



WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

Volume 38, Issue 7

July 2018

The Curves Keep Life Interesting

If you are a fan of beautiful curves in woodwork, mark July 10 as a can't-miss evening. Our 7pm meeting will be at Philip Nereo's shop in Windsor. As you may recall from the May issue of the *Wood Forum*, Phil was a founding member of the SCWA, and has been making sawdust ever since.

An early influence was an uncle in Boston who worked as a patternmaker. Coupled with a lot of self-teaching from books and a lot of hands-on learning-by-doing, Phil wound up in the mid-70s under the influence of John De Marchi, who was an instructor in the Sonoma State University art department. He studied art and sculpture there, and founded his business, Nereo Woodworking, in 1979. Starting out in cabinetmaking, he saw it was a very competitive field and realized he needed something to make his work distinctive, and began embellishing it with beautiful architectural trim. Eventually,



he settled into the stairmaking trade, which many woodworkers are hesitant to approach, for good reason: it's not easy! "Staircases are more complicated," he once said. "They're challenging and stimulating. They have to be uniquely sized for the house. You can't order one out of a catalog or get one at Home Depot."

In addition to staircases, he also produces custom wood-turning, curved moldings, historical restoration work, interior and exterior decorative details, and an occasional piece of furniture.

Nereo Woodworking is located at:
6851 Starr Road, Windsor CA 95492



SCWA Monthly Meeting

June 5, 2018

by Joe Scannell

The meeting began with several announcements by Show Chair Don Jereb. The first was that the summer picnic would again be held at Don's beautiful home in Santa Rosa, on August 11. As an added attraction, Don's wife will be harvesting honey from her hives, and anyone who would care to "suit up and go in" would be welcome.

Secondly, the Garrett Hack class will be conducted on Saturday and Sunday, September 15 and 16, at 180 Studios in Santa Rosa. At least 18 attendees have already signed up. Mr. Hack will also be lecturing to the association on Friday, September 14, which will be our regular meeting for the month.

The 30th Annual *Artistry in Wood* is growing closer. Entry drop-off day is Thursday, November 8, and opening night is Friday, November 16. Don has lined up two judges thus far. One of these is COR graduate Ross Day, who is coming from Seattle. The other is woodturner Julian Shaw from Sebastopol. Don is actively seeking a third judge, one with an artistic background, to round out the panel. Suggestions are welcome, and should be made by contacting Don Jereb.

Program Chair Chuck Root then introduced our host and speaker for the evening, Michael Cullen, in whose shop, Blue Horse Studio, we were meeting.

Michael began by discussing his current project, which many in the audience had been admiring, a large walnut table constructed from two slabs joined down the middle by shaping one slab to conform to the natural edge profile of the other. The table was, by my recollection, about seven feet square, and more than two inches thick. He surfaced the entire thing with hand planes, and the revealed figure was magnificent. He started the project by building a small maquette to show to the client for approval.

When she saw the model, she was sold instantly. So now he often makes such a model to help a client better visualize his proposal.

Michael has been working with wood on an informal level most of his life, but when he was in college he began taking sculpture classes and his horizon opened up. After graduation he went to work as an engineer, but continued his sculpture studies as well. He credits photos in *Fine Woodworking* and *American Craft* of the work of Judy McKie and Wendell Castle with turning his head sharply in a new direction. He put down his tee-square and drove across the country to Leeds Design Workshop, where he trained for four years. Eventually he wound up settling in Petaluma.

Michael said his purpose for the evening was to encourage each of us to try working with others, not only in woodworking, but in all the crafts, because we all share a common thread.

We may work with different materials but what we do is very much the same: we create things with our hands.



Michael was originally trained as an engineer, and was accustomed to beginning every project with detailed orthographic drawings, showing front, side, and top views. He told a story of showing a client such a plan, and after much deliberation she said she was unable to decide which one she liked the best - she liked all the designs. Michael quickly put things on hold, went back to the shop, and made a small model of his design.



Photos by Jose Cuervo



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When he began working wood, Michael said he never imagined he would be working with others. He just figured it would be himself, alone in his shop, creating. But in 1990 he got a call inviting him to participate in a furniture show in Boston. He showed a piece called “Moon Desk” on which he collaborated with his wife Barbara, who worked with a material called Fimo to sculpt cameos of the four phases of the moon. This was his first collaboration with anyone, and he and Barbara would continue the process for many years.



