



# WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

[www.sonomawoodworkers.com](http://www.sonomawoodworkers.com)

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April 2010

## March Meeting: An evening with Joe Amaral



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## April Meeting

**Who:** Design Workshops

**When:** April 10th (Saturday) 11AM

**Where:** Design Workshops 486 Lesser Street Oakland

**Contact:** Rich Borden Phone 510-434-0727

The April meeting will be at the Design Workshops in Oakland, a company that does large scale architectural woodwork installations for corporate and private clients. Car-pooling to this event, which will NOT be on the first Tuesday of the month, but rather on Saturday, April 10 at 11 AM in Oakland is suggested. If you have not identified a member or two to carpool with, please do so, or go to the Petaluma Park and Ride, just to the left of Highway 101 exit to H'wy 116. **Be at the Park and Ride by 9:15am. We should leave by 9:30.**

### Directions:

Take the Richmond Bridge over to I-580

Follow signs for I-580 and merge onto I-580 E

Take the exit toward Downtown Oakland

Merge onto I-980 W

Merge onto I-880 S

Take the High St exit toward Alameda

Follow signs for I-880 S/San Jose and merge onto

Oakport St

Turn right at Lesser St

Destination will be on the left

### March Program Notes by Bill Hartman and Art Hofmann

Our Chairman, Mike Wallace launched our March 2, 2010 meeting, which was held in Bill Hartman's woodshop classroom at Rancho Cotate High School. The first announcement had to do with membership renewal notices, namely, that these will be going out soon. – Bill Taft announced that the SCWA Artistry in Wood show Sonoma County Museum will start on September 10 and run to October 17. Entry date is September 3, the Friday before Labor Day, and the Wednesday after Labor Day, September 8, will form the September meeting with the judges.

Art Hofmann introduced the evening's presenter, Joe Amaral. Joe was with us last year, and we all recognized the depth of Joe's knowledge on finishing, and thus re-invited him to tell us about common finishing techniques and everyday problem solving in relation to finishing.

Joe began by showing us a sample board of many different finishes done on cherry. An original finish on a piece of furniture should last, he told us, 20 to 50 years. Surface preparation is vital for a successful finishing outcome. Porosity plays a big part in determining the finishing schedules & sample boards. Mechanical adhesion is a key element in finishing, which is why sample boards are important, since they can determine the compatibility of the finishing materials and the adhesion of the products used. Giving each layer of finish enough time to cure before adding another layer is crucial.

Joe showed many of the off the shelf products that are widely available, warning us that each had to be checked against experience. Best to read all the data and spec sheets that you can before using them. Be informed - the chemical coating companies constantly experiment and often change their formulas, which is another reason for keeping a sample board index. Keep things as simple as possible

is one of Joe's rules for finishing. Varnish and polyurethane have good build, dry hard and come in many sheens. Only the gloss finish does not contain flattening agents, which can show as a haze in the lower sheens.

Safety is very important. Use solvent resistant gloves. And MSDS sheets are available from all locations that sell finishing materials. Just ask for them when you buy your products. These sheets list specific hazards of the products, indicate how they should be used and solutions for any health issues that may arise. Keep in mind that you are taking in solvents and such through eyes, skin, hands, throat and lung tissue. Use good gloves, keep good air flow going, so that you don't get pickled before your time.



Finishing, obviously, begins with surface preparation, which may be done with hand tools, like planes, scrapers, and sandpapers. There are lots of things out there, Joe says. He showed us a piece of horsetail rush, which he collected up in Fort Bragg, where he lives. It is very silicon rich. He dries it, and slits it open. Worth a try. The 3M Corporation puts out a lot of products, some of which are quite good, if overpriced. Joe also has good things to say about Abranet, a plastic net-like abrasive by Mirka, a sentiment echoed by Dennis Lashar. Grits go all the way to 1000. Hookit and Hookit 2 are good, too. But taking surface prep far up the scale of grits can be counter-productive, since mechanical adhesion is an important element in finishing.

Joe recommends doing sample boards and adhesion tests. The more experimenting you do, the likelier you will achieve the effect you desire, whatever that might be; a closed-pore look versus, a close-to-the-wood look. Joe brought in a variety of commonly available products: varathanes, tung oils, pure and in various blends, alkyd varnishes, interior-exterior urethane, which are available sources like Home Depot, Orchard Supply, Highland products, and Behlen. Joe thinks highly of Epiphanes, which is formulated for the yachting industry, very expensive but very good. All of these products, he cautions, perform to different standards. – Some folks like to mix their own materials, oils and varnish blended with mineral spirits, but Joe stays away from this. Waterlox is a product that has recently undergone reformulation for the CA market. CA is a guinea pig state for the finishing industry, with new products that are often quickly introduced to meet new air quality standards, and then at times, just as quickly abandoned.

