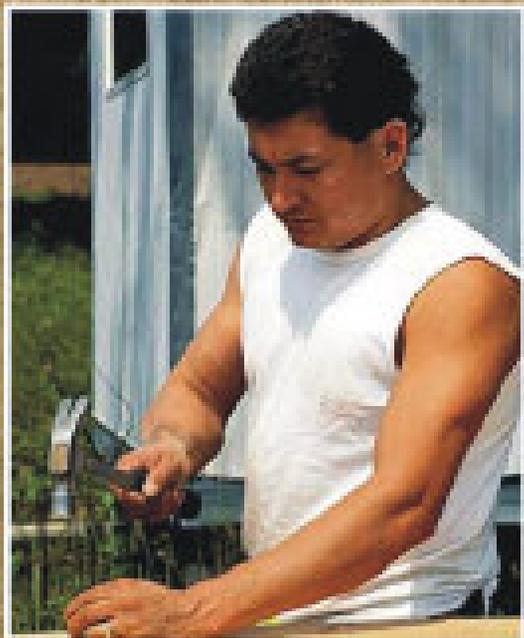


WOODWORKING *Essentials*



WOODWORKING

Essentials



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How it all began...for me

What do a skiing trip, a broken leg and woodworking have in common? Nothing, unless you're Attila the Hun and want to replace my broken leg with a new wooden one! Or, of course, unless you're me.

As you might have guessed I'm the one with the broken leg, and I managed it while we were on our skiing trip. The woodworking ties into this whole thing because I was forced to stay almost immobile for too long with nothing better to do except twiddle my thumbs and gaze off into space.

Where, the "space" involved in this case, turned out to be the roof our host's log cabin and a nicer roof I've never seen. But it still left me to my mournful thoughts.

I mean there I was, stuck indoors virtually for the rest of our trip without being able to take advantage of the great skiing conditions, and having to listen everyone else enjoying themselves. And if that sounds like grouching, it was, and I'm not too ashamed to admit it.

I know that I'm no saint, so I know that I get cranky. Anyway, to allay my boredom and I suspect to stop me from becoming cranky, between them, Jack, my long suffering husband, and our host found and supplied me with a mile high stack of books.

Now, I'm voracious reader so it didn't take me that long to whittle the stack almost down to nothing, but it was enjoyable nonetheless. I was even carried out and placed ever so gently in a cozy chair and tucked up with enormous blankets every morning so that I could better enjoy myself.

Having whittled down the pile of books to almost nothingness, I was left with a few magazines and books on woodworking. Not being particularly interested in woodworking at that point, but having nothing better to do, I started to go through the magazines first, deciding to leave the books to the last.

And that, my friends, is what skiing, broken legs and woodworking all have to do with each other, because as they say, the rest was history. I was caught, hook, line and sinker and it even got to the point where I had to be persuaded to put the book down.

Since the books belonged to our erstwhile host, I figured he had to have had some passing interest in woodworking so I plied him unashamedly for

all the information I could get. Jack, the poor dear, only looked at my host and thanked him quite laconically for supplying me with a new hobby.

My hobby-collecting¹ was legend amongst our friends by then, so everyone only laughed, and I just ploughed doggedly on, determined to get all the information that I could. Which, brings us to this point and my introduction to you into the world of woodworking.

It's been a considerable number of years since that fateful skiing trip and I haven't looked back since. That doesn't mean that I've stopped my hobby-collecting, only that I find new and inventive ways in which to merge everything together, without any mishaps.

Except for the one time of course when I tried my hand at pottery and ended up using a chisel instead of a shaper. Not a big accident by any means, and don't ask me how it happened – it just did!

But at the time I remember seeing my nicely forming pot collapsing on my wheel in two distinct pieces. And that's what you get for absentmindedness. There's a good chance that I just reached for and found the nearest tool that would fit into my hand to do the job.

That was Jack's fault of course. We were both working at the same time in the workshop and he had left the chisel on the table next to me where I had unfortunately left my pottery tools as well.

Needless to say, I didn't pursue pottery very far, although it was nice for a while. It just didn't have the same impact or oomph! for me that woodworking did. Can you imagine taking a saw to a piece of clay the way you'd do for a piece of wood? Just not the same satisfaction.

¹ A term I've coined and which I tell you about in the next section.

Forward

Be it rigs, jigs, or power saws, if you're going to be doing any type of woodworking for any length of time, then you're going to need all of these tools and more. The thing with all of these though is the fact that if you're just beginning, then you really need only a few of them.

Everything can come later as you need it and depending on what you're doing. But how do you get started with your new hobby though? Even to decide first whether you want to continue woodworking, you need to first do something. And to do something you need tools.

