

Makers

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There's a movement afoot that's taking my world by storm and that has nothing to do with politics, pandemics or any of the other troubling upheavals in which we find ourselves immersed. It's a movement of people working both individually and collectively at learning to make things.

I have to admit I didn't at first understand the essence of the Maker movement and saw many of the young folks involved as sort of upstarts. After all, I've learned most of what I know from a combination of personal experience and observing the work of experts who'd been actually doing the work for, say, two or three decades or more. What could I possibly have to learn from someone who has never served an apprenticeship in a serious wood shop?

But, I try to be open-minded (I do not appreciate the eye rolls, daughters!) and little by grudging little, I learned about the Makers. The thing is, most of the things I want to do, I know how to do. I don't need a lot of instruction, per se. But I do appreciate sharing ideas and the new makers are all about that. Their videos tend to be not so much 'how to' as 'how I did' and I think that serves a need that's somehow more personal and engaging than more formal, step by step instruction. It contains the tacit subtext of, "...and you're welcome and encouraged to do it your own way." Which I appreciate, 'cause I was gonna do things my own way, anyhoo, doncha know?

Anyway, what else am I going to do on a slow evening when the writing muse leaves me in the lurch? So, I started watching Maker videos about woodworking and in no time, I was hooked. Don't get me wrong – many people are better at making entertaining videos than at the craft they highlight, so you do find yourself wading through plenty of (ahem!) misdirection. That's okay. Enough of them are good and quickly getting better that I'm really enjoying this exploration. It's about bringing more minds and hands to the conversation.

For example: I've made jigs galore over the years – the 'third hands' every craftsperson needs at some point. One of the most basic for a hand woodworker is what's called a shooting board. You can Google Paul Sellers for a fantastic tutorial on how to build a traditional jig of this style. Please do; I did. Or go to Rob Cosman for his refinements or to James Hamilton (aka Stumpy Nubs) for his down to earth take. All worth the time to watch and absorb before you build your own.

But in trolling the blogisphere prior to building my new shooting board I came across one of those 'upstarts,' a young (from my 67 year old vantage point) maker by the name of Tamar Hannah (3x3 Custom) whose fresh, parallax view totally changed my approach to building this simple device. I followed her method – not religiously, of course, I put my own spin on it but pretty close – and now have a shooting board with detachable donkey's ear and other accessory fences that serves my needs exactly and is MUCH easier to store in my tiny workshop than four separate versions would have been.

For carving, I'll stay with long-time experts Mary May and Chris Pye. But someday I'd love to carve a dragon like the one by Emma Cook (aka The Tiny Turner). I'm new to turning and my mentors are Tim Yoder, Tracey Malady and Cindy Drozda. Even so, I admit I enjoy watching Ashley Harwood turn a huge

table pedestal or her delicate finials for ornaments. I make my own finials differently, but I can't make them as repeatedly perfectly as Ashley and it's excruciatingly fun to watch her work.

For dovetailing, or for that matter, anything in the furniture / cabinet arena, Paul Sellers is my guy. He's been there, done that and his generous sharing of his skills and tips has become a mainstay of the online woodworking community. Rob Cosman makes some fine dovetails and shares great approaches. Frank Klausz is a past master and we can all learn just by watching him work. But if a friend who'd never cut dovetails asked me who to watch for a tutorial, I'd steer him or her to Anne Briggs (Anne of All Trades). Anne is young and can't claim the many thousands of dovetails cut by Sellers or Klausz. But here she has a really good method and her video on cutting dovetails by hand should be required viewing by anyone seeking to make their first dovetailed box. She makes this essential skill accessible to newbies. Her approach is straightforward, relaxed but exacting. This is not to say Anne is anywhere near replacing Paul as my go-to. But for a newb who wants to cut dovetails with a few simple tools, Anne gets my vote as first teacher.

I've quickly come to respect the Makers and their movement. I'll always turn to Paul or Stumpy as my mainstays but more and more I find myself seeking out the latest by Tamar or Anne, Matt Estlea or Jay Bates. These folks have all become my friends, although I've met none of them. A friend being someone in whose company one's life is enriched.