



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

www.sonomawoodworkers.com

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Address Letters to the Editor
or article submissions to:

mike@pamg.com



Jim Heimbach's Cradle

February Meeting Notice

Where: Wigfield Woodworking
660 Lakeville Street, Suite C
Petaluma, CA

When: Tuesday, Feb. 5th, 7:00 PM

Who: John Philips, Harpsichords

February Meeting

By Art Hoffman

Our February presenter is John Philips, a builder of world-class harpsichords, who owns a small shop in Berkeley since 1975. Since then, he has produced nearly one hundred instruments. These may be found at institutions and in the hands of musicians both in the U. S. and in Europe and may be heard on over fifty recordings of period music.

The meeting will take place on Tuesday, February 5th at the shop of Steve Wigfield in Petaluma, CA. Remember Wigfield's? **BYOC: Bring your own chair and dress warmly.**

Currently, John Phillips Harpsichords produces four to six high quality instruments per year, offering models based on French, Flemish, German, and Italian instruments. It also services and mends harpsichords and provides concert and recording rentals. The shop is dedicated to recreating the sound and feel of old harpsichords and to producing fine musical instruments which are equally at home in the music room, concert hall or recording studio. Like the finest antique instruments, these harpsichords are extremely responsive and give the player an intimate connection with the sound production. All instruments are custom built to order, and there is a long waiting list (4 years!) for them. You can see several examples on his website, www.jph.us.

John will tell us about the history of harpsichords, explain how they are constructed, and discuss the ins and outs of his business.



Phillips Harpsichord

The meeting will take place at Wigfield Woodworking, 660 Lakeville St., Suite C in Petaluma. Steve's shop is on the left hand side of the building. There is parking in the back of the complex. We begin at 7 P.M.

If you haven't been to Wigfield's shop before, the directions are as follows. Go to Petaluma. Approaching from the south on H'wy 101, take the H'wy 116 exit in south Petaluma, (exit number 472B) which will turn you around in a big hook. Take a right and go underneath the Freeway and head north on Lakeville H'wy, which, in a very short distance becomes Lakeville St. Look for the address on the left. From the north and west, go to Petaluma. Either go south to the 116 exit and then take a right, which puts you on Lakeville Street, or take East Washington Street to Lakeville Street and head south. Look for the address on the right.

Repeat! BYOC (Bring Your Own Chair)! Dress warmly.

Calendar

By Art Hoffman

February 5: John Phillips, world-class harpsichord builder, Wigfield Woodworking, 7:00 PM

March 5: Roger Heitzman, art deco furniture maker and sculptor; Rancho Cotate High School Wood Shop, 7:00 PM

April 2: Elizabeth Lundburg, turner of sculptured vessels; Cotati Cottages Clubhouse, 7:00 PM

Wood Forum's New Look

By Mike Burwen

As you can see, this issue of the Wood Forum's cover page has a new look. In addition, each month the Forum will contain an article about a piece made by an SCWA Member that will be depicted on the cover, presuming that members will be interested in having their work publicized. If you don't like these changes, or have other suggestions to improve the Forum, let me know. The new features are:

- The cover page contains a table of contents that includes page numbers.
- The cover page picture is that of a piece made by a Member, which is described in an accompanying article.
- The next meeting notice appears on the cover page.

If you would like to have one of your pieces featured in the Forum, please send me a couple of pictures (preferably jpg format, at least 500KB) and a few paragraphs describing the piece. I am particularly interested in pieces that posed interesting or difficult challenges. Include in your description how you overcame those challenges. Send the info to mike@pamg.com.

New SCWA Email Service

By Larry Stroud

As of January 2013, the SCWA has a new Gmail account to which posts should be made, and from which messages and the *Wood Forum* will be sent. If you have a message (e.g., wood for sale, woodworking related events, etc.) that you would like sent to our membership, please send your request to SCWAMESSAGES@gmail.com. I will expedite your request. Please add this address to your safe sender list so that messages and the monthly editions of the *Wood Forum* will not be trashed by your SPAM or junk mail filters.

Officers Meeting

By Steve Thomas

A meeting of the officers was held on January 8, 2013 at 5:30 PM. Officers in attendance were Larry Stroud, Jim Heimbach, Art Hoffman, Bill Taft and Steve Thomas. Other members in attendance were Bob Moyer, Don Naples and Carl Johnson.

Highlights of the meeting were as follows:

- Discussion about the roles of SCWA officers in general and specifically the role of Chairperson.
- Agreement to use Robert's Rules of Order to govern future meetings and resolve conflicts.
- Appointed a Nominating Committee to seek candidates for the vacant positions of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. (Note: Mike Burwen resigned the latter position.) The Committee will consist of Larry Stroud, Bob Moyer, Carl Johnson, Art Hoffman and Don Naples. The Committee plans to put forward a

slate of candidates for an election to be held at the earliest possible regular meeting.

