



In the Workshop with Charles Neil

Monthly Newsletter

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Welcome to all New Subscribers!

Two Steps Backward - Three Steps Forward

Many of you have already heard of the break-in that occurred on March 13th at our workshop. I didn't get upset, I got mad.....real mad and ain't over it yet. But Sherri and Billy had to completely re-group and start over, here is the story.

In the break-in, (some local young folks) our video camera, digital camera and some hand tools were taken from our shop during the night. A trail led out our back door to the double-wide home behind us, the police chief found some of the items (not the video equipment) in the home but said, "They say they don't know how it got there." As far as we know, it ended right there for the thieves as well as law enforcement.

Billy and Sherri were just getting really good using our equipment and software and starting to put out much better videos than in the beginning. Having to replace the equipment was not something we were going to do until later in this year, however, Sherri started the task of replacing the two-year old equipment....much harder than one would think. She ended up needing to upgrade the camera to work with our recently purchased sound system, then with the camera upgrade came a software

upgrade, and with the software upgrade comes a PC upgrade which will take a little longer to replace, so for now, all of the video, shorts and DVDs are being produced in much higher video and audio quality - three steps forward, but the time to produce them on the current computer is massive. It took over 8 hours to produce an 8 minute clip that we uploaded to [Brightcove](#) and [Youtube](#) today. Our current PC will do the job, just very slow at processing it.

All of that to say, last week we filmed a lot of video for our website and for youtube, but the rendering and upload will be a bit slower so stay tuned, new video tips are coming your way!

Buying Wood

Here is where my world and yours will differ. I rarely buy wood for a specific project, but rather I bulk buy. I try to keep on hand several hundred feet of varied species, of which at the moment I'm extremely low on. I also hunt, wide, thick and unique figure and grain, and buy it whenever and wherever I can get it.



There are two basic types of lumber retailers, one we will call a "General Mill" where lumber is sold by volume, truck loads to furniture factories,

cabinet factories, etc. Then we have "Specialty Mills" and "Pickers."

Let's take a look at a general mill. These guys produce thousands of board feet a day and some will have retail outlets where you can buy from, however, the bulk of their business is in larger footage, as in truck loads. Dealing with the little guy who wants 50' of wood and wants to go through everything is a loss of time and money and usually they have little interest. On the other hand, if they have a retail outlet then your chances of buying from them are good. In this world the lumber is graded by American Hardwood Lumber Grade (AHLG) Rules and terms (Google AHLG for more info).

FAS - First and Seconds - means one face will yield approximately 94% clear cut and the second face, no less than 84% clear - it must be 6" wide and 8' long. Walnut is graded less strictly and can be narrower and shorter.

Select - Same as FAS except shorter (6').

1 C or 1 Common - can be 3" wide and as short as 4', but usually it is 3" and wider and averages 6' to 8' and has 83% clear face and the second has at least 67% clear face.

Here is a good tip. Instead of always going for the FAS, look at the 1C. Often it is about ½ the price of select and FAS and unless you have the need for the long, clear lengths, it is usually your best buy. You may have to cut around some defects, but considering the amount of lumber you get for the same money, it does well.

There is also a 2C or 2 Common grade that is usually fairly rough, but don't disregard it. I love 2C as it is usually very cheap and in abundance and while you will have a fair amount of waste, it makes for great short stock, and I'll tell ya, I've gotten some of the best figured wood from 2C lumber.

Remember, when you find defects, you also find figure. The maple 2C lumber is a great source for some of the wildest stuff you've ever seen!

The Specialty Mills and Pickers are the guys who buy from the General Mills. The Specialty Mill will buy selected logs from a large mill, often competing with veneer buyers for the same log, so prices definitely go up, but so does the quality of the material. The Picker is a guy who usually has a good rapport with the big mills and graders and has them pull out the wide, figured, extra nice stuff on the condition they will buy it all, and usually at a higher price.

Now, in all cases, wide lumber is more expensive. In all grades, you usually have a price for normal widths, for example, FAS 6" to 8" wide and a higher price for 10" and wider and in recent years I have seen the price point jump another notch at 12" and wider. So, just buying FAS won't get you the wide stuff, you must be specific.

The Specialty Mill will saw the logs, now just because a log looks good, doesn't mean it is. I've seen maple logs that the exterior was ribboned all over the place and so it was thought it would be super curly, when sawn, the outer 4" to 6" of the log had curl and the



interior was just maple, so the mill bit the bullet, therefore the prices throughout have to maintain a high enough profit margin to

offset this occurrence. By the same token,

this is where sequentially cut log sets and some of the most spectacular lumber comes from, but so does the spectacular prices.