Generally, oil finishes tend not to be all that hard or durable, though they do achieve that close-to-the wood look. Polyurethane is good for durability. All materials have their place in the finishers supply closet. Alkyd varnishes as opposed to urethanes appeals to him.



When it comes to products that contain flattening agents, i.e. semi-gloss and satin finishes, you will indeed get less gloss, but there is a haze because of the agents. Flattening agents are suspended, then 'settle' down on pieces, sometimes to disturbing effect. Gloss can be adjusted by taking the finish down mechanically, i.e. sanding, and then adjusting the sheen downward with waxes.

Every product is formulated in a different way; each has pluses and minuses. Wiping varnishes dry faster and harder. One problem with oil varnishes is bleeding, if they are thinned too excessively. Also, too much heat can be a problem with any finish, so watch your temperatures, and that goes for the shop, and the material you are finishing. More than a ten degree difference, and you can be in trouble: Things must be in balance. Wrinkling can result if there is too much air flow. Joe recommends little laser thermometers which are commonly available, as are hygrometers. Guesswork and seat-of-the-pants rules just doesn't cut it anymore.

Thus Joe took us through a panoply of products, and then honed in on shellac, a finish which when coated with wax, he likes very much for its versatility and looks. It comes in a wide array of colors - i.e. gold dust shellac, blonde, orange, garnet, and the darker button - and can be applied in many ways. Of course, it, too, has its limitations in relation to moisture and alcohol. Sometimes, on the coast where Joe lives shellac will not be ready to rub out for six months to a year. Some mixtures of shellac can be sprayed to good effect. Joe uses 200 proof ethanol from Texas to dissolve shellac flakes. Shellac should last a long time in flake form if stored properly. Doubts? Perform a drop test on glass. If the stuff hardens on glass, it will perform on the wood.

Sources of supply: Homestead, Jeff Jewett's company, Ron Ashby in Napa, as well as Shellac.net. Also, Andrew Wallace of Ft. Bragg is carrying shellac flakes now, whereas Ron Hock has discontinued doing that. Kremer Pigmente carries high-grade German processed shellac.

Wax will protect shellac from moisture to a degree. Joe uses a variety of waxes, water-based wax (no amber sheen), beeswax with carnauba, conservator's wax, and plain beeswax. Waxes have long term stability and has been a staple in finishes worldwide for centuries. Clapham's wax is good, smells nice, is 'almost like nothing is left on surface,' good to use on insides of cabinets. Caution must be exercised here, too, however, since waxes will rub off on surfaces if friction, as on chairs is involved. People sit down and when they get up, voila, there is a wax stain on their clothes



#### About Kremer Pigmente:

Located in NYC, they are a purveyor of artistic paints that according to their website:

*"..have been discovering and redeveloping historical pigments since 1977. Our assortment consists of over 1000 different mineral pigments made from precious and semiprecious stones. We offer some of these pigments in various grindings and qualities. Special requests in regards to purity and particle size can be complied with."*

247 West 29th Street New York, NY 10001

Phone (212) 219-2394

<http://kremerpigments.com/>

Don't use old material that has been sitting around for some time, mark your cans, throw the old stuff out, it won't work as well. Stir your materials. Keep everything mixed up well. Remember to agitate water-borne products in use. Improper thinning is another no-no. Shellac can be thinned and thinned, but then your finish won't build.

Joe turned to some beech boards that he had prepared, cautioning his listeners again not to use an extra high grit, but to go a bit lower, so that the finish adheres to, but does not 'glaze' the surface. In working a project, the finish is always left, logically enough, as the last step, and planning for it is often put off until the end, whereas it should be part of the job from the beginning. A typical schedule might call for as many as five different operations: sand, color, seal, glaze, and topcoat.

An understanding about solvents and their relationship to resins is in order, and should be on a par with one's understanding of tools for woodworking. Education and some experience are necessary. Take some workshops and work up an index of finishes that you feel confident about. When we encounter a can in a store and see that it contains petroleum distillates, aromatic hydrocarbons, alcohols, ketones, or water, and that this is a wipe on finish, we can at least ask ourselves for openers if we are comfortable safety-wise with the solvent. Ask for product sheets. (When I asked him after the meeting about General Finishes products that I like, Joe said that GF didn't put out enough information to satisfy him. Good stuff, but not defined enough for him to use them.)

Joe set about doing a series of demonstrations along with a running commentary on the processes involved. During this portion of the program, he was also fielding questions from the members.

