

Artist Profile

## Grand Master of Maui Woodworking, German John Wittenburg

**Peter Naramore**

If one man were elected to represent Woodworking on Maui it would have to be John Wittenburg, popularly known as German John. His towering physical presence and decades of massively built koa furniture cast a long shadow on the Valley Isle.

I had come out to Kahakaloa to visit John at his remarkably beautiful and unique home with the intention of separating facts from myths surrounding this enigmatic man.

John, who was born in the German town of Wittenburg in East Prussia, immigrated to Montreal, Canada as a young man more than 50 years ago. One of his earliest woodworking experiences there was providing occupational therapy through woodshop for inmates in a mental hospital. Further west he did a stint building 200,000 gallon redwood water tanks. He later found employment as a carpenter along the west coast of British Columbia far north of Vancouver helping to build a shipping port.

The stories go on and just get better as we sit in his book lined office surrounded by antique clocks, rifles, maps and all manner of hand made curiosities. A standout is a masterfully built secretary desk complete with secret compartments and a centrally mounted clock from a vintage German ship. The entire piece is constructed campaign style with fancy rope work handles and a detachable stand in preparation for rapid deployment.

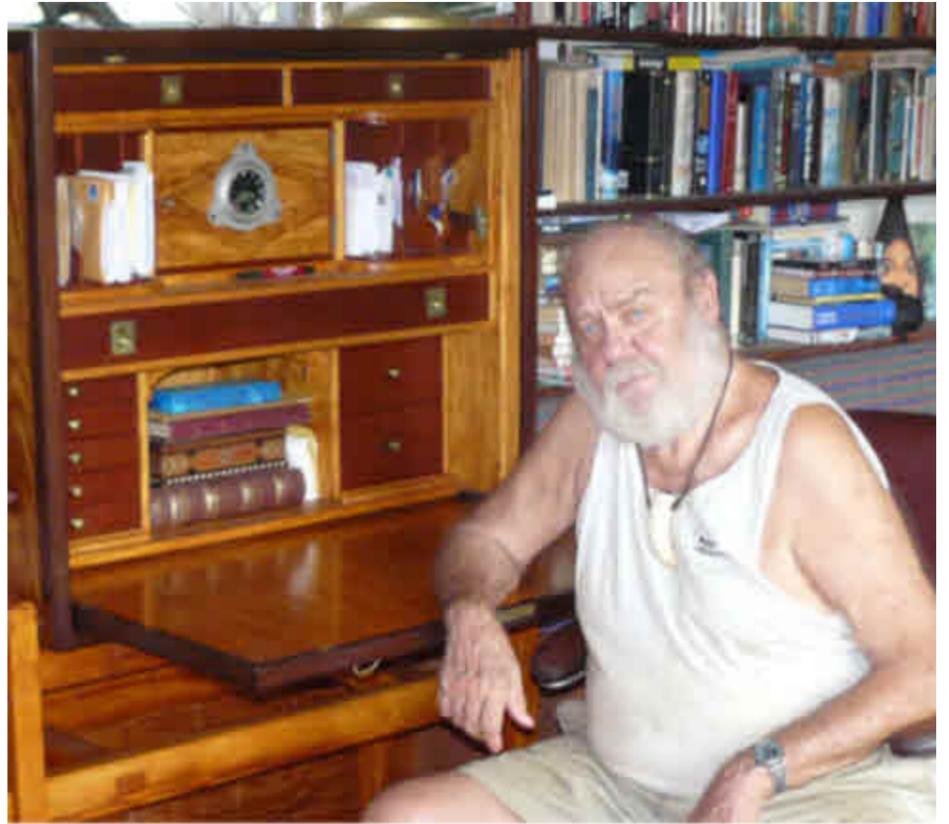
John joined the US Navy and was stationed in Hawaii from 1958 to 1962 with the intention of becoming an American citizen after his cruise

on a destroyer. In a remarkably brief four years he attained the rank of Seaman First Class and worked on the ship as a Quartermaster (Navigator). Honorably discharged in Honolulu, he attained citizenship and soon found employment with Lokahi Pacific building new high rise hotels in Waikiki.

In 1966 John moved to Maui where the seeds of his future began to take root. Working with wood had been a part of his life since childhood. As a boy he had haunted the workshop of a country wagon maker. In his itinerant teenage years he worked in Bavaria carving "wooden Madonna's for five marks a piece". He earned his journeyman's papers as a cabinetmaker in Germany in 1952. As he sat on Maui's shore carving a mermaid into a small block of driftwood he realized that woodworking was once again to become his passion and destiny. I turned the very same carving over in my hands while listening to John's deep, booming voice recant the details of his fascinating life.

