



From The Shop



The newsletter of the Lehigh Valley Woodworker's Guild

Issue 07.2008

Next Meeting: July 15th, 2008 (3rd Tuesday!)

Location: Lehigh Co. Senior Center
1633 Elm Street
Allentown, PA

Title: Mr. Jeffry's Third World Table Saw, Jointer and Planer Project.

Speakers: Jeffry Lohr of Schwenksville, PA; Abubakar Abdullahi, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Organization: Moringacommunity.org.

Remember – July is Picnic Meeting Month!

June Highlights:

Charles Bender – Period furniture secrets and secret compartments and fine furniture in general.

Note: Contact info at very end of article.

I enjoyed the meeting a lot because it was so unstructured. It was like a chat about period furniture with a fellow, surprisingly young, who not only knows his stuff, but can execute with perfection. Charles "Chuck" Bender was younger than I expected. I checked out his web site prior to the meeting as I always do when one is available and when I saw the furniture there I figured this would be a dignified older gentleman. Instead we got someone who actually sat next to Craig Bentzley at the May meeting. Chuck takes his work seriously but does not take himself too seriously, and has a great sense of humor that came through clearly in his presentation.

Chuck has his own business in Pottstown after being located for ten years in Glenmoore, on the side of a busy highway. They moved to their Pottstown location in a newly converted barn. The new studio gives them plenty of space and light to work by and no where near as much noise from traffic.



Not your everyday chair. Chuck makes these and teaches people to make period furniture. All his carving is done by hand. Want to see a \$5,000 chair? Well, it may be this one or...



Chuck Bender shows off his spice chest to some admirers. Extremely interesting speaker with talent to match.



This "roundabout" chair.

Chuck has been messing around with wood since he was 12. He was criticized when he was young for having taste that was too old fashioned. He worked for many years for a cabinet maker and after 17 years went on his own. He has been inspired by Sam Maloof and Green and Green works.

I lifted this bio from his web site – he has a school and teaches fine woodworking in classes of about 6 people. More about that, but this is who Charles is:

Chuck Bender began his woodworking career at the young age of twelve. He joined a woodworking club in junior high school and soon realized he loved working with wood so much that he had to do more. As he entered high school, his thoughts turned to potential careers. Woodworking was fun but was it something he'd like to do daily?

Making his way through his freshman year, Chuck met Werner Duerr, the cabinetmaking instructor at the Central Chester County Vocational and Technical School in Pennsylvania. Werner was born, raised and trained in Germany. He taught his high school class just like his apprenticeship in Germany. Chuck was inspired by the friendly old German and took advantage of every opportunity to expand his skills and knowledge.

After high school the real training began. Chuck spent the next ten years learning in two furniture shops in Chester County, PA. During those years he expanded his skills, learned new production techniques and taught himself how to carve, all while immersing himself in the study of 18th Century furniture. His skills expanded and he was given apprentices to train. He travelled extensively to museums, private collections and antique shows just to study the furniture. This lead Chuck to doing much of the design work and making the "one of a kind" pieces for his employers. At every turn he met knowledgeable people who were willing to teach him what they knew about 18th century furniture and the craftsmen who made it.

In 1991 Chuck started his own shop, Charles Bender and Company, Cabinet and Chair Makers. Over the last 17 years, he has spent his time continuing his study of the fine furniture made in America. He has gained a national reputation for his unrivaled work and has been chosen by the editors of *Early American Life* magazine as one of the top 200 craftsmen in the country more than 14 times. With numerous magazine and newspaper articles, awards and honors, Chuck continues to build some of the finest furniture in the country.

Chuck's work is seriously based on classic designs. He explained that he does not have a dovetail jig in his shop, and that his major tools are jointer, planer, and a table saw.. Yes there are others but there are no shortcuts. His carving is done by hand. His hardware is

made to order by a metalsmith in England. Much of his work is modeled after William and Mary, Queen Anne, and Chippendale. He also does some Pennsylvania inspired work.



Detail of the chair back. Like all fine works, this photo does not nearly show the fine hand carving.

