Lake Charles **Woodworkers Club, Inc.** September 2000

AUGUST MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Julian Dondis, owner of Greengate Garden Center, was both our host and speaker at the August meeting at his home garden. Lee Frazier updated us on the Millennium Park project and asked for volunteers to construct several signs for the park. He brought an archeticual rendering of the signage.

Lee (*Lagnappe Woodworks*, specializing in outdoor furniture) and Barry Humphus discussed garden furniture construction techniques prior to our tour of the garden. Barry went over several joinery techniques relevant to outdoor furniture, pointing out that angled through mortise and tendons provide better drainage of a joint should water intrude into the joint. Glues should be either epoxy or water resistant polymer based (such as Tite Bond II). Wood choices vary, but teak, cypress and white oak are the typical choices for outdoors. Mahogany, redwood and cedar are also acceptable choices. Fasteners should be coated, brass or stainless deck screws. Finishes can be exterior paint, poly or oil, but always use UV resistant products. It is important to paint or treat the bottom of legs to prevent water wicking into end grain, however, if the piece is sitting on very well drain ground, Lee pointed out, this is not an issue. Barry brought an oak deck chair as an example of UV resistant oil finishes (*Watco* Exterior) and also passed out a few plans for outdoor projects he's built.

Julian Dondis has some 40 years experience at gardening and garden design at Greengate. His home garden is in effect an experiment about what can be accomplished in the Lake Area.

Many tropical plants adorn the Dondis garden with such varieties as plumb bago, lily of the Nile, African iris and ruella. Especially nice were the Mexican Sky flower and arboreta fern. Julian pointed out a great ground cover in dwarf Monkey grass and showed off a great Louisiana sable palm. He also has Japanese plumb and Noble laurel. His Oriental magnolia has star shaped flowers in creamy white. Lots of red cana and asparagus Miori complemented several areas of the garden.

An especially serene area is the patio area. Overlooked by the kitchen, Julian experiments here with zammia palm, card board palm and dwarf Japanese maple. A large crepe myrtle features blooms going up to the second floor of the home. This tree has inspired your editor to prune his big crepe and attempt the same effect.

Julian pointed out that one of the great little tools of any yard is a standard water timer for the faucet. These are inexpensive items (about $11.00 at Lowes, Stines and Home Depot) and are insurance against letting the water run all night. George Kuffel says they last four to six years.

John L. Fontenot brought one of his beautiful turnings for us to admire. It is a wine goblet. Now he needs to make about five more for a set. Eltee Thibodeau showed off some of his scroll work — this time a napkin holder suitable for any table.

TAKE THE SPINDLE SANDER TO THE WORK.

The Porter-Cable 121 oscillating spindle sander brings a fresh approach to power sanding, giving you the might of a bench top tool in the palm of your hand. Well, two hands, actually. For large work pieces, where bringing the work to the bench isn't practical, simply bring the P-C 121 to the work. Its 6-amp, variable-speed motor — a feature not found on most bench top sanders, oscillates the abrasive drum at 38-60 cycles per minute, while turning the drum from 2400-3600 rpm. A jointer-like detachable fence even helps you sand straight lines on crooked cuts. All of this would be fine if you were a cabinetmaker or carpenter, but what's in it for woodworkers? Porter-Cable officials say you can mount the 121 in any router table (its mounting-hole pattern matches P-C's popular 690-series router), and turn it into a regular bench top unit. Expect the Porter-Cable 121 to sell for about $250 when it arrives in stores early this Fall.

ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER

You've seen full-size lathes, and you've seen mini-lathes. Now, look at Delta's new "Midi-Lathe" (model 46-250). This 1/2 hp, multi-speed (500-3700rpm) lathe comes with everything you see here: spur center, live center, tool rest, and more. You can turn pieces up to 10" in diameter, and the Midi's bed length of over 33" gives you 14 1/2" between centers.

Unlike a mini-lathe that you might outgrow as you get hooked on turning, the 46-259 grows with you. Add the optional bed extension for about $50, and you've got a full 37" between centers. The basic Midi-Lathe will sell for about $330 when it comes on the market later this Fall.

COMING UP.....

September 9th, Saturday — Millenium Park
Project at the LC Civic Center Grounds

SERIES ON WOODS

Over the next several months, we're going to give you information on a variety of useful woods. They'll go alphabetically, so if you want information on Zebra wood, just be patient, we'll get there. In general, we'll describe the wood, show a photo of the tree it comes from and give you as many charactistics and uses as we have time and space in the newsletter.

