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DECEMBER MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Happy New Year!

The Lake Charles Woodworkers annual holiday meeting was once again held at the fabulous shop of Gail and Mickey Hart. I think anyone who has been there would love to have a duplicate. And once again, the munches were great (your editor even baked some of them).

We had a pretty big crowd with over 30 people including members, their spouses and some guests. We were glad to see our newest member, Kirk Brame and the often missing Brent Evans there. Brent's knees are better. He had surgery a couple of months ago that had some complications. While he can play golf again, he said no football!

Members brought lots of great Show and Tell. Included in the lot were several great bowls by Gary Rock with one platter of ambrosia maple and a bowl of walnut plus a small jar and a potpourri bowl of sycamore, Eltee Thibodeaux showed some of his scrollwork as well as a clever corner clamp. J.W. Anderson showed off a terrific beechwood plant stand and his DeRidder buddy, Mickey McMullen, brought a neat scrollwork farm cart he made a while ago.

John Leonard Fontenot showed a turned juniper bowl. John believes that cedar is a trash wood, but

clearly he turned trash into something of beauty with this bowl. LCWWC President Bubba Cheramie continues to experiment with turning interesting woods. He brought a natural edged bowl of spalted aspen and a bowl in progress of chinaberry (a name which reveals my Texas heritage—people from Louisiana call it chinaball). Turns out that it is a very interesting wood. See the article on Chinaberry (*melia azedarach*) later in this issue.

While Kyle Andrepont couldn't attend, his dad Aaron brought a sample of Kyle's recent work: a tool box (made for a local carpet layer) constructed of pine with walnut trim. Everyone appreciates Kyle's careful and meticulous work.

Pie Sonnier specializes. He builds cars out of wood. My friend Joe Richardson has a street legal car who's frame is made of wood (a 1954 Morgan sports car), but Pie's cars are very special. His 1959 Cadillac model and Ford Model A Roadster model were a hit with the group. Pie said that the Caddy took about 60 hours to build. The plan he had was not accurate, so his spouse found photos on the Internet of '59 Caddy's that allowed him to create an accurate design. Pie added that cutting all of the parts takes the most time while assembly just takes patience and glue time.

Lee Frazier's son drives a fuel tanker truck for a living, so Lee created a tractor-tank truck model of cypress (his favorite wood) with some walnut for highlights.

Nancy Borel had to work at the McNeese graduation ceremonies but passed on a question: What is an efficient way to cut a circle out of wood? Several suggestions were made including using a table saw, band saw or router. All of these techniques require a jig. See the article on circle cutting latter in the Newsletter.

You can see all of the Show and Tell and 300 more on our web site at www.lcwoodworkers.com.

Coming Up . . . Join us at Bubba Cheramie's shop for some jigs, Show and Tell and some round-robin discussion of best practice in wood working; Saturday, January 8th at 9:00 a.m.



CHINABERRY WOOD

Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*) is a fast-growing tree which has become naturalized in the southeastern U.S. It is invading the forests, fencelines and disturbed areas of Texas, Louisiana, Florida and elsewhere, including Hawaii. Belonging to the mahogany family of plants, chinaberry is native to Asia. Striking and colorful, chinaberry was widely introduced as an ornamental shade tree because of its large compound leaves, its distinctive clusters of lilac-colored flowers and its round yellow fruits. Its seeds are spread by fruit-eating birds and squirrels.

Although it is revered for its beauty in its native range and is used for its medicinal properties, chinaberry's fast-growth and rapidly spreading thickets make it a significant pest plant in the U.S. (even so, it continues to be sold through nurseries.).

I recall a large chinaberry tree in the backyard of my grandmother's home in Dallas. During the Summer, the neighborhood kids regularly used the green berries as ammo for our rubber-band powered sling shots. During the Fall, the berries got a bit mushy, but that was great because they went 'splat' when they hit. The local squirrels got interested about this time as food for the cooler months. As the berries dried out, they became 'harder' ammo for our fun.