The Picker - one of my favorites. A picker is pretty much what the name implies. Same as an antique picker, he's the hunter, does the hunting. Scrounging and sortin' through. Typically he has a group of large and small mills as stated who pull for him. Problem is the mills will pull good, great and indifferent, he has to buy it all, sort it out, haul it, keep it, and handle it a dozen times, and now days, photograph it, email the photos, describe it and then go through a ton for small project sales and then wrap, ship and hope everything suits. The picker is the one who will typically give you the most attention and assistance, and usually, capable of surfacing and edging your material. He's the guy who works the hardest to give you what you want and his prices have to reflect it. It is a tough business, I did it for a little while but didn't care for the hassle, I've spent half a day going through lumber only to have the guy tell me, "Well, I'll let you know, I'm gonna look some more." Half day shot and got to re-stack all this wood, not for me, besides, once I get my hands on it, it is hard for me to let it go.

I've written all of this just to give you a little understanding of where the lumber comes from and what it goes through before you get it. Here is something else to consider, the US and Canada are the last source of hard woods and we are the sole source for the entire world and our supply is shrinking rapidly. Too much of our lumber is exported, in my opinion, and the other countries are paying a premium price.

My buddy, Bob Kloes, from Wisconsin is a furniture maker and sells some wood, a part-time picker if you will, so I asked Bob to give us his take on it and here it is:

Some Information and Hopefully Answers about Good Lumber

by Bob Kloes

I have been buying and selling and using lumber for over 25 years. I learn new things every day. You never know it all and I am living proof of that.

A lot of people ask me how I go about finding and buying good wood. A cabinet shop uses different lumber than a furniture builder. A



homebuilder uses different lumber than a bridge builder. We all use wood and that is a good thing. Years ago I knew a fellow from the forest products lab here in Wisconsin. His job was to find uses for all kinds of wood.

He always said, "the only good tree is a dead tree." You can't use it unless its cut down. Now, I love seeing huge old trees in the woods as much as the next guys. I am no tree hugger nor do I like to see clear cuts all over either, I like a happy balance. Enough of that stuff.

A cabinet shop uses maple for cabinets. It is usually (at least in Wisconsin) soft red maple or hard maple. Soft red maple is where I find most curly maple. I also get hard curly maple, but it is much more rare. Birdseye maple is always hard maple. I have seen birdseye in white pine, ash and elm. I have seen curly figure in most everything. Red maple seems to take stains and dyes better than hard maple or silver maple. It grows nice and tall. Around here it was considered a weed tree for a long time.

When I go looking for furniture lumber I look for figure. As a furniture builder I like to give my customers something special. Anybody can build a desk of maple. I like to build a

desk with 1 piece sides and lid. It is not easy to find great wood, but it is not undoable either. I have found most loggers and small sawmills good to work with. But you need to be honest and up-front about what you want. I have a few that save me all the "different" stuff they saw or cut. They know what I want and also that I will take all of it and pay right away. That is half the battle. Every business likes customers like this. Of course you need to have a way to haul it and store it. You also need the capital to pay for it. I have bought some great lumber over the years for as little as a dollar a foot, because of these rules. Now, if I went to these mills and said I want 1 piece that is 7 feet long and 12" wide and I want it all white on both sides and kiln dried and wrapped nice and pretty so I don't get splinters and dirty my hands....well you would be told to go take a long walk off a short bridge. A lot of what I get is by volume. When a mill calls and says I have some curly for you, you better be ready and able to take it. I can get 2000 to 3000 feet at a time. Some great, some good and some for painted furniture. That is how it is. It also helps if you make something to give to the owner or logger. The old lesson of, "treat people how you want to be treated," goes a long way. I love going through a pile and pulling out 18" wide curly maple 16 feet long. That is one of the great joys in life. I like selling people lumber. It is much easier if they can come and pick out what they want. If that is not possible, I can ship, but that entails lots more work. I like you to see what you are getting before it leaves my hands.

I have handled many thousands of board feet of lumber. Every time I get a new load, I always think I find something special. I think the good Lord has been very good to me. Shoot me some questions about lumber and I will try to get the answers for you. I love talking about wood. Almost as much as old hand tools and old woodworking machines.

