

# Southwest Louisiana Woodworkers Club August 2020

Bill Fey, President

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Barry Humphus, Editor, Eltee Thibodeaux

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**Mentoring Program** - If you have a project, a problem in any woodworking area, these members have volunteered to help. Give them a call. Frank Tartarmella 802-8989; John Marcon: 478-0646; Eltee Thibodeaux: 436-1997; Ray Kebodeaux: 583-2378. Each have years of experience and knowledge.

## No July Highlights

Once again, we must delay our monthly meetings because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to restart later this year and perhaps at either the Stines in Lake Charles or Sulpher depending on the Stines management. Please keep safe for you, your family and friends, wear a mask when you cannot do social distancing and keep social distancing as much as possible.

## Repairing Carpenter Bee Holes

Wow, do we have a lot of carpenter bees in Southwest Louisiana! My patio cover is supported with a redwood frame and the carpenter bees love this wood. I also have a supply of redwood stacked on my patio for future projects. Periodically, I go out and swat them with a badminton racket. While this reduces the number and is rather satisfactory, you can never get them all.

If you have some redwood, oak or even beach in your stash of wood and this is available to the bees, you will find neat 1/2 inch holes that they have bored to lay eggs.

If the hole is active (i.e. a bee is in the hole), squirt a bit of Wasp spray into the hole and plug it with a 1/2 inch dowel. That will kill the bee and you will be good to go.

Once the hole is there, though and you want to actually use the wood for a project, it will need to be repaired. I was also faced with the task of repairing a number of voids in the wood made by carpenter bees. This task involves two basic types of repairs: 1) plugging holes, and 2) filling tunnels. The holes consisted of either entrance holes where the bees burrowed into the wood or the ends of nesting tunnels that were exposed after cutting pieces to length. Carpenter bees will typically burrow into the bottom or side of a board, go in about an inch, and then turn at a right angle to excavate nesting tunnels that run with the grain of the wood. Entrance holes are about 1/2" in diameter and are almost perfectly circular whereas tunnels are anywhere from say 1/2" to 1" in diameter but tend to be more oblong than circular.

You may be wondering why I didn't just cut out the bad wood? Well, the lumber appeared to be old growth redwood which is relatively scarce and valuable so I wanted

to recover as much of it as possible in order to build a garden bench. Once I started milling the lumber into smaller pieces, I was able to discard most of the really damaged wood, leaving me with just enough mostly sound material for the planned project. I figured plugging a few holes here and there wouldn't be a big deal. As the milling progressed, additional damage was invariably discovered so the repair effort turned out to be a bigger job than I anticipated. Alas, such is the way woodworking goes sometimes.

To plug the exposed end of a carpenter bee tunnel, assuming the rest of the board is relatively intact (and no bees are slumbering in the tunnel), the first step is to create a wooden plug that fits into the hole. For this, I ripped a piece of wood slightly wider/thicker than the hole and drilled into the end of it with a small drill bit. With the piece temporarily attached to the drill via the embedded bit, the wood is spun with the drill while holding it against a rotating sanding belt. As the wood becomes rounder and rounder, more sanding pressure can be applied. Eventually, a tapered dowel of the required diameter is formed.

However, should you not want to go through this process, the bees make an almost perfect 1/2 inch hole. So you can purchase a 1/2 inch dowel at a local supplier, tap it in to the hole, cut off the excess and sand it flat to the board. This works well should you not have the dowel exposed or do not care about the exposed pine or other dowel material. I have certainly done this many times for the patio frame.

Tapering the dowel makes it easier to insert into the hole. As long as the last few inches fit snugly into the hole, the board can be trimmed to final length without exposing more of the tunnel. After trimming off the end with the protruding plug, the board is ready to go. Epoxy does a good job filling in any gaps around the plug but you can more easily use a standard wood glue to secure the plug.

BTW, there are also wood wasps that bore into wood. They make smaller holes but also enter into the carpenter bee holes to lay the eggs. Same process and have a good time swatting the bees!

Coming Up. No meeting this month because of the COVID-19. Maybe we can get together by December should a vaccine be available.