- Jim Heimbach will send out membership renewal notices by the end of January.
- A motion to revisit the ByLaws was approved by consent.
- A motion to make Larry Stroud the second signatory on the SCWA bank account was approved by consent.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 PM.

January Meeting: Nick Christianson, Urban Hardwoods

By Mike Burwen

Founded in 2001, Urban Hardwoods manufactures and sells large slab tables made from trees reclaimed from urban settings, primarily in the Seattle, Washington area. The Company has showrooms in Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Our speaker, Nick Christianson manages the San Francisco showroom and is responsible for marketing and sales in the Bay area.

Initially, the company milled the wood, dried it and sold the material to furniture makers. Over time, the company evolved such that it now manufactures finished tables and table-tops and no longer sells the material. Urban Hardwoods' tables are high-end, priced from \$3500 - \$50,000, and the company's sales are in the \$4 - 5 million range. Nick thinks that the Bay area is an ideal market for these products, especially in Silicon Valley.



Urban Hardwoods Claro Table

It takes about 3 years from harvest to finished product. The logs are milled using a custom-built bandsaw capable of handling logs up to 8 feet in diameter! Finished table tops are 1-3/4 to 2 1/4 inches thick and the wood is slabbed

accordingly. It is then air dried for nearly 3 years, then kiln-dried to a moisture content of 6%. After kiln-drying, the moisture content will rise 2-3 percent.

If needed, the slabs are cut on a massive computer-controlled table saw that can cut a mitered edge with 1/100th of a degree precision. Planing and sanding are done with tools large enough to handle big slabs, although an employee, who worked in Japan for 15 years, likes to hand plane the surfaces! Small voids are filled with clear epoxy, sometimes with the undersurfaces painted black. Large voids are left alone. Butterfly keys are used where appropriate. Nick mentioned that the company's standard is to make and install a finished key in 15 minutes! All the table tops are sprayed lightly with lacquer.

Nick mentioned that, up until recently, the company had the market for its products all to itself, but, as its success increased, new competitors have entered the business. He mentioned two of them in the Bay area: "Tree to Table" and "Original Timber."

Much of Nick's talk focused on sales and marketing, which he says is the key to making a successful business. He emphasized that the US is undergoing a renaissance of sorts. People are making things again and the market wants to buy products "Made in the USA." Unfortunately, he claims that there is often a disconnect between people who make things and people who buy things. Marketing's goal is to bridge that disconnect. Urban Hardwoods employs several marketing/sales strategies appropriate for the high-end furniture market. These include:

- Digital marketing
- Print advertising
- Online advertising
- Editorial placement
- Selling through the "trade" (Designers and Architects)
- Selling to commercial accounts
- Fairs and Trade Shows

Nick says that digital marketing is a necessity today. A well-executed web site is a keystone in that the objective of all selling and advertising tactics is to drive potential customers to the web site where they can see examples of the company's products and place orders. Further, almost all digital marketing can be done at little or no cost! Free tools are available to make very nice web sites. Free programs are available that will automatically distribute messages, pictures and even videos to social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr. Digital marketing also has global reach. Nick says that sales are booming in Hong Kong, for example, based solely on what the customer sees on their web site.

Urban Hardwoods utilizes print advertising in magazines and newspapers. Magazines tend to be specialty publications such as *Elle Décor*. A full-page ad in that magazine costs \$1500 - \$5000, so magazine publications have to be selected carefully for maximum impact. Nick

said that many furniture decisions are made by people (more women than men) who tend to tear out pages of things they see and like and retain them for a long time. The Company also places small ads weekly in local newspapers. The purpose of all these ads is to get the prospect to go to the web site. Nick said that the simpler the ad, the better. One uncluttered picture of a table and a minimum of text is much better than cluttered graphics and extraneous text.

Urban Hardwoods does online advertising through *Google Ads* utilizing Search Engine Optimization (SEO). There is not enough space in this article to address this topic in detail, but there are many references on these subjects such as: <http://searchengineland.com/guide/what-is-seo> and <http://www.google.com/intl/en/ads/>. Google Ads is an amazing service. One pays only when a user clicks on the ad and the amount of money spent can be limited to any amount. For example, if you pay Google \$1/click, you can limit your exposure to, say, \$20 or 20 clicks. Free of charge, Google will assign you an advisor who will help you write your online ad, test its efficacy, and help you adjust your message for maximum impact.



Urban Hardwoods Pacific Madrone Table

According to Nick, one editorial is worth a hundred or more times as much as an ad. It is word-of-mouth on a national or even international scale. Obtaining editorial placements, however, is essentially a direct sales process. Editors have to be found and cultivated just like prospective customers. When meeting editors face-to-face or on the phone, you have to be upbeat and positive and present new ideas that generate interest. There is no substitute for developing close personal relationships with important editors.

