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### JUNE HIGHLIGHTS

Dr. Todd Shupe was our presenter at the LSU Ag Center this month and Tom Strawn, Regional Director of the Center was our host.

One of the the projects in which Todd is currently involved is a study of termite infestations in this area. Lake Charles ranks only behind New Orleans in the severity of formosan termites. He had requested that those who could, bring some bags of identified saw dust or chips to the meeting. He will place this into the study as bait at the Sam Houston State Park where the research is in operation.

Todd discussed the wood products business in Louisiana, especially as it involves small operations such as millers, cabinet makers and others involved in wood products in Louisiana.

Besides good basic advise on operating a wood related business, Todd mentioned several sources of funding—grants (which you don't pay back) and low interest loans for those interested. Todd mentioned that lendors will look at several factors in determining the qualifications for SBA and other loans.

One of the most exciting programs is the Small Business Innovative Research grant (SBIR), a Small Business Administration program that awarded more than \$1 billion in 2000 and about \$3 million to Louisiana small businesses in 2001. Qualifications are simple but the proposal must be innovative. Phase I awards can be up to \$100,000. The idea is to do research on something to benefit your operation and other businesses. Todd gave the example of figuring out a drying schedule for low value hardwoods.

When asked, Todd also mention the controversy regarding CCA treated wood. The EPA has banned its use for residential users begining in 2004. After that time, CCA treated wood will become very expensive (as it has to be gotten from existing stock or imported).

Todd pointed out several publications from the LSU Ag Center. There are a number of them on display in the lobby of the Center on just about all aspects of agriculture in Louisina. One of the publi-

cations that will be of interest to members is the one he passed out the last time he visited with us: *Woods of Louisiana*. There are actually two versions of the book and the better one contains actual wood samples. You can get the good one by emailing Todd at tshupe@agcenter.lsu.edu and requesting it along with your mailing address. You can also call him at (225) 578-6432 (Office) to request a copy.

As we knew that Tom Strawn was going to be there, we gave him a bit of a challenge: identification of a tree. In our neighborhood, there is a tree that I have never been able to identify. The shape is like a water oak but the leaves are definately not oak



as the dense leaves taper to a point. In the late Spring, there are small flowers that result in a seed pod at the end of each flower. With one quick look, Tom identified it as Ari-

zonia Ash (*Fraxinus velutina*, aka Burland Ash or Velvet Ash). He said that while it has the good wood working characteristics of more common ash, it is affected by boring insects and its roots tend to rise above ground over time. It is a widely planted ornimetal tree in the Southwest. Tom said that they are fairly rare in Louisiana as most samples have been brought from out of State over time as decorative trees. It grows fast but is fairly short lived in the Gulf Coast climate.

Show and Tell brought some wonderful sweetgum bowls from Gary Rock, a Lighthouse scrollwork from Rod Nunnaly, a 24 oz bowling pin mallet turned by Eltee Thibodeaux as well as an engraving for the Westlake Rams, also by Eltee. See them at the LCWW web site.

Coming Up . . . Annual BBQ. Friday, July 18, 5:00 p.m. at the PPG Park Pavilion. Get your tickets from Dick Hopes or Barry Humphus and bring your old wood working magazines to trade.

## BLOCK PLANES

Of all the hand planes in a shop, the one to reach for most often is your block plane. That's because it's handy for fitting joints, trimming parts and planing a delicate detail. Block planes typically run between 5" and 6-1/2" in length and were originally designed to plane end grain.

Many woodworkers believe that the reason a block plane handles end grain so well is that the blade is at a much lower angle than a standard plane's. True, the blade is much lower (roughly 20 versus 45 degrees for a standard bench plane), but the effective angle is virtually the same. Why? The blade on a block plane is installed bevel up instead of bevel down (as on a standard plane).

