



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

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March Meeting Walter Kitundu, a Renaissance Man



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April Meeting Notice

Who: Laura Mays, Irish Furniture Maker and Educator

Where: Rancho Cotate High School Woodshop, Cotati, CA 94952

When: April 3, 7:00 PM

Laura Mays, master woodworker and furniture designer, grew up in Ireland, maintained a studio on the rugged west coast of Ireland and now calls Northern California home. It seems that throughout her life, she's maintained an acute sense of place, an appreciation for her home and her roots...and the residual effects of that are breathtaking.



Her roots come to life in the charm and captivating simplicity of her work. You can almost see surly green landscape, cliffs eroded by weather and time, jagged coastline and grey sea. But you can also see the sophistication of her architectural training. Even her material, wood, is relative to the locale she creates in.

Laura is now teaching for the fine woodworking program at College of the Redwoods, where she was a student from 2001 through 2003. She went there after reading Krenov's books and cottoning to his philosophy. Along the way she formed a partnership with Rebecca Yaffee with whom she has worked for the past eight years.

March Meeting

By Art Hofmann and Mike Burwen

Business Meeting

A business meeting convened at 6 pm, March 6 at Bill Taft's Clubhouse. Officers present were Wallace, Heimbach, Lashar, Burwen, Stroud, and Taft.

Treasurer Jim Heimbach announced that 2012 dues payments have been received from 54 Members to date. It was agreed to send a total of three notices for dues payment. Members will be deemed as non-renewals if not paid up by the end of May. For those Members who have not renewed and receive the *Forum* by regular mail, April will be their last issue.

The subject of seminars was discussed. Bill Taft, Seminar Chairman, is looking for ideas. Anyone with thoughts on this subject should contact Bill who plans to submit a 2012 seminar program plan at the next Business meeting.

It was decided to hold a special meeting of the officers to discuss the proposed ByLaws revisions. Michael Wallace will make the arrangements.

The parameters of this year's Artistry in Wood show have yet to be agreed to with the Museum. A meeting with the Museum staff is needed to make sure that we are all on the same page. Michael Wallace, Art Hoffman and Larry Stroud will attend that meeting as soon as it can be arranged.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 PM.

At the beginning of the General Meeting, Michael Wallace asked for input regarding the SCWA's support for high school woodworking classes. Bill Hartmann is pushing hard for support because the Supreme Court eliminated the fee requirements for special classes. Several ideas were put forward such as raffling off Member's work, having a collection jar at Member meetings, donating matching funds, etc. Michael will take these ideas under advisement and poll the membership.

General Meeting

Mike Wallace opened the meeting by reminding everyone that the 2012 dues are due. Please pay up if you have not already done so. You can do so by mail; simply send a check to the post office box listed at the bottom of the newsletter. A budget is being prepared, and your dues will need to be in for us to have an accurate picture of our financial resources. Time to pay up.

Bob Nelson had some fiddleback maple for sale, plus some

red wood that might be sequoia, but he wasn't sure of its origin.

Frank Morales asked about carving, a class or instruction in same, and another member responded telling us that there is a carving class in Sebastopol at a church there, Saint Sebastian's.

Art Hofmann then introduced speaker Walter Kitundu. Walter is a "renaissance man" who makes unusual musical instruments and sculptural sound installations, takes pictures of birds, plays several musical instruments and in all ways is a multifaceted artist. He is currently employed as a Senior Design Developer at the Exploratorium in San Francisco.

Walter brought several instruments with him. One was a kora, a scaled down version of a hybrid phonograph-pickup version he had built some time ago when he found himself fascinated with the music of the Malian kora master, Toumani Diabaté. He played a selection for us that lasted about five minutes and was enthusiastically received.



In college he was part of a hip hop group, which gave him experience as a performer. As a DJ, the turntable was at the heart of what he did, and he not only used it to make new and interesting sounds, but also used it to give instrumental voice to the music he was making with others. Later he began using the turntable as a percussive instrument, hitting it in various spots with a chopstick to produce tones. Essentially, the turntable became a set of drums!

One day, he put a tin can over the turntable cartridge and hit it with chop sticks. Rather than go 'thunk,' it produced an interesting sound. Cartridge pickups on turntables are very sensitive, and Walter used that sensitivity to produce a large array of sounds. Using this property, he began to make instruments that feed vibrations into the needle. Thus, the cartridge became his instrument.

