

# DIMENSIONS

## Newsletter of the Pacific Woodworkers Guild

### At a Glance:

- Next meeting is Tuesday November 19th.
- Toy Workshop Part II Saturday November 23 (see pg 4)

### When Last We Met

By Gord Bednard

Meeting began at 7:20 with President **Bill Ophoff** calling for order and surprisingly getting all and sundry to fall silent and pay attention. Bill announced that the previous executive meeting had resolved to begin the business meetings early (7:15) while retaining the 6:30 start time for the pre-meeting demo. It is expected that this change will be effective starting with the November meeting.

Following opening remarks an idea was presented to make the newsletter the vehicle for more of the "business" part of the meetings (for example - the announcement of upcoming events) which would leave less of this "stuff" for the meetings.

Visitors were then introduced: **Brian McLaren**, who admitted under questioning that he was a friend of Steve; **Annie Prefontaine**, luthier extraordinaire and **Aymeric Ronce**, possibly the youngest woodworker in the room.

#### Guest Speaker

It was then time for the introduction of the guest speaker for the evening, who turned out to be none other than the previously named **Annie Prefontaine**. Annie kept the attending members' attention for at least an hour (including Q&A) with her description of the art and science of violin making. Annie's discussion touched on a number of the different aspects of both violin and guitar making while still retaining some of the mysteries of the craft (sorry Phil - it seems if you want secrets you will have to pay the consulting fees.) The following highlights from this talk were noted: Most of the work she does is repair to existing instruments, building guitars and some violins. Both repair and new construction can be challenging work. While some of the equipment used is purchased from various mail order suppliers, many of the tools are homemade, such as the "dowel and rod" clamps used for holding the tops to the sides and the exquisite miniature planes for shaping the front and back to

achieve the right sound quality. Bill (prez) drooled excessively over the planes. Very few power tools are used, and the tools she brought and displayed were basically all she needed to make an instrument. The neck can be made from various hardwoods, the front and back are made from book-matched spruce.

Book matching is done (as opposed to using a wider board) to obtain the correct tonal quality and sound reproduction. Stock is quarter sawn and air-dried wood is better. She gets her wood from suppliers in Toronto and the USA. Annie uses mostly hide glue for violins because it is reversible and #2002 glue (Lee Valley) for guitars. Presumably no one really wants to fix guitars and having heard what passes for music lately, I'm not surprised. Her violins are built to classic designs and plans, while guitars can be different shapes and sizes. For those of you with a crying need to work in thousands of an inch, have plenty of time on your hands, and are already well fixed for income, Annie noted it takes approximately 250 hours to complete a violin and it would sell for 2500-3000 dollars. (you do the math). Some of the catalogue names for suppliers are: GEWA; Dick - [www.dick-gmbh.de](http://www.dick-gmbh.de), Luthiers Mercantile Ltd - [www.lmji.com](http://www.lmji.com). Lee Valley; Garrett Wade and Lie-Nielson also sell merchandise for the luthier trade - Annie can be reached at 604 469-2955. Annie's presentation ended with much applause and presentation by Bill of one of the Guild's coveted yo-yos.

Bill Ophoff explained the concept of the President's Challenge and noted the following themes for upcoming meeting (see box at left).

#### Show and Tell

**Vic Wasend** showed a collection of Japanese planes. These are very simple in form but apparently quite nice to work with. He has everything from bullnose to rabbit planes and a whole lot of stuff in between. The blades are laminated with a thin sheet of hard steel and

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### Upcoming President's Challenges:

- > **November** - Boxes (perhaps from the sawdust huddle).
- > **December** - "Look what I made for Christmas"
- > **January** - Bookends
- > **February** - Intarsia, inlay or mosaic work.
- > **March** - "Mistake" month - bring out the problems so others may avoid them.



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Please direct newsletter submissions to the newsletter editor, Steve Hansen, via email: [urquell@shaw.ca](mailto:urquell@shaw.ca) or call 604-986-5471.

The Pacific Woodworkers Guild is a non-profit association of British Columbia Craftspeople dedicated to excellence in woodworking. Guild members meet on the third Tuesday of each month (except July and August) in Richmond, B.C.

The newsletter is published monthly, ten times per year, and distributed free to members and associate members. Membership is available to anyone interested in any form of fine woodworking. Membership fees are \$25 for twelve months; Associate membership fees (newsletter only) are \$15 for ten issues.

