



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

No. 11

June 2008

Welcome to all New Subscribers!

The Cruise-In

Had about 25 people - not a huge number but with gas hitting almost \$4 a gallon, it did ok. I think everyone who came had a good time. We demo-ed the Saw Stop contractor saw a couple of times, until ya see it in person, it's hard to grasp. I really enjoyed saying hello to



all who made it and look forward to meeting others in the future. Maybe next year we will do it again. *(more photos on last page)*

My World

It's been a very busy month. Bob Kloes was down for a couple of weeks, really enjoyed that. We spent some time working on the shop - putting some tools together we had gotten and just sorta hanging out. Since Bob

was last here we had changed the shop around and replaced some tools, added a few so we played with some of them.



Mike Galloway (mikega on the forums) and his dad Charlie

came down the day before the "Cruise-In." He helped me get my lathe set up and going and did some testing on some of the sharpening products we have as Mike is a very accomplished turner and carver. I did a fair amount of woodwork on orders and have just finished a bunch of info clips for Woodcraft to put on their website. I really enjoy doing the clips, course I get to test and play with tools and stuff I normally wouldn't and it is very educational for me as I get to see what's new and innovative out there and how it works. It allows me an opportunity to expand my knowledge on tools and equipment. I'll share some of what I learn in this newsletter.

The DVD sales are doing well. The Finishing Set and the Sugar Chest Set are heading out to some retailers. I hope you don't think all I do is push my DVDs but they are an important project to me and I currently reach about 1% of the woodworkers out there. I do appreciate all of the support and feedback you guys give. Sherri is looking at doing some advertising as our List of Titles grows and the word gets out we hope that volume will allow us to get them

out at a little lesser price. The DVDs and all are her baby, content is mine I guess, but I'm a woodworker and I don't see that ever changing, no matter where all of this takes me.

For the balance of June I have a lot of finishing up to do on projects and have the last finishing class at the end of this month so then my plate is clear, I plan to work on my orders, my router and turning DVDs and then see where we are at!

Smart Tails

Smart Tails are my Handcut-Dove Tail Jigs. I designed these years ago. We looked at marketing them, but rather decided to give them to you. We filmed a video and Sherri did a .pdf file on them so here are the links:



To view the Smart Tails Video:

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

under "New Videos" choose Smart-Tails and the .pdf download can be found at:

<http://www.antiquesbuiltdaily.com/smart-tails.pdf>

In My Opinion

The Video Thing!

I really think this video thing is the instructional tool of the future. While nothing beats a hands on class, with travel and lodging cost what they are, people are going to opt for a good DVD and put their time and money into their shops. I could be wrong, but I don't think so. Sure, there will be a lot of folks who still do the classes, but they seem to be holding back. I haven't posted any classes for the coming year, I'm very undecided. I don't want to put them up then not be able to fill them and have to cancel.

For me, the video and class thing has been more of a fun thing than a business thing. I have told you that the video thing is Sherri's baby and has grown well and continues, so we have to make some decisions. It is now self-sustaining and we have tripped over a lot of rocks figuring it out but it has come to a point that in the very near future we are going to have to either go hard forward or back up some and go harder at the furniture building, but we can't keep up the present pace for both.

It's a tough business, especially pricing. It's hard to have people understand what they are getting. To do a DVD on one specific finish or on one specific technique is easy, but what we do is cram it full and try to show the details because that's where the difference lies and based on the feedback of those who have them, they are glad we did it that way.

DVDs have never done very well in the retail world and VHS was worse, we decided it was due to trying to do time restraints, one hour or less, and skipping the details. We have been told we have the most successful DVD series ever done in woodworking and it is still growing but it is most likely because we pay

attention to the details, just as we do in our woodworking, that's the meat and taters you all want to know.

I have made my living almost all of my life working wood and am perfectly content to keep on, but if the world wants what I know, then I'm good with that too. So what I've decided, and told Sherri, is that we either get it rolling or not. I'm good either way, but come January 2009, I'm either going to be in the educational business or the furniture business.

Sometimes I feel like the guy who was late for church because he was late getting bailed out of jail from Saturday night. That straddling the fence is tough on all of the central parts, time to go one direction or the other.

The Finish Line

Big slabs have become a huge thing now days. Big, freeform slabs are being used for tables, desks, counter tops - and they are beautiful. So I thought it would be good to address finishing and working with them. Leveling, smoothing and finishing.