BASSWOOD: CARVERS MAKE A BEELINE

Among the most important of America's nectar-producing trees, the basswood makes itself at home along city streets as well as in the forest. In cityscapes, nurserymen call the hardy, decorative tree American linden. But in the woods, it's basswood, beetree, lime, or whitewood. Regardless of its name, basswood has proven its value.

Indians of New York state's Iroquois nation carved ceremonial masks from the sapwood of basswood trees, then split the green-wood masks from the trunk. The gummy inner bark provided bandages. From its dried fibers they wove rope.

Beekeepers today appreciate the quality of basswood-derived honey. In summer, the tree's fragrant flower clusters provide a strong-flavored nectar. Basswood stock also becomes the very boxes in which the honeycombs are stored and shipped.

The forest-products industry lumps the four native North American basswood species together in the marketplace, for there are few differences between them, except where they grow. *Tilia americana*, of the northern Great Lakes states, provides most of the basswood harvested.

In a setting of mixed hardwoods in the well-drained ground of a stream valley, basswood can grow to 90' tall with a straight trunk 3' in diameter. But because basswood sprouts from the stump, it's often seen as a clump of three or four smaller trunks.

Young basswood trees feature light gray, smooth bark, while that of older trees becomes darker and deeply ridged. In late winter, small reddish-brown buds appear on branch twigs. Their nutlike flavor signals that you've found a basswood tree.

When leaves form, they have a distinctive heart shape with lightly serrated edges. The leaves also display an unusual trait: The undersides, not the tops, are shiny. Clusters of sweet-smelling white or cream-colored flowers follow the leaves.

Weighing about 26 pounds per cubic foot air-dried, the wood has a tan color, and in some cases may be nearly white. You'll find the grain of this soft hardwood straight, close, and normally featureless. Occasional basswood stock may display some dark stain, which doesn't affect the wood's performance but may mar a project. Dry basswood is very stable.

Carvers prefer basswood because it holds detail well, doesn't split, has straight-grain, and carves easily. They usually prefer air-dried, slow-grown northern stock.

Basswood also can become drawer stock, hidden furniture parts, and painted items. In industry, it plays a role as boxes and food containers. As veneer, it can underlie fine cabinet woods in plywood. This light, versatile wood also works for picture frames, toys, and millwork such as window sashes. It even makes fine turning wood.

Many large hardwood retailers outside its natural range carry basswood in board form. Specialty suppliers offer basswood carving blocks and blanks.

Expect to pay around $2 per board foot for select and better 4/4 stock, and about $3 and more per board foot for thicker boards. Veneer isn't available at retail.

Both northern and southern varieties of basswood show little contrast between early wood and late wood, although northern basswood provides tighter-grained, finer-textured stock. Carvers also will want to avoid basswood with mineral stains, unless the project will be painted.

Turning: Woodturners will find basswood superb for food containers, since it imparts no odor or taste.

Machining: Basswood's low-hardness rating makes it ideal for hand tools. Power planing basswood poses no problems. You'll find jointing effortless, too. Because the wood is dense, ripping requires a rip-set blade with 24 teeth or less to avoid burning. In crosscutting, it won't tear out or chip. Use sharp bits and don't rush the router when shaping basswood, as its tight grain and density does tend to burn (although burns easily sand off). Unlike some other lightweight, straight-grained woods (such as redwood), basswood fastens well with nails or screws. And it's not necessary to predrill (though recommended).

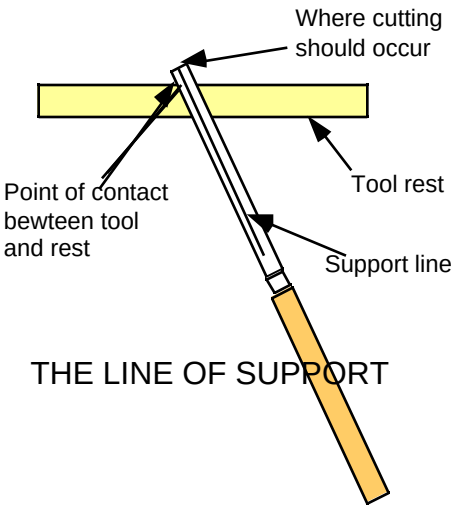
Sanding basswood proves to be a soothing, smoothing task. But when it comes to staining, blotching can result. If uneven staining appears on a test piece, apply wood conditioner before staining. Remember, though, even wood conditioner won't subdue discolored streaks in the wood.