Then you'll need somewhere to store your tools. And of course you need somewhere to work, and don't forget somewhere to keep your wood, and finished and unfinished projects.

Whoa! It sounds like you might be needing a whole lot of things and you're still not even sure whether you want to continue with this woodworking lark yet.

Or was that just me? Go on, tell me that from the minute you decided to take up woodworking you weren't overwhelmed by the myriad of tools in the stores.

Only whereas earlier you might have ignored the callings of these tools, now with the prospect of a new hobby under your belt you just can't wait to buy them and get started on your projects.

The best thing about this whole thing though is that so far you've had only the bare bones of an idea to get into woodworking and you want to set up shop! I know that's what I was about to do. Jack, ever the patient man, didn't even bat an eyelid at my enthusiastic plans.

Instead he allowed me to go through the remodeling of a new workshop, the addition of a new chest of drawers and armoire, and a new set of kitchen cabinets.

At which point when I slowed down he merely pointed to the stash of magazines and frames which I had collected just as enthusiastically for my last latest hobby – needlepoint.

A sheepish smile was my only answer, there was really nothing I could say, especially not with such overwhelming evidence stacked up against me. I

couldn't even deny any of the other various hobbies which I had tried – and put away – over the years.

I can't help it, I think "hobby-collecting" should be my official hobby, but since that's just too expensive, I think I'll stick to denying any such notion. Besides, if I became a hobby-collector that would be too much like admitting that I was a ditz who just liked to go from one thing to the other, without stopping in between.

So now that I've cleared up the fact that I'm not exactly a ditz (only sometimes!) we can perhaps hopefully move on to more pressing matters. Like whether or not I would be able to wheedle my long suffering spouse into helping me outfit my new woodworking workshop.

Well, since by that time I had as yet to take up even a hammer or saw in my hands to start off my hobby, I was quite wisely asked whether or not I wouldn't perhaps like to start out by wielding these items in an attempt at getting my feet wet.

Luckily ours is a chaotic household and the kids are grown enough not to need constant supervision. (And since they weren't of a college going age either, we didn't need to watch every penny that I would be spending!)

Anyway, the point of the whole earlier rambling discourse was to show you just what a dear the man is, and how he managed to rein me in, by first helping me to get a feel for my latest hobby. Ever so thoughtfully, the next day, he placed two books in front of me, and told me he'd go along with whatever I chose.

I know that might sound like an ultimatum, but it wasn't. It was Jack's attempts at getting me firmly back on the course I had charted and keeping me from skipping steps one through infinity and going straight to the one before the last.

Of the two books, one was a beginner's guide to woodworking and the other was a college prospectus with a bright green post-it sticking out of the top with the words, "Read me!" on it. I was naturally enough intrigued and duly opened the prospectus to the read-me page.

What I found delighted me because I had never even thought of this route to begin my woodworking. Jack had highlighted a series of potential woodworking courses which I might like to take, and which were all basically the equivalent of Woodworking 101.

I kept the woodworking book as well, and the very next day enrolled myself for two classes in beginner's woodworking. This worked well on two fronts, since now I was able to get a feel for woodworking without an initial costly

expenditure, and since I was also able to soak up everything I needed to learn firsthand.

Since it was still the early days of summer, Jack set up a temporary space for me to work on the back patio. This let me play around a bit more, and also gave me the excuse to buy at least a few of the basic tools.

And the outcome of this whole thing? Well, would you believe that while Jack was keeping me company during the nights when it was balmy enough for me to work outside, he also got the woodworking bug.

Suffice it to say that we now have a workshop where the both of us can work when the kids are busy elsewhere doing their own thing.

And unlike my previous hobbies, I didn't become bored with this one and walk away from it. Partly because Jack was also involved and that made it all the more fun, but mainly because it's just very satisfying to be able to make something from your own skill, and with your own two hands.

Pride in your work goes a long way to keeping you on a steady course, and it really is fascinating to watch a simple block of wood, or a few planks of lumber take shape into whatever it is that you want it to be.

Now that's power, and that's the reason you become so caught up in woodworking once you start. For my part anyway that was the reason, besides which I don't think I was meant for anything dainty like needlework, or anything with flair like painting.

There was just something satisfying on a very primal level of being able to wield all those tools and to watch your sweat and blood go into making that piece. And yes, I said sweat and blood, because that's what I meant.

If you're going to be working with tools for any length of time, you just can't get away from the fact that you will get cuts and bruises and a few other things. And as long as the "few other things" don't include anything too worrisome, then you're okay.

