



SHOP HRS.
 OPEN - MOST TIME
 CLOSED - SOME TIME
 BUSY - ALL THE TIME
 ON SCHEDULE
 NONE OF THE TIME

In the Workshop with Charles Neil

Monthly Newsletter

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Welcome to all New Subscribers!

The Price Paid

I would hope by now that most of you know who we are and what we are about, but just to set the record straight and to establish what qualifies us to do what we are doing I'll do this thing, not that I want to but everyone says I need to, I guess facts are facts.

First of all, I'm not some woodworking guru or genius, quite the opposite, complex things take me a while, it is just that finishing and woodworking are not complex to me and that is a divine GIFT and I know it. I also know that a gift or talent is something that must be perfected and honed, and above all, it must be shared, it's to this end we now reside.

I have always had a fascination with wood and furniture...always. Even growing up as a very young child I would "make stuff." When I turned 13 I got introduced to cars and painting them, I was hooked and for the next fifteen years or more I did auto body and custom finishes and I loved it, all the time doing wood as a

recreational hobby, but as the auto body thing wore thin and became less challenging, the wood became more so –so I went to work doing wood and over the years I've done about everything I can think of..kitchen cabinets, flooring, built a coffin or two, beehives and a ton of furniture in about every style you can imagine. Living in a very rural area, mostly farmers and factory workers,

making furniture for a living was tough, real tough. Several times I had to work at other things to keep eating, had to price things at half of what they should be to get work. Got cut pretty bad on a table saw from being exhausted trying to meet a deadline. At that point I gave up deadlines, it takes what it takes. The injury was a big setback, eight months or so not being able to work, I almost lost everything I had, but through pure stubbornness we prevailed. My family paid a price as well, there were many times we wondered how we could go on, but we did. One thing I never did was to compromise my work or short-cut something for a dollar. I always believed that if you do something the best you can and learn as much as you can it will pay off - and it did. I have

never lacked for work, never, our name and reputation spread purely by word of mouth,



just as it does now. If we had a problem, it was not being able to keep up, we hired folks, went through about ten years of that and a ton of people, most just wanted to slap it together and go, I wound up repairing most stuff. I finally gave up and decided to go back to just me and now I have Billy who helps me, also Ed who helps out with sanding and stuff part-time, Sherri does everything administrative and computer wise (including videos and website) and helps out in the shop when needed.

Through all this I was asked to teach some classes and did, found I really enjoyed that..a lot. Now this may sound big-headed but its not meant to be, but doing the classes I found



out how much I had learned and grown and how much they wanted what I knew. So for me it an itch I just had to scratch was born. I kept teaching, nights and weekends and I loved it.

When I got out of my 15K square foot shop and downsized to just the 3 ½ of us, I was so far behind I had to give up teaching to keep building, my personal average was 60 to 70 pieces a year, and I mean significant ones, doesn't count the little stuff thrown in, of course the average day was 12-16 hours and 6 ½ days a week was normal, never taking a

day off, holidays came and went, and we kept working, a relentless, non-ending task, but through it we learned how to get things done, and done correctly, yet quickly, jigs and techniques developed, colors and finishes perfected, tens of thousands of dollars in tools, products bought to see if they could help speed us up, most became dumpster filler.

We always wanted to get back to teaching. Video seemed the way to do it as it allowed for home digestion and reference and the DVD offered good photo and sound vs. the old VHS. So we started working on them a little, and as technology and affordability grew, we have grown with it. Sherri, like myself won't be conquered by anything and she loves the computer world, so she dove in and learned the do's and don'ts and as technology progressed, she was on top of it, and just like me she keeps an eye out for anything that will help us out.

So, anyway, we started filming a few DVDs, put some little stuff on youtube.com and started getting a ton of emails and somewhere along the line, started writing this newsletter.

We have had a lot of input from you and that is a blessing beyond words, it's simple, you tell us what you want and need and we will do our best to deliver.

