



In the Workshop with Charles Neil

Monthly Newsletter

No. 9

March 2008

Welcome to all New Subscribers!

...and a lot of you this month!

Finally Saw Dust!

Well, it is done! The Finishing DVDs are done and if the legs would cooperate, I'd be doing back flips! I'm glad I did it but I don't ever want to do it again.

So what's next? SAW DUST! I got to get some projects done, let's see, couple of high boys, couple of low boys, two chevel mirrors, two tables, two beds, four dressers and four night stands, a fireplace mantle, four rockers, twelve of my ladderback chairs out of bubinga and that is just what I'm behind on through the middle to end of April then I'll be good to go, not behind on videos!

Welcome to my world of furniture making, we call it "Rock and Roll Time." I'll crank up the CD player, really loud and get with it, slammin' and jammin'. Some Bellamy Brothers, Kentucky Headhunters, Eagles, ZZ Top, Bonny Raitte, with some good Bluegrass to level the mix. Billy will don some ear muffs so he don't have to listen, I'll hit the door at 5 to 6 am, head out about ???pm and be happier than a pig in a mud hole on a hot July day.

I Definitely "Have Talent"

(for getting myself into trouble)

Now, I'm sittin' here writing this newsletter, cell phone rings, it's Billy. He's picking up some walnut for me, "Hey, the guy has four pieces of nice cherry feather crotch. Immediately I say, "Get It."

Billy returns and comes flying in, look at this crotch!" Now there were four pieces, 6" wide by 38" long, sawn 5/4, perfect feather crotch, for \$50.00. Cool. I keep writing.



Billy takes the ticket in the office and starts telling Sherri about the cherry, insists that she come and look. Now ya gotta understand that



Billy is 31, single and if you gave Billy the choice between going on a date with two enticing blonde twins and going digging through a wood pile, well, the ladies will get a

rain check! If ya cut Billy's head open the multitude of wood samples would be unreal, he loves wood and woodworking.

Now, here comes Sherri, where's the cherry? Bill shows her the four boards, she says, "You paid \$50 for four little boards? I'm in trouble and haven't moved....that's talent!"

Then comes the dreaded question I bet you have never been asked, "What ya gonna do with that?" Oh, I got something planned, thinking all of the time, stuff it upstairs with the rest of my cool stuff.

Sherri looks at both of us and says, "What? Do you guys think money grows on trees?" Well, in my world, yea!

Door Making Tips:

Raised Panel Doors

I keep reading out on the forums about "space balls" - a spongy little ball that goes in the groove on both sides of the door panel to keep it from rattling and allow for expansion.

Here is what has worked for me, for years. How about put a little glue, top and bottom in the center of the panel. If it expands left and right, gluing the center is fine. Be sure to keep the panel centered. A pencil line on the rails and the panel, prior to assembly works well. Oh yeah, I always leave a 1/8" space on both sides of my panels, just what I've always done and never had an issue. Another thing I do is that I always seal the ends of the panels with some shellac or finish prior to assembly, this also helps reduce expansion and contraction by sealing off the end grain where wood absorbs and releases the majority of its moisture. This is part of building to finish, don't forget to sand your panel before inserting because they are very hard to sand after assembly.

Cope & Stick Doors/Panels

A lot of us use router bits to make doors and panel and frame construction. Here are some things to know:

The sides are called - STILES
The top/bottom are called - RAILS

Always cut both rails and stiles about 1/8" wider than needed. When you run the profile with the groove, chip-out is almost always a problem no matter how light the passes you take.

Whenever possible, cut the "copes" or tenons first as tear out on the ends can be a problem, use a backer to help eliminate it as much as possible.

In both cases, the extra width allows you to saw the profile edge one more time and re-run on the router, the chip-out is usually a result of the slot cutter and once the outer face has a clean cut, it usually does not re-chip. This is the way I cut all of my "Cope & Stick."

Remember "SNEAK UP ON IT!"

IN MY OPINION

I got to tell ya, I've had it with the "Big Magazine Guys!"

Several years ago they did an article stating that the helical head planers and jointers were in no way better than the straight knives. After seeing the material I got from Bob Kloes who uses a helical head planer, I started gettin' a sick feeling in my stomach. I honestly believed what they said and bought straight knife tools.

For years now we have used abrasive drum sanders on our figured wood, hours of

sanding, because the straight knife stuff chipped out so bad. What we have spent on sandpaper, drum sanders and the endless hours processing is unreal.

Well, I just got a helical head planer and jointer. The magazine was wrong - DEAD

WRONG. To think of the time and money I have wasted on their advice, well, I ain't done.



