

Artist Profile

A True Renaissance Man, Maui's William Vitarelli

Peter Naramore

William Vitarelli, known to many on Maui as 'Vit', or 'Rubak' is a true Renaissance man. He has lived multiple lives that continue to unfold to this day in a journey that began in the early twentieth century. My initial impression of an off beat, passionate, independent architectural consultant wildly waving his hardened working man's hands to better express his ideas was not incorrect. We first met in Haiku in 1978 where I had been hired by a client to provide creative carpentry, cabinets, counters, interior and exterior staircases, the front door and more. Vit, who was the architect on the project, pushed me to go further. "Carve that newel post, make the outdoor stairs curved", "Make it different, make it unique", he would say. He could as easily have been describing the course of his own long and fascinating life.

He was born in Manhattan New York, Third Avenue, Greenwich village. "It was a slum", he flatly declares, "You had to be on good terms with the Mafia in order to get anything done". His first impressions of woodworking were

in Kindergarten at four years old. His teacher had many craftsmen's blocks, some carved into acrobatic figures with jointed limbs. It made a lasting impression. By the eighth grade in Yonkers New York, he proudly remembers being known at PS 11 as the #1 shop guy. "It's all I wanted to do, I ate it up" he says. At high school in Westtown New Jersey, the three hour shop



William Vitarelli begins a new carving project

classes enabled him to tackle larger furniture projects, "I was hand cutting dovetails, doing serious work", he said. After a four year college education in industrial arts, at the start of the depression, Vitarelli emerged with a New Jersey certification to teach high school shop. "Ultimately I knew I didn't want to teach shop the rest of my life, I wanted to work with my hands; own my own shop", he said. Eventually he went back to school and got a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University, which led him in some very different and interesting directions.

In about 1950 Vitarelli was employed by the US Navy to help rehabilitate Palau, Micronesia. His actual title was Deputy Governor of the Western Caroline Islands where he was the educational administrator. There he built schools, often using only unskilled labor. "Imagine", he says "Two hundred recalcitrant kids hauling coral block by raft and on their backs from the reefs to an inland building site". He encouraged the use of the local Mahogany over the rare "Dort" wood as a building material. He supervised the construction and setup of the first post WW2 sawmill on the island.

The stories are great but I'm digressing from the main topic. While at Columbia University, Vit had also gotten a degree in architecture, not AIA but a degree that enabled him to teach architectural rendering and one that fostered a deep love of architecture that has persisted throughout his life. Within a few years Vitarelli, or Rubak as he was affectionately known in Palau, was hauled back to the US under suspicion of being a communist sympathizer. "I was a rabble rouser, a whistle blower" he said, a "natural target" during those paranoid early '50s times. During the more than two years it took him to exonerate himself in the eyes of the Supreme Court, Vitarelli lived and worked in Buck's County Pennsylvania.

An English teacher he had befriended during an art teaching stint at the George School by the name of James Michener hired him to design his home. Michener was also instrumental in finding Vit work in New Rochelle where he designed and supervised the construction of a 13 acre private "swim club". A free man once again, Rubak returned with his wife and children to Palau where he picked up his old job and lived for nearly another 20 years.

In 1972 the Vitarelli family moved to Maui
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The Bulletin Board

Meeting: Saturday, September 13, 3:00pm, in the Hui Children's Art Building, 2841 Baldwin Ave.

Show: Hawai'i Craftsmen's 41st Annual Statewide Juried Show, Honolulu Academy Art Center, October 11-31, 2008. Prospectus: <http://www.hawaiicraftsmen.org/>

Show: HFIA Hawai'i's Juried Woodshow, Na La'au O Hawai'i 2008, Hawai'i Convention Center, November 20-23, 2008, Prospectus: www.hawaiiiforest.org/woodshow/woodshow.html

Guild Builds 3 in 1 Great Time Had by One and All!



Our shelves in use at the Hui

Ricardo and Joanne Vasquez

As malahini -- we are still learning about Maui, both the place and the people. We got to experience some of the best of both during the July guild meeting at John Wittenburg's.

