MWG Sharings

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Featured Artist - Takeo Omuro

By Peter Naramore

Local legend Takeo Omuro began his lifetime of woodworking experience at about 8 years of age using a pocket knife and a coping saw. His "lumber" came from discarded wooden crates scavenged at the local markets. A Kahului neighbor made cabinets in his home shop. Takeo was fascinated by the noise, dust and power of the saw. In the 1940's, while still a student at Baldwin High, shop class offered real hands on instruction and rewarded talent and enthusiasm with opportunity. It was here that Takeo was first introduced to a lathe, the tool that would figure so prominently in his adult life. But it was a long road from here to there.

Youngest of four, Takeo was born in Kahului in 1932 of immigrant Japanese ancestry. His father was a hard working, entrepreneurial, Christian immigrant of samurai stock who at 32 retroactively completed the 8th grade at Lahainaluna. He went on to several careers including Bookkeeper and Bill Collector, finally settling on a restaurant business in Wailuku known as Omuro Sundries. It remained a vibrant, family run business for 40 years, closing in 1986.

For young Takeo, helping out with the family business was natural and expected but sawdust had gotten into his veins at an early age. In 1950 Takeo began working at B.J. Kim's Cabinet Shop making .75 cents an hour.

Takeo with a 28" diameter Norfolk pine bowl

"It amazes me to think now of what we did in those days" he says. "We typically provided all the millwork, doors, double hung sash, cabinetry and trim for a house.

Two senior carpenters and myself!". He eventually rose to journeyman's pay of $1.25 per hour. Big money then….

There was a lot to learn but the real education began when along with 29 other Maui boys he was drafted as America entered the Korean war. Hawaii was a territory in 1952 but nevertheless, being Hawaii born, he was a US citizen and therefore eligible for the service.

Since an older brother was already serving in Korea, Takeo's first trip from his island home was an extra long one. After basic training at Schofield, he hopscotched across two oceans and the U.S. continent to report for duty in Frankfurt, Germany.

It was a long way from home for a local boy in the early '50's but typically, he thrived by making the most of the experience. Once his natural ability for construction became known, his talents were put to use by Uncle Sam building rifle stands, cabinetry and whatever else was needed. He sufficed with meager allotment of tools and materials and struggled with the metric system.

As I sat with Takeo in Koho's restaurant for this interview, he passed me a stack of those tiny black and white photos with the scalloped edges. Here was precious proof of ambitious projects produced half a century ago, half a world away. Takeo bubbled with enthusiasm as he pointed out difficult details and explained how most everything was accomplished with hand tools!

In the Fall of '54, a civilian once again and back on Maui, Takeo opened Kahului Cabinet Shop. Here he provided a full range of woodworking services including furniture repair, cabinetry and custom built furniture.

"There was no other way to learn about joinery than first hand inspection" he informed me,

"I would crawl under tables and turn over chairs seeking clues."

Kula resident Haku Baldwin provided Takeo with much of his early education as she needed a great deal of refinishing and restoration of her old Koa furniture. Often Takeo would make patterns from antique furniture to use as learning tools.

Like many before him, he discovered that the "natural ability" to design and build beautiful things was a

The Bulletin Board

HFIA Wood Show: Friday March 27th at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. Call 808-933-9411 for more information.

Call for entry: Lark Books seeks excellent images of one-of-a-kind, handcrafted contemporary cabinetry. Entry deadline: April 1, 2009 more info.— www.larkbooks.com

MWG General Meeting : March 14th 3:00 PM Hui Children's Art Building 2841 Baldwin Ave

MWG General Meeting : June 27th 3:00 PM Hui Children's Art Building 2841 Baldwin Ave

long and arduous process of trial and error.

Throughout his career he kept returning to lathe work as a point of fascination and inspiration.

He produced giant bowls, platters, lidded containers and much more from whatever local woods he could salvage. His truck and ever present chain saw became a familiar sight in the forests of upcountry Maui. Norfolk pine, monkey pod and tamarind were some of his favorite woods but he was willing to try almost anything. During the 80's and 90's Takeo became a regular participant in the burgeoning craft market scene throughout Hawaii.

Over time, demand for his wooden artistry became so great that he could sell out months of work in a matter of days at the big crafts fair held on Oahu each December.