The "trade" (designers and architects) is a distribution channel in and of itself. Nick pointed out that rich people rarely shop themselves. They hire designers to do that for them. If a piece is sold through a designer and the customer is happy with it, that designer is likely to become a sales outlet for many more pieces. In addition, designers can be a great source for finding collaborative talent. On

the downside, pieces must be discounted to allow the designer a profit, typically on the order of 10 -30%. Designers can also be fussy customers and difficult to work with. Finally, payment terms are typically much less attractive than a direct sale.

Cultivating designers and architects is a direct sales process involving cold calling, multiple contacts, assiduous follow-up, etc. Nick says that it is important to leave information when a call is made. Business cards, photos, ad reprints, testimonials, postcards, etc. are appropriate. A handout that Nick likes to use is a photo of a piece printed on a 5" x 5" card with the website printed on the back. They are too big to put in a pocket like a business card, and thus are more likely to be noticed.

Commercial accounts are becoming an increasingly important channel for Urban Hardwoods. Locally, it has such companies as Google, Pixar, Facebook, and Nordstrom's as customers. However, if a commercial account places a big order, it can wreak havoc with the company's ability to service other customers. Nick mentioned that a big order from Nordstrom's tied up the factory for 3 months.

Nick concluded his presentation with Q&A followed by a round of applause. SCWA members should take a close look at the Urban Hardwoods website, www.urbanhardwoods.com. There are well over 300 photos of finished product, harvesting and factory operations.

Piece of the Month: Jim Heimbach's Cradle

By Jim Heimbach

This cradle, which I built for our daughter's first child, Josey, is my first foray into original design. My wife, Debra, is 100% Norwegian, so I thought it appropriate to use the Viking longship as my inspiration. My research led me to use the prancing, reversing curves, as well as their spiral crests, of the prow and stern of the burial ship Oseberg. I was also inspired by the graceful hull shape of the Gokstad, another burial ship. I used the shape of a lizard's tail as the pattern for the crest spirals.

I found this cradle to be my most challenging and enjoyable (as well as time-consuming) project involving several woodworking skills I had not used before including steam bending, lapstreak construction, and scarf joints on curved sections.

The cradle is made of figured Claro Walnut with Maple strips along the gunwales. Pegs joining some of the lapstrakes are Cherry. Inside the cradle, the mattress deck is of Maple, with Wenge supports. The stand is of Claro Walnut that came from an orchard tree below the graft,

where English Walnut "marbled" with the Claro. The pegs and sockets for the pivots are of Lignum Vitae. The cradle can be lifted from the stand by raising it from one side of the stand and pulling the peg from the other side.



Lizard Tail Detail

Our daughter reported that, since baby Josey began sleeping in her cradle, she has slept through the night, so in the most important criteria, my cradle is a success!

The Crazy New Wood Tax

By Mike Burwen

As of January 1, California retailers are required to collect a 1% sales tax on some wood products. The money is supposed to go to help the state enforce timber harvesting regulations. The list of taxable and non-taxable products is nothing short of insane. Unfinished flooring is taxable, but if it has a finish, it is not taxable. Lumber and plywood are taxable, but if the plywood is sold as an edge-banded shelf, it is not taxable. A piece of wood, say 1 x 3, sold as lumber is taxable, but the same piece sold as molding is not taxable.

The law is contained in AB1492 which says ". . . a *lumber product or an engineered wood product for the storage, use, or other consumption in this state.* . . ." is not specific. The Department of Forestry decides what products should be taxed. The list of taxable items is supposed to be contained on the website, <http://tinyurl.com/a6nk82e>, but when I tried to go there, I found that it doesn't exist! Every SCWA member should write Governor Brown and Senate/Assembly representatives and ask for sanity

Pacific Madrone

By Mike Burwen

I guess that many of our members are familiar with Pacific Madrone. I made a large tool chest and an office cabinet out of the stuff, so am somewhat familiar with its appearance and working properties. However, Urban Hardwoods' madrone tables made me think that there is more to this wood than I know and inspired me to look into the subject.

Madrone is one of the most abundant hardwoods of the West Coast, yet few furniture buyers know about it. Many woodworkers shy away from it due to its inherent instability. However, recent advances in drying and sawing techniques are now producing high-quality timber suitable for furniture and many other uses. Although the wood can be quite plain, it is also available in many figured patterns, just as beautiful, but generally less expensive than other figured woods.