Carpentry and construction jobs continued to pay the bills in his early years on Maui. "There wasn't a whole lot of employment options in those days", he said, but a six month stint working on two Maui made films of Michener tales, "The Hawaiians" and "Hawaii", did provide John with his "dream job". An old Danish wooden cargo ship, "The Carthaginian", which was idling in the Lahaina roadstead, was purchased by the film company and converted to asquare rigger. In need of an experienced navigator and seaman to take charge of its operat

**German John, pg2**



German John Wittenburg in his office among a lifetime collection of knowledge, cherished mementoes, and finely crafted furnishings that are the hallmark of this amazing gentleman

**Shaun Fleming**

### Master Craftsman David Marks Gilding Seminar

In September, the Maui Woodworkers Guild brought Master Craftsman David Marks to Maui for an intriguing workshop on gilding. David Marks is a professional furniture maker and gilder from Northern California. The event was held at the Hui No'eau Children's Center. On hand were approximately 18 inquisitive students of varied artistic and professional backgrounds, from woodworkers to ceramic workers and painters.

Gilding is the craft of covering a surface with gold leaf or other metals. As David explained, one can apply gold leaf, Dutch metal, silver and copper to a wide variety of objects and surfaces including furniture, rocks, shells, wood, ceramics and tile. Chemical patinas can then be achieved by oxidizing the metal leaf with mild acids. David displayed a number of his gilded turnings and wood samples, all finished with various metals that resulted in brilliant colors, textures and abstract patterns. He also provided his portfolio for us to view.

The workshop was very hands-on, as each participant was supplied with four sample boards to create their own pieces of art. Packets of Dutch metal, silver, and copper along with various application tools were made available, and David patiently walked the class through the process of first applying the leaf then patinating it using a variety of chemical tarnishing agents that resulted in array of magical patterning and fabulous colorings from bolds to blues and crimsons. Several students had brought along uncompleted ceramic works on which they were able to practice the gilding process. All-in-all this was a great learning event.

The delight of the participants was very evident as the most unique piece created was one that was able to walk away on its own ... a very industrious student, covered in leaf flake, grinning from ear to ear.

By the end of the day, participants had gained an appreciation and enough knowledge of the processes and resources for materials that they can now engage in their own gilding practices here on Maui.

More information on David Marks and his craft can be found at <http://www.djmarks.com/>.

**Ricardo Vasquez**

### Woodworking Techniques - Template Making

An accurate template of irregular shaped walls, inside openings or other unique projects such as laying up veneer for mega-yacht helm stations is invaluable to have when doing custom work. A good template can allow for a tight fit without the use of scribe molding which is desirable in higher end work.

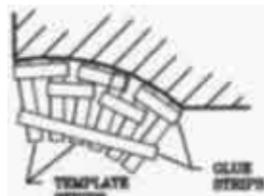
I use an easy, quick technique for making templates that serve as a reference during layout and construction and that lessens installation time.

I use standard 1/8" door skin material ripped into 1 1/4" strips. On the job site I use a pair of laminate shears to cut the strips and a hot glue gun to adhere the strips together. I keep the template strips on the same plane; not overlapping to increase accuracy. Secondary strips are glued on top of the template strips to hold them in place and strengthen the template. Labeling the template is critical.

For example: for an inside opening I would cut pieces of the door skin material to fit tight to the walls around the perimeter of the opening. 4-6" strips would span the corners to hold the template strips in place and depending on the size I might add more strips to make the template sturdy. I mark which side is the top so that I can correctly orient the template back in the shop.



For curved walls or to fit around obstructions you can cut part way thru the template strips and bend it to fit or lay the strips in a spoke fashion to fit to the radius. Again, glue strips on top to hold in place.



The more you use this technique the more you will appreciate its usefulness.

## Da Prez Veep Sez:

**Peter Naramore**

Aloha Fellow Woodworkers. As you may know, our Guild founder and President, Mats Fogelvik is leaving us. He and his wife, Maira, are building a house on the Big Island where Mats will also relocate his business and workshop by early 2008. To say that he will be missed is an understatement.

Incredibly, it has been nearly seven years since the formation of The Maui Woodworker's Guild (MWG.) and over that time Mats has been the essential root of its perpetuation and maintenance. It is our intention and challenge to use Mats' departure as an opportunity to reenergize the Guild toward positive development and continued growth. To meet these challenges, Board members and volunteers are pursuing other goals set for the MWG earlier this year:

