



MINNESOTA WOODWORKERS GUILD

V1-N2, February 2026

Editor's Note

- Ed Estlow

First off, thanks much for the compliments I received on reviving the newsletter! I'm still getting into the swing of things, and hopefully this one looks a little better than the last one.

In this issue, you'll find a wonderful piece by our own Jake Brown on the artistry of woodworking. Jake does an excellent job of articulating what many of us feel about our craft.

Brittany Edwards reminded me that Lost Art Press offers free (not a typo) PDF versions of all their books authored by press co-founder Christopher Schwarz. Brittany also notes that Lost Art Press has several great [Substacks](#) in case you're looking for more newsletters.

Speaking of Lost Art Press, I will add that if you're a fan of roughing it in the great outdoors and do not know the name Dick Proenneke, you'll be interested in their book, [The Handcrafted Life of Dick Proenneke](#). It's about the man and the tools he carried into his 30-year sojourn in the Alaskan wilderness. Unfortunately, this one is not among the free offerings.

As always, we'd like to thank our many supporters for helping us do what we do. George Lucas highlights several of these fine businesses.

Khrisslyn Goodman summarizes the recent focus groups the Education Committee held.

There's also a long read by Bob Filipczak, a member of sister organization, the Central Minnesota Woodworker's Association. Bob took to the keyboard upon the 25th anniversary of that group. I found it interesting to see what other folks with similar passions to ours have been up to in the last couple of decades. This is a bit of an experiment to see if you folks enjoy these longform articles, or just consider them TLDR – Too Long, Didn't Read. Let me know!

Last, I'm looking for a name for this newsletter. I talked it over with a few folks and we decided we'd let the membership submit names. Look for a brief survey in the next couple of days.

President's Message

- Paul Ehrlich

These cold winter days are a great excuse to be spending more time in the shop! We also have a lot going on in the Guild both in person and online.

Typically, this time of year we don't have an in-person meeting. But in January we did meet at Sheer-Craft in St. Paul for a session on boat building. It was a great event and well attended. This was also our first event that was streamed as a YouTube "live" event. Our February meeting was online and featured tours of six members shops. Both events are now available for viewing on our YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/@MNWoodworkersGuild>.



Phil and Maria presenting on boat building.

We have also had a launch of our new education program with a three-session class on digital design. The class was held online and is being held online. The education team is working on gathering input from members (see their piece in this newsletter) and will be offering a range of hands-on classes.

Our big event for this Spring is the Northern Woods Exhibition which will be held on April 23-26, 2026 at Eden Prairie Center. The deadline to enter a piece is mid-April and we are

looking forward to another great show. Our big Fall event is the Woodworkers Expo which will be back at the Fairgrounds this October.

The Guild is successful because of the time and effort that our members put into volunteering. We are working on a new program focused on recruiting and recognizing volunteers. To support this, we are looking to add a new board member who will be a focused-on volunteers. Please let me know if you are interested in serving on the board wither in this, or other roles.

Sincerely

Paul Ehrlich

President Minnesota Woodworkers Guild

President@mnwwg.org

The Art of Wood

- Jake Brown

Hello Guild members! My name is Jake Brown, and I am the chairman of the Northern Woods Exhibition. I am elated to write to you today in celebration of original art in the woodworking community. I graduated from the Vermont Woodworking School with a focus in Advanced Fine Woodworking and Furniture Design. All too often, our craft is limited by searching for the perfect plans. I implore you to discover the liberation of creating your own.

Woodworking and furniture design is as much as an artform as any other medium. As craftspeople, we know this to be true from following the evolution of design through the centuries. Moving from Chippendale to Stickley, Wharton Esherick to Wendell Castle, and from George Nakishima to Yuri Kobayashi. All art builds on each other, just as all human experience does. If we abstract our argument to art across all mediums, we can easily see that da Vinci, Van Gogh, Kahlo, and Basquiat all evolve from collective human experience, and are all vastly singular in their voices.