He started off his talk by saying that he attended Paul Anthony's presentation the prior month and wanted to try to bring more slides. One of the reasons why he thought to talk about secret compartments in furniture was because it sort of is an interesting adjunct to the subject of period furniture. Craftsmen did it for fun, as a signature, as a puzzle, and sometimes because people paid extra for it. He one time was messing with a museum piece and found one that still had old papers in it. I asked if they were used to hide like crazy video tapes but Chuck told me there were no video tape players back then. Who knew? They served no real clandestine purpose as it turns out. But I was watching the Count of Monte Cristo and Edmund Dantes was asked to carry a note from Napoleon to a friend and it was a trap and got sent to prison as a spy, so you should be careful if you get one of these old pieces.

Chuck, like out friends Craig Bentzley and Walt Segl can speak in great detail about period furniture. Chippendale, as example was painfully time consuming to make and expensive to buy, so people flocked to it as a show of their wealth. This was about the mid 1700's. It was sort of a fusion of Chinese and French and was, in addition to beautiful, was fashionable and Chippendale was an attempt to cash in on that and go right for the dollars.



This is a magnificent piece made by Chuck.

Sometimes Chuck gets asked to repair a piece. In this way, he sort of backs into finding interesting pieces to duplicate or at least ones that inspire designs of his own

The conversation sort of meandered casually through slides of detailed or general comments about Chuck's work and some of the intricacies of the secret compartments, all of it interesting. One of the real points I got in spite of Chuck's friendly and casual nature is his attention to detail, not taking shortcuts, dedication to old world craftsmanship, and knowledge of period furniture while being able to deviate from a strict style to incorporate his own ideas into a design that improves upon those style.

One thing that Chuck downplayed in the meeting is the fact that he runs a rather extensive school on woodworking. His courses have great variety and are taught in his place of business in Pottstown (actually East Coventry, PA). He starts at the apprentice level, moves on to Journeyman level, next set is Masters level and topics range from fundamentals to carving to project construction. Course range from a weekend to almost a week. There are also some supplemental classes, one to 2 days in length on a variety of topics,

to include one on Adult and child hand tools. Chuck also had sources for stock to be used in his classes. He does get some materials from our own Shady lane folks, Mike and Louise Peters! Interesting – tell your family – he offers gift certificates. What do you get for the woodworker who has everything?



This highly figured Tiger Maple Kas was designed in the Dunlap style



A Philadelphia rush seat dining chair.

compartment. Of course, a spice chest to us and a wardrobe for Mini Me.



Still close to home is this Shenandoah chest.



Hand carved. Nothing more needs to be said.



OK, time for some secrets. The front of the drawer is ti the left, and, when you pull it out of their case, there are secret drawers built into the side.



This is a Philadelphia Spice chest. This is a little over 4 feet tall, and will set you back \$22,000. In all sincerity, this looks exquisite. AND – the middle section has secret

Some presentations inspire us to go out and build jigs, some to sharpen our tools. Some may tell us about new products we are interested in, others may introduce us to new techniques such as use of a scraper. Our speakers truly run the gamut of our hobby. Presentations like this one show what can be done with dedication and passion and pursuit of perfection. I do not believe Chuck Bender feels he is Superman, with an inborn ability to create works far beyond those of mortal men. I do believe that Chuck knows he has the intensity to pursue mastering of the skills necessary to create immaculate works of beauty.

I sense, given Chuck's ability to communicate with woodworkers at all levels that he has an excellent ability to convey information, necessary in teaching. This is a skill that some are in fact born with and that others acquire.