- 1) After our successful show at the Hui last December and January, members of the MWG board met with Hui No'eau staff to propose an alliance. John Hoxie, managing director, and the staff of the Hui enthusiastically supported the concept. Along with numerous potential benefits envisioned by the meeting, a major long term goal of the MWG Board, a permanent meeting place, was realized. As of June 2007 our bimonthly meetings are being held at Hui No'eau's new Children's Art Studio on the lower part of the property accessible from Kaluanui Road.
- 2) In 2004, a woodworking studio was to be built on the Hui No'eau Visual Arts Center grounds. MWG committed to help plan and run the studio as a teaching facility. Those plans were shelved later that year as the majority of attention was shifted to the task of raising money to purchase the property from Maui Pineapple Co. Now, with ownership of the property a reality, the Hui No'eau organization has been forced to focus on the more pressing need to construct a new ceramics facility. The new woodworking shop, for which considerable funds are earmarked, will have to wait. Hopefully, MWG participation will be a key element in its design and use to the benefit of both organizations.
- 3) More immediate and exciting though, is preliminary planning for our second joint presentation of "Inspired Hands 2008" next December. It isn't too early to begin thinking about what you may wish to design and enter the show. The usual guidelines will pertain.
- 4) Another major goal achieved is this inaugural newsletter. To be published on a bi-monthly basis it is intended to provide a link between us and serve whatever other functions anyone can imagine. We are open to submissions of articles, news, notes, items for sale, want ads and pretty much anything else that pertains to woodworking on Maui. Please contact our editor, Al Rabold at 878-8525 or [arabold@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:arabold@hawaii.rr.com).
- 5) We are planning to increase the MWG web presence by expanding our current site and offering a page for each member in good standing with extra pages available at a nominal fee. Also under consideration is a Chat Room for improved networking and problem solving and a classified ad page.
- 6) We are actively seeking means to increase membership and encourage participation from our existing members. The Guild is a group effort. The larger the group, the greater the result. Please share your thoughts and ideas on how best to achieve this with your Board members. Also, anyone interested in joining the current steering committee please contact any existing Board member.
- 7) There will be new Board members elected early next year.

The next lively and informative meeting at The Hui Children's Art Studio will be Saturday, December 15th from 3 to 5 PM. The theme of that meeting will be Wood Turning. There will be demonstrations and discussion led by some highly experienced turners. See you there.

**German John**

ion, John stepped in. With his gaze firmly fixed on the horizon, John leaned back in his groaning desk chair to better visualize his cherished bygone days aboard the Carthaginian when telephone poles were erected in Maalaea harbor to simulate mid 19th century Honolulu.

In 1967 he purchased the dramatic property along the waterfront at the foot of Kahakuloa Head where he now lives. He always intended to move out there but it took many years for the classic hand made home, workshop and out-buildings to be completed. Meanwhile there was the beach at Kihei.

In 1970 John moved his workshop into an antiquated naval building on the makai side of North Kihei road (now occupied by the Pacific Whale Foundation. In lieu of rent he provided the government with boat repair and carpentry as needed. He married and built his home nearby where he began raising his two sons. His signature style custom built tables, chairs, beds and all manner of wooden accessories began to flow from this early workshop where John often employed enthusiastic helpers. As time went by, he gained a well earned reputation for solid, honest koa furniture that was truly built to last. Clients usually returned and often became friends. "I realized that I usually left money on the table in most business transactions" he said, "but I always got by and was never lacking work". Looking through his vast portfolio of furniture pieces, it's easy to verify that statement.

After our lunch of beer and "refugee stew" eaten in the kitchen that feels more like the deck of a ship overlooking the bay, we head up to the workshop via the battered golf cart that stands in for John's failing knees. A couple of new, small scale projects are all but complete, needing only photography. His skills and the creative muse have not left him. John is cautiously optimistic about his future saying only that he has turned a corner and it looks like clear sailing ahead.

**Editor's Note:**

*I was especially pleased when Peter called me about doing this interview with German John. I first met John at the second Woodworker's Guild meeting and he, frankly, intimidated the be-jeepers out of me. I had no idea what to make of him! Over the years though, I've come to know and respect John as a completely amazing person. I'm very proud to think of him as a friend.*

*Every conversation with John is an adventure. No matter what he is saying or how he is saying it, if you're smart enough to pay attention, I guarantee you will come away with a hysterical anecdote, a proverbial "pearl of wisdom" or a bit of woodworking technique that will make you a better person as well as a better woodworker.*  
- Al

**Mats Fogelvik**

**Na La'au o Hawai'i, HFIA Woodshow 2007**

The Hawaii Forest Industry Association hosted its 15th annual wood show for two weeks in September. This is the first year the show was presented in a real gallery, the Honolulu Academy of Arts. Finding a good venue has always been a challenge for the HFIA. Hopefully, the it can continue at this venue for years to come. It has been a progression from a "county fair" atmosphere to something more refined and able to showcase the art of woodworking in a more appropriate setting. This year the show consisted of 97 pieces by 58 woodworkers.