When you add the typical 25-degree bevel that's ground onto the blade to the 20-degree blade angle, you end up at 45 degrees. So why does a block plane work better on end grain? First, the lower blade angle allows for a one-handed grip that puts the hand, elbow and shoulder in line-this creates a much more effective thrust. Second, as the bevel is up (and there's no need for a frog), the blade can rest firmly on the bed of the body. So its fully supported virtually all the way up to the cutting edge. This excellent support combined with an efficient stroke, allows a block plane to cleanly sever wood fibers without chatter or tear-out.

There are two main types of block planes available today: a standard block plane and a low-angle block plane. As discussed earlier, the blade on a standard block plane rests on the body at about 20 degrees-this creates an effective angle of 45 degrees.

The blade on a low-angle block plane rests on the bed at about 12 degrees. Combined with a 25-degree bevel, this yields an effective cutting angle of approximately 37 to 38 degrees. You wouldn't think that 12 degrees would make much difference, but it does. A well-sharpened low-angle block plane will generally outperform its higher-angle cousin. A good choice is the Record 60-1/2 or the Stanley 60-1/2 (about 1/4" narrower than the Record). They fit well in both your apron pocket and your hand.

Since they have no frog to adjust the blade back and forth to open and close the throat opening, some block planes offer an adjustable throat plate. This lets you close the opening for fine cuts, and open it for coarser work. Inexpensive block planes do not have adjustable throats and probably not worth the money. For just a little more, you can pick up a quality block plane that has an adjustable throat. To adjust the opening, loosen the lock knob and pivot the lever to move the plate open or closed.

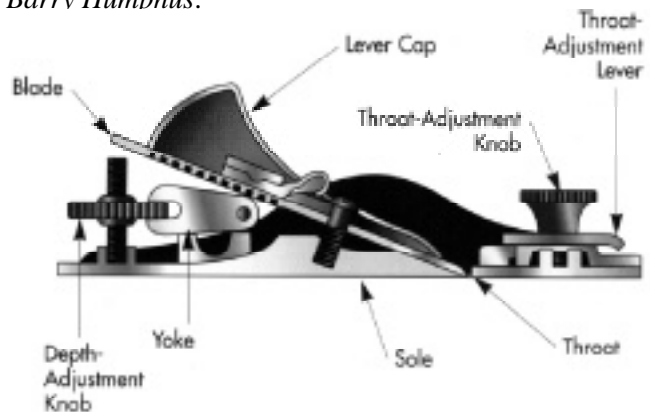
Another feature to look for in a block plane, in

addition to an adjustable throat, is a depth-adjustment mechanism. You want one that works well and is comfortable. Be sure to take the new plane out of the box before you buy it and try out the depth adjustment. It should work smoothly, easily and be easy to get to.

There are three common grips with a block plane: light, heavy, and reverse. The grip used most is the light grip. The plane nestles in the hand while the fingers wrap around it with the index finger pressing down on the throat plate lock knob. This grip works well for most trimming and fine-tuning work.

Although you don't often use a block plane to remove a lot of wood, a heavier grip comes in handy every now and then. For this grip use two hands to guide the plane. This works especially well when planing end grain, since you want firm pressure to prevent chatter. Just like a Japanese plane, you may find that you have more control over a block plane if you reverse it in your hand. This grip lets you pull the plane instead of pushing it. This is a good grip when chamfering edges or making a final pass on an edge of a workpiece. A hybrid of the heavy and reverse grips is to use both hands to pull the plane. One hand grasps the throat-plate lock knob to pull the plane, while the other hand wraps around the body of the plane in a reverse grip to guide it through the cut. If you skew the plane body slightly, you'll find that this modified grip works extremely well on end grain.