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Bill Ophoff  
Dan Lemire  
Lou Hafer  
Paulin Laberge  
Paul Townsend  
Bill Fox  
Art Liestman  
Bob Bedier

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#### 2x4 Challenge Assistants

#### Richmond Carvers' Show

#### BC Woodworking Show -

*Competition*  
*Assistant*  
*PWG Booth*  
*Assistant*

#### Christmas Toy Workshop

#### Fundraising/Raffle Assistant

#### Library

Bill Ophoff  
Bill Fox  
Harry Taylor  
Denis Reid  
Jan Dicks  
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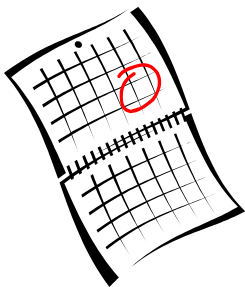
softer iron as a backing. When sharp, you can actually hear the cut. Typically the planes can cost 35-40 dollars, but the blades can be upwards of 300. Vic sharpens them on 1500 and then 6000 waterstones.

**Guy Lautard** showed off his .45 cartridge, laminated and turned, intended for use as a lamp base. **Dennis Reid** update the members on the toy workshop and reminder all that the next workshop would be on November 23, from 10-2 at Bills's shop . **Lou Hafer** showed off a dance barre (yes, that's the correct spelling) built for his wife. **Greg Parsons** offered to bring in a cedar strip canoe for the February demo.

## Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Pacific Woodworkers Guild will be held on Tuesday November 19th, starting at 7:15 pm (**note new start time**). Pre-meeting demo at 6:30 pm. The speaker for the November meeting will be a Lee Valley representative who will discuss and demonstrate a new sharpening system.

Coming up: December - History of furniture design; January - "Noh" masks from Japanese Kabuki theatre.



## James Krenov—Selected Articles (Part Four of Five)

*James Krenov, doyen of the American school of woodworking, officially retired from teaching this year. He leaves an incredible legacy and to honour him we reproduce selected items from his book "A Cabinetmaker's Notebook".*

What is it like when you first set up your own shop? Most of us begin with just a few very simple machines that we have to make do with, and we go through the stage of becoming a cabinetmaker; a stage that may last for years, when we have to be inventive and make various simple tools. During that time we have to try to think all the while, "This is the kind of work that I'm going to stay with, and I don't want to fight it. I don't want it to be something that is always a struggle. I want the kind of work that I basically enjoy." There are aspects of it, of course—the dust and the dirt and the noise and the sweat—that are dubious enjoyment, but still, in the midst of it all, you want this thing that you feel is right and feels right. You have got one or two simple machines. You've got your hands, and your eyes, and your wood—this is what you are going to live with. If you are going to be a maker of musical instruments—or whatever you are going to do—you will have a tremendous use for fine knives, fine chisels, special little tools that you might make, and small machines, to serve your particular purpose. Of course, some of us are fortunate enough to start with a shop that has what we need to save most of our energy, and don't have to struggle quite as hard as other people do. But for most it is a modest beginning and you accept it and you want to enjoy it.

There is reason enough for a young person (or any person really) setting up a shop, who wants to do what we call fine craft in wood, to be doubtful about the final appreciation of his audience. There isn't the establishment of mutual confidence. The public does not always know, almost never knows, the difference between the surface which can be produced in sensitive hands and with a sensitive eye, and the surface that you have run off the jointer and belt-sanded. It is, I think in some instances, as bad as that. Not always, of course; I don't want to seem prejudiced in any way, but there is often a tremendous lack of understanding. The more sensitive work you do, the more afraid you will be in the first stages of your life as a craftsman, because you will always be wondering, "Will anyone ever come who will appreciate this? Here I am working, making these tools. Here I am listening to this old man telling about the difference between one surface and another, one edge and another. Will it ever mean anything in my own work and my own existence?" And I am perfectly aware that in many instances it won't; not because you are insensitive, but because of the climate, the craft climate, the attitude towards wood. The fact that

for years and years there hasn't been that much work done which is delicate and sensitive in this medium. There has been fine work done on a larger scale, heavier things a bit sculptured and large, yes. But small delicate things - an exquisite little jewelry box, a graceful little table, or a cabinet which is intended for lovely things and is itself a complement to them—this kind of work is rare, almost extinct. There is a true need to create a climate in which it can be done and appreciated.

Maybe this atmosphere of understanding will come; I can't say. But until it does come, work. Even when you are worried, work. Don't be pressured by originality. Don't lose time thinking that your work has to be wild and wooly, or slick. A nice four-legged table with pleasing and subtle, well-proportioned legs spaced right, the top in a pleasing form, is a beautiful thing, and rare. We don't necessarily have to make all kinds of sweeps and bends and such. Or worry if people say, "Well, it doesn't look...original," or, "I've seen a four-legged table almost like this before."