## Drawknives and Spokeshaves

When the last grains of sand run through an hourglass, I know how I want to check out. I want to drop on the shop floor in the middle of a project. The mortician will have to pry my woodworking machines out of the cold dead fingers of my left hand. They will then have to pry my hand tools out of the cold dead fingers of my right. The last two tools she will wrest from my grasp will be a drawknife and a wooden spokeshave. I am so dependent on these two tools, that I am sure when that final moment comes, they will be in my hands.

Early records show that a drawknife and a spokeshave were in every woodworker's kit. In fact, these guys often owned more than one. These are two of woodworking's most useful tools. Today's woodworkers will benefit as much from them as did the old guys. I am writing about the two tools together because that is how they are often used – together.

The drawknife is a knife that is used on the pull stroke. Using two hands provides a lot more control. Pulling with arm, shoulder, back and leg muscles places a great deal of force behind the blade. An experienced user can slice a shaving as thick as his thumb, or cut one as fine as a human hair. This means a drawknife can accomplish quick stock removal, fine work and everything in between.

The issue for today's woodworker is to find a good drawknife. Those sold in stores and catalogs will not generally work. The reason is simple. The tool is supposed to be a knife, but toolmakers insist on grinding their drawknives like a chisel. A 45° bevel won't work any better on a drawknife than it would on a pocketknife.

Our predecessors bought lots of drawknives back when toolmakers still knew what they were doing, and many of them are still around. You should have no trouble finding a good knife on eBay or from old-tool dealer web sites. Look for one with tight handles, that has not been beat, or ground down to nothing. Drawknives were made with cutting edges more than a foot long or as short as 4". An 8" to 10" knife is about the right size for most work.

When choosing a knife, don't be tempted by the ones with folding handles. They look nice, but leave them for the collectors. The extra length created by the hinge places the handle too far away from the edge. You sacrifice control. Drop handles cause a similar problem. They lower your hands out of the plane of the cut, sacrificing power.

A drawknife's handles are misleading. They suggest that you hold a drawknife like you did the handle bars on your tricycle. In fact, how you hold a knife is a function of the

work, and a straight grip on the handles is only one of many possibilities. A drawknife is frequently used on end grain. Then, you have to choke up on the control handle (the right hand if you are right handed). Sometimes you hold the blade vertical, then your right hand holds the handle with an overhand grip. The important point is to not get locked into a misperception or be limited by it.

A drawknife is a slicing tool, not a two-handled hatchet. This means you do not use it by hacking. Think about a butcher cutting meat. You start close to the handle and makes a slicing stroke that ends with the point of the blade. The result is a clean, easy cut. So too it is with a drawknife. Start the cut close to your control hand. Lift the blade ever so slightly to create some clearance behind the cutting edge and to engage it. As you pull the knife, make a slicing cut that ends up at the far end of the blade. The closer you are to end grain, the shorter the radius of the slicing arc.

Besides an easy, glassy smooth cut, using the knife this way has other benefits. By slicing, you distribute the cutting action along the entire cutting edge, and it will stay sharp longer. Pulling directly toward yourself, or hacking as with a hatchet, places the wear all in one spot on the blade. This area becomes dull faster, and you will eventually develop a hollow in the cutting edge.

Once you understand how a drawknife cuts, you will understand the flaw behind a common misconception. Some woodworkers hold the knife upside down. This position – with the bezel down – changes the cutting action. You have created a high-angle cut that will not slice. To better understand, imagine paring with a chisel. You place the bezel up, raise the handle slightly to create clearance, and cut with a slicing action. Consider what kind of cut you will get if you try to pare with the bezel down, and how much control you will have in this position. That is the correct way to do this.

Woodworkers who use a drawknife this way argue they have more control. The mistake is a limited cut for control. In accepting the limited cut they sacrifice the drawknife's most important feature is it's ability to remove wood fast. Furthermore, the higher cutting angle will not cut as cleanly and creates more friction, which dulls the edge faster. Using a drawknife upside down to training wheels on a bike. If you only know how to ride with training wheels, you mistake them for control because you don't fall. Better to take a few spills and learn how to really ride. Then, you truly have control.

A drawknife will eventually need to be sharpened. In fact, if you buy an old one, it will need some work before

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you can use it. Never grind a knife-edge tool. Sharpen your knives with sandpaper adhered to a wooden block. A drawknife edge is a special case, in that it is only one half a knife. The bottom of the blade is flat, as on a chisel-edge tool. That is where you begin. Hold the block, or the stone, flat on the surface and work back and forth. Be very careful not to raise the block, as this will round the edge, aggravating the very condition you are trying to correct.