Geez, I am a sick man. Take care until next month.....Bob (bob@bobkloes.com)

Retiring an Ol' Friend

Not going to say I'm not EVER going to make another Keeping Chest or Sugar Chest, but I'm kind of burned out on them. After building so many of every size and wood you can think of, well it's time to pass the design and technique on. Over the years both items have been big sellers at my shop and are definitely something that has proven to be treasured possessions of all recipients, kids especially, but everyone loves the personal secret space of a Keeping Chest. The Sugar Chest, well, its allure is many fold.



A reminder of simpler times, a simplistic form that draws you to it, a great conversation piece. They are both fun projects and straight forward builds.



So as Sherri types and sends this newsletter, I'm teaching my last class on "The Virginia Sugar Chest," filming as we go (the "Keeping Chest" project is already on DVD, "The Adventures of Bob and Charles"). So pick up the torch and carry forward.

More Peggin'



Last month we talked about pegging joints and I told you about leaving the peg proud and how it adds an antique flavor. I used this technique on the walnut corner cupboard I was working on so I took a close-up photo that I wanted to share with you.

In My Opinion

Not a Crusader, but.....and I probably shouldn't write this.

Last month I wrote about my disdain for slanted evaluations of products and tools by the woodworking magazines and I referred to what I felt was a totally wrong evaluation of the Earlex HV5000 turbine spray system. What I didn't tell you was that I had a unit sent to Marc Spagnuola (aka The Wood Whisperer) and my buddy, Bob Kloes to test, use and either confirm or dispel my own personal feeling about the unit and I asked each to render their independent opinion. They did. Marc did an excellent video on it. More importantly, the magazine did a re-test and reversed its initial evaluation and was big

enough to print it this month. Hats off to Fine Woodworking Magazine.

Thanks to Marc, and Bob and Fine Woodworking for helping set the record straight.

The Finish Line

How I did it. This month I've been finishing two corner cabinets you guys have seen sitting around my shop for a while so I thought I'd show photos of the finished pieces and tell you what I used.



The ash corner cupboard was e b o n i z e d (blackened) using General Finishes water base black stain with a "slug" of India Ink. I sealed it with General Finishes "Sanding Sealer" and then used General Finishes

Enduro Poly with Cross Linker added in satin sheen.

In the past I have also used W.D. Lockwood water base dye #327 with a "slug" of India Ink. Both products are very black, but from habit, I always add the India Ink.

The walnut corner cabinet was done in a petroleum base. The trace was Gemini Coatings New England Maple. I then sprayed



a base coat of Gemini yellow NGR Dye (#NG1703) followed by New England Maple (#DS64). Sealed with Gemini Vinyl Sealer (#VS0100) and then followed with Mohawk Finishes Heavy Bodied Glaze in Van Dyke Brown (#M506-14786). The top coat was Gemini Coatings (#S5993) pre-cat lacquer in "flat" sheen.



Again, from past finishing, I have used Mohawk Raw Sienna (#M520-477) as a base followed with Light Walnut (#M520-

2067) which also does well.

Both interiors were finished with Zinnser B.I.N. primer, shellac base followed by Gemini white pre-cat lacquer (#DC1030), another nice interior finish is General Finishes White Acrylic.

The interior and back of both pieces are poplar, hand planed. Note the old look of the poplar on the walnut cupboard back. The finishing schedule was the same as for the rest of the cupboard. This finishing technique/schedule also works well on pine for a light brown antique finish. Note how the glaze hangs in the hand planed texture. We



intentionally hand plane a little rougher than normal to get the effect.

I personally like the effect and look and it also allows for use of much cheaper material but yet yields



a nice, primitive, antique look.

I have 7' long x 42" wide, 3 board top farm table done out of the same "sorta curly" maple, finished in the exact same manner and it is great! No huge worries if it gets a nick or dent. In my opinion it makes for a really cool and fun woodworking - no fussing over super small details and when done, it is friendly and to tell the truth, I've built a ton of this type of surface and finish and everyone loves it.

The Weather Report

Gettin' better. March was nuts, one day 70, next day 30. Everybody fought the flu and colds but seems to be coming around. It is time to get the garden planted. I do like a garden, fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, corn.....and I like working it. It is hard work but enjoyable and considering we freeze or can enough to supply our needs for a year or two, as well as give away about twice as much as we keep, it makes for a nice hobby.

