

Woodworking – A Lifetime Hobby of Fun and Sharing, Dave Ellison



An Early Start

It was my good fortune to experience an early introduction to woodworking through my Grandfather who was a carpenter by trade. At the age of 6, I spent part of a summer with both Gramps and Grandma serving as a “go for” on many occasions when Gramps was building houses. He taught me about tools (hand saws, planes, hammers, chisels, and hand drills). He also built me a toolbox that he eventually filled with hand tools. For me, this was a “hot start” for a lifetime hobby that I still love.

Some Exceptional Learning

While in the eighth grade, I enjoyed an introduction to “Industrial Arts” where the wood project included using hand tools to carve a walnut bowl. We also learned how to type and had a short course on home economics. Then, in the ninth grade, I was able to convince my parents to let me take a year-long class in Industrial Arts. The catch was that I had to agree to take Latin as well because they wanted me to eventually go to college. I should mention that Latin was not as exciting as woodworking.

As it turned out, the Industrial Arts teacher – Mr. Jones – was an excellent woodworking teacher and an artist as well. We started the year with hand-tool projects and advanced to power tools. Safety was a real focus, and this early learning has helped me keep a variety of body parts out of the machinery so far. I am very thankful and a bit lucky as well.

One of my power-tool projects was making a walnut headboard for my parents. An interesting “art” addition suggested by Mr. Jones was the old English “E” I carved on the two sliding doors. Both of these carvings plus all of the walnut wood in the headboard have since been repurposed as follows.



Walnut headboard for parents, 1958



A new headboard (2020) for Emma - one of our four grandkids - made of ambrosia maple and the other old English "E"



A walnut and ambrosia maple wagon made in 2013 for Emma with an old English "E" as a license plate

Woodworking Advances with Shop Space, Tools, and Friendships

Ever since my early woodworking experiences, I had always dreamed of having a wood shop to enjoy. Ruth always supported that dream as well. So, when we moved to our first house in 1972, the wood shop was in mind. But this was an old farmhouse in the middle of Fairfax, VA, that needed a lot of TLC just to be comfortable. So, the wood shop took some time to develop.

In 1975, I joined the firm (Reston office); and that's when we had the good fortune of meeting the Mynhiers – a lifetime friendship began to develop. One of our house priorities was to construct a concrete floor in our dirt cellar, and Mike agreed to help hand-mix and place that concrete floor. So, our woodworking experiences together were delayed until both of our families relocated to Atlanta in the 1980s.



Dining room table,
repurposed heart pine

Because affordable houses are simply larger in Georgia than in Virginia, our homes needed furniture. Mike and I got interested in “heart pine” (beautiful, first-cut pine wood without many knots), which was being repurposed from the beams of old buildings being torn down around Georgia (i.e., flour mills and bank buildings). We found a sawmill in Milledgeville that processed this reclaimed lumber and made a number of trips to purchase wood for furniture. My basement wood shop in Atlanta was fairly well equipped, so we started building furniture together. Mike's first piece was a sewing cabinet for Marge – see Mike's story. I built this dining room table seating 10 to 12 with two leaves followed by a china cabinet

and then a server.



China cabinet



Server

Mike began his journey in building a wood shop in his basement, and he definitely has an eye for great tools! I continued with building a new, Honduras mahogany desk . . . customized for personal computers as these were now becoming the thing to own (1980s). The firm then relocated our family to Denver (1993), and we really missed the Mynhiers' close friendship and the woodworking experiences together. We did make up for some of this loss through global travel together and are blessed with visits to all seven continents.

When Ruth and I moved to Denver, our home had a walk-out basement calling for a wood shop . . . and that's what happened. In the new shop, I enjoyed upgrading my tools and added both a lathe and a band saw plus



Our "Home" workshop in Thornton, Colorado

replaced my aged table saw, joiner, miter saw, and planer. These were big tool advances. I also became friends with Don Roberts, who joined the company in Denver in the early 1990s after being with Dames and Moore as their European regional manager for

many years in London. Don was a woodworker and also a collector of old English hand tools like moving fillisters, etc. As both Don and I transitioned from CH2M HILL in the early 2000s, I was given responsibility for some of Don's tool collection, which are now on display in my current wood shop.



English hand tools from the 1800s

Some of my more recent furniture pieces have included Ruth's slab desk made of Hawaiian repurposed Monkey Pod wood and a credenza made from

"Beetle Pine" wood from the hills of Colorado.

Unfortunately, climate warming caused the beetle pine bugs to kill every other tree in Colorado. The good news is that this repurposed wood can make very interesting furniture.



Ruth's monkey pod slab desk and beetle pine credenza - 2019

During the "Stay at Home" requirements of the Covid-19 pandemic, I have been busy with furniture making for both kids and grandkids. A bedroom set for Emma is now complete with a headboard, a desk, and a dresser made from Ambrosia Maple. A work desk for one of my son-in-laws is now in the planning phase.

Enjoy Wood!



Emma's desk - 2020