The following is a list of the topics that were addressed:

Adhesions tests, after a sample finish is set and dried properly, a cross hatch test can be done with a razor blade. Cut a 100 square pattern onto your sample. Put packing tape on it, and let it sit a

while. Finally rip the tape off. See what percentage of the squares come off. If you lose 20% that is acceptable.

Paper towels: some towels have lint, some are good. The good ones make good applicators.

Epifanes is good if you want to spend the money. Joe likes the alkyd varnishes and stays away from the urethanes. Two component polyurethane goes on doors, then a varnish on top. It's fast and inexpensive.

Lights: Bill Taft told us that in the next twenty years, there will be many florescent light formulations. Joe said that he does have a Kelvin reading instrument, and relies on it at times.

Joe went into a demo of padding on shellac. Shellac and wax is priceless on art objects, he says. If you are cleaning a finished object, do as little as possible, remove the surface dust with distilled water. Forget all the cleaners they want to sell you.

Why wax on top of finishes? It is for sheen adjustment, makes you want to touch it, draws you into the work. When working with waxes he sometimes uses a heat gun, since it makes the wax harden more quickly for the final polishing. All waxes have different uses, a different feel to them.

Microcrystalline wax works well for outdoor applications, lets him dial in adjustments.

Touch up: Dents can be steamed out. Strip your finish. Take the least aggressive approach. Re-do your top coat. Lots of difficulties here, especially dealing with something like a dent or blemish on a table top that is hit a lot by raking light which makes it very visible. Fillers: select a filler that is pretty close in color. All kinds of fill sticks are available, even acrylic ones. They can be burned in, some are high gloss, have the wrong sheen, wrong gloss. Other fill sticks are made of hard wax or softer plastic and have a lower sheen. Mist on a sealer coat. Sometimes it works to make a hole in a paper towel and apply your finish through the hole so that surrounding area is not effected, but this is hard work. A sheen meter sets at a sixty degree angle is helpful. It costs \$700 but is worth it for the professional finisher. Cyanoacrylate, - aka Crazy Glue - is useful, since it has a high solids content, and won't react with subsequent chemistry. If you burn in material be sure to make your marks go in same direction as the grain, not cross grain. Joe favors an electric butane torch for touch up situations. And don't forget, there are also artists' pens from the art supply store. Polyester fills and Bondo also have their place, as do blend-all powders, used with pigments and dyes to color them. You have to be careful how you topcoat a repair over a ding. If you use, for instance, a lacquer over what was basically a shellac surround, the different mediums will age differently.

In the end, Joe told us, there are lots of ways to learn: work shops, videos, and practice. It takes a long time to develop skills that are good enough to fool the eye. We sent Joe off with the usual round of applause for his skillful and informative presentation.

## Calendar

May - 4 - George Miller, wooden puzzles at Bill Hartman's classroom shop at Rancho Cotate High School

June - 1 - Karl Schumaker and Greg Zall: two approaches to marquetry at Karl Schumaker's shop in Sebastopol

## Quick Survey

I asked members to name a tool that they bought that 1) never used or 2) used only once or twice. No recent purchases were allowed. Here are the results:

*Many years ago I purchased a device that attaches to a scroll saw for cutting corner profiles for crown moulding. I used it once and had no luck in mastering it like the demonstrator at the wood show did.*

*That would have to be the Delta Mortising Attachment for my drill press. In theory it seemed like a fabulous idea, and in practice was such a pain to set up that I never used it. And as we know, the difference between theory and practice in theory is much smaller than the difference between theory and practice in practice.*

*I bought a Boggs Concave Spokeshave in 2008 that I've never used.*

*Bought wooden handscrew clamps two years ago and have yet to use them.*

*Got a new Craftsman wobble dado blade from my father-in-laws estate several years ago. I put into my contractor table saw once, and the vibration from that darned thing startled me so much I never cut anything with it, and I have never used it since!*

*I bought a Performax 16/32 one sided wide belt sander which I thought might help me make more bonsai tables. It has a dust collector which is required. But I haven't been using it. It takes up a lot of room and I'd be better off without it.*

*Bought a cheap (Harbor Freight) dovetail jig. Tried it experimentally and couldn't get a decent joint - lack of understanding on my part I think. It sits on the floor under my bench, as it has for the last two years. Since I never used it I also bought a Face Maker. I never used it either though my wife is pushing for some kitchen cabinets so they may get some use soon.*

*Bought a Norris 51 for a good price over Ebay. Found out it has a special patented prototype blade - maybe 1 of 1??? Couldn't bear to devalue it. Didn't want to get rid of it. Can't afford to buy another one to use. Oi Vey!*

*After my shop was destroyed by fire, I replaced a Craftsman dovetail jig with a Porter Cable dovetail jig. I used it once and got all my dovetailing done at Western Dovetail for ever after. It's for sale.*

*I have a 12" Delta Table Saw which I only used two times and that was twenty years ago.*

*Bought a Porter Cable Profile sander in 1999 to help refinish two sets of wood slat blinds for my last home and never used it again. Have found a better way with my Fein Multimaster.*

*I bought this Exact-a-guide at wood show about 12 years ago to help me cut some plywood. Used it once. Since then, I've moved it twice and it sits in my garage until I figure what I will do with it.*

Sounds like a collection of tools ripe for a tool swap meet!