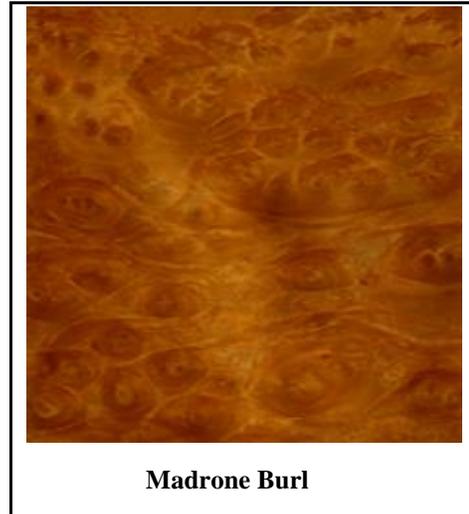
Pacific Madrone Floor

Pacific Madrone (*Arbutus Menziesii*) grows in the inland coastal mountain areas from southern British Columbia to Southern California. It is most prolific in California's Siskiyou range and in Southwest Oregon where it is harvested commercially. North of the Siskiyou to the Canadian border, it is called Madrona. In Canada, it is called Arbutus.

Madrone is fast growing and can reach a height of 100' and a trunk diameter of 8' in favorable growing areas, although 80' and 3' are more typical mature tree dimensions. With a specific gravity of .65 when dry, the timber is heavy for a temperate climate tree. It is both heavier and harder than oak, walnut, or cherry, but competes well with them as a desirable furniture wood.

Typical of fast growing trees, the wood will shrink as much as 12% tangentially when dried. Twists, cups,

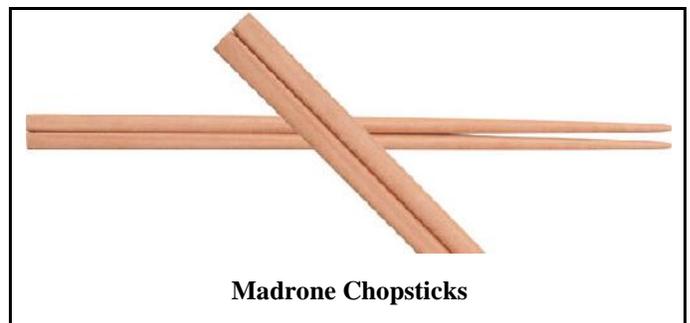
checks and other undesirable characteristics are commonplace. If dried with care, however, large, stable pieces of wood can be obtained. Companies that manufacture madrone flooring use a technique that involves steaming the wood for 8 hours, then quickly cooling it before putting it into the kiln. This process alters the cellular structure in a way that promotes stability, a necessity for flooring. In fact, flooring suppliers classify it as suitable for commercial applications.



Madrone Burl

Madrone is an excellent wood to work. It machines well, takes a fabulous finish, can be steam bent and provides a hard, durable surface. It likes hand tools. Krenovians will be delighted with the surface produced by a hand plane. The wood is phototropic like cherry and will darken over time on exposure to light.

It turns very well. Some turners like to turn it green and then let shrinkage result in ovate-shaped bowls that can be quite attractive. There are many uses for small pieces of this pretty wood. One company makes madrone chopsticks that are sold online for \$18 a pair!



Madrone Chopsticks

I didn't know that some madrone trees produce burlwood which is both rare and expensive. Some companies specialize in providing madrone burlwood to musical instrument makers. One piece of instrument quality burl 6/4 x 8" x 2' retails for \$250! The burl is also popular as a

marquetry material and for small items like wine bottle corks. A 1.5" x 1.5" x 3" chunk will set you back \$8 - \$10 at retail.

Retail prices advertised online average about \$9/bf for non-figured and \$15/bf figured, but there is probably a much greater price spread. It is readily available in up to 8/4 thicknesses. If you are willing to trek to far northern California or Oregon, you can buy madrone direct from mills for prices as low as \$1.55/bf, although the better stuff will be closer to \$5/bf. If you want to buy the wood surfaced and die-straight, you might consider buying solid madrone flooring. It comes in widths from 3"- 8" and lengths up to 8'. Flooring prices range from \$6 - \$8/sqft according to figure. Floor planks are 5/8" - 3/4" thick and are tongued and grooved, making for tight joints and easy glue-up.

About the SCWA

Founded 33 years ago, the **Sonoma County Woodworkers Association**, is dedicated to the art and craft of fine woodworking. Its more than 100 professional and amateur members share ideas, experiences and techniques. At monthly meetings, well-known woodworkers discuss their craft and demonstrate their methodologies. Each year, the SCWA sponsors the *Artistry in Wood* exhibition at the Sonoma County Museum featuring members' work. Annual dues are \$35.

Wood Forum is the monthly newsletter of the SCWA. Members are invited to submit notices, articles and comments for inclusion. Submit entries to:

Mike Burwen, Editor
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