So the whole sweat-and-blood I mentioned was very real, but don't let that scare you off. You will become injured during the course of your woodworking. It's just a matter of making sure the injuries stay to a bare minimum and taking all the right safety precautions. These I've discussed in the section "Safety First" if you want to skip ahead to that section.

Introduction

Whenever you think of woodworking – if you ever do, that is – what’s the first thing that comes to your mind? Before I got involved in woodworking myself, I know that I always linked woodworking with high school and a few unfortunate experiences.

Quite a few people in fact might feel the same, but it doesn’t need to be that way. Woodworking can be a fun and interesting hobby, and in time you’ll come to look forward to the part of your day that you can devote to sharpening your woodworking skills.

What is woodworking though? It’s such a broad range of things that for the most part you’d probably always link it with fine or antique furniture. But woodworking can be so much more than just furniture, or refurbishing antiques.

When you start to learn woodworking, the first thing that you’ll make definitely won’t be a fine piece of furniture. And you definitely won’t want to start immediately on refurbishing any heirloom pieces either.

In fact, in the beginning you could probably get away with starting off your hobby with a prefabricated kit, if you like. It’s easy and because it’s prefabricated, you won’t have too much to do as a first step. Think of it along the lines of taking your first dip into the baby pool.

Buying a prefabricated kit is also good in that it saves you money. It might not be all that cheap, but if you don’t want to spend too much while you’re still in the deciding stage of your new hobby, then these kits are cheaper than buying your wood and a set of rudimentary tools.

On the other hand, if you’re like me, the first thing you’ll want to do is to outfit your new woodworking workshop, then buy your pieces of wood and your tools.

After that of course, you’ll either go around frantically trying to find someone to tell you what to do next, or you’ll do the sensible thing and buy a beginner’s book to go with your wood and your new tools.

Then again, you could of course just get right into the heart of the matter and use enthusiasm instead of knowledge or skill, and turn out something or other that still resembles a block of wood.

Yes, despite the fact that I had only a very rudimentary workshop, and only the barest of tools at my disposal. And despite the fact that I also had a

beginner's book at my disposal, and was also enrolled in woodworking classes, I went ahead and attacked – and that's the only word for it – a completely harmless piece of wood with gusto and happy vigor.

The outcome was a testament of what not to do, but I was impatient and the classes were only starting in two weeks. I couldn't wait that long! The suspense would do me in. And yes, although I had been reading up on the book that Jack had given me, it still didn't make too much of a difference.

That piece of wood wasn't a total loss though, and it taught me what not to do and also that my tools weren't the right ones. However, it taught me one, even more valuable lesson. And that was that knowledge and theory were no substitute for experience, and skill.

Luckily for any more poor innocent blocks of wood, I was momentarily preoccupied with something else for the next two weeks, and by then I had already started my woodworking class. Otherwise you can be sure that I would have been at another piece without any further delay!

What is woodworking?

I could probably give you a very boring description of what woodworking is and what it encompasses, but I thought I'd save that until later on in the book, when you're at a point where you simply have to read the whole thing to finish it off. But that's only because I'm such a nice person, you understand!

Is there any good way to explain to someone what woodworking is? I find it to be along the lines of explaining to a blind man what a rainbow looks like. Unless he's seen and knows what color is, to the blind man, a rainbow will have no meaning in his life.

So, just like the rainbow I could try and explain to you what woodworking is. But just like the blind man, you won't be able to fully grasp what it is I'm trying to say. You might have a slightly better idea but you won't be any the wiser for it.

The easiest thing would be for me to tell you that wood working is exactly what it says: the working of wood. And in case that's not too clear I'll tell you that it involves the use of wood and various tools, and that you can carve figures, or make your own furniture.

I'll go one better and tell you that the oak table in your dining room, and the cherry wood rocking chair in your living room, and just about any other piece of well turned furniture was crafted by a skilled woodworker. And thing about that is, that although you might now have a slight idea of

what it might be, you still haven't grasped the whole concept as yet. And until you try it for the first time, and turn out your first piece of woodworking wonder, you can't truly understand what it is. But you can try.

If you take away just one thing from this section, don't let it be that woodworking is about making furniture, or about making ornaments. It's not about marquetry or even parquetry, and it's not about inlaying or lathe work, or hand tools and power tools.

It's not about a lot of things, but it is most definitely one thing. And that is, that woodworking is an art all by itself.

The Aim

Having now sorted out, quite satisfactorily what woodworking is and isn't, I feel that we can now move on to greater things, namely that of woodworking itself. Before we do that however, there are a few things that you'll want to know about this book. Like what you can expect out of it.