Chippendale



Stickley



Wharton Esherick



Wendell Castle



George Nakashima



Yuri Kobayashi

For myself, I found my voice as an artist ten years into my journey with craft. Miles Davis put it succinctly when he said, “Sometimes you gotta play a long time before you start to sound like yourself.” I’ve found there has been nothing more satisfying than finding my voice as an artist. Undoubtedly we are all influenced by the art around us—but each individual has their own life journey with their own lens. You are the only person who can design your work.

I encourage all guild members to sketch, model, and design something only each of you can—and bring it to the Northern Woods Exhibition. What a beautiful chorus we can make!

Education Update

- Khristlyn Goodman

Thank you so much to those of you who took part in the Education Committee's Focus Groups in late January and early February. We sincerely appreciate your time and it was fun to get to meet you!

The results of the focus group yielded these themes, in addition to information about potential best class days, times, and length:

Learning Philosophy & Pedagogy

Participants consistently want to understand the why behind techniques, not just step-by-step instruction. They favor an interspersed approach with conceptual explanation and hands-on practice rather than front-loading theory. Some participants compared this to language immersion: the more intensive and continuous, the more fruitful the learning.

Hands-On, Small Group Settings

There's strong consensus that in-person, small group workshops (around 5–10 people) are ideal. Participants referenced negative experiences with classes of 20+ students. They want to watch an instructor demonstrate, then immediately try it themselves. Materials should be prepped and ready, equipment should have backups, and the space should be well-lit and organized.

Community & Relationships Over Content Alone

This came up in virtually every interview. People want friendships, mentorship, social connection, and a sense of belonging. Multiple participants noted that woodworking is a solitary pursuit and the guild's greatest value is bringing people together. One participant offered a critique that the Guild needs to actively work toward a welcoming, inclusive culture through mixers, introductions, and icebreakers.

Skill-Building Over Finished Projects After Basics are Mastered

While some woodworkers in the focus groups want to leave with a tangible piece, others, especially among advanced woodworkers, is that learning a skill or technique matters more than completing a specific project.

Flexible Format to Match Content Type

Participants distinguished between skill/technique topics (suited to shorter sessions, even online, spread over weeks) and project-based learning (suited to multi-day intensives). The format should follow the content.

Structured Curriculum with Clear Levels

One participant explicitly suggested a numbered course system (101, 102, 201, etc.) so people can self-select into the right level. Others echoed this implicitly by expressing frustration with classes that didn't match their skill level or learning style.

Constructive Feedback with Ground Rules

People are generally open to feedback but nervous about the word "critique." They want ground rules established upfront, kind phrasing ("you might try this to tighten that mitre"), and trust among participants.

Professional Member Value

Professional woodworkers expressed a desire for business skill development as a draw for membership in the Guild. They're not interested in taking classes but may be interested in teaching or peer design groups.

Access Considerations

Tool access varies; some participants can practice between sessions, others cannot. Members driving from outside the metro need multi-day formats or weekend options. Online/video options could possibly serve those who can't drive at night or in winter.

Additionally, our first class launched this month, an online course designed to help people hone their SketchUp skills. Look for a companion Fusion class coming up, as well as a hand tool course (including learning how to sharpen them!) with a tool box project for beginners at Sheer Craft in St. Paul.

Our Education Committee is working hard to establish a PDF reference library that will live on the Guild website. We're covering basic tools, vocabulary, safety, and other topics. We'll announce it here in the newsletter.

Minnesota Woodworker's Guild Supporters (February 2026)

- George Lucas

As a woodworker, you often need to acquire hardwood for your projects, whether it be quarter sawn white oak, walnut, purpleheart or poplar.

The Woodworkers Guild has many supporters that offer guild members discounts or wholesale pricing on hardwoods, often including hardwood plywood.

Wholesale hardwood suppliers: These suppliers do not offer their products to the general public, only to those businesses that have an established account. The guild has accounts with all these hardwood wholesalers. Visit our website at <https://mnwwg.org/supporters/> for specific requirements for each supplier. Wholesale pricing is typically 30–50% lower than retail. You will have to show your guild membership card and provide the account number which is available on the website in the members only section.