Moon Desk



Michael continued to approach design from an engineer’s perspective. He had been trained by an Englishman whose directive was to never make mistakes and to always work on paper, but in 2000 he was invited to Emma Collaborative in Canada. In 1982, a woodturning and craft event was organized by Michael Hosaluk, an artist and woodturner, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This evolved in the following years into the Emma Lake International Collaboration. In 2000, Hosaluk invited over a hundred artists from many different disciplines and from many countries to come spend a week in Saskatchewan creating. As Michael Cullen puts it, “There were 125 artists from many different disciplines, all working together and doing some crazy stuff. Nobody planned anything on paper, no models, no mock-ups.” He offered the example of a spoon he carved, then handed off to a painter. Two hours later, being the obsessive Michael he used to be, he went back and checked on his spoon. One of the painters had decorated it with an array of wild colors, and some silver leaf on the handle, and as Michael expressed it, “she had nailed it!”

The week at Emma was a time of just letting go, having fun, trying something new, without the pressures of having to finish a commission on time and such. Returning home, Michael was fired up and began approaching others he knew to work together on projects. And they did. And the results were extraordinary. He was collaborating with ceramic artists, painters, you name it.



Spring Rain

Michael had developed a style of carving in the 90s that is typified by this piece, *Spring Rain*. Then he traveled to New Zealand to work, and met a Maori man by the name of Lionel, who was reputed to be New Zealand’s top carver. This man did not hesitate to tell Michael that he was doing things wrong, and they butted heads for some time until both men checked their egos and embarked on a project together. The arrangement: Michael would build a piece of furniture and Lionel would carve it. Michael watched the carving process intently, and the experience greatly influenced his carving style for the future.

Michael described several other collaborative experiences he's had over the years, a couple with woodturner Graeme Priddle, one in his shop in Petaluma, another in the village of Breville, France just outside the city of Cognac. On that one, in 2009, they worked with other artists for five weeks to produce an outdoor sculpture garden for the town commons, seen here. They wound up making 16 spheres, representing the 16 provinces in France, from red oak tree sections supplied by the townspeople. The work included turning the chunks on a hefty Titan 400 lathe, carving, and painting.



Other collaborations took him elsewhere around the world: Canada again, Hawaii, Nepal, Angkor Wat, Cambodia, Los Angeles. As he discussed each of these, Michael stressed the importance of keeping your eyes open to see how other woodworkers do things, often with very primitive (by our standards) methods, and to learn from the experience.

One story he told was of being in Bhaktapur, Nepal, one year after a devastating earthquake. Tools were scarce and very basic. A project called for drilling counterbored holes for some bolts. Somehow they located some spade bits, but these were short-lived. Michael said “they folded up like an umbrella - they must have been made of aluminum.” The Nepalese carvers were watching all this, wondering what the heck these crazy foreigners were doing. Finally one of them stepped

forward and showed their method - just carve it! He quickly produced a 1-1/2” diameter bore an inch deep. Then another stepped up and demonstrated his skills. He made a perfect counterbore in one minute, and then asked “Is this good?” “Yeah, there’s forty more of them.” And the stories continued until the hour was late, and the evening was concluded with a very generous round of applause for our host. Thanks, Michael.



Photos courtesy Michael Cullen

Footnote from Program Chair Chuck Root:
Michael donated his \$300 stipend to Arrowmont.

October 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6

September 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7					

August 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
14	2		1	2	3

July 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2	1	3	4 Independence Day	5	6 Greg Zall Marquetry class -->	7
9	10 Meeting @ Nereo shop 7pm	11	12	13	14	
16	17	18	19	20	21	
23	24	25	26	27	28	
30	31					

Artistry in Wood

Entry Drop-off date:
November 8

Judgment Day:
November 13



More from 2017

Artistry in Wood



Hilo Daydream by Stephen Hamner



Ash Hole by Robert Nelson



For the Love of the Game by Anthony Westergaard



Redwood Bowl by Steve Forrest

previous page:
One Season by Vincent Van Dyke

Photos by Debbie Wilson
SCWA Wood Forum July 2018

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Wood Forum is the monthly newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association. Please feel free to submit articles and photographs for inclusion in the publication. You can send your submissions to the Wood Forum Editor at SCWAEditor@gmail.com. Advertisements are also accepted with a nominal cost for paid members.

Membership Application

I would like to join the SCWA to meet other people interested in the craft, the art and the business of fine wood-working. Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$35 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 website.

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____ Home Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

What can you do to help further the organizational goals of our volunteer-run association? Please tell us how you would like to help:

Please send check and completed application to:

Sonoma County Woodworkers Association, PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402