Early on, WK had an insight: why not put the strings right on the turntable? A video followed of a Stylophone, one of his creations. The video showed that it produced an enormous array of sounds with various inputs from records or played directly. For example, he could blow on the strings and get sound through the needle. This led to a series of stringed instruments that explored many facets of the turntable-string combination. Ultimately, he created a series of over twenty instruments, many of which can be viewed by perusing kitundu.com, and these are just the ones he made to for himself: there is another score or so that he has made for musicians and specific groups like the Kronos Quartet.

Next, we were treated to a slide of a bass version strung with fishing line plus a delay pedal. Then a slide of a stylus glove that would permit WK to play four parts of a record at the same time. Ultra sensitive, melodies and chords would move up and down as the speed of the turntable changed.

As he became more renowned, Walter started working in other mediums and on a larger scale. What follows here are some highlights from projects that he has done over the last decade. Some have not been realized because they are not really quite feasible. For instance, he designed an earthquake powered turntable, which moves when the earth moves and makes sound. It is 18' tall and anchored into the ground.

In 2002, Walter was part of an engaging three person show at The Luggage Store, a San Francisco gallery (which does not sell luggage) where he created and installed a month-long site-specific work that invited a population of urban pigeons to take shelter inside a creative enclosure built into the windows of the gallery. The idea was that birds would perch inside the built space on the ledges, which were sound sensitive, visible outside to the public, but in the gallery could be seen only through peep holes. The weight of the birds triggered sound installations and turntables inside the gallery. It took the pigeons two weeks to find the holes and then it began to work. They arrived at one and left at three pm. When pigeons dropped feathers they hit strings that made sounds. After the structure was removed, the pigeons continued to show up, miffed that their space was gone.

After a quick detour to a rainwater run-off powered acoustic turntable, and an escalator powered turntable, he told us about his wave-powered instrument. He had been wanting to work with larger forces, like wind and water. Using plywood, he made a kind of boat, a Rube Goldberg

contraption that took advantage of the wind and the water. The little waves made a water wheel spin, which turned a series of pulleys which turned an offset cam that operated an accordion and a pump that pumped air into a Melodica. Two salad bowls spun in the wind and powered a turntable. The whole affair turned into a happening. The craft was about the size of a VW. When the occasion came, it was launched at Rodeo Beach. Bystanders helped out with ropes that stabilized the craft. Waves came in and there was a hiatus when nothing happened, which confounded Walter, who felt he had completely misunderstood the ocean. It only worked only 40% of the time because of the slowness of the waves, and finally the whole apparatus burst apart when a large wave hit it!



In 2004, Walter was invited to Iceland, an island that is ripping itself apart, geologically. He is fascinated with the place, admires its people, its history, plus the great plus great literature in the sagas connected with its past. He came up with the idea of a geologic sound casting project. Working with vulcanologists, story tellers and artists, he wanted to press 18' diameter records and install them in the landscape such that they would have been affected by lava flow. Then the records would be excavated and played publicly. This idea is currently on hold.

Next Walter talked about a kinetic sculpture of a heron and a fish, both of which were activated by cams. He says that he spent several delightful weeks whittling and putting this together. He considers it a meditative activity, one strongly influenced by the creativity of artists associated with Cabaret Mechanical Theater in England, particularly the work of Paul Spooner and Keith Newstead, which he finds 'creatively heroic.' (If you are interested, Google links to CMT, Spooner and Newstead to see delightful images and videos.)

Walter is an avid bird watcher and photographer. Indeed, he has a website devoted to some of his excellent bird and animal photography (www.kitunduphoto.com/). Thus, some of his instruments incorporate bird imagery or are bird shaped. One major project was a commission for a mural at the newly renovated Terminal 2 at SFO. The finished mural is 8' tall and 27' long. It consisted of blown

up pictures of birds on plywood with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background. Benches in the shapes of wings were to be included and these were playable instruments, and some of the birds on the mural itself were instruments as well. Needless it say, it was a difficult and arduous project, but successful in the end. His photos were printed onto the plywood by the Magnolia company in Oakland, which specializes in printing on esoteric surfaces. In the end 150 jigsawed pieces were inlaid into a contrasting plywood background.