Next, work the bezel, or upper surface of the edge. This surface is curved like your pocket knife. If you work only the cutting edge, you will gradually increase the angle and reduce the tool's ability to slice easily and cleanly. So while honing this surface, be sure to gradually lower the block so you are dressing the entire curve, rather than just the edge. In other words, do not just sharpen the blade. You also have to maintain the curve's original shape as possible.

Work the lower surface and the upper curve through several grits. It is not necessary to create an edge as sharp as on a chisel or plane blade, but it causes no harm.

A word of safety about drawknives: The tool has an open, unprotected cutting edge. Hang it on a wall. This protects the tool and you. If you store the tool in a drawer or tool box, wrap or cover the edge. Less, it can give you a really nasty bite when you reach in for the tool.

The spokeshave usually cleans up after the drawknife and brings your work down to the line. The tool will create a finished surface, or one that requires only a light sanding. The difference in the two tools is that while the drawknife can also make fine cuts, the spokeshave cannot do heavy jobs. It is a lightweight tool intended for very fine work.

The spokeshave is referring to the type with a wooden body. While the metal-bodied version has the same name, it works in a very different way, and nowhere near as well. The wooden shave's cutter is close to parallel with the sole and the bezel is placed up. It is the same configuration as a drawknife. The metal version's cutter is bedded at 45°, with its bezel down, in the same configuration as a plane and a drawknife used upside down. The wooden version's cutting angle is much lower, making it a true shave. This lower cutting angle is the reason the tool works so well on end grain, and cuts so effortlessly with the grain.

While you may have to hunt to find a good drawknife, wooden-bodied spokeshaves are readily available. They are not mass produced and do not show up in many catalogs. Rather, they are made by individual tool makers, and have to be purchased from their web sites. Most of these shaves are as good as any shaves made in the past.

In the past, common-grade shaves were made of beech. The best grade were made of boxwood. Neither is a particularly pretty wood. Today's shave makers work with highly figured woods, and their shaves can be spectacular. If you own a small piece of really special wood, they are happy to make it into a shave for you.

Some catalogs sell low-angled shaves with metal bodies. Chatter is a spokeshave user's biggest problem. A wooden body absorbs shock better than metal and reduces the tendency to chatter. Stick with wood.

Like drawknives, shaves were once part of every woodworker's kit. Having a wooden body and a lightweight cutter, fewer of them have survived. Of those that have, a large percentage are worn out. Because shaves wear quickly, most recommend you not use an old shave. Put it on display as an artifact, but spare it. You'll be real happy with a new one.

While you can manage very well with just one drawknife, you will find that the more familiar you become with wooden shaves, the more of them you will want to own. I have only one but it is very nice. It is more efficient to dedicate a shave for a certain job. The more jobs, the more shaves.

Unlike a drawknife, you have to set up a spokeshave. Most of today's shaves have a top adjustment, which allows you to set the tool without removing the cutter. Adjustment is usually made by turning a small Allen screw. If not, you will have to examine the tool to see how it is adjusted. The trick in setup is to cock the blade so it is higher on one side than the other. In this configuration, you have every setting you need. When you want to take a very light cut, move to the shallow side of the blade. To make a deep cut, move to the deep end. Much of your work will be done with the medium setting in the middle.

The drawknife is designed to be pulled. A spokeshave can be pushed or pulled, depending on the job. However, 90 percent of the time, the tool is pushed. The only time it can be effectively pulled is when whittling very straight-grained wood. An example would be Windsor chair spindles.

Most of the work you do with a drawknife or shave is shaping, which involves cutting across grain. In this case, the muscles involved in pulling a shave are inadequate. When you push a shave, you can apply weight from your upper body down onto the tool. It is your weight that keeps the edge engaged and cutting.

Enjoy both tools and keep them sharp. Barry Humphus and help from Popular Woodworking.

No Face to Face meeting this Month

We hope to get together soon!

No meeting this month because of the COVID-19 virus. Stay safe, stay safe at home as possible and because SW Louisiana is a hot spot right now, keep it up.



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