After this many years, ya know what ya know. I have always guaranteed my products for my lifetime and I have never gotten a piece of furniture back, had a finish failure, or had a client only buy one piece. I know that's a pretty tall statement but it is ture. One of the things I forgot to mention was that in the early years I was blessed to work with some "Ol' timers" who were in my book masters. Everything was done old school, by hand and I learned a ton about acclimation, drying and seasoning, building to allow for seasonal

changes, finishes, worked on museum antiques from around the world and when you see something that has been around for two hundred years and it is still holding, ya have to figure it's a good thing, then you start to see how you can do the same, better and faster, as the world pace demands it as well as your own survival, you test and experiment a lot. An example is to be able to take a far more durable, faster, modern day finish and have it look like a beautiful period finish.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned is to "Sneak Up On It." I have told that to every student who has crossed my path, it is simple, take your time, build it one step at a time and one piece at a time. Norm's saying, "Measure Twice and Cut Once," mine is, "Measure Twice, Cut Twice." If I need something 2 1/2" wide, I cut it 2 5/8" wide then gently skim the edges to a final 2 1/2". If there is any stress relieved, I still have room to correct it. I never cut to final size until I am ready to install. If I have an oops elsewhere I hopefully have room to correct. I'm always telling folks, "slow down and hurry up!" In my world I make my money when it's done, and I've learned to take my time, ensure every cut and it goes much faster. I still get impatient or think I remember and make a mistake.

It is to this end that qualifies me to do what I am doing, I'm no genius, but I am very, very experienced, of course my definition of experience is mistake + mistake + mistake.

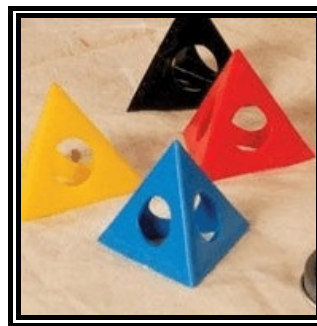
One of the things I miss the most is being able to build something because I want to instead of I have to, I hope in 2008 this changes.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that I've paid my dues and then some. Me, my family and everyone associated have sacrificed a ton, we have come up through the ranks and have the battle scars to prove it.

So there you have it, I'm no better of a woodworker than you or the next person can be, I'm just a woodworker trying to share a lifetime of experience so you won't trip over the same rocks I have, and as Forrest Gump said, "That's all I got to say about that!"

Why Didn't I Think of That?

Couple of weeks ago when I was up at Woodcraft, I was cruisin' the store and I spotted something called "The Painter's Pyramid." It's a nylon or plastic pyramid that has a sharp point and you simply use it to support panels, doors, whatever, when you are finishing. For years I've used sticks, nail boards, screws, whatever, now, with water



bases you have to use either stainless or brass or you will get rust spots. These pyramids really seemed like a good idea, as nail boards and such are a pain and the cost of long stainless or brass screws isn't

cheap either. Also, nails and screws seem harsh and will often puncture into the wood requiring touch up, the pyramids are softer yet sharp enough to leave minimal contact and you can clean them, stack 'em and they are pretty inexpensive, (Woodcraft www.woodcraft.com sells them for \$5.99/pkg. 10, you can also order them direct, www.painterspyramid.com, but they are \$6.99/pkg.10 from the manufacturer, didn't find them at other woodworker store sites).

Now, the way it works is simple, finish the back side of something, leave the edges, flip it over onto the pyramids and finish the front and edges, both sides dry at the same time, nail and screw boards work the same but these little gizmos are great, it's one of those things you wonder, why didn't I think of that.

Video & DVD Update

Well, we got “Oil Finishes” shipped, got sanding and gel finishes wrapping up now, moving to coloring wood, then to repairing and so on. This Finishing DVD set keeps growing and growing, but that is ok. If ya gonna fight a battle, go well armed. As I have said before, it is my intent that this series settles the finishing issues for many years to come and at most we will have to do a follow-up or two, just to keep up with the changes.

We got the Bob & Charles adventures out, what a nightmare, it just goes to prove that if ya want something done, do it yourself. The reviews have been great, it wound up being seven DVDs in the set, Bob and I just kept coming up with “stuff” we felt needed to go in the DVD. It covers the making of a Keeping Chest and a Colonial Candle Box, but to a bigger degree, dovetails, bracket feet, locks, hinges, the list is endless. Sherri decided to re-introduce the set because many have asked about it so you can find it on our website, just click on DVD Store or you can follow this link:

<http://www.antiquesbuiltdaily.com/dvdstore.htm>

She has a special price on it and a preview is also available on our website.

I think the next DVD project will be a router one. I do like routers, and I use them constantly. Of any tool I own, my routers and bits are probably the most used and have allowed me to do the majority of my work, I don't know of anything you can't do with a router and a good selection of bits. I think the title should be “Magical World of Routers” because they can certainly create magic, if ya know what to do.

Once finishing and routers are done we are going to be doing some really neat projects for every level. I hope you will consider getting the DVD titles available to date as they will be the in depth version of techniques used

in the projects, and as always, if you are not 100% satisfied, we will refund your money and shipping charges.