For stability in use, always work wood with a maximum moisture content of 8 percent. Feed straight-grained wood into planer knives at a 90° angle. To avoid tearing, feed figured wood or twisted grain at a slight angle (about 15°), and take shallow cuts of about 1/32". For clean cuts, rip with a rip-profile blade that has 24-32 teeth. Smooth crosscutting requires at least a 40-tooth blade. Avoid using twist drills. They tend to wander and cause breakout. Use brad-point bits and a backing board under the workpiece to reduce tearout. Drill pilot holes for screws. Rout with sharp, preferably carbide-tipped, bits and take shallow passes to avoid burning. Carving softwoods, and a soft hardwood like basswood, means fairly steep gouge bevels—greater than 20°.

Next time: Beech

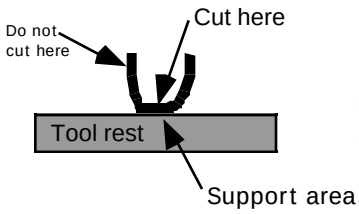
TURNING SQUARE STOCK

To get a piece of stock from square to round on a lathe, wood turners turn to gouges. Using one properly makes it a quick and easy task. Remember the following advice, and you'll be able to do it, too.



Cut with the line of support: When a turning gouge's steel circular shaft touches the tool rest, only a small section actually contacts it. This is the supported area. Trying to cut with any part of the gouge to the left or right of this area can result in grabbing of the work and damage to the wood, or worse.

You'll see this effect if you rest a gouge on your workbench. Hold the handle as you normally would, then press down on the left or right side of the gouge—the areas not contacting the bench — the tool twists. Now push on the part of the gouge in contact with the table. Nothing happens because that part of the tool is supported by the table. (cutting on the lathe with a gouge works the same way. Use the supported area and all you have to do is guide the tool.



With the gouge on the tool rest, imagine a line. From the handle to the cutting edge passing through the point of contact between the tool and the tool rest. That's your support line, as shown in the drawing. Where it reaches the cutting edge is where the tool should contact the wood. If you roll the tool left or right, the line moves and the point of contact with the wood moves with it.

Controlling cut depth: Lowering the gouge's cutting edge onto the upper surface of the workpiece gives you greater control over the depth of cut and lets the tool slip. Start with the handle lowered and the cutting edge above the work. Then slowly raise the handle.

First, the heel of the tool, then the bevel edge comes in contact with the wood. You'll feel it, and know precisely where the wood is in relation to the cutting edge. Continue raising the handle slowly, lowering the cutting edge into the wood. With very little practice, you'll be able to produce paper-thin shavings under precise control.

Keep the bevel in contact: Much to the surprise of many wood turners, the best results happen when both the cutting edge and the tool's bevel contact the wood at the same time. When the tool's bevel is flat against the wood, the edge makes a clean cut and the depth of cut is controlled by the tool. Raising the handle creates a deeper cut because the bevel no longer controls its depth.

Practice locating this bevel controlled position. Keep the suggestions below in mind. You'll find woodturning becomes safer, easier, faster, and produces better results.

Always wear a face shield or eye protection. This will protect you from flying chips or other objects imbedded in the wood (especially green wood).

Before you turn the lathe on, check its speed setting. Out-of-round pieces generally require slow speeds, such as 800 rpm. For later shaping cuts, speed up the lathe to 1,800-2,500 rpm.

For better tool stability, position the tool rest within 1/2" or closer to the workpiece. To test for clearance, rotate the work by hand with the lathe turned off. From *Wood Online.*

HONDURAN TRIP

Recently, we visited Trujillo (pronounced true-He-yo), Honduras. Honduras is the primary source we have today for red mahogany. Honduran mahogany comes from vast tree farms — much like the pine tree farms you see just north of Lake Charles. Mahogany from the rain forests is considered endangered. Mahogany is used for almost every type of construction — from houses to fine furniture, carving and general construction. We saw some of the old growth mahogany trees in a trip to a mountain rain forest just a couple of miles from Trujillo.

The cabinet work we saw was truly lovely. What really got our attention was at Trujillo's Villa Brinkley Hotel where owner Peggy Brinkley had traded a long-term stay for extensive carving of nearly every support beam, entry way, headboard and even the covers for the menus in the restaurant. The carving was done by Renaldo Fernandez, now a famous wood carver living in New York. He spent 18 months creating this master work and even carved a full size portrait of himself which can be seen in the restaurant. The carving subjects are all of classic Mayan origin — heads, faces, and symbols done in the style of the ancient Mayan culture.

At a private home, we saw the work of a local master carpenter and cabinet maker that also included the regional carving styles. His work for Honduran land developer Berkie Campbell (former first lady of New Mexico) included cabinets, a five foot wide headboard carved into a mermaid, chairs and benches, window casement work, framing and other objects that were done in the local mahogany. All of his work was of a quality comparable to the best you see in the U.S. *Barry Humphus*.