Takeo's insignia burnt onto a turning

His finely developed sense of design and skills became the topic of an extensive cover story and article in the May/June '92 issue of Woodwork magazine. Pretty impressive for a self taught local boy from Hawaii territory!

Takeo's wry sense of humor and ready chuckle are still his constant companions. When asked what wisdom he would most like to pass on to younger generations of woodworkers he replied with the name of a good hand surgeon for "when you'll need him" and finally,

"Don't get old!"

Journey to Iraq

By Shaun Fleming

Being a woodworker I'm lucky enough to ask questions about wood that most people never think to ask. When working with a piece of wood I often wonder where the tree was grown, how old it was, and if it died of old age or was harvested early for lumber. I think about the seasons it has lived through and the hands it has passed through to get into my shop. One of the perks of being a woodworker is being able to find out where your wood came from, and who cut, milled, and dried it. Whether it drifted across the Pacific Ocean only to land in Kahului Harbor or whether it came from a friend's backyard, we a re able to form a personal connection and appreciation for the wood we are receiving.

Eight years ago I was presented with the opportunity to harvest and mill a dying grove of Koa trees planted in the West Maui Mountains by my children's great great uncle, David Thomas Fleming, in the early 1920's. After harvesting and milling many board feet of lumber, I had acquired a small collection in my shop to work with. I have been lucky enough to work with this gorgeous wood and to be able to share it with others.

About a year ago an eager woodworker came to my shop looking for wood. I found him a nice piece when he mentioned a friend of his in Wisconsin that turned pens. I said I had a few scraps of Koa from the West Maui's laying around and sent him on his way with a handful of curly scraps.

A few months later I received a nicely turned Koa pen and a thank you letter mentioning that another man at a woodturning event had admired the wood. The letter also asked if this man's cousin (who was coming to Maui for his 50th wedding anniversary) could pick up some wood for him. Upon receiving this wood the man and his turning club participated in Woodcraft store's "Freedom Pens" event that sends hand-turned pens to the soldiers in Iraq.

It touches me to know that a soldier in Iraq may be using a Koa pen that came from a tree planed nearly 100 years ago to write to his or her mother, father, brother, sister, wife, husband, or child. It makes me appreciate the journey of a tree from a seed to a pen that can unite families overseas. This event has given me an opportunity to be grateful for the unique and incredible gifts of nature that we often take for granted.

Veneer Cutting Method

By Ricardo Vasquez

I have developed a system to cut veneer that utilizes a Festool circular saw, model number TS55EQ and Festool fence. The cut I get with this system produces perfect cuts with no chip out even when cutting burl or curly grained veneers.

I hinge two pieces of 3/4" laminated ply together. For my jig I use an 18" piece for the bottom and a 14" piece for the top. I screw the Festool fence to the top piece lining up the edge of the fence with the edge of the plywood opposite the hinges. This size jig can easily accommodate most common sizes of raw veneer.

The saw blade is adjusted to create a 1/8th inch deep saw kerf in the base. Be sure to check the blade depth before each veneer cutting session or you could accidentally cut through the bottom of the jig and then have to take the time to replace it.

The first cut of the veneer renders a clean straight edge on one side of the veneer. The veneer is then repositioned for the second cut with the newly cut edge away from the edge of the fence. Simply measure over from the saw kerf in the bottom piece of the jig to locate where to position the cut edge of the veneer, i.e. if you want a 6" piece of ve-

neer measure over 6". Measure at both ends of the veneer to assure that the cut piece will be parallel. A couple of pieces of tape can hold the veneer in place while the top of the jig is lowered and the second cut is made. The result is a piece of veneer with perfectly cut edges that is also perfectly parallel. When you are joining multiple pieces of veneer the value of each piece being perfectly parallel is evident when you are taping up the veneer.

The top piece with the Festool fence attached and the saw running along the fence apply enough pressure to yield a clean cut each time.

Up to 10 leaves of veneer can be cut with one pass of the saw.

Festool fences are available in lengths from 4-10 ft but any length of veneer can be cut by joining additional Festool fences end to end.

Steam bending seminar on Maui

By Mats Fogelvik

Every year since 1993 Hawaii Forest Industry Association (HFIA)have hosted a wood show in Honolulu. They usually bring in a juror/woodworker from the mainland, which also will facilitate some sort of seminar on Oahu, Maui and Big Island.