Now, I can grow anything, but I'm having a tough time with T-bones and shrimp. Oh yea, gotta tel ya this, I grow some of the small round watermelons (Baby Sweets) and I have a yellow retriever named Rascal who loves them. My granddaughter said he has a de-seeder. That crazy dog will sniff a melon, paw at it, you pick it, its perfect, but when he eats it, he can "spit" or "squirt" the seeds out of one side of his mouth and never stop eating. Later this summer I'll get photos, you gotta see this dog eat watermelon, he loves it!

Craftsman Profile

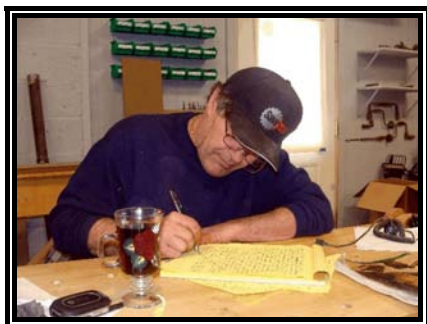
CJO Glassware?

While this artist is not a woodworker, per say, for me this is a proud write. Crystal Ortiz is my unofficial, adopted daughter (Sherri's daughter) of whom I am quite proud of and very close to. Mother of three, wife and a

young woman who excels at whatever she does. Sometime back, Crystal picked up a paint brush and started doing florals on, well, just about everything. You name it and this child will paint it. One kind of cringes when you see your big two-board curly cherry table covered in paint jars and all that goes with it, but hey, she knows someone who can re-finish it if something happens.

Didn't take long to see Crystal had found her talent. Man can this girl paint. I watch and just shake my head, the three dimensional effect she gets when she paints astounds me and everyone else who sees her work. She found a way to paint glassware and as I write, I'm drinking coffee from an Irish Coffee Mug with a beautiful red rose on it.

So everyone encouraged her to keep paintin'. And so she did, it turned into a little business for her. Being a housewife with three children, Emily (12), Nicole (11) and Chandler (8), it allows her to help out with finances while being home raising the younguns. Crystal's husband, Willie, does auto body repair and finishing, which as most of you know, I did for many years.



I could go on, but to say I'm proud of Crystal is an understatement. So her mom

(Sherri) designed and put up a website to help her promote her work, so rather than sound like a proud papa with a wallet full of photos, here is Crystal and her work and I hope you find something you like - bookmark it so you can find her the next time you want something really unique.

www.cjoglasswareandgifts.com

Whoa Norm!

No, No, No, don't do that!

I caught the episode of Norm building a Lowboy, I admit that I only caught it part way through, so, I am assuming he was using solid wood and therefore want to address this issue. In the part I caught he glued the three tenons on the sides and back solidly into the legs, not a good idea. I thought it would be a good point to address in this month's newsletter.



Lowboy sides and backs are usually about 14" to 18" wide and therefore will expand and contract. Gluing them solid doesn't work, they always crack due to no allowance for expansion and contraction.

The correct way is to use a "draw-tight" joint. A draw-tight joint is what you use when attaching a pegged breadboard to a table top. This is where you drill through the bread board and tenons, then remove the bread board and "slot" the hole in the tenon so the top can move independent, now you understand the draw-tight joint.

Usually I glue just the center tenon and drill and slot the top and bottom tenons and peg all three. What, no glue? Yep, no glue and be sure the mortises in the leg are longer in both directions to allow for movement. If ya are doing cabriole legs, where ya have an applied ear, glue it to the leg and let the side and back sit on top (ear under) and leave

about 1/8" between the ear and the apron (side-back).

It's simple, the sides and backs are gonna move and unless you use plywood, you are going to have to make provisions for the movement.

With today's central air and modern heating methods, environments are much drier and contraction is more an issue than expansion.

The Tool Crib

Miters - Yep, those ****^#* miters. You know, that are never quite perfect. Me too.

Some time back I talked to a good friend of mine, Jerry Payne, who is a picture framer. Now, Jerry has taken framing to another level and is quite an artist, but that's another story. Anyway, I asked Jerry about his miters. He told me he had a guillotine (lion miter trimmer) and other things but he always used a hand miter saw and a sanding wheel. Said he had it forever and didn't know who or where he got it. Explained a little further how a slow, simple hand cranked wheel allowed him to ease into a perfect miter and that it made "tweaking" a lot easier.