The benches and "musical birds" on the mural are percussion instruments, and children enjoy playing them with rubber-tipped mallets that are made available.

Walter's latest work is a wall sculpture of a boat for the Haas Fund. The idea behind the commission is that a piece by a designated artist is displayed for 18 months and then given back to the artist with the stipulation that he donate it to a non-profit. In an attempt to emulate the reality of water motion, LED lights shimmer from the sides of the boat onto the wall, mimicking the play of light and movement on water, and sound is produced via a cam which is operated by a handle at the stern. Like all of Walter's pieces, the boat is fanciful and contains both visual and aural elements.

Walter received a terrific round of applause. Members left the meeting feeling truly inspired.

Calendar

April 3: Laura Mays; Furniture Maker, Educator from Ireland

May 19: Bruce Johnson; Sculptor

June 20: John Economaki, Tool-maker extraordinaire

July 10: Tripp Carpenter, Kathleen Hanna, Grif Okie on Arthur Espenet Carpenter

From the Chairman

By Michael Wallace

It's the middle of March and it has been raining all week. I can't get into my shop because I would expose some of my equipment to the elements, so I'm just stuck inside thinking of what I want to build next. I do hope you're not thinking of doing some woodwork, but actually doing it.

Things are moving along with the Association. We had a very good meeting with Walter Kinutudu. A number of the officers had dinner with him prior to his wonderful presentation and as such we got to know his story a bit more in detail. He captivated us with his stories about his growing up and his family. His mother is currently building hospitals in Tanzania and his father was at one time, the number one student in all of Tanzania. An amazing individual who we hope we see again.

Many people have written to me that one of the points that they took away from Walter's presentation is that you just have to keep trying something that you want to do. A few nights later, I saw a TV show that had an interview with a woman who was a high tech executive. When she retired, she decided to work on health issues in Africa. One of the young interviewers asked her about success and failure. This young lady, recently graduated from college, had a fear about starting projects or ventures because she was afraid of failure. The executive replied to the effect "Who decides success? If you think you failed, it's because you didn't re-define success". I liked that. It means that you just have sometimes try using a new technique or start a project that might be out of your skill range. Progress is measured in the steps you take towards the ideal.

In a similar vein, there is a documentary about an 89-year old sushi master. Rated as the best sushi chef in Japan, his restaurant is in a train station and has only 10 seats. He is a living master, but he says that he has yet to achieve mastery.

I can imagine that our own masters in woodworking, like Krenov and Maloof, saying the same. As much as most of us wish we had a 10th of their talent, they probably thought that there was much more to learn.

So, it comes down to this. Your mistakes are not truly mistakes, but learning experiences. Don't get disgusted

with yourself when things don't go right. This is woodworking. Things happen. Enjoy the journey.

See you at the next meeting!

Digital Workshop

By Michael Wallace

This month's edition of the Digital Workbench is all about that creature "The World Wide Web" or Internet. Over the course of several columns, I will try to cover what I have discovered about Internet websites, blogs, podcasts (both audio and video), on-line videos and forums. It's a huge amount of material and I am sure I am going to miss something. During this series, if you think I should see something in this area, please let me know and I'll check it out and send it along.

Fair enough? Actually, I am never really sure who is spending anytime on these columns, perhaps I should say that the 10th person who sends me an email on these topics will get \$10, or perhaps not.

So to begin, let's explore some really interesting websites. For me, there are several that I look at monthly if not weekly. The two that I will cover this month is the website run by Popular Woodworking magazine and the one that is called "Joe the Woodworker".

Popular Woodworker's website is www.popularwoodworking.com. Run by the same folks that bring you the magazine, this website is, I think, a model for all woodworking magazines, though I think there is one that can be arguably a contender for that honor (get to that next month). On this website you will find access to a variety of project info, bloggers, videos, news, etc. Also, to be honest, a fair amount of ads, but nothing grossly offensive.

The purpose of the Popular Woodworking website is to promote the magazine, and it does that quite well. You can use the magazine index to look up past articles, download project plans and of course, order back issues and buy other other products like their books, DVD's and ebooks (a subject of its own).