Aetna Building Solutions, White Bear Lake MN



Industrial Lumber and Plywood, Minneapolis MN



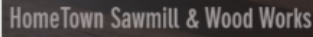
Hardwoods, Rogers MN 


Metro Hardwood, Maple Grove MN 

Vetch Hardwoods, Rochester MN 


Retail Hardwood suppliers: These suppliers sell to the public. Guild members receive a 10-15% discount, you will have to show your guild membership card. Visit our website at <https://mnwwg.org/supporters/> for specific requirements for each supplier.

Forest Products, Maplewood MN 

Hometown Sawmill and Wood Works, LeCenter MN 

K & J Lumber Products, Mora MN 

Rockler, several locations 

Siwek Lumber and Millwork, Minneapolis and Jordan MN 

Storm Trees, Eden Prairie MN 

Wood from the Hood, Minneapolis MN 

Woodcraft, Bloomington MN 

CMWA: 25 years of Woodworking Craft

By Bob Filipczak

When you start talking about our 25 years together, the conversation needs to start with Rollie Johnson. Rollie started the Central Minnesota Woodworker's Association (the CMWA) in 2001 and has been an active leader and member to this day.

“The way it started is that I knew probably a half a dozen or so woodworkers in the area, and I thought there's got to be more people interested in serious woodworking than just the few of us.

So, I put together a flyer, and it was just a little flyer,” Rollie said. It announced a meeting for interested folks at the St. Cloud Library in January of 2001.

“I mailed a bunch of them to cabinet shops in the area. I sent them to Home Depot and Simonson’s and Matthew Hall,” Rollie explained. He reserved a small meeting room, but it had been double-booked and the library gave him a bigger room down the hall. Good thing, too.

“It was kind of funny,” Rollie said. “I thought we would probably have a half dozen people in this big room. Well, it turned out that we had around 50 people show up for that first organizational meeting. By the end of that meeting, we had eight volunteers to form a steering committee and then we were off and running.”

History

Rollie incorporated the club in 2001, and the first year of the meetings were at Rollie’s commercial woodworking shop in Foley. Members commented on the long drive, so the club tried a few other peoples’ shops. Then Rollie gave a presentation to the Sauk Rapids Rotary and mentioned that the CMWA was looking for a more permanent location.

Greg Vandell, then superintendent for the Sauk Rapids school district, said they might be able to help. Rollie met with the folks who ran the adult education program for Sauk Rapids and they made a deal with the school district: “We would teach outreach programs in trade for a venue to have our meetings,” Rollie explained. The meetings then switched over to the Sauk Rapids Middle School and the CMWA ran an outreach program for kids ages 11 to 13.

During a remodel, the location for the club switched over to the old high school for three or four years. Then the school district decided that woodworking was too dangerous for kids and the CMWA needed a new meeting place.

The Paramount Center for the Arts welcomed the CMWA to use their facilities downtown for meetings. And that worked for a while, Rollie said, but, “The problem with the Paramount: it was a nice place to have meetings, but we couldn't do any demonstrations of any kind because we couldn't use power tools down there.”

Rollie began talks with the Paramount as well as the MMAW (Mid Minnesota Association of Woodturners). Originally the MMAW was part of the CMWA, but they split off later as their club grew. After lots of meetings and proposals, both clubs got permission to use the Paramount Tech Center in Waite Park.

The space was also being used by the Great River Theater to make sets a couple of times a year, but eventually GRT moved out. That's when the CMWA got to call the Paramount Tech Center home. As Rollie put it, "It was an advantageous thing, and it's very unique in that we're one of the very few clubs that has our own shop."

The CMWA has been at the Paramount Tech site for the past eight years.

A Shop of Our Own

As any woodworker will tell you, having a dedicated shop is a big deal. It's more than a room full of tools. It's a refuge, a design studio, a workshop, a classroom where you teach yourself—sometimes by trial and error—and a lot of other things.

When CMWA got a shop of its own for the club, it was a great leap forward. The Waite Park building houses the CMWA, MMAW and a woodcarver's group as well. For CMWA, it's where we conduct classes, hold board meetings and monthly meetings with presentations and have open shop twice a month.

Once we had our own space, we began to equip it with tools and workbenches. There are more than a dozen workbenches, and building those was a club activity that involved a lot of members and a lot of work and a lot of oak. Consequently, we can run classes where everyone gets their own bench. In terms of tools, we have collected a very comprehensive collection of equipment, including table saws, band saws, hand planes, jointers, planers, sanders, routers and tables, scroll saws, lathes, and sharpening wheels.