It was a wonderful group of woodworkers with a wide range of experience including some who have been working with wood for more years than they may want to acknowledge who gathered for the day.

When Joanne shared the images and description of the day with her brother who lives in Los Angeles he had a couple of interesting comments; "we don't have guilds here, we



Shelf Joint

have gangs" and "never in a million years would something like that happen here, I'm envious". He also made a couple of comments about "barley pop's and power tools" but I assured him that the beers came out after the power tool work was done!

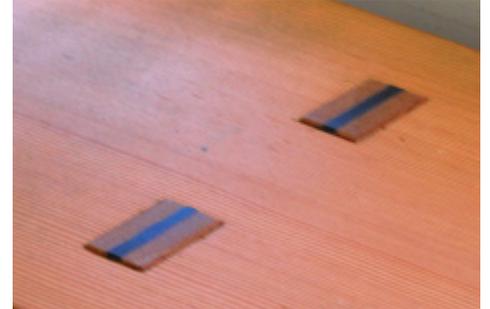
This is really one example of what the guild can be. A group to share ideas and techniques; stories and laughs; making new contacts and strengthening old ties.

John Wittenburg's property is a true paradise. A "German Robinson Crusoe" is one description of John since he moved to his property before there was anything there and has built it to what is with his own hands. It was marvelous to notice all the small touches of creativity and the artifacts that speak of various parts of his long and adventurous life. One marvels at the stories the shop holds of all the fabulous furniture pieces that have been designed and built there. Just listening to John tell about some of them was a real treat.

All contributed plenty of delicious food & it was professionally and artfully arranged by John's new apprentice who used to be a professional chef. The famous Refugee Stew that was cooked in the outdoor kitchen while the project was built was especially good. From

the variety and quality of the food you would have thought it was a meeting of some gourmet club.

After a day of work in the shop everyone had developed good appetites and it was wonderful to relax and enjoy the food amidst such surrounding.



Leg Joint

Some people who did not physically participate in the actual construction contributed their good spirits and helped make the entire day a success.

Mahalo nui loa to John Wittenburg for having us all out to his fantastic property and opening his shop and home to us.

If you were fortunate enough to have been there this year I know you will look forward to the next event of this kind and we hope those who were not able to attend can join us next time.

(See more pictures at www.mauiguild.com/meetings/July2008meeting.html)

mahalo!

maui woodworking guild

At the Maui Woodworker's Guild meeting on July 12, over twenty of their finest woodworkers joined forces and helped to construct shelving for the Hui Programs office. The shelving was made from wood from the Baldwin High School's old bleacher seats, donated by a Guild Member. They completed the project within one day!

The Hui would like to thank all who participated in this undertaking, we really appreciate your time and effort for these much needed shelves!

The crew at work.

Vit

where they began creating an artistic legacy that continues to thrive and grow. Vit supervised creative construction projects acting as architect and design/ construction enthusiast. Many private homes, businesses and even a Lahaina art gallery have been graced with his organic designs that often encompass natural and 'found' building materials. All the while Vit has worked



An elegant Vitarelli original

wood, stone and earth on his own property in Peahi. When I called him for the interview to write this article, he asked to borrow a mallet in order to begin a new carving project. The chips were flying from the coconut log before our interview was over. His furniture and art continue to appear in Art Maui exhibitions as well as private galleries and shows. He is known by all to be a Quaker and an outspoken man of Peace and Love. The rest is history.

Community Service

Ad Hoc Community Service Committee

Tom Calhoun

It seems the guild has gotten quite a lot of good will built up from the bookshelf project for the Hui No'eau. No doubt State Forestry looks kindly upon us too after the tree planting excursion.

It's always been as much luck as connections that have gotten us show venues in the past. There is, after all, a lot of work and cost involved in staging any kind of show that people will want to attend. Yeah, we're talking thousands here - not chump change for any of us.

