



In the Workshop with Charles Neil

Monthly Newsletter

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Welcome to all New Subscribers!

What's Your Definition of a Great Finish?



I just returned from a road trip through nine states in the North East. I had the opportunity to talk to a lot of woodworkers, see a lot of projects. Finishing seems to be quite a problem for a lot of folks including some of the well known woodworkers we all know and love!

It became quite apparent that my definition of a great finish is not the same as most others. To be quite blunt, most of what I saw, my clients wouldn't accept and I wouldn't expect them to. I'm still perplexed by the effort that folks put into their woodworking project and then make a mess of it with the finish. I guess it has to do with where you set the bar.

Through the years, my furniture was sought after not only for the woodworking craftsmanship but the finishing. Years ago I had a client cancel an order for a bed from a furniture maker in New England because he happened by my workshop on his way to a ski lodge and could not believe the finish.

Now think about it for just a moment, it doesn't matter how much time and effort you put into your project, if the finish is not done as well as your woodworking techniques. The finish is

what is first seen and touched. It should appear one with the wood, it should not look like plastic. When you touch it, your hands should glide smoothly and not feel any bumps or grittiness. I liken it to feeling melted butter between your fingers where they slide with no friction.

A few years back we had a large gallery at the front of our shop. Now you can imagine the dusting that would have needed done daily, well, Sherri doesn't like to dust every day. She would get a kick out of all of the finger trails across the furniture when it was dusting day. People love to touch and feel a fine finish. We always got a chuckle when people referred to my furniture as "soft."

Every day I get emails asking me what is the one thing that has set my furniture apart from the others....it's simple....the finish. The attention to the detail in the woodworking and the finish will be a win-win for your projects, large or small.

My World

DVDs and What's on the Burner

Somebody shout "Hallelujah!"

Finally, getting the router DVD sets finished up and Sherri will begin shipping as quickly as possible. What a load off my mind and shoulders.....geez! Now that we can do them in-house, completely, I feel much better about doing them. After we get the clock project

completed, I know many of you are waiting for it, we can get some of our new ones going, already filmed one on Re-Sawing and it will be released after the routers are shipped, no side tracking right now.

We're also going to release a DVD on mortise and tenons and one on turning as well. The turning one, I've mentioned this before, will be more directed at furniture turning as in bed posts, legs, finials and that sort of stuff.

On my trip I chatted with a lot of folks and a lot of the retailers and asked what they saw as issues in the woodworking world. Strangely enough it was finishing, but more pointed to what to use, like where do you want an oil finish or what's the difference in a poly and acrylic or what is a urethane? Basically, what's the difference and the plus and minus of each. So, I'm putting that on my plate to address in the future as well.

In My Opinion

I think with the news media around there are enough opinions....just a thought instead.

Unless you haven't a TV, Radio, or Computer you are aware of the "Bail Out" happening in our country. Doesn't matter if I have an opinion on it or not, but the term "Bail Out" brought this to mind.



Across the mountain from me, just outside of Charlottesville, VA and just down the road from Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, is a small restored tavern, Mitchie Tavern (pronounced Mickey) to be specific. This tavern is one of the oldest restored taverns in America. Years and years ago I fell in love with a pencil post bed on display there

which is the piece from which my pencil post bed design evolved. Sorry, got off topic....out back of the tavern is an out-house. It's a really nice two seater and above each hole is a rope and a sign that reads

"If ye fall in, use the rope to pull ye self out"

Guess that sums up my opinion on bail outs!

The Finish Line

Oil Finishes - I have written this many times, made a video or two as well, use an oil finish that has resins and driers, [Waterlox](#) is a good one. When you see a can with "metal driers" in the ingredients, don't panic, it's not lead. Lead has been gone from finishes for a very long time. The driers added cause the oils to dry quicker and harder thus forming a protective barrier as well as setting the resins. The resins add strength and durability to the oils. You won't see resins without driers. Once cured (a week or two) the finishes are also food safe because even if ingested, are not re-dissolved by the body.

A Visit to Fine Woodworking Magazine

Another great opportunity came our way while we were peddling around the north east. We were invited to visit Fine Woodworking Magazine while in Connecticut to chat with some of the folks there. It was interesting to see how the magazine comes together and how they have to always be working so far in advance. They fly crews all over the world if necessary to get photos and do copy for the articles they bring in every issue. I also had the opportunity to visit their in-house workshop. Lot's of woodworkers on staff! Seems they have a lot of interesting stuff in the pipe line and are working on upgrading their [web site](#).

Taunton Press and Fine Woodworking Magazine are nestled in the picture perfect small town of Newtown, Ct. A quiet and picture perfect New England town. It was an enjoyable visit.

In addition, Taunton publishes Fine Home Building, a magazine on gardening, cooking and Threads (sewing).