The big slabs offer challenges other things don't. Usually there are checks, knots and other defects that need addressed and rarely are they flat. Huge slabs, when they are dry are going to distort, twist, you name it, and rarely are they as dry as our normal woods.

Big thick slabs are difficult to kiln dry without damaging them so moisture content is greater and thus they have to be handled differently.

Usually they are put in high-use projects so finish has to be able to handle the use and yet move and work with the slab.

Now, most any finish can be used to create a beautiful finish initially, but a year or two later is a different story. The wood is going to continue to dry and seasonal change is much greater.

Now I have done a lot of slabs and used some very unique finishes. Post catalyzed conversion varnish is a favorite as well as catalyzed polyester coatings which is like spraying a heavy coat of body filler on except it is clear and harder. It is also impractical for the average woodworker.

I've been looking at what will do a good finish. Now oils do okay but are not going to really seal up the wood so drying out faster and movement is going to be greater, not to mention hairline checks and defects are going to be much more difficult to handle. So what we want is something that really seals up the slab and will help with defects and be as close to bullet-proof. What's the answer?



For the average woodworker I think it is the "Pour-Ons." You know, the pour on epoxies and polyesters. Some out there are EnviroTex, a polyester, System 3 Epoxy, Glaze Coat by Famowood. The epoxies are tougher than the polyesters.

The reason for my suggestion is that it will encapsulate the slab, its not going to allow for much additional drying out. It's going to flow into and harden checks, soft areas and

knots and can be applied thick to allow some leveling help. Now the downside - it is expensive and requires some knowledge.

I've told you this before, when using these finishes, don't ever try to do it in one coat but rather put on a good light coat with a brush or squeegee, let it cure 3 or 4 days, then sand it. Bubbles and blisters are inevitable in the initial coat. Air trying to escape from inside the wood, the finish flowing into defects, etc. The first coat isn't going to be pretty.

Always do the top surface first as air can be forced out the bottom and bubbles aren't as bad. That's why a good light coat, just enough to seal it and fill in the defects is a good idea, then sand it as much as you can without going through which will break any bubbles and start leveling.

Now, to help with bubbles, exhaling on the bubbles (carbon-dioxide) or flashing over it with a butane torch while it is wet will help them to pop and allow the finish to flow out. So baby-sitting the finish for the first 3 or 4 hours is a must.

Now, doing the entire slab is a must - top and bottom. After the first coat, apply a second, babysitting as well and insure you have a total coating with no bubbles and it now should start really looking good if all is well. If not, stay with the light coat and sand one more time then re-coat. The object of the game is to get a good, solid coat that is about 1/8" to 3/16" thick. You can go a 1/4" or more if you need to.

Now, I know what you are thinking, it's going to look like plastic.....NOT!

Here is what is cool about this stuff that is never addressed. Once it is cured (gloss) you will have a gloss finish and probably some dust in it and maybe a bubble or two. Simply pop the bubble, pour some more in the

defect, let it cure. Now you can sand the surface with varying grits, moving up through until you have a 600 to 800 grit surface for a matte sheen, 1200 to 1500 for a satin and 1500 to 2500 for a gloss. You can buff it out with automotive compound, dig out a defect, re-fill it, sand it.....

My point is that you can treat it like a solid surface counter top, (for example, corian or the like).

By sanding and moving up the grits you can develop any sheen you want and the heavy plastic looking coating now looks like a picture perfect, hand-rubbed wood finish.

You can do the same over faux finishes. Take some double layer MDF - Do a marble or granite faux finish then do the pour on and you have counter tops. No it is not as tough as solid marble or granite as is popular today, but you also didn't have to take out a second mortgage.

To really show this I got a 4' x 4' claro walnut slab from my friends at Good Hope Hardwoods in PA. Norman and Skip have



been one of my best sources forever. Anyway, planning a short video on leveling and finishing it and will put it on my site. Believe me, it will open up a new world to you.

Visit Good Hope Hardwoods at:

<http://www.goodhope.com>

The Weather Report

Well - it is definitely warming up but we have had good rain fall. Got the garden planted. I do enjoy the garden and while hard work, it is relaxing and the rewards are nice too.

They are forecasting extremely hot and humid weather here for the next 10 days or so. All of the projects I have going on in my shop I must pay close attention to as I finish them up, keeping in mind that they were began with much less moisture in the air and there is likely to have been some expansion over the past 10 days or so but should be peaking and will then contract somewhat. Sometimes this can be a big issue for you if you are in the building process as the seasons change but as long as you are alert and expecting that some things may have moved a little and you focus and think through any adjustments you make, you should be fine.