I could start out by telling you what it's not about, but I won't bore you with those details since that could go on for pages. I could tell you what it is about, but then you already know that. It's about woodworking, nothing more nothing less.

And this is where we depart from conventional norms and head off into a different part of woodworking. I'm not going to presume to teach you how-to woodworking techniques without the benefit of actually being there with you and showing you what you need to know.

That's just not mine or Jack's way, we prefer a more hands on method and we practice what we preach. Besides, there are more than enough books out there whose authors will take you step by step through the ins and outs of woodworking for the beginner.

My aim instead, is to give you as much of the necessary information you'll eventually need as possible, stuff that you might normally have had to sift through more than one book to get at. I'm not claiming that it's all in here or that I've managed to cover the whole of woodworking.

That would be beyond me and the scope of this book. In fact it might require more than one book. So instead of handing you a series of how-to woodworking books I ended up with this, my piece de resistance.

Very simply, what I have tried to do is give you an overview of what you might expect from woodworking, and interspersed all of that with various terms and phrases which you might hear from time to time. In other words

you can think of this as sort of a beginner's guide to speaking woodworking!

Finishing meant a lot more than I thought it did, joinery was a whole new world, and let's not even start with mortise and tenon joints. And what was I supposed to do with a biscuit cutter in woodworking? Despite my enthusiasm, it was all very confusing.

And although I can now understand, and converse in this different language with ease, I know how difficult it is for the beginner. However, don't expect to become instantly knowledgeable or a genius about woodworking just because you've read this book.

Don't get discouraged though, you need to start somewhere and I can personally guarantee that there's no better place to start than at the beginning. Or if you like, at the ending where I've included a handy "Glossary of Woodworking Terms" section for you to use.

Woodworking 101

The minute I even thought about doing this book, I knew that one of my titles was going to be Woodworking 101. There was no question about that. So here we are, in the section I planned before anything else, and now I barely know what to say to you.

Since I knew that I didn't want to go into any detail on techniques and the like, what could I do here then, that would be of benefit to you. It took some doing but I went back to the days when I first started and tried to remember what it was that I needed to know about most.

And it was then that I realized that I needed to know just about everything. Well, since that wouldn't do in this book, I decided instead to cover what I think of as the basics. It still won't be easy to get your head around woodworking, but it will help.

And once you get the hang of it and once you can wrap your head around the number of odd terms that you'll come across in woodworking then you should okay. The really difficult part for me at least was trying to make it all come together for me

The Basics

These can be considered as the basic steps necessary to start any woodworking project. They very rarely change even as you gain in experience. The only difference between an experienced woodworker and you is that you need to go through the list of things to do. They do it automatically.

The steps are the same for simple projects as they are for the more difficult ones. You might add or omit a few as time goes on and you become more comfortable with woodworking, but for now you can go through these to get a feel for doing a project on your own.

You might want a prefabricated kit to begin with in which case most of these steps are probably not necessary, but if you go through them anyway, you can see what it is I'm talking about. Over time you will find your feet and find your own style.

Here though I've gone with the premise that you'll be making your own sawhorse first of all, and that's why I keep mentioning it – not because I'm fixated on it!

Design /Plan

For your first project, start with something simple. I always feel that the best place to start is with your own design. If you're not comfortable with that however, you can always find any amount designs available in various books and even on the internet.

If you're taking a woodworking class then you'll be settled on that score and will have a design. But if you're going to plan your own design, don't worry, there is a best place for you to start from, the beginning. I know, that wasn't funny, but at least it's true.

To make it easier for you I have one suggestion to make. Don't start with grand ideas of making a Queen Anne coffee table or even an armoire. Start with something like a saw bench, or a simple workhorse.

Once you know what you want, then make a rough sketch to see whether you can get your idea down on paper. If you have any particular requirements work them into the design, and then set about drawing a better guide.

This beginning phase might be difficult and if you need help don't be ashamed to admit it. There are many experts you can talk with and you can even find them in internet forums.

Get the Necessaries

Next decide on what items you'll need to complete your project. I'm talking about tools, sandpaper, lacquers, nails, safety equipment. If you don't have it then you'll need to get it.

If you're just beginning then, you'll probably need most of those things so make a list beforehand so you don't miss out on anything important. And the next important necessary item on your list should be your lumber. You probably want to start out with something simple here too.

Pine is the easiest to get and the easiest for you to start with. As you progress you can decide whether you need hardwoods or softwoods, and which type of wood you want.

Safety Check

After you get everything that you need together, double check that you have all the necessary safety equipment with you. Since you're just starting

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