Around originality there is no doubt a law of diminishing returns; nowadays there has to be. Though maybe we are drowning not so much in the original as in the imitation, in just things. For many of us originality is a pressure; we are being pushed around by people wanting something new, different. Then there's the other pressure of doing the new without borrowing too much of the old, or at least without getting caught at it. Students are forever running to libraries to get various books—on peasant art, Scandinavian modern, Shaker, Colonial, Indian—one this and one that. They fill their heads with all these images, and then frantically try to come up with something of their own. As though you put these ingredients in a kettle, add water, stir, and cook for two hours. What do you get? Pottage. Pea soup.

It's a losing battle. And so exhausting. Stay out of it. It took me along time to realize this, and accept my unoriginal self. Try to find the sort of people for whom there is another originality - that of the quiet object in unquiet times. It is rather ironic. We seem to have come the full turn, really. We're so up-tight that relaxation is something new, especially with regard to things. So apiece in low key, where the wood has its message and there is an idea and inspiration, where someone has worked honestly and well but with humility too - this is original.

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By contrast. That's the paradox I mean: let people take home a piece (cabinet or whatever) that is harmonious and well done, and simply live with it; they can have this little thing on a wall and come home and not have to open their eyes wide to exclaim, "Oh, great!" On the contrary, they come home with all these tensions, and this thing by its very being helps them relax somehow. They look at it; there is nothing wrong. They like it, it needs no explanation, no exclamation. They sit and relax and just live with it. All is well.

Perhaps because of my limited imagination, I have never felt that as a craftsman I could, or should, excite people in the usual sense of originality. If what I do achieves this other result, of soothing, or simply pleasing a certain kind of person, then perhaps everything is all right.

I try to remind my students of this, to give them confidence when I feel that they are worried about the future, under pressure, looking for new ideas rather than at the wood itself. Instead of touching the wood, turning it, looking at the other side, and then listening to it, these students are pressured by the belief that ideas have to come from outside and they have to be new and striking. So I try to restore their confidence and calm them and slow them down. I tell them that even if they won't make all that many things, or things that are **all** that striking, the things that they do will, if they are done right, appeal to the right person. And that is very, very important and should be encouraging. At least it should be reassuring, although sometimes one wonders; even as we reassure, we are at that very moment ourselves right in

the middle of tension and contradiction because it is so difficult to establish any tangible evidence of the fact that this message is valid. Perhaps I and people like myself are doomed to fail in that respect because we are, in a way, contradicting a proven truth.

Very often students will come running to me, on Wednesday, let us say, with a sketch of something they have done. Their eyes are shining and they are raring to go and they have got to finish this whole thing and take it home to mother or the girlfriend or someone by Friday at the latest. And it is so difficult to explain to them that there will be this Friday, yes, but which Friday are we really talking about? There will be another Friday, and a Friday after that, and still another. And to get them to accept such an approach, to slow down, go into the work, let it come and see what happens is tremendously difficult, both for them and for me.

Yet I do believe that some are going to persevere and learn to think the other way: "I'm going to make these things because I want to make them, because I love the wood, because I have these fine tools, and I am just going to work and be happy doing it, no matter how long it takes, and learn all the time." I hope that, for these craftsmen, the beginning will come. people will notice and will see, even though they may not quite understand. They will say, "My goodness, this isn't what we always run into. This is somehow different." And maybe at first they will be puzzled. Maybe at first they won't even directly like the thing, but they will be aware of it. It just cannot be denied in its sensitive diversity. And out of that, maybe there will come a better time for our kind of craftsman.



## Unclassifieds

- > Craftsman 12", 2-wheel Bandsaw with stand \$250; Dewalt 700 series 8" bench-top Radial Arm saw \$250; 60 Sq Ft dark oak Parquet flooring - offers. View in Bill Fox's shop at the next meeting. Tony Carter (604) 983-9542.
- > Wanted — Holly (clear) - slab or round (1.5" diameter or more) - dry preferred. Even small quantities welcome. Murray MacKinnon (604) 986-5746.

## Annual Christmas Toy Workshops

The second (and last for this year) Christmas Toy Workshop will be held on Saturday, November 23, 2002 at Bill Fox's workshop from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.. This our final effort for completing toys for the Christmas Bureau. Members may bring finished or started toys to the meeting or to the Saturday Toy Workshop.