So, I'd like to suggest we form an ad hoc "Community Service Committee". Nothing formal, just an email linked group using the guild member's address (short for email address) list to put out the word whenever a likely non-profit or similar organization is found with a need of our skills. Whoever makes the initial contact would become the coordinator for that particular event. This means they would put out an email to the guild to see if an adequate number of woodworkers would be willing to put in a little time to make the project happen, If so, they would find someone willing to allow use of their shop for a day, locate materials, set up a day that most of those interested could come, and , to use the idiom, "giterdun".

This sort of sounds like a lot to do , but it really is only few short communications. If you get too few responses for your project, that would pretty much mean a no vote in

terms of the Guild. If you only need three or four woodworkers to accomplish the project and you get that amount of response, then you get to look good for that needy organization.

It all comes back one way or another, and this is a small island where we really have only a small customer base, so any buzz we create on the good side actually gets pretty good mileage for the amount of effort expended. A benefactor may decide that they might do well to partner with us for a show or may have access to a show facility. Who knows, a client organization member may even need someone to remodel a kitchen or build dining room furnishings. You could benefit directly!

So, rather than a formal committee let's run this as informally as possible. That way no one or two people wind up with all the responsibility and the resultant burn out. I don't think we even need to vote on any of this, if someone puts the word out on a project and it happens, it's good for all of us. If it doesn't, maybe that project just wasn't meant to happen.

Outdoor Circle has requested our help on September 27. They will be planting a "mini-forest" between the safety runoff and the north bound lanes of the new Haleakala Highway. If you are interested in participating, contact me at worldwoodworks@hawaii.rr.com or 214-0738.

MWG Membership Application/Renewal

NAME: _____

BUS. NAME: _____

ADDRESS 1: _____

ADDRESS 2: _____

CITY, ST & ZIP: _____

HOME PH: _____ BUS. PH: _____

CELL PH: _____ EMAIL: _____

WEB SITE: _____

May we publish? **Yes** **No**

Address:
Home Ph:
Bus. Ph:
Cell Ph:
Email:
Website:

Please Remit:
Dues (Annual \$50.00): _____
TOTAL (Chk No _____): _____

Membership in the Maui Woodworker's Guild includes participation in all activities, show entires at member rates, bi-monthly meetings and newsletters and a one page display about you and your work on the MWG Website (mauiguild.com). Participation in Guild activities is expected of all members. Membership runs from February to February 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 96768, Makawao, HI 96768.

Seminar

Michael Fortune Seminar and Lecture

Renowned Canadian contemporary furniture master Michael Fortune has been selected to jury the 2008 HFIA Woodshow to be held November 20 to 23.

He will be coming to Maui for a hands-on, full day seminar and slide lecture on steam bending of wood. The specific date and location is yet to be determined but it will most likely be after the Woodshow. A nominal fee will be charged and space is limited.

This event is co-sponsored by the Hawaii Forest Industry Association and the Maui Woodworker's Guild. Contact Mats Fogelvik to make your reservation.

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For want of a little time and effort, this space could be all About YOU & YOUR WORK!

MWG Swap Meet is a free service to Maui Woodworker's Guild members in good standing. Ads should be limited to 25 words or less. Multiple ads are acceptable. No personal information other than your telephone number will be included in your ad unless specifically requested. Please submit your ads with your full name, telephone number and email address to.

Editor@MauiGuild.Com

Or

MWG Shavings Editor
P. O. Box 305
Makawao, HI 96768

MWG *Swap Meet*

Wanted: Barter, trade or buy, logs or whole trees, lighter colored species such as camphor, tamarind, jacaranda, painted gum, tropical ash, primavera, Queensland maple, or hau. Minimum diameter 10 inches, wet or dry, properly sealed with minimal checking. Al - 878-8525 or al@alapaki-woodart.com.

Wanted: Small to Medium Wood Lathe in good condition, Vit, 573-6590

For Sale: Freud 97-102 cabinet door/raised panel bit set for router table, used for 2 kitchens, and is newly re-sharpened. I am selling because I have a shaper now. Sells new for \$150, I am asking \$50. Mats Fogelvik 575-7678 or mats@fogelvik.com



Website: WWW.MauiGuild.Com

Maui Woodworker's Guild
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