The past few years the Maui Woodworker's Guild have co-sponsored this seminar and helped to bring the juror/woodworker here. This last Woodshow in November we had Michael Fortune, master woodworker from Canada, here, and on Nov 25 the MWWG hosted a steam bending seminar in the Studio Furniture workshop (Curtis & Christian).

I met Michael first time at the Furniture Society Conference in Philadelphia a few years ago and then again at the Conference in San Diego. Both time is saw him do demonstrations of steam bending, and I was very impressed with his skills. Since then we have kept in touch, and a few of might remember that he visited Maui a couple of years ago,

unrelated to HFIA, and had a class in my workshop about string inlay.

This time we decided to do the steam bending class, I really wanted to get a feel for this process. It took a lot of prep work, I had to build a steam box, about 8"x8"x48" from exterior plywood. As a steam source we used an old pressure cooker retro-fitted with a radiator hose. The heat source was an old gas camping stove. The bending blanks were prepared from a variety of local hardwoods, and they had to be air dried. The blanks were 1"x2"x36". I built the bending forms to Michael's specifications, and also drying forms.

We had a collection of Koa, Curly Koa, Canadian ash, Eucalyptus Robusta, Lychee, Ohia, Silky oak, Pheasant wood and Blue Gum Eucalyptus. Quite an experimental collection, we did not really know what to expect. Traditionally, it is only domestic air dried hardwoods used for this technique, and Michael brought a few pieces of his own wood, which he bent first. After about an hour in the steam box, we clamped it to the bending strap and attached it to the bending form. The bending form has to be fastened securely to a sturdy bench, it is a considerable amount of force applied

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Membership in the Maui Woodworker's Guild includes participation in all activities, show entries at member rates, quarterly meetings and newsletters, and a one page display about you and your work on the MWG Website (mauiguild.com). Participation in Guild activities is encouraged for all members. Please include your check for the appropriate amount with this application and send to:

Maui Woodworker's Guild, P.O. Box 305, Makawao, HI 96768

to the bending lever. The Ash piece did bend beautifully without any failure.

The key to this system is the steel strap, end stops and other hardware, supplied by Veritas, which allows bending the wood under compression, which prevents the fibers in the wood to pull apart during the bending. The Veritas system is actually developed by Michael Fortune.

As soon as the first bent piece had cooled off it could be taken off the strap, and transferred to the drying form. This is an important step, to allow the wood to dry (about a week) in the same shape as it was bent to prevent spring back. This form can be rather flimsy compared to the actual bending form. Next we tried some of our local hardwoods. We had two different bending forms, one 8" radius and the other 14" radius. They were all harder to bend than the ash, but maybe they were too dry? Below is an unscientific summary of our results of the bending.

My conclusion is that this is an excellent method to make furniture parts which need to be curved, less work than bent laminations and stronger than band sawing curves from solid wood. Much less waste will be generated. It was encouraging for me to see that some of the best results was achieved with koa wood, which is one of my primary woods. A week later when I took the pieces off the drying forms, the spring-back was minimal and seemed predictable. In the future, I will design and incorporate steam bent elements in my furniture.

We also did some hot pipe steam bending, but that will be a whole other article. I will also post more info and pictures on our Guild website when time permits.

Resources:

Hawaii Forest Industry Association	http://www.hawaiiforest.org
Big Island Woodworker's Guild	http://www.hawaiiwoodguild.com/
The Furniture Society	http://www.furnituresociety.org/furn/
Michael Fortune	http://michaelfortune.com/
Veritas	http://www.leevalley.com
Studio Furniture	http://www.studiofurnituremaui.com/
Maui Woodworker's Guild	http://www.mauiguild.com/

Woodbending Observations — Exotic Wood Samples

Robusta	Extremely hard to bend, some fiber failure and checking.
Blue Gum	Extremely hard to bend, moderate fiber checking.
Koa - plain	Hard to bend, very little checking, some failure around knot.
Curly koa	Moderate to bend, almost no fiber failure
Ohia	Hard to bend, no failure
Lychee	Hard to bend, no failure
Pheasantwood	Very hard to bend, and failed, but the sample had short grain.
Silky oak	Hard to bend, very little failure.

Maui Woodworker's Guild

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