Then the front cover, on how wax is a good finish. Since when? Looks good today, check it in six months, there is no wax that makes a durable, lasting finish, end of story.



Then comes the spray gun test. Again, their results were so slanted. One of the spray guns and one of the turbine units I use and have been and still do use them in our finishing classes. People love them. They are economical and work great. They basically stated they were trash. I got so mad that I got in touch with the manufacturer, wrote a review which the manufacturer sent to the magazine. They agree to re-test the unit after which, in a small and obscure location sort of retracted their previous review.

I could go on, but to sum it up, I really dislike "Big Bullies" picking on people especially when it is untrue.

I don't claim to know it all, but I know what I know and when I've used something for years and know that it works, well, I don't like someone who knows nothing about it telling me it doesn't work!

So in my mind, a magazine tool review is about as good as a political poll, it is all in how the question is worded.

SUBSCRIPTION CANCELLED!

The Finish Line

So Many Products!

When I did the DVD series on finishing, I really tried to find stuff that would be readily available to everyone. So I scoped out the box stores - not with much success. I did find some rattle cans of DEFT as well as DEFT brushing lacquer, spray cans of ZINSER Shellac and surprisingly, some Seal Coat Shellac.

The spray can of shellac and the Seal Coat are dewaxed and what we look for in wood finishes. The



rattle cans are about a one pound cut and the Seal Coat is a two pound cut. Shellac is a marvelous sealer, as well as a finish. I usually

prefer shellac as a sealer, but on non-hard use projects, it makes a good finish as well.

DEFT is a nitrocellulose lacquer. I used DEFT as my primary finish for years, of all the lacquers, it is the softest, but does a good job and is



the easiest lacquer to work with. The rattle cans dry faster than the quarts or gallons which are designed to brush (use a good, natural hair brush) thus they dry slower to allow for flow out.

Shellac dries faster than lacquer. A quick and easy finish is to brush or spray several coats of shellac which dries hard and fast, lightly sand with some 400 to 600 paper to a smooth level surface; then spray a coat of DEFT in the sheen you desire, it is available in gloss, semi-gloss and satin. That's it, you're done!

As with all of my finishing techniques, the objective is to build the finish. This technique uses shellac as the building base and DEFT to finish it off which will also add additional durability. An alternative would be to use a gel polyurethane (a wiping finish) as the last coat. Be sure to scuff sand between coats of poly, best to use 600 grit or higher. As with any wiped finish, it is very thin but poly needs a little mechanical bond in between coats, using coarser grits creates a heavier scratch which thin finishes cannot fill. I will use 1200 to 1500 grit as my scuff before my final coat..

The Weather Report

Well, Spring is Springing. The robins have arrived, temperature ranging from the 50's to mid 60's. Can turn the heat off in my storage room - glue and water base finishes are out of danger. With just a little heat in the finishing room I'm good to go, 70 degrees with 30% humidity, can't get any better than that! Poor ol' Bob up in Wisconsin, he's still in the 30's with snow still on the ground. Hope your weather is getting right for the shop.

Craftsman Profile

Carpenter a Woodworker!

This one is! I have only met Brendan through the our videos and newsletters this past year and enjoy our exchanges.

Sherri contacted Brendan and asked "What's Your Story?" He wrote us back saying that he was honored that we wanted to share his story with everyone and gave us a bit more about himself than can be found on his website:

www.brendancarpenter.com

Brendan is an ex-Financial Executive who recently decided to take some time away from the finance world and focus on his life long hobby of furniture making and restoration. Having come from the fast paced environment of rapid growth start-up companies, Brendan welcomes the slower, deliberate pace of the small shop environment.



Brendan began woodworking like many others, he picked up a hammer and nail early in his life. This evolved into learning how to use various tools and techniques. Although primarily self taught by being a voracious reader, Brendan has been very fortunate in receiving some formal education along the way from notable industry veterans like Lonnie Bird and Michael McDunn.

Like so many woodworkers, Brendan has on occasion made some extremely expensive "firewood." He tries to keep this to a minimum nowadays, but he continually finds that some of his greatest learning points happen as a result of a mistake. Lesson learned: Keep going and you'll learn as you go!

Early in life, Brendan served his country as a Marine and then later graduated from East Carolina University with a concentration in Accounting. He is the proud father of two little boys, Ethan and Graham which he says are by far his greatest achievement.

Thanks for sharing your story Brandan, and thanks for having served our country. Another southern boy from South Carolina.