That was fun. Another quick survey next month!

## FOR SALE

John Keller is offering the following for sale:

Rotary phase convertor, many extras maximum accumulated 3ph, 15hp, load like new, paid \$1750, sell \$950.

N'RA/Holz 24" bandsaw, 3hp, 3ph, 220v. German made, very good, sell \$1300.

Fleder AF22 mobile dust collector. 1ph, 220v 3hp, magnetic controls, many extras. Like new, paid \$2020, sell \$950 as equipped.

Note: Equipment is set up and running. Call John Keller for more info: 539-2938.

Package price on converter and bandsaw \$2,000.

## From the Chairman

Hello again,

It's April 1 today, as I write this. Normally, pranks and tricks are played on this day, did you get pranked? When I was a kid, my brothers and I put salt in my dad's sugar container. He thought it was funny too. Only one prank that I think I ever played.

As expected Joe Amaral delivered a first class instructional on finishing. I think all who attended got a lot out of that meeting. Joe's a great teacher as well as a craftsman and I'm sure he'll be back for another round sometime in the future.

Looking over our latest membership list, a large number of you have yet to send in your membership dues for this year. This will be the LAST newsletter you'll get, so PLEASE send them in now! You can clip/copy the form on the back of this page and send your dues along with it.

I just finished "Shopcraft as Soul Craft" by Matthew B. Crawford. I will write up a more detailed report later, but I think it was a great read. His main premise is that shopcraft work (specifically in his case, motorcycle repair) has a lot more "truth" to it than being stuck in a cubical somewhere or being part of a large organization like academia. Crawford comes to this after spending a fair portion of his younger years hanging out in Volkswagen speed shops and with their owners. He has an advanced degree in philosophy and spent time in a "think tank", as well as working in a corporation. While I found myself disagreeing on a number of his points, there are some rather strong elements of truth of what he writes about. The book is available via the Sonoma County Library system and I recommend that you get yourself on the reserve list for it.

We are five months away from our annual woodworking show. Just a small reminder that you should start to think what you're going to do as well as perhaps get in that workshop and get busy!

Our next meeting is going to be in Oakland. I do hope many of you will go. I have seen some of the work that Design Workshop does and I can tell you that they do an excellent job. Visit their website: [www.design-workshop.com](http://www.design-workshop.com)

See you at the next meeting!

Michael

**Photo Credit:** Rick White, Michael Wallace

# WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

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**Join Us!** The Sonoma County Woodworkers Association is a 31-year old association of over one hundred professional and amateur woodworkers who meet monthly at members' shops to share experiences, ideas, techniques, and mutual enjoyment for creating with wood. Membership entitles you to attend monthly meetings, receive Wood Forum, our monthly newsletter, attend our annual show, and apply for seminars and demonstrations. Annual dues, payable at the beginning of each calendar year, are \$25. New members joining after September 30 may, for \$35, have their membership extend through December 31 of the following year. Please consider joining the SCWA and meeting people who, like yourself, are interested in the art and business of fine woodworking. Send dues to:

**PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402 Santa Rosa, CA 95402**

*Wood Forum* is the monthly newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association. Please feel free to submit articles, notices, photographs, announcements, and comments for inclusion in the publication. Advertisements are accepted with a per-entry cost of \$5 per column inch. All submissions for the March issue must be received by April 20, 2010. You may submit your entries to the editor listed below.

Contact Michael Wallace  
Snail-Mail PO BOX 1838, Sebastopol, Ca 95472  
E-Mail [mjmwallace@gmail.com](mailto:mjmwallace@gmail.com)  
Home (707) 824-1013

**Wood Forum 5**



Santa Rosa, CA 95402  
April 2010

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# WOOD FORUM

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yes, I would like to join the SCWA and meet other people who are interested in the craft, the art, and the business of fine woodworking. Here is my application. I have enclosed a check for the annual dues of \$25 that covers my subscription to Wood Forum and entitles me to attend the monthly meetings.

Send check and completed application to: Sonoma County Woodworkers Association  
PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402

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