Another variation is to mount the plane upside down in your bench vise. This allows you to trim small pieces where you can see them. An interesting version of the block plane is the knuckle-joint plane, introduced by Stanley in 1888. Virtually identical to a Stanley No. 9, these block planes had a longer lever cap screw and a unique hinged lever cap known as the knuckle joint. This plane was designed to provide a more comfortable one-handed grip. If you're fortunate enough to stumble across one at a yard sale or auction (and the price is right), snap it up. For lots more info on old Stanley planes, see <http://www.rovers.net/~nichael/nlc-wood/stanref-type.html>.  
*Barry Humphus.*



## MILLING LUMBER

Several years ago, George Kuffle hired an arborist to cut down a magnificent (90+ years according to the ring count) example of a red oak tree from his yard. The tree was dropping limbs on his new shop and he decided it was time the tree should go. When he discussed this with Barry Humphus, Barry suggested that as the tree was very straight, large (more than 60 inches diameter at the base) and in good condition, that it be milled into lumber.

The arborist arrived and was told what would be done, so the tree was felled so that the maximum lumber could be had from the tree. Eight to 9 foot logs were cut from the trunk and the limbs were turned into firewood.

After the arborist did his work, a miller came to the site. He lifted the several thousand pound logs onto his portable mill and ran 2", 1-1/2", 1" and some 1/2" lumber from the logs. He also cut "stickers" (basically 1"x1"x36" sticks) that would be used to separate the boards for drying.

The resulting lumber was "sticked" and stacked behind George's shop where it lay for a couple of years to air dry. Since then, many great projects have been made from this tree including a recent dining room table, end tables, fly-tying table, a pool table and many other items from the wood. Brent Evans, reported that it was the best oak he had seen and was very dense, close grained, stable and useful for his projects.

Unfortunately, there are very few arborists and millers who will do this sort of custom job. So if you have a tree that is a good candidate for turning into lumber, you have few choices in the Lake Area.

Fortunately, there are some folks that still perform this sort of service. Recently, we talked to Richard Desjardine (337-582-3082) who is an area miller. Richard uses the LT-40 model Wood-Mizer brand portable mill. This unit uses a bandsaw system to cut the wood and in the larger systems, provides lots of log handling abilities.

As Desjardine is located in Hecker, he will come get your logs, bring them back to his place and mill them. The lumber can be returned to you or sent on to a kiln (listen up Bryan & John).

The Wood-Mizer uses a thin kerf bandsaw

system to produce uniform lumber thicknesses with relatively little waste. Along with good control of the logs, you can expect good quality boards from this system.

The quality of the lumber you get is dependent on two major factors: suitability of the tree to be cut into lumber and the skill of the miller. In general, the cost of milling is per foot and this will vary according to the quantity and quality of the logs.

Richard said that he is often called on to mill a favorite tree (e.g., the old walnut that great-grand dad planted all those years ago). Another problem are trees that come from someone's yard. They often have nails, spikes, bullets and lots of other metal trash embedded in them. As the metal will ruin an expensive band saw blade in a hurry, its worth carefully examining the logs with a metal detector.

So no matter how skilled he is, Richard said, a miller often does not see lot of trees that are good lumber candidates. In general, the tree must be tall, straight and free of metal. The type of tree is also important. Milling a slash pine into lumber is probably not worth the cost as southern yellow pine is low cost and readily available.

We also talked to The Tree Feller (478-8733), a local ISA certified arborist. An arborist can advise you about the viability of your trees and tell you if the tree is worth milling. In addition, they can take down the tree, cut it for milling purposes, grind down the stump, treat your trees for disease, etc. If you are looking to remove a tree, always go for a State certified arborist

Once the tree is felled, you may have to face removing the stump and there are a few alternatives to consider. One way is to just let it rot. Rotting takes time and is done by natural fungi. Just keep the stump slightly moist and cover it with sod. To enhance the process, bore 1 inch diameter holes vertically into the stump. and add a bit of fertilizer to the holes. Don't add too much or it will kill the fungi.

You can also "grub" the stump—i.e. dig around it, cut off the tap root and pry it up—a lot of work but quick and cheap.

Another choice is burning it out. However, this is prohibited in most cities in our area so you can't do this unless you live outside a town.

And of course, you can always have your arborist chip it out with a stump grinder—fast but pricy. *Barry