If you submit your email address to the website, you will get an email about once a week, letting you know about new content that has been posted. What I like about this site, is that the layout is clean and crisp. Lots of white space around the various links and videos. Navigation is easy and intuitive. The people who write for the site are knowledgeable and freely share their techniques. There

are free plans, and, if you get the magazine, you get free cutlists for the featured projects.

The biggest reason to periodically visit this website is its team of contributors. They are:

Former editor Christopher Schwartz, a proponent of hand tools, and benches. His columns have included his re-discovery of the famous Roubo bench and reflect his fondness for hand tools. His postings can be on a variety of topics. Last couple of weeks it was a set of videos that he made while teaching at Roy Underhill's school in South Carolina.

Managing Editor Megan Fitzpatrick, runs the series "I Can Do That" and while there are often guest writers, she often posts her magazine projects on-line that you can download for free.

SketchUp master, Robert Lang, posts a new SketchUp model almost every week. If you go the SketchUp set of pages, you will find links to SketchUp models for just about every project in Popular Woodworker going back several years. I believe all of them have been done by Bob. There are over 200 free models linked on their website. This is a great resource, not only for the projects, but also for someone learning how to use SketchUp.

The only thing missing is a forum to interact with other woodworkers. However, you can send them comments which they will often post. The hot topic this week is the proposal from a California legislator who has submitted a bill that prevents table saws from being sold without a Saw Stop like trigger (a hot topic across the country right now).

I can go on and on about this website because it has so much great things on it, but suffice to say, if I can just get you to look at it now and then, I think you'll be hooked.

"Joe the Woodworker" is at www.joewoodworker.com. This website bills itself as "The Official Website of the Non-Professional Woodworker," and I agree. While I can't find out Joe's last name, he does have a bio page and he says he's from Forest Hill, Maryland.

I first heard about this website from Bob Moyer. A couple of years ago, we had a meeting at Jeff Barnell's shop. The topic was vacuum bag veneering. While Jeff had a commercial veneer press, Bob brought along his smaller vacuum bag system. He said the plans were from this website. The plans still exist and so if you want to try veneering, but don't want to layout a lot cash for a large vacuum press, the plans on this site are easy to follow and the cost is essentially zero. According to Bob, the vacuum system works great!

The emphasis of this website is more about veneering than general woodworking. Joe does have several pages devoted to non-veneering topics like "Setting Joiner Knives" or "Sharpening a scraper", but mostly it's geared to veneering, a topic I am just beginning to explore. The content on this website tends to be static but it does have a lot of information about veneering. The plans for building your own vacuum press are worth the visit. Joe has made sure that steps to building your own press are easy to follow. He also solicits feedback, so I'd imagine if you got stuck, he'd respond with an email. I have not had the opportunity to try that, but I'd suppose that he still wants hear from people.

Well, this is a rather lengthy column. You can see that there's a lot to be covered on this topic. Next month, I'll visit another magazine's website and a couple of other websites done by individuals.

Urban Hardwoods

By Mike Burwen

Strolling along Post Street in the City last week, I came across a new shop called Urban Hardwoods. The company makes mainly slab furniture from urban trees in the Pacific Northwest that they harvest and process themselves. The species are mostly madrone, claro walnut and western maple. They clearly have George Nakashima for inspiration. In any event, if you are in the City and want to see some nice pieces of wood, go to 434 Post Street. Bring your checkbook. A one-piece claro slab table about 14 feet long is priced at \$46,000



Urban Hardwoods –Manufacturing

About the Association

The *Sonoma County Woodworkers Association* is a 32-year old association of more than 100 professional and amateur woodworkers. Monthly meetings are held at member's shops and other venues to share experiences, ideas and techniques, and to hear well-known woodworkers discuss their work. Each year, the Association sponsors the *Artistry in Wood* juried exhibit at the Sonoma County Museum at which members are invited to submit pieces. Annual dues of \$25 cover membership for one calendar year

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. Submit your entries to:

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Membership Application

I would like to join the SCWA to meet other people interested in the craft, the art and the business of fine woodworking. Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$25 for the annual dues. I understand that this fee entitles me to attend monthly meetings and to receive the Wood Forum newsletter by email or via the SCWA's Web site.

I am enclosing an additional \$15 to receive the Forum by regular mail.

Name _____ Email _____

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

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