The Weather Report

Well, the temperature has been like a yo-yo on a string, up and down. It is definitely dropping. Remember to protect your water based glues and finishes from freezing!

Water Based Finishes and cool/cold weather are not friends. Below 60 degrees and they dry very slowly, 70 to 80 degrees is ideal. That's not always possible so if you need to apply water based finishes in cold weather, warm the finish. Sitting it in a vessel of hot water and getting it up to about 70 or 80 degrees will help a lot. Also, allowing the object to be finished to warm up will help as well. Warning, don't get in a hurry and think you can microwave the finish to warm it up, it will damage the resins. Just be patient and warm it on a radiator or in a hot water bath.

Oils and Solvent Based Finishes won't freeze but they too will benefit from being warmed up, it will speed up the dry time. Don't get the idea to sit them over on the Kerosun Heater either, they're flammable. A closed heat source or a hot water bath will do well.

Warm finishes flow out and penetrate better and dry faster too. Make sure you apply in light coats, whether wiping, brushing or spraying.

The Tool Crib

[The Kehoe Jig](#)



When I first heard about the Kehoe Jig I was, well....apprehensive, thinking why do I need a jig to do dovetail splines? I decided to give it a shot and I do not have the words to tell you how impressed I was. It wasn't long and not too many conversations later, [Kehoe](#) became a sponsor of our project videos. I choose my sponsors based on what I think their product can bring to you, the woodworker, and I think this is a great addition to any shop, small or large.

I have done splines on the table saw or router table but often avoided them because of all the set-up and fuss, especially when it comes to making the actual spline, but the Kehoe Jig makes it so stupidly simple. I mean, you can make these in a quick minute. I filmed a video on how to do it. We'll be putting it up in the next couple of days in "Today's Video" on our website and Kevin will be putting it up on his as well.

This jig is just amazing, now if you read the blog on the step back cupboard a while back, you know what I'm talking about, if you didn't catch that one, [check it out](#). I've been working with this jig and you can do straight line splines as well as the dove tailed ones. I've used it on drawers, feet and about anything you can think of that has a corner. You can do any size or degree that you can get a bit for. The great part is how safely you cut the splines on the table saw, fast and accurate.

Another really unique feature is that the splines are cut at a one degree angle so it locks the joint completely and insures a perfectly tight fit. A couple of clients dropped by the shop after

I had completed some drawers using this jig, their first response was how they liked the dove tails showing from both directions, like a butterfly, they commented "How masterful!" I simply smiled and said thank you.

This jig gets an A+++ . He has a really great "internet" price right now. A definite addition to Santa's list!

Orion Mortising Attachment

I've done it and I know you have too! Think about all of the times you've seen a tool used on a TV show and then made a purchase. Well, years ago, after seeing Norm using the hollow chisel mortiser that attaches to a drill press, I ran out and got me one. It did okay, but slipped and was hard to control, then came the stationary ones and the drill press deal was forgotten. I'm going to be releasing a DVD in 2009 on mortise and tenons and I plan to cover every which way to do them so I got me a new attachment for my drill press, the [Orion Mortising Attachment](#). I was very impressed. It works very well, unlike the older ones, it doesn't slip on the column and it's adjustment (micro) and hold downs are superb. Be sure to check the quill size, it has adapters to fit most presses. The quill is the round disc above the chuck that keeps the shaft from going to far up, it's what the chisel holder attaches to. Measure yours and compare to the ones listed.



One caution, it does not work with a keyless chuck, it's too long. I used a [keyed chuck](#) in my drill press that I normally use on my lathe, popped the keyless out and put the keyed one in and went to cutting mortises.

If you have a drill press and want a hollow chisel mortiser, this is a good one.

Sherri's Update

Website

I haven't had a lot of time to get the articles going but I do have a button now called "Woodworking Articles." If you remember last month's Craftsman Profile about Louis Scrivani, his entire article is posted here as well as Charles' article on woodworking as a business.

Sponsors

Our sponsors continue to support all of us and we have been able to initiate a Weekly Contest with giveaways provided by our sponsors. Here are some ways of letting the sponsoring companies know that you appreciated them sponsoring Charles Neil project videos.

- Take time to click on the sponsor banners from our website. This way they know that you are visiting their website from ours. No, we don't want you to just click for clicking's sake! Visit their site, look around, join their email list.
- Drop the sponsors a note and let them know you appreciate what they are doing.
- When making a purchase, check them out first. Many of the sponsors are the manufacturers and may or may not sell their products direct. One thing for certain, if you want good information about the product, go straight to the horses mouth!
- After making a purchase, give them feedback, not just critical, but let them know what you like as well. This communication helps them know what helps you.

We have worked with these sponsoring companies and yes, they are businesses set out to make a profit, but....the people, employees and staff.... need to know how and when they can help you. They get better at their jobs when you tell them what your needs are, they do strive to meet them as best they can.

Just a few ideas.