Na La'au o Hawai'i is the only statewide woodworking show, and although off-island, it is a great opportunity for Maui's woodworkers to showcase our art. The Guild played an important part in making this show a success. David Marks was sponsored by the Guild to come to Hawai'i to hold gilding workshops and be one of the jurors.



"One with the Wind, Becoming the Wind"  
First Place Sculpture by Dennis Holzer

The winner of "Best of Show" was Tai Lake from Hawaii, with his entry table, "N.Y, N.Y.". First place for sculpture went to our own Dennis Holzer, with his large monkey pod sculpture, "One with the Wind, Becoming the Wind".

Other entrants from Maui Woodworker's Guild were Shaun Fleming, Al Rabold, Tom Calhoun, John Wittenburg, Robert Lippoth, Gerald Filipelli and I. Images of the whole show are posted on our web site, [mauiguild.com/Shows/HFIA2007.html](http://mauiguild.com/Shows/HFIA2007.html)

**Editor's Corner**

**"MWG Shavings" Newsletter Finally Arrives**

The Maui Woodworker's Guild Board is pleased and excited to finally have a "real" newsletter for our members and the community at large. Hopefully, it will prove entertaining, informative and useful to all.

Thank you to those members who volunteered (or allowed themselves to be drafted) to write articles for this issue. I have to say you all did a terrific job. The quality of your writing made my job a pleasure. A special thanks goes to Mark Beauchamp who got us enough ads to offset most of the cost of printing the hard copies needed for distribution.

This first issue represents what we on the Board envisioned but we really need your suggestions. Its important to us that we give you a "McDonald's" style newsletter - "Have it your way!" Please feel free to contact me ([arabold@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:arabold@hawaii.rr.com) or 878-8525) or any other Board member with your suggestions.

So, what did we learn from this first edition? First and foremost, it will only happen if the writers are committed to do what they say by the assigned deadline. Second, it takes about 3,000 words of input, 3 or 4 pictures and a few business card size ads to print a double-sided 11 inch by 17 inch newsletter. Third, a page of input using 10 point Times Roman fonts, single line spaced and 1 1/2 inch margins yields about 750 words. This means we need at least four articles that long for every issue we print.

Why did I just go through all that? Well, printing a newsletter is a real commitment because it is a regularly scheduled event, hence the articles and their associated deadlines are very important. Because your Board members are giving so much of their time to running the Guild, its up to you, the membership-at-large to pony up and volunteer if you want this publication to continue!

The big question then is what do we need to make it happen? I think there are a number of items and I'm sure you all can identify even more.

- 1) We need your participation. Volunteer to write, suggest an article, participate in distribution, sell an ad, whatever. Just participate!
- 2) It would be terrific to have two or three reporters willing to commit to have at least one article ready for every deadline. They can either write it themselves or solicit an article from others then assist as needed to assure that they are ready on time.
- 3) Someone to sell commercial ads like Mark did so successfully.
- 4) Someone to handle member's ads for the "MWG Swap Meet" column.
- 5) Someone to handle printing and distribution. Finally, how should you submit an article? The short answer is "anyway you can." I can convert formats, scan, or OCR just about anything. The preferred answer is via email in either Microsoft Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) using 10 point Times Roman fonts and 1 1/2 in margins. Photos should be jpeg format, pre-edited and supplied at not more than 96 dpi. Hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together! - Al -

**Classified**

**MWG Swap Meet**

Ads can be placed in the MWG Swap Meet column by members in good standing only. The cost is \$5.00 for the first two lines plus \$1.00 each for additional line.

Photographs may be included for an additional \$10.00 each. They must be 2 3/8 inches square maximum, RGB or grayscale jpeg files at a maximum of 150dpi.

Commercial ads will not be accepted. Only individual items (tools, wood, materials, etc) may be advertised in this column

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Cut Along Line

**MWG Membership Application/Renewal**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

BUS. NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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WEB SITE: \_\_\_\_\_

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|------------------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>May we publish?</b> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |
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| Bus. Ph:               |            |           |
| Cell Ph:               |            |           |
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**Please Remit:**

**Dues:** \_\_\_\_\_ **\$50.00**

**Extra Web Pages:** (Qty \_\_\_ @ \$25 each): \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL** (Check No \_\_\_\_\_): \_\_\_\_\_

Membership in the Maui Woodworker's Guild includes participation in all activities, show entries at member rates, bi-monthly meetings and newsletters and a one page display about you and your work on the MWG Website ([mauiguild.com](http://mauiguild.com)). Send photos and text to the Guild web address. Additional web pages may be purchased at \$25.00 each per year. Participation in Guild activities is expected of all members. Membership runs from January to January and is \$50.00 per year. Please include your check for the appropriate amount with this application. Mail to: **Maui Woodworker's Guild, P.O. Box 305, Makawao, HI 96768.**

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