For example, if you have made a project with a drawer and the drawer was fitting nicely three weeks ago but is snug now, well, yes, you will need to re-fit it, but keep in mind that it is probably at it's largest size in expansion so you don't want to fit it so loosely that when it contracts it doesn't fit at all.

Really pay attention when the seasons are changing in the middle of an on-going project.

Turning Green Wood

Now, what part of this isn't fun? Having it dry out, warp, distort and crack.

When turning green wood, first, always leave it thicker and heavy. Let it dry, then final shape. Some guys like to microwave it. Go

easy, drying wood that fast can destroy a project. If you choose this method, at most, only a few seconds, just enough to warm it, then let it sit and cool, then warm it again, go easy. Sneak up on it!

Putting in the oven a to warm, same as above also works but use low temperatures, 200 degrees or less. Getting the surface warm without getting it warm on the inside will cause it to "case harden," where it will seal itself on the outside and still be wet on the inside, not a good thing.

Here is something to try, works very well...

Soak the turning in denatured alcohol over night or at least six to eight hours. (Closed container to prevent evaporation). Remove the piece and let air dry a day or so, the alcohol will dispense and replace moisture and since it evaporates quickly, well you get the point. Works well.

Omni Jig

In the July or August newsletter we are going to take a look at Porter Cable's new Omni Jig. I have the old one and all the jigs, as well as Bob, but I just got the new one and from what I can see and have done on it, Porter Cable didn't miss a trick. This baby ain't no baby, it's built like a 200 year-old pine knot. Impressive



to say the least and to say I'm going to put it through the paces is an understatement. If you have any questions you want answers for on this jig, just drop me an email and when I am putting it to use, I'll try to get your question answered as well. Rest assured, I listen to what manufacturers have to say about their projects, but when it get into my shop, it has to prove itself. Simple and efficient, get the job done. More to follow.

The Tool Crib



Kreg - Now I knew Kreg did the pocket screw thing and did it well, but I had the opportunity to explore the rest of their products. Miter Gauge, Band Saw Fence, Router Table and Stops. More I worked with their products, the more I wanted to see so I asked Woodcraft if I could do some clips, they agreed, so they should be up on their site soon. Hope you take a look, all I can say is that I have told you time and time again. My purpose is to inform, no more, and when I tell you it's good, it is. The one single thing that stood out most about Kreg was the simplicity and accuracy of what they have.

Designing Furniture

Well, just in the time I've been writing this letter I have gotten several emails asking if I would do a DVD on the subject. The short answer is yes, the long answer is, it's up to you. Can I sell it? I'll tell ya now, it would be a \$40 to \$65 DVD. Why? Because while it's not super hard to do, it would take me building a lot of projects to "show."

Designing incorporates a lot of things and to keep it simple and easy to understand will take showing how to figure it out, not a simple formula, it is a little more complex.

While things like the Golden Mean -of a ratio of 1.62 (rounded) is the ultimate, more often than not, particularly in figured woods, having the stock to be able to achieve it isn't possible but you have to be able to balance your proportions. In my world it is a daily thing. Build a corner cupboard 3' wide and 7 ½' tall, make the plates and glasses fit on the shelves, and have the shelves fall exactly behind the glass door mullions, or same

cupboard a foot shorter, or a foot wider. Well, you get the point.

Build a 36" wide table that is 7' long with 4" aprons with 3" square legs, something doesn't work. Drop the leg to 2 ½" and it will balance, or go to a 5" apron. Extend the over hangs for a shadow line and so on.

So, here is the question, if I do it, will you buy it? It would be Fall before I can get it done and make it worth my while, I would also do a full length on all the projects if I can make it financially workable, I'll do it.

Remember, I have to buy all the materials, hardware, build it, so I can show and explain it. To show every step of the way takes a lot of time. Sugar chest, for example, filming takes weeks and weeks, then Sherri has weeks editing and making into a DVD. Just building it - 3 days and it's curing and waiting to be delivered.

Sharpening Systems

Well, while Bob was here we went through some sharpening systems. Tormek, Jet, Worksharp and the new Koch system. Additionally, Mike Galloway and Jeff Fleisher spent some time with them too. We had flat blades (chisels and plane irons) as well as carving and turning tools.

Now, here is where we need to define sharpening.