Our Sponsors:

[Bartley Gel Stains](#)
[DeWalt Power Tools](#)
[Eagle America Router Bits](#)
[Gemini Coatings](#)
[General Finishes](#)
[GoChi](#)
[Jet Woodworking Tools](#)
[Kehoe Dovetail Jig Co.](#)
[Porter Cable](#)
[Powermatic](#)
[Timbermate Woodfiller](#)
[Turbinaire HVLP](#)
[Waterlox](#)
[Woodpeckers, Inc.](#)
[WoodRiver by Woodcraft](#)
[Pro Tool/Worksharp](#)
[Painter's Pyramid](#)

Pass the word around, together we can get it done.

Full Length Project DVDs

The "Hancock Shaker Clock" Project will be out shortly. Check our daily blogs as that is where we will announce when it is live.

Classes

I have gotten a lot of emails about classes and I have given it a lot of thought. My concern is filling the classes in this economic climate. Travel, lodging, all that stuff might be tough. If there is enough interest we can do it.

Our classes are one week long, Monday through Friday, we start at 8am and go until we're done. Saturday is always available for additional help if needed. We would hold classes in May and October of 2009 and the cost would be \$800.00 each class per student, all inclusive and limited to 6 in the Finishing Class and 4 in the Woodworking Class each scheduled week.

We will not be offering project classes because they always seem to be more of a distraction than anything. There are so many questions and areas that don't pertain to the project and then there is the added cost of the materials.

Class Synopsis

Finishing A to Z: An intensive, hands on class taking you through preparation, sanding, hand applied finishes and sprayed finishes.

In the Workshop: We start with processing wood, cutting, squaring, move through using routers, dove tails, mortise and tenons, sanding and prepping, pretty much all core woodworking techniques, raised panels, doors, drawers. This will be an intense class where we hit the door running and keep plowing til' ya get what ya came for!

I will show you how to cut a hand cut dove tail in 30 minutes and have you fully understand it, practice will perfect it and you can practice at home. Several hours on a table saw and you will understand it....safety and a multitude of other things like jigs you can make. This will be a super class, sort of a buffet geared to where the students want to go.

We need to hear from you as soon as possible if you are interested in attending either of these classes. Please email us at workshopofcharlesneil@msn.com or call at 540-740-3620.

My Daily Blog

I know a lot of you are following the Daily Blog on our web site. We try to get as much up as we can and there is usually some good stuff there, it basically follows the day to day happenings at my shop and I try to take you along on our projects and expand on points of interest. You may want to take a look from time to time and there is an RSS Feed link if that is easier for you. I have a lot of stuff to

make so you are surely to find something that peaks your interest. [Click Here to Check Out the Blog](#).

"In the Workshop" Forum

It's growing, ours is different, we're all friends, a little more of a comfort zone for everyone no matter what their skill level. We all share our views, our thoughts and our woodworking, our nonsense and our concerns. It's a fun place to be, spelling and grammar don't count and we have our Weekly Contest there too! Hope you join in, it's all free. [Visit Our Forum](#)

One Last thought before I close...

My Santa List Picks

As some of you know and some don't, over the past year I have reviewed and demonstrated a lot of tools, about 150. I was thinking of all those tools which ones stand out in my mind. Most are sponsors but that's not what got them on the list, but rather they are sponsors because they are on the list and are tools I use every day. It is simply my personal opinion so here are my Top Twelve in no particular order.

[Wixey Digital Protractor](#)
[Worksharp 3000](#)
[Painter's Pyramids](#)
[Pinnacle Cryogenic Turning Tools](#)
[WoodRiver Chisels](#)
[Kreg Pocket Screw Kit](#)
[Osborne Miter Gauge](#)
[Jet 22-44 Oscillating Drum Sander](#)
[Kehoe Jig](#)
[Pinnacle Router Lift](#)
[Pinnacle Free-Hand Router Guard](#)
[Jet Parallel Clamps](#)

Again, just the ones that really stand out. My basis is how often I pick it up and use it and how well it performs. Some are expensive, some are not and the one common

denominator is that they are all very simple to use and very effective. I don't know that I ever did any reviews on anything I wouldn't personally use, I don't do commercials, if I show you something, it works.

Catch ya next month!



PS. Buy something you normally wouldn't, WE ARE the ECONOMY! Buying products stimulates it, think on it!

We found a passion for woodworking a very long time ago and now have pointed that passion toward woodworking education based on our experience. We try to simplify woodworking so that even the novice may enjoy the hobby and be proud of their achievement and accomplishments in woodworking.

As we have grown over the past 18 months, there have been so many people, like you, and companies that have supported our endeavor and continue to do so. I have never wavered from giving you the truth about everything I do and will continue to do so. When a product or company is written about in my articles, it is because I have a loyalty to a good product or business, but...it is not a loyalty that is paid for, so please, never be confused on that.