



With Wakened Hands

Furniture by
James Krenov
and
Students

by James Krenov

introduction by Ellis Valentine

principal photographer Seth Janofsky



Commissions

When we first started, there was quite a bit of skepticism about us, and even some irritation, in the woodworking community. Magazines sometimes spoke of us as being way out in left field, and said that our students would be shocked when they left us for the “real world.” Twenty years later, I must say that a lot of them have discovered a “real world” where they are able to quietly go about their work. They live the life that they have chosen, with its inherent hazards, setbacks, and deep secret satisfactions.

Skeptics are surprised at the high percentage of our students who are still craftsmen and getting along in the world. A few of them are very well known craftsmen doing beautifully. Some are working for others in high-end furniture shops making very expensive things for very rich people. These former students often end up being given the most difficult work in the shop because they are so skilled and sensitive. Others are working quietly, as I said, by themselves, surviving and getting along and making friends, and working their way from one modest commission to the next. On the whole, the apprehension that I felt in those first years, when we were bombarded with criticism, is gone. So is the criticism. We have slowly but surely become known as a good school for a certain type of person with a certain kind of aspiration.

In the beginning there was the assumption that I create, educate, and encourage little Krenovs—that the student work is somewhat cramped or at least affected by me. Yes, I am an influence, but I do not shape people. We encourage our students to work with a spirit of sensitivity and intimacy in the process of working with wood, but we don’t dictate the proportions, the design, or even the subject.

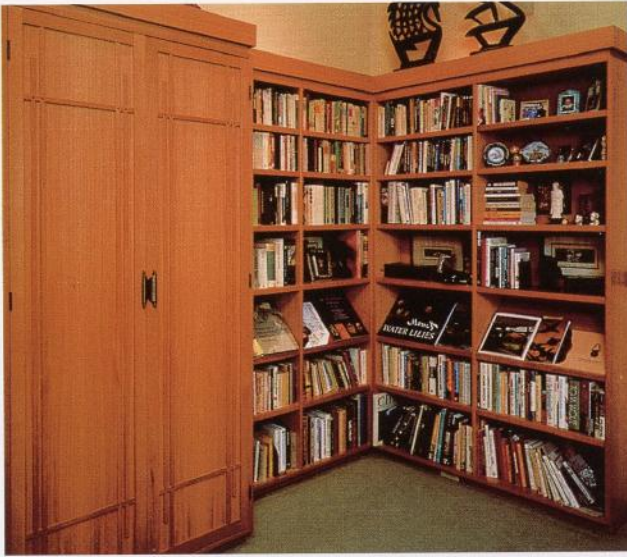
The majority of our students are in a one-year program, but we have been given permission by the College to keep six people by mutual agreement for

This page and opposite:

Interior, Ross Day.

Mahogany and cherry. Lacquer varnish finish. Ross Day has his workshop on the waterfront in Seattle. He does both commissions and spec pieces. This interior was designed and built for a client.





This page:
Additional views of an interior by Ross Day.

a second year. This second year amounts to a year of independent study; students have complete freedom to explore and challenge themselves in any way that is reasonable. We encourage visitors to our school to commission one of our second-year students to build a particular piece. This is a wonderful experience for the student, giving him or her a sense of reality and looking toward the future, but it is just as interesting for the person commissioning the piece because they can visit during the building; they can discuss the concept, the design, and then watch it evolve.

When working with clients, we encourage our second-year students to pay very close attention to the function of the piece, where it will be, how it will be used, what it should house, or any of the particulars that are important to the owner. The craftsman should respond to this with a few ideas and suggestions, and also with great respect to the wishes of the client. Thus the choice of craftsman is also the choice of a particular approach to workmanship.

These pieces live quite well in any home that represents a person or people with a balanced or fairly refined taste. Clients get what suits them and what they want to live with, rather than relying on period styles that may not suit their lives. An object that really suits one in every sense makes one happy; it is a joy to live with. So, a little freedom in choosing one's craftsman and approaching this whole matter of commission would certainly benefit many people, especially since by their nature the craftsmen who have been with us are not eccentric and publicity minded or showy in the sense of building anything for anyone. They give the potential client the chance to get a quiet, balanced, fine piece of workmanship.

Since most of our students past and present are living (and really feel good about living) a fairly balanced and modest life, they do not generally aspire to exorbitant prices and exclusiveness and an air of snobbishness about their work or their attitude or their relation to clients. It is all very friendly and quiet, and, we dare say, modest from the point of view of the craftsman, and thus the person asking for these services can feel quite secure in the honesty, integrity, and modesty of the craftsman.





This page:

Above: Dining table and chairs, Ross Day. Walnut with pear chair backs.

Right and below: Dressing table and stool, David Welter.

Kwila. This set is beautifully done. It was crafted while David was a student at the school. He is now an important staff member.

Opposite page:

Chinese chair, Yeung Chan.

This is a truly Chinese chair, faithful to the original in every respect. An amazing person, Yeung has the skill, historical knowledge, and reverence for this difficult work.