But here is the secret of the chinaberry: catching fish. All you do is crush some of the dried seeds and throw the result into a pond. A few minutes later, fish float stupified to the surface and you can pick them out with your hands. It turns out that the chinaberry pulp and seeds are poisonous. If you sand it, you need to wear a respirator. Like many of the woods that we use, there can be some sensitivity to the natural toxins that they contain.

Chinaberry outgrows, out-shades and displaces native vegetation; its bark, leaves and seeds are poisonous to farm and domestic animals. Research shows chinaberry to have insecticidal, antiviral and possible anti-cancer properties. At least one European company makes flooring from chinaberry wood.

Chinaberry is a deciduous, wide-spreading tree which grows up to 50 feet tall but it can be shrubby. The tree has a blue-green cast. Chinaberry thrives in a variety of soils, and is cold-hardy and

drought-resistant. Its leaves are large (to 2 ft. long) and double-compound (having leaflets on leaflets).

The leaves have long stems (called *petioles*). Its leaflets are dark blue-green above, have toothed margins and are pointed. Leaves alternate along the stem. The mildly fragrant chinaberry flowers are small and lilac-colored, with 5 petals surrounding a purple tube. The flowers occur in showy clusters at the ends of branches. Flowering begins in about mid-March (in Florida). Chinaberry fruit are round berries, changing from green to yellow, hanging from long stalks; the fruit eventually becoming brownish leathery seed capsules. The capsules will hang from the tree throughout the leafless winter months. In Florida, Louisiana and Texas, the fruit ripen in late summer and early fall.

Seldom has a transplant been as happy as the chinaberry tree. Introduced to the sundrenched American Southwest and Mexico centuries ago for shade, the chinaberry embraced its arid new home and flourished. This cousin of mahogany from China relished the hot, dry climate and responded to it with rapid growth in even the worst of soil.

Native Americans, Mexicans, and new settlers in the barren land welcomed the new tree. Indeed, people cooled off beneath its branches, but didn't hesitate to fell it for wood the worked into rustic furniture and tool handles, and burned for fuel. Still, the chinaberry offered them much, much more.

When denied the luxury of real soap or its ingredients, the resourceful sought out the generous chinaberry. By mashing its large, yellow, berrylike fruits and adding them to water, they whipped up a cleansing bath for grimy clothes. For this, chinaberry came to be called "soap tree."

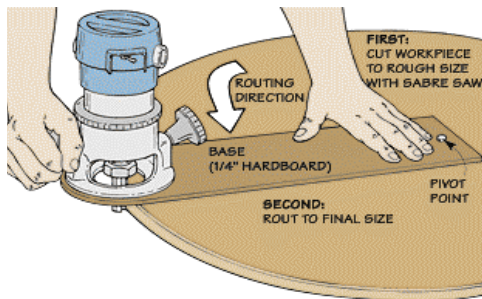
Could the beneficent chinaberry be the answer to a prayer? Maybe. For sure, it's the stuff from which prayers are made! The same bone-hard, reddish-brown seeds that bowl over fish served the missionary friars of that part of the continent as rosary beads. With frequent use, the seeds took on a lustrous polish, as if responding to the spiritual purpose. *From www.woodmagazine and edited by Barry Humphus.*

Don't forget your 2005 Dues. Send your check to Dick Hopes, 1139 Green Rd, Lake Charles, LA 70611.

CUTTING CIRCLES

Recently member Nancy Borel asked about cutting circles in wood. We asked the members attending the December meeting and got several responses.

