

The Careful Woodworker by Dennis Sandretto, May 2020



I grew up on a farm, so had a lot of chores, and learned to work with my hands. Every Christmas my brothers and I would pour over the Sears Christmas catalog to make our wish list. However, one Christmas my family decided on giving handmade gifts instead of bought toys. My gift was a toy box my father made, along with a saw, hammer, small crowbar, and screwdriver. My first wood project was a bird house made as a 4-H project when I was about 13.

When I started working in Corvallis, I bought an ice chest that needed repair. Little did I know it needed one side replaced plus other rehabilitation. It sat for about a year until I signed up for a woodworking class at a local school so I could use their equipment. That ice chest is one item my eldest daughter claims as an inheritance.



Following are some examples of my work.

Here is an example of thinking outside the woodworking box but using its



equipment: a Maui fishhook necklace. I made 20 of these to give as presents on a Disney cruise with my extended family.

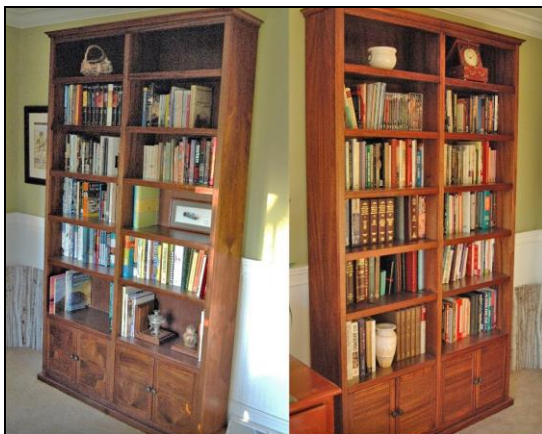
Maui fishhook necklaces.

I made three small cherry cabinets, one for each of my children. It has a secret compartment, accessible by removing the bottom drawer, lifting a small wood catch, and raising the back. I included a note inscribed on the back, to wit: "I was making this secret for a year, but now it's over and the time is



Cherry cabinets.

here. There is a secret we now can both share, and if you look close you will know just where. I made this with love right out from my heart; though I may be gone, we never will part. Dad 1995."



Bookcases and bedroom furniture.

For my eldest daughter, I am currently almost complete with a complete kitchen cabinet replacement, as well as building a kitchen island cabinet, double oven cabinet, and desk. She liked the cabinet doors and drawer fronts inset, so the challenge was on even though her sister cautioned that that would be more difficult for me. Fortunately, she wanted them painted white, so I could pay less attention to the quality of wood.

She similarly wanted doors on her bookcases to be inset as well but wanted them to be mahogany to match her bedroom set I built, also with inset drawer fronts.

My son and daughter-in-law were expecting their first child and wanted a black walnut bedroom set for them and their newborn. I found plans for a changing table and bed that would convert from a crib, to a toddler bed, to a full-size twin bed. So, I dutifully began construction until they found out they were going to have twins. So I had to quickly make a second crib/toddler bed/twin bed.



Bedroom sets.



Jewelry cabinet.

The project that my wife likes the most is a small jewelry cabinet seen here. It matches the dresser, and two end tables that also match a large sewing cabinet that I made for my eldest daughter when she first

started sewing. It has an insert table that significantly expands the area for fabric layout.

In 2014, after clearing land in Seward, Alaska, in 2011, I traveled to Seward to help our middle daughter and son-in-law build their 2,700-square foot, 5-bedroom, 3-bath home. Being an engineer, woodworker, and builder, I first built a scale model of the home, about 1:40 scale, with all the studs and framing just as the full scale was to be built. I later gave it to my granddaughter to use as a doll house and to get ready for the experience.



Daughter's Seward Alaska family home.

Working for 2 or 3 weeks each summer, with a crew of four, except one summer where, starting on workday 23, we added three more until workday 40. All the studs had to be cut to length since the wall height was 9 feet. I cut about 90 percent of the wood, and was involved in all aspects of the build, except for the roof. Partial move-in was in 2015, with interior work continuing for two more summers. The final move and work trips were in 2017. Not bad for three road trips and 4 years of summers.

The project, which has resulted in the most memories for two generations and has been the most fun, is this combination teeter totter/slide that I made for my three children about 30 years ago. The children and grandchildren have used the slide the most, the teeter totter feature is hardly used.



The careful woodworker!

And just to show that I am indeed a careful woodworker, here is the proof. I am blessed with an additional digit just in case I became entangled with a saw blade.

One final postscript in the spirit of “we are in this troubling Covid-19 time together”:

I create a lot of sawdust and am allergic to dust. As such, I had a supply of



Teeter totter/slide.

N-95 masks, four of which were still in their original wrappers. Since I am between projects, I gave them to my doctor neighbor for use in his clinic.