The Finishing Book

Many of you have emailed about the book that will follow the DVD series, Finishing A to Z, it is a reference book to the series, it will have sanding schedules, finish schedules, thinning ratios, color formulas we use and sources as well as anything we feel needs more attention or last minute inclusions, it goes with the DVD series and will be used with our finishing classes and would not be much use without either so it will not be sold separately as far as planned right now.

DVD Orders

To clarify just a bit, when you purchase a DVD title from our website, I try to get it out within 24 hours if listed as “In Stock,” within 72 hours if not listed “In Stock.” The finishing series has taken a lot of time and focus, as you know we are a small operation but we want to be the best, shipping as well, so, if you do not receive your order within 5 days of placing it, please drop me an email at and let me know so if I have overlooked it I can get it out right away.



Dancin' Bob

In the Adventures of Bob & Charles set, I had to step off camera to get something so Bob is standing there, so he starts dancing - 270 lbs. Of bald Bob, dancing, well dancing, stumbling, whatever you want to call it, anyway, Bob will be back in



May and if I can find an XXXL TuTu and a pair of size 14 ballet slippers, never mind, that is a picture I just don't think I wanna see. Maybe we can get him to moon walk!

The Finish Line

Mixing Shellac Quick

I like everybody else, normally would just put my shellac flakes in a jar and add denatured alcohol, let it soak a day or so, shaking or stirring as often as I remembered.

When Bob was down he told me he used a coffee grinder (electric) not an expensive one, I think I paid fourteen dollars at Walmart, anyway, you grind the flakes up and they dissolve in one-third the time, works great!



Black & Decker brand @
Walmart - about \$14.00

FYI

Urethane and Polyurethane - it is the same thing, it is a mixture of "many" resins so don't let the name fool ya.

More on Water Base

Often times when spraying water base, the tip or nozzle will start to clog up because of its thicker viscosity as well as its inability to re-dissolve itself, as it passes through the spray gun it can slowly build up, trying to close off the nozzle. Leaving a water base in a spray gun for any prolonged length of time is a good way to lose a gun. When this stuff dries it's tenacious. Turbines seem to be the worst because the air is warmer than compressed air and of course warmed up or heated water base (a lot of people like to warm it a little before applying in cooler weather to help it set) is worse yet.

There is no real good solution or one I have found, except to keep some warm water and a soft brass brush or stiff toothbrush handy to keep it clean. Between coats I'll cover the nozzle after cleaning with a wet sponge and a rubber band. If it is going to be an hour or more between coats, flush the gun, first with water, second with denatured alcohol. The alcohol will remove the water and keep any parts from rusting, removing the nozzle, needle and spray cap and cleaning well after each use is just smart.

Having some very small sewing needles handy to run through small holes is also a good idea. Don't force them, just enough to clean, you don't want to enlarge the diameter, they are precision made, so go easy.

If you do get a finish set up in your gun, disassemble as soon as possible and try soaking it in acetone. Oh yeah, sometimes a thin broom straw will clean out the holes. Keep the lid on, it keeps it from skimming.

The Weather Report



Well, in my neck of the woods its turned a might cool, and humidity has dropped significantly, this brings a lot more “static electricity.” The gauge at the moment reads 22%, I like to keep it between 35% and 45% so it’s time

to get out the humidifiers and throw a pot of water on to boil.

Be sure to ground your dust collectors, wrapping the pipes with copper wire and grounding it keeps static electricity from building thus you won’t get shocked, but more importantly, you won’t create arcs on dust laden pipes. A major fire hazzard in shops is fine dust, It will burn almost as rapidly as solvents. It is dangerous and static electricity draws dust and the arcs can ignite it. Dust collection bags need to be emptied.

Ever got shocked with your shop vac? Anytime you move a volume of air through a pipe or hose your gonna get static unless you ground the pipe or hose.

So here is something for you to think about, turbine sprayers and air hose, may be minor, but it is there, a simple wrap of copper on a line with an alligator clip and wire to a ground pulls it off. Many years ago when I did a lot of automotive spraying, I found that if I dropped a chain from the car to a wet floor, with a ground wire in it, I got less dust in my finish. I will touch a copper wire with a probe on it to the piece I am finishing to pull off any static that is there - Can’t tell you If it really does anything, or if it is just crazy thinking, I’m not an electrical engineer, but I get very clean finishes, turbines seem to be worse as the hoses are larger and water base seems to be worse than petro, in any case, call it fact or fiction, it seems to help!

Craftsman Profile

What’s Your Story?