Mock Ups

Mock ups answer the questions. Get you some cardboard, try appliance stores, sides of washing machine boxes or refrigerator boxes do great. Get a hot glue gun and get to building. It is the best way to work out your design and perfect your proportions. 1/2" MDF and staple guns work well too.

Also, not enough can be said about mock ups for insuring functionality and perfecting design and technique.

The time and effort spent here will be well worth your while.

Mortise & Tenons

Next to a dovetail, the strongest joint in woodworking.

Coming up through the ranks I did a lot of refinishing and restoration and when you see something that is hundreds of years old and it is still going strong, you have to conclude

that it's construction was well founded and there was always the same construction, dovetails and pegged, mortise and tenons, and in a lot of cases, no glue, just a peg going through a joint, sometimes the joint would loosen a little as the peg shrunk or backed out slightly but just by simply removing the peg, adding a bit of glue, reset the peg and "viola" good to go for a couple hundred more years.

Now days, we have lock miters, pocket screws, biscuits and loose tenon joinery and while they have their place, they depend on glue as the strength with the exception of the pocket screw and with today's modern glues they make a strong joint.

However, when you are making an heirloom the good ol' time tested pegged mortise and tenon is hard to beat, a little glue and a peg in case the glue fails, you just created immortality. So here are some of my rules for pegging.

I prefer at least a 7/8" to 1" long tenon. Longer if I can. I use one peg on 2" wide and smaller, two pegs on 2" and up. If I have a 1" tenon, I peg it at about 3/8" from the shoulder (seam). I usually use a 1/4" hole and a 1/4" peg. Cut square, no dowels. I taper the peg slightly to give some glue relief. If I'm doing a blind peg (not all the way through). If I'm going all the way through, I use a backer to drill through to the back and taper the peg slightly so it passes through better, coat the peg with glue, drive it in until you get the "square" on both sides. Now, because you will be creating some pressure, I always keep a clamp on so I don't crack anything. Why no dowel? Dowel pegs are easier, but they hold all the way around the circumference. Square pegs, outside of being more attractive and historically correct, hold on the corners

allowing for some expansion and contraction. When you put a square peg in you will notice how the corner darkens slightly due to compression. I've seen a lot of "dowel" or round pegged joints crack, I can't remember a square one ever cracking the wood, but again, keep some clamp pressure on when driving the pegs and use a hammer, mallets bounce too much. Pegs should be able to be tapped in if you have to drive hard the peg is too big.

I always saw the pegs off about 1/16" to 1/8" above the surface and rasp and sand them flush to the peg face. Another neat thing is to peg the joints after construction and sanding, put some masking tape over where you are going to drill, to catch any glue squeeze out, use a good bradpoint or forstner bit to drill a clean hole. Peg the joint, cut it off about a 1/4" above the surface, then rasp and file it down to about 1/16" to 3/32". Lightly ease the shoulders of the peg and leave it above the surface, gives a nice look and if ya feeling creative, use different wood pegs, but always use a good hard wood, pine don't work.

The Tool Crib

This is a new area of my newsletter. As you now know, I don't give much weight to tool and product reviews, however, when there is a good product that works for me in my shop, I want to take the opportunity to share that information with you.

Dust Collection

Now, when I first started, dust collection was a trash can stuffed under the contractor saw, a shovel and a broom. Then way back when I got some dust collectors, you know, the ones with the big bags, turn them on and a big cloud of dust came blowing out of the bags, filling the shop with dust, back then our

shop was 15K square feet and to have an external, whole shop system was just not affordable, so we did the best we could.



Couple of weeks ago I got two of the cannister top dust collectors, WOW, what a difference. No cloud of dust and they perform great, now I won't mind using them.

You Might be a Woodworker if

...you can never walk into a nice house or fine furniture store for the first time without a tractor beam feeling of force pulling you towards any wood cabinetry or furniture. Pitbull

...you don't wash your hands before dinner because "it's just a little sawdust" but wash them after eating for fear of getting french fry grease on your curly maple. Toddj99

...if you wish Glade made scents like cherry and walnut sawdust. Boardman

...you park the car at a flea market and walk ten paces ahead of your significant other towards the tables like a small child runs toward the lights of a Ferris wheel anticipating that cool old tool that's waiting for you. Joesdad

...when in church you realize that you left a pencil behind your ear. Router-Jim, WI

...you see a picture of an old barn with "See Rock City" painted on it and wonder if there is any good lumber worth salvaging in it. Sniper, AL

...you wish you had one of those big hobart rotisseries that will take 5 ft. boards. Wing Nut, PA

...you have more saw dust in your pockets than you have money. Bob, WI

...you own at least one pick up truck. Eightfingers, MO

...when you see a dead tree you mourn the loss of the lost board feet instead of the lost shade. K.L. McReynolds, KS

...you have fifteen different finishes in your cabinet but really use only one. Mags, AZ

...your wife never notices your after shave but she comments on how much she likes the smell of the fresh cut wood on your clothes. Vince, SC.