I've always used a disc sander and my own pyramid jig on the table saw to cut miters, did well, so I thought. I had one of the guillotines but found that the newer "off-shore" models just were not as accurate as they were presented, the older ones do well.



Now, I like the disc sander and miter gauge to "fine sand" my miters but found them to be too

aggressive and trying to do a minor tweak wasn't easy.

Not too long ago I spotted "The Wheel" (Precision Miter Sander) in a catalog, so after I quit choking at the price, I decided to get one, I also got the saw, just had to see. Now I ain't telling you to buy one, just giving my personal take on it. I really like the ability to control the speed of removal.



I have a passion for anything that helps to make a tough issue easier and miters are tough. Well, while the price is a little tough, I have to admit the tool is built rock solid and works like a dream. I would have to say that I got my money's worth. Ball bearings, solid, accurate. The unit also has provision for multi-sided frames and does more than just 45 degrees. I find it good for most any angle. It is the truing and defining of the cut edge that I like. I don't mind paying more for something if it is built to last and does a good job and this puppy does.

I got mine from **Woodcraft (#147317 & #147318)** and I am not sure who else might make them or carry them but I really like having this in my shop.

Sherri's Update

Woodworker's Cruise-In

If you haven't already, mark your calendars for Saturday, May 24th. We've invited everyone to meet at our shop and have a fun day of woodworking talk and play. Bob will be here from Wisconsin and many of our internet friends have already said they will be here too.



It will be sort of a tail gate party but the shop will be open and we can just have a good time. It would be great if I could get a head-count of who "thinks" they can attend that day as we will probably have a local group do some

b-q chicken or something like that. All you need to bring is yourself and a chair, or a tail gate! **MAY 24**, don't forget!

DVD Update

The next DVD Title to be released will be "The Virginia Sugar Chest" project and a series on Routers, Basic and Advanced.

Sales are great and we thank everyone for your support, encouragement and feedback, that is what helps the next title exceed the one before.

Shipping of all titles when ordered is being made within 24 hours of receiving the order (excluding Sundays). HOORAY!

April Subscriber DVD Special

As a subscriber to our newsletter, with any DVD order in April, you will receive our "Cabriole Leg & Flame Finial" DVDs at no charge.

Forum

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. Bob and others are out there and a lot of "fun" goes on.

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 Furniture Making World

Let's see...

Have had some flu, finished a bunch of stuff that's been hanging out. Couple of corner cabinets, sugar chest, several pipe boxes, keeping chest, filmed some stuff, working on a crotch mahogany - bee's wing walnut table to go to Montana a walnut pull apart table, 54" square when closed with 2-16" leaves, a sideboard to go with it. Finishing up a cherry armoire, making a walnut step back



cupboard, wrapping up another Bombe, working on 12 bubinga chairs, gotta do a curly cherry high boy, a walnut rendition of Thomas Jefferson's "Seed Press." Then next week....

Just kiddin! But this is a typical month, a lot of folks think we are a big shop with a lot of people, not so. Me, Billy and Sherri, that's it, but over the years we've learned how to keep things moving, it's a way of life and it's hard, but when ya like what ya do, it makes it easier and I'm glad to be back in the saw dust. The time off doing the Finishing DVDs was a good break and was something different, but it still doesn't measure up to watching something beautiful rise out of a pile of wood, by your hand. And I know most of you think I'm kidding about all that stuff in a month, but I'm not, maybe 5 or 6 weeks and then you start over again. To another end, I guess that is what qualifies us to do what we do with the videos and DVDs. Keeping up the pace we have had to do for so many years, every now and again you learn something and we simply stop long enough to show you.

Time to say Goodbye for this Month

Last month I told ya I was going to do a turning and router DVD series - that's working. This week we are going to film the Sugar Chest DVD, ins and outs of how to make it.

We have a little get together coming up in May, I think Sherri has already mentioned that. We'd love for you to drop by.

Just finished some stuff for Brightcove and Youtube.

I'm working on a sharpening thing, not sure if it will be a DVD or what, but there are so many different things showing up I decided to check them out. I've been gettin' stuff together and will do a sharpening systems test of



sorts, just want to see what does what, I'll let you know what I find.

Been thinking about doing more on specific projects, would love to get your input and thoughts about what I can offer you, what you would like to see so visit our forum at

[Visit My Forum](#) and let's toss it around and decide.

Catch ya next month!

PS. Check out my youtube on glazing glass:

[Watch Glazing Video on Youtube.com](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIWdKkNd55Y>