How did we get all the tools? Over the years, and especially since we got a permanent home, tools came from donations from our members. Rollie has done a lot of tool and equipment reviews for Fine Woodworking, and the companies who sent him them typically don't want them back. Rollie has regularly donated them to the CMWA.

As impressive as the shop and equipment are, CMWA is really about the people who keep it running and who participate in club activities. While many of our classes are taught by members, themselves nationally recognized woodworkers, their connections to the greater woodworking community mean we often have national woodworking experts, like Mike Pekovich, come to teach the workshops and seminars. "It always comes down to the people that volunteer to help with the classes, because it's always a lot of work putting those things together, getting the materials ready, doing all the logistics of it," Rollie observed.

"I guess really the biggest thing is that we have a great facility and we have access to nationally renowned educators," Rollie explained, "which is a real benefit for us because most smaller schools don't have that ability."

National and International Members

When we talk about our renowned members with a national reputation—which we don't very often because we are, after all, Minnesotans—we need to start with Rollie himself. Rollie is both nationally and internationally known in woodworking circles. His long-term relationship as a contributing editor to [Fine Woodworking Magazine](#) is first on his list of accomplishments. He is also on the faculty of the [Center for Furniture Craftsmanship](#) in Rockport, Maine—one of the foremost woodworking schools in the nation. If we went on to list all of his awards and accolades, we would run out of room.

Steve Schwartz is also a member who teaches nationally. He also goes to New Zealand once a year, for a month, to take woodworking classes there. Steve often volunteers to do demonstrations at our meetings, and we have [videos of his presentations](#).

Our own Don Peterson, current Vice President and coordinator of our course offerings through the Paramount, won an award last year at the Minnesota Woodworkers Guild [Northern Woods Exhibition](#). This year he is teaching a class in Kansas. He helped bring in [Roger Knudson](#) to speak about design at one of our meetings last year.

Highlights

Charlie Meyer has been with the CMWA from the beginning as part of the original steering committee. He has also served as President. Two highlights he remembers from his time with CMWA involve clocks.

The first clock is a grandfather clock that CMWA built for the [Gorecki Guest House](#), which is associated with Centracare's St. Cloud Hospital. (It provides short-term housing for anyone receiving healthcare at the hospital, which is right across the street.)



The second clock was, again, a grandfather clock. He and member Mark Voigt worked to finish this project in 2024 after Tom Rosga, our newsletter editor, passed away. The project was featured in an article for WJON:

[Fellow Minnesota Craftsmen Complete Late Woodworker's Grandfather Clock](#)

Charlie said the Rosga clock was one of the most fun experiences he has had at CMWA, mostly because he got to work with Mark.

Mark agrees. "One of my fond memories is working on that clock. His wife asked us to work on it. So me and Charlie Meyer took on that responsibility and spent quite a bit of one summer doing that."

Mark teaches many of our courses at the Paramount Tech center and having that space has been a real benefit. “Since we've moved out to the shop, we've been able to keep improving it,” said Mark. “it’s a real fun place to have classes. I've enjoyed teaching the classes in that facility because as class members, students get free membership for the remainder of this year. I'm just excited that we're able to pass on our enthusiasm for woodworking in that way. Prior to being in that facility, we didn't have that opportunity. So that's where I see a big difference.”

Participation

Maybe the most distinguishing feature of CMWA, month after month, is the participation of our members.

On open shop nights, the number of members showing up to use tools and work on project varies widely. Sometimes we only get a few, and sometimes we get a crowd (especially during our Holiday Stocking Stuffer nights in December).

For our monthly meetings, however, our participation is strong—very strong. We typically have 40-50 members on our roster each year. Our meetings have between 25-40 members show up for each presentation, even on some very cold and snowy nights.

That level of participation in our core meetings is what keeps this association strong. As Rollie puts it, “The biggest thing is that we do have a really good facility. And the attendance for most of the meetings is pretty good considering the number of people we have that are members—active members, paid members. A lot of times we have better than half of our membership at a meeting, which is pretty amazing.”