There is a major difference in sharpening and shaping. Shaping a tool edge requires grinding. Here is where **Tormek** and **Jet's** water stone wheels do very well and coupled with the vast

range of jigs to help insure an accurate grind, they are hard to beat and they will also impart a super edge. Along with the leather stop wheels and the leather profile wheels a razor edge is no issue.



press the tool to it and it liquefies to keep the tool cool and instantly, you will see the black form on the wheel (metal). The difference on the Koch vs. other compound operations is it requires you to press the tool firmer than perhaps you are used to but that's a 10 second study, not an issue at all. The four wheels are made for straight and curved and to be used with different compounds.



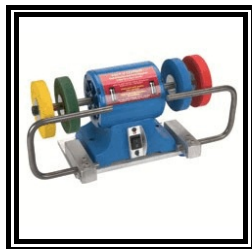
Simple, flat blades and general sharpening is about as easy as it gets with a **Worksharp** and being able to progress through various grits

up to a 6000 grit and a leather stropping wheel, well, it's hard to beat for simplicity and ease. It is a dry sharpening system. One of its limitations is larger turning tools, they have to be done free hand and it doesn't accommodate large plane irons, however, I have a new retro-fit they have come up with that addresses that extremely well. It is a flat surface with a guide for use with wider chisels and plane irons. Now with their see-through wheels that allow for a free hand sharpening from under the wheel, free handing of most turning and carving can be done very easy and with the glass flat wheels, truing and flattening of the backs of chisels and plane irons is superb, for simplicity and a superb edge, it's a tough unit to beat.

Now, while it is not a grinder as associated with turning tools, the green compound will definitely cut a burr on a turning tool and do it in seconds. Mike had some carving chisels that he had re-ground but definitely were not even close to carving sharpness. A few minutes on the Koch - green compound first to finish shaping the blade, then a quick hit with the white (blue) to finish it up and he was cross-grain carving on some poplar as well as on the end grain, leaving that nice, "wet-look" cut.

Now, don't misunderstand, I got nothing against water/oil stones. Silicon Carbide (wet) sandpaper on a piece of glass or marble with a honing guide and leather strops, done it for years, but the machines do help and are much faster.

Now comes the Koch, it is pricey no doubt. But, whatever your definition of sharp is, this guy will change your mind.



The Jet and the Tormek have all the jigs and can sharpen about everything you can think of. I think the Tormek jigs are easier than the Jet but not by a large margin. I think the Worksharp is about as slick and easy as it gets. The Koch, as long as you don't need to do heavy grinding, it is unbelievable and for a carver it is a must. For light shaping and a super razor sharp edge, it is hard to follow.

I'm not sure what the wheels are made of, they are not leather, but wow, there is two compounds, one is green (course) and the other is blue (looks white) that's finer. Simply put, you put the compound on the wheel,

Sherri's Update

T-Shirts are expected in about 14 days, more on the website and on our forum when they arrive.

Three Day May Special - All DVD Sets will ship NEXT Friday - June 13th, via priority mail.

We really appreciate all you do to get the word out about our DVD Series, "In the Workshop with Charles Neil," and we continue to ask for your support.

I am looking at some ad placement in some upcoming woodworking magazines as well.

All of our DVD titles will be available through Woodcraft.com or Woodcraft stores by the end of June. If your local store doesn't have them in stock, ask for them, they are available.

A Tough Write

I know this newsletter is a lot about tools, but that is what I have been doing for most of the month and we got through the cruise-in and the tee shirt contest. Got all of the DVDs out and were settling back into woodworking when life took a major change.

Last Thursday, Sherri was in the office working on the computer and had been complaining she didn't feel well. With the new computer and video equipment and all the issues that go with that as well as trying to get all the DVDs out and handle phones and emails, it had been pretty overwhelming, with most of it behind her, I thought it was just being tired and coming down from all of the stress. NOT.

On her way home she called to say she was really feeling worse. She decided to go to the

emergency room, fortunately she did. She was having a major "heart attack."

She's on the mend now, five stents and according to the doctor, 30 minutes later, she wouldn't be here and they rushed her into surgery, did the first stents, doctor said at that point her chances for survival were 1 in 500. Thank God for the number 1.

Not a lot more to say except my thoughts haven't been on woodworking and for several days now, I've gone home very early, just to work in my garden. Today I'm gonna go fishing. Sherri's back for 2 to 3 hours a day and mending well, but today I'm not going to put off going fishing so I can work.

I did a clip for Woodcraft on making some fishing lures (no plug) and I kinda got carried away, so I'm gonna go see if they work and if my finish holds up.

The days of living to work are over, it's time to work to live.

I'll write again next month, but I'll have to wait for a rain day.