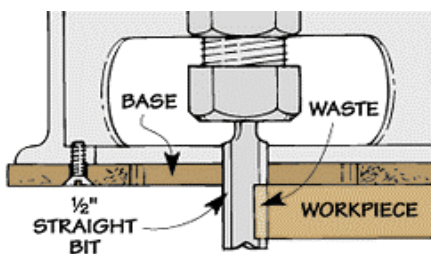
The best way according to several members is to use a trammel attached to a router (or even a RotoZip). By mounting the router on a trammel, you get both an



exact cut and a smooth edge on the work piece. The trammel is nothing more than a base made from 1/4" hardboard or plywood that pivots on a bolt or dowel pin. The pin fits into a

hole drilled in the center of the work piece. To size the base, rip it to width so it is wide enough to support your router. Then cut it about 9" longer than the radius of the circle to be cut.

The next step is to locate the pivot hole in the

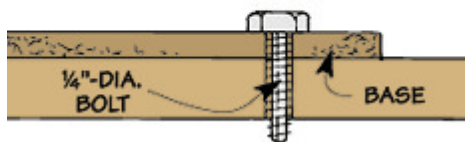


base. After mounting the router to the base and installing a straight bit (a spiral bit works as well), measure from the inside edge of the bit and drill a hole centered at a distance that matches

the radius. Note that the hole at the center point doesn't need to go all the way through. In fact, I use a 1/4" dowel

mounted in the hole that goes through the trammel. You can drill several pivot holes in the trammel to get a different radius as needed. You drill the pivot hole in the work

NOTE:
DISTANCE FROM INSIDE EDGE OF BIT TO CENTER OF PIVOT POINT EQUALS DESIRED RADIUS



piece. That way, the hole doesn't show on the top of your work.

Before routing the circle, it's generally a good idea to first cut the work piece to rough shape using a "sabre" saw. This way, there is not as much material to remove as you route to the final size.

It is important that you route in a counterclockwise direction. This means that you are routing in the

opposite direction as the rotation of the bit. This is safer because the bit pulls the router into the work piece so it doesn't bounce along the edge. By the way, you can purchase a trammel of this design from several tool suppliers (e.g. Woodcraft or Rockler) that is made out of clear acrylic. See below for these.

Another method is to rough out the size of the work piece with a sabre saw and power sand to the line you've drawn. Like a router, this leaves a smooth finish on the edge of the piece.

Still another way is to use a bandsaw. You cut a 3/4" thick trammel and clamp it to the bandsaw table just shy of the blade. From the blade, measure the radius of your piece to a point along the trammel. Drill a 1/4" hole through the trammel. Locate the center point of your work piece and drill a 1/4" hole half way through the piece in the bottom. Install a 1/4" dowel pin in the bottom of the work piece at the center point then turn the work piece over and mount the center pin in the pivot hole of the trammel.

Turn on your bandsaw and rotate the work piece through the blade keeping just proud of your line. After the circle is cut, sand the edge to finish as needed. For small thin work pieces, you could use a scroll saw instead of a bandsaw. One advantage of using a bandsaw is that you can easily tip the table to put a bevel on the work piece (which you can also do with a table saw by tilting the blade).

You can also just hand turn the work piece through the bandsaw blade without using a trammel keeping the cut proud of the line you've marked. Of course, you could also do this with a sabre saw. The down side is that you will likely need more sanding.

Using a table saw, you can do the same thing as with a bandsaw using a trammel clamped to the table, though the cut will be somewhat rougher and you'll end up doing more sanding.

If you have a small circle to cut (up to 6 inches), you can use a special circle cutting bit mounted on a drill press. These are a bit tricky to use and keep sharp and be absolutely sure you clamp your work piece securely to the drill press table.

Commercially made trammels have a few advantages over a shop-made one. Generally, the router base mounting holes are predrilled to fit most router bases and they have precise pre-marked radius scales. Some examples include the Jasper Model 300 Circle Cutting Jig (7" to 52") (Rockler part 24435) for \$50. Smaller versions of the Jasper jig are available from Woodcraft.

Member Kirk Brame said that the annual Houston Wood Working show is April 1-3, 2005 at Reliant Park (next to Reliant Stadium). Don't eat the hot dogs!