Sherri's Update

I now understand wanting a piece of equipment to make your life easier but have to wait for the right time to purchase it. In the last month, I have been able to purchase some equipment to be used in the production of our "In the Workshop with Charles Neil" video series. Hooray!

All back orders are shipped and copies of each and every title are available for shipment when an order is placed through our shopping cart.

I am working on the resource page on our site that will eventually link to resources that you may want more information for after seeing a video clip on youtube or our website along with our DVD series.

Video Clips will be coming at a steady pace once again. Our main objective has been filming for the Finishing series, however, we

did film a few clips here and there so they will be uploaded in the next few weeks. Now that Charles is back in his shop making saw dust, we will be filming clips regularly of different tips and techniques that don't even come to mind when you aren't using them. If you have any suggestions for topics, please email us, we need to hear from you.

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!

My Forum

On our website we have the forum, some of you have visited, would like to see more, so drop by, ask a question, give your opinion, don't be bashful, its just a group of friends sharing ideas and experience.

Time to say Goodbye for this Month

My World

Well, as far as DVDs go, I'm gonna do a router and a turning series as we go through the projects that I have to get done. I'll be filming the use of routers as well as some turning, then I will address each topic unto itself.

Bob Kloes will be here in May for a couple of weeks so who knows what kinda trouble we will find to get into.

Bob and Billy both love old tools and machines, I like them too, but these guys are big into them. Starting with the next newsletter we are going to have them do a write on some of their stuff like that. I don't want to get into that because I buy tools from

a different perspective than most. In my world, tools are just that, a tool. Name brand and color is irrelevant to me and to a big degree so is cost. In my world, I look for a tool or piece of equipment that will handle the load, help me be more efficient and effective, in a hobby environment what I buy would be judged differently. Having said that, in my shop I have tools and equipment at the upper end of those that are available just prior to buying industrial (very expensive) equipment. The other thing is that I am not seeking production equipment, only tools that help me be more efficient, I buy the same tools that you do, just more of them! I never want the woodworking taken out of my own hands.

All of that said, what I have found is that every manufacturer has its strong points and it's weak and to go through all the possibilities would be an endless task and probably create some hard feelings, I would rather remain neutral and teach how and about and not so much what.

What you see in my shop and on camera are my choices. When I started furniture making full time, my shop consisted of a Craftsman Contractor Table Saw, a radial arm saw, a small electric sander, a router and a planer. That is what I could afford at the time. Through the years, as finances and circumstance as well as needs changed, I purchased additional tools and equipment, I still buy and replace today, so if there is one single piece of advice I could give you on buying tools and equipment is to buy the best you can afford, and buy what you need to accomplish a task, you won't regret it. Do your research, compare and ask around (and don't rely on magazine tool reviews).

One last thing before I go...in doing my Finishing DVD, I sought out a lot of various products and information. Probably the biggest source of information was from Kent

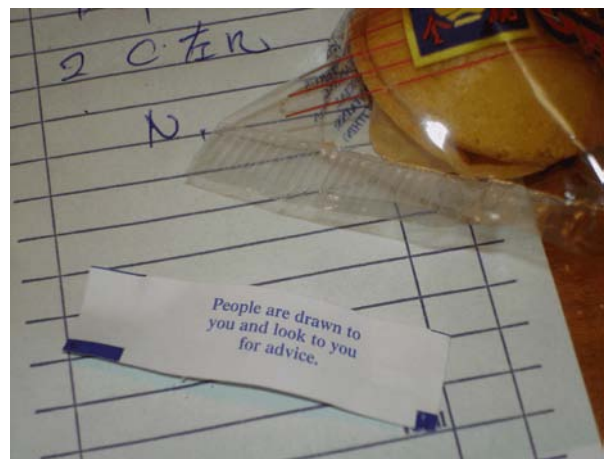
Harpool of Woodcraft. Kent was always willing to help me find the people I needed for information and if ya ask him a question about any finishing product, he had the answer or knew where to find it. A wealth of information and as fine of people as you would ever want to meet.

Kent, a big heart felt "thank you." It could not have been done without you.

Catch ya next month!



PS. Just so you know, any one of my power tools is worth two to six times what my truck is, but then again, I drive them a lot more than the truck.



Charles loves Chinese Food, maybe I will believe more in those hokie fortunes next time. *Sherri*