NO SUBMISSIONS THIS MONTH, we have met so many of you online, but we need your stories, we want to share with everyone, again, everyone has a story about how you got into woodworking, your mentors, your styles, look forward to hearing from you.

Wow - A New Shop!

Over the holidays I got some sort of flu bug and didn’t feel too well so we started cleaning up the shop, I’m talking a drag out, throw away, put up, wipe off, so that’s where that has been, get the shovel type cleaning. Now by most of you guys’ standards, my show is far below par, clamps still have glue all over them, benches still have a lot of battle scars.

Got my spray guns clean and shiny, got all of my routers up from under the benches, I gotta tell ya, its been a long time since everything I own wasn’t covered in sawdust, I like it. I could get used to a clean shop, well, at least for a day or two.

You’ll get to see the clean shop in videos we make from now on. Billy and Sherri made me promise to keep it clean!

You Might be a Woodworker if

...when you’re in church assessing the (sometimes sorry) condition of the pews and going through the process in your head on how you would fix them. Woodma, CA

...you measure the oven to see what is the longest piece of wood you can put in it. WingNut, PA

...you put "Out of Office" in your calendar for the 2008 IWF in Atlanta, 15 months before the show. Sniper, AL

...you're a guy and you use Vaseline on your hands at night. Sylvester, MI

...you can describe everything in your shop but not in your living room. Poppie, KY

...your wood stash has taken over your children's bedrooms. Sawdust_Tim, AZ

...when looking at any painting, even a masterpiece, you find yourself checking out the frame first. Router_Jim, WI

...measure twice is law. K.L. McReynolds, KS

...every T-Shirt you own has glue stains on it and you can remember what you were gluing up when you got them. Gmike

...your socks with holes in them are used for finishing rags. Duggie, Ontario

...you know that 1023 is not an airliner. BacsBob, OH

...your new SUV has bark in it. CharlesNeil, VA

Sherri's Update

DVDs are shipping daily, thanks for your support, the feedback and comments have been great and help us to put out the best product we can. The first DVD in the Finishing Series went out and we are getting back great comments, they mean a lot. Our woodworking friend Karson suggested "Scene Selections," consider it done. From now on, when appropriate, there will be a scene selection menu that will help you return to a certain area of the DVD instead of FF or REW. Thanks Karson.

The "Ask Charles Neil" Forum is now live on our website, you can go there from the main page of our website, just click on the link. I am using a program from a provider that is free, thus we have to tolerate some ads, don't feel a need to click on them unless you are interested, it is not an affiliate program, just there because the forum is free. The purpose of the forum is to allow you to discuss woodworking issues directly with Charles, when he is at the shop, he will check in at least once a day. He will still be "lurking" on the other forums, this is where we find out what you want to learn or are having issues and perhaps Charles can help, so, join the forum.

Don't forget that if you send our newsletter to two woodworkers, using the link at the bottom of the newsletter email (Send to Friends) I'll send you a link to receive a 10% discount on any DVD (s) you purchase in the next 30 days. Many of you took advantage last month and you can too!

Time to say Goodbye for this Month

This past month I haven't done squat in woodworking, I've watched finish and paint dry, that's comparable to watching grass grow. I have filmed a lot, had to take a shower most every day, shave, comb my hair and try to be halfway presentable. I hope you folks appreciate the effort that goes into these DVDs, cleaned my hands, lacquer thinner, bleach, scotch brit, a file, scraper and some 320....GEEZ!

Now the funny part, I rolled laughing when out on one of the forums the subject of my wardrobe came up, seems they didn't care for my sleeveless shirts and fingerless gloves, Bob and I both got a laugh as it seems we share the same taste in clothing. I was amazed the cut-off jeans seemed ok, but as we have gotten a lot more serious in our filming, you'll typically see the red shirts,

Sherri says they show up better, whatever, but when summer comes, the sleeves gotta go.

Hey, when Bob came down, his wife went out and got him new underwear and some new shirts as he was going to be on film, the shirts I got, the underwear still pondering!

Hey, that brings up a point, why do I wear the gloves? Well, it's simple, when ya lift, tote and tug on wood and tools all day, it saves the hands, and for me, it seems to help my grip. We all like them, especially when sanding with the sanders, we have the anti-vibration which has a padded palm and the wrist strap all seem to cushion the constant vibration of the sanders which really seems to aggravate old joints. Another reason is that it seems I am always pushing something through a router table, table saw or re-sawing on a bandsaw and corners seem to be the push area in many cases as well as push sticks and should I get a kickback, the push stick isn't going to slam into my palm.

Catch ya next month!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping tail.