bring their works to the public eye, a very difficult thing to do. Advertising rates are prohibitive to the small artisan or company. So many struggle to hold on and many don't make it. Simply because people don't know about them, you need to understand that the home woodworker is the engine that drives the woodworking market.

Guys like me, well, we're losing ground quick. Many of my friends and colleagues have closed their doors, the day of the small furniture maker is all but over. There are many factors which contribute to it and as I stated last month, we have some people who are looking hard into the causes, but for most, it is like being a wagon maker when Mr. Ford invented the assembly line.

Weather Report

Well, here in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia it is cooling down, leaves are starting to change and in a few weeks the mountains will be ablaze with an ocean of color. My favorite Season. We will all start to camp in for the Winter and get back to some woodworking. Now may be the time to get some things cleaned up and repaired in the shop so the cold days to come can be spent working wood.

Winds of Change

We have decided to pull our jigs from our website. Sales have been good but it is just more than I can handle with my furniture. We have three jigs left, first come gets them. At the end of the newsletter I usually show you

what I've been working on during the month, the past month, it was jigs, youtube and dvds. We are thinking about allowing one of the magazines to print the plans for making them, its always been about getting them to the woodworker and this would be the easiest way to go without contributing more to the non-profit part of the organization than my profit part can handle. I have many more jigs that I have developed, they'll just have to wait. It has been suggested that we do a 2nd Jigs DVD or write a book, we'll see.

I find myself rethinking my plans which I set in motion several years ago which were to teach and I set about building every style and period I could think of and did so. I'm going to build a Goddard Townsend Secretary, some Newport pieces and I really want to do some "significant" piece with Bob Kloes and perhaps a few others, just to do them.

The teaching thing is a lifelong evolutionary process we perceived to do as we wound down somewhat from building on a day to day basis. I've said it before and I say again, "Having a group of people all working and learning together and being able to share 40 years of experience is for me like plugging in a battery, I get recharged, I LOVE IT!

So I find myself wondering where my path will lead. As stated, some want me to write some books, there is talk of traveling around the country doing classes and as I write, shops to sponsor the classes are being talked to.

There is talk about doing classes here, doing downloadable projects which would reach worldwide, get harder into the DVDs. One guy offered to double my yearly income to come to Florida and head up finishing architectural stuff.

We utilized youtube to test the waters as to personal acceptance, teaching format and in a broader sense to see if there was a demand

for what we do. To that end I must give a heartfelt “thank you” to each of you. Our youtube views as well as newsletter subscriptions continue to grow. I must admit I wasn’t prepared for the response I’ve gotten. It has been quite amazing and very humbling.

I will drastically be reducing uploads to youtube because as much as I love doing them and teaching you, as I said earlier, the non-profit side is out of contributions at this time, the winds may change again, we’ll see.

So, I’m going to focus on my classes, I’ve got a few private classes as well as group stuff, I’m gonna finish my DVDs I’ve got going, finish up about fifteen furniture projects (wow) that’s better than a 150 and figure out what I’m going to do after forty years of being bent over a bench or tablesaw, I’m definitely going to pursue other avenues. With that said, many of you have asked about the classes for 2008 and I can’t honestly say I will be available to schedule them, we’ll see.

You Might Be a Woodworker If...

Last time this will be included - we only had four of thousands contribute.

You might be a woodworker if....

...you don’t have underwear because you used it for rubbing out a finish.

...you have more sawdust in your pocket than money.

...your new SUV has bark in it.

...you buy tools on ebay without knowing what they are.

...your vacation is scheduled around tool shows.

...on your honeymoon you visit every sawmill in four states. (True Story)

...the guys at the local woodworking store no longer ask for ID when writing a check.

...your mate has threatened to leave if you don’t get out of the workshop and you have to think about it.

...when a customer comes into the local woodworking stores and asks you where something is, you can tell them but you don’t work there.

...the lint filter in the dryer is usually full of sawdust.

...your new wood storage area looks a lot like a spare bedroom.

...you stood in the middle of a woodworking store, on your cell phone, swearing that you are still tied up in traffic.

...you take your partner out to dinner and your local woodworking store just happens to be on the way to the restaurant you chose.

...you’ve sneaked a new tool in your shop and covered it with dust so when asked you can say, “I’ve had it for a while.”

...all of the doorknobs from the shop to the bathroom have glue and stain on them.

Bob and I

(Bobby Neil's Boxes "R" Us)

I have enjoyed Bob Kloes and his wife Beth being here for the last 10 days. It has been a wonderful experience. We are family, we worked hard, shared tips and knowledge and had a lot of laughs,. Built jigs (Bob helped me get a load of Pro-Ams done). Built some jigs for each other, built 16 Keeping Chests, got started on some candle boxes. Smearred paint and finish, tested stuff, trashed the shop, cleaned it up and ate a lot of Bar-B-Q. Bob and Beth had never had a Bar-B-Q with coleslaw, a fried pickle or had ever drank "Sweet" Tea. But we certainly introduced them to "Southern Cuisine."

They still don't do grits - but we'll work on that, and besides Bar-B-Q they took a fine likin' to biscuits and gravy and I couldn't send them home without a Virginia Ham.

It has been great and a life long friendship has emerged. I'm planning a trip to Wisconsin, gonna eat lake perch and cheese.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles H." with a stylized flourish at the end.