It does occur to me after sitting through sessions like this one that I can continue to bang out crap that is "good enough", but one day, I need to take on a project with no end date in sight, done mostly by hand, not

settling for second best, not rushing to finish, and one I can look at and NOT make excuses for



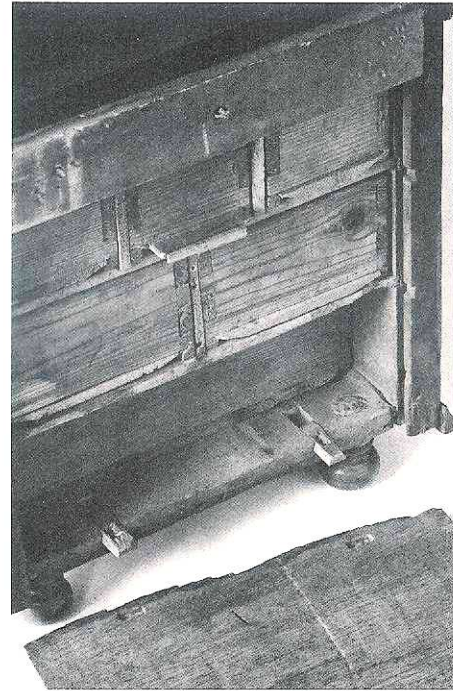
This is interesting for two reasons. The Philadelphia spice chest shown during construction and...



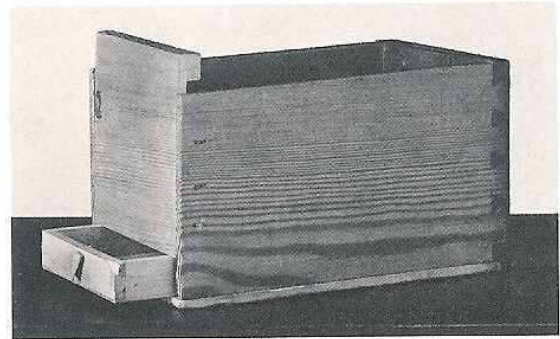
The secret drawers attached to the center divider.

I will close on this note: Judy Muth related that they carved a chair seat as in a Windsor chair and asked Chuck if he carves chair seats and if that is a time consuming and expensive thing. Chuck replied he does not generally do that, can do that, and if the chair seats are carved in a generic way, that is prices one way, but if chair seats are carved to conform to specific butts, that is a whole different pricing structure.

Or something like that.



The back of this spice chest removed to reveal a small compartment in the back.



Cat. 49a Center drawer detail showing secret drawer

A little drawer in the back of a big drawer!



This looked like a fold open writing desk with a felt bottom. Bottom removes to show the small set of drawers under the top boxes.



And still another space under the box floor.



The detail continues on the inside.



Chuck advises that the center section of this has an entire set of secret compartments in back – it slides out.



Beautiful lowboy.



Great looking spice chest.

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Newsletter offer – Want to write it?

I am tired. Anybody have a burning desire to write and publish this thing? Let me know.

Drag and Brag



Ken and Judy with their always great preparations!



An oak root sculpture from Will Schmidt – his work captures our imagination.



Not Drag and brag, but Tom and Tim Enot explain the hand made bags Tom's wife is making for our Christmas blocks. These are really nice folks.

And the Woodcraft winner is...



Sleeping Norm Bachman. (Sorry Norm – bad photo)

Wood Specials

SHADY LANE TREE FARM

Louise & Mike Peters
5220 Shimerville Road
Emmaus, PA
610 965-5612 Please call

FLEETWOOD LUMBER & FLOORING

BILL BURKERT
27 Rapp Rd.
Fleetwood, PA
610 944-8364 Please call

Member discount 5%

Bailey Wood Products, Inc.

441 Mountain Rd.
RD#2 Box 38
Kempton, PA
610 756-6827

Woodcraft

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2008 Meeting Calendar:

Month	Topic	Speaker
June 17th	Charles Bender – Fine furniture maker and woodworking teacher.	Charles Bender
July 15th	General Woodworking – Outreach program for West Africa Woodworking youth. ALSO – PICNIC and FUNNY TEE SHIRT NIGHT!	Jeff Lohr
August 19th	Open	Not me!
September 16th	FESTOOL DEMO	FESTOOL – arranged by Woodcraft
October 21st	CONTEST TIME!	
November 18th	FREUD DEMO!	Freud tools –arranged by Woodcraft

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WEAR A FUNNY TEE SHIRT!!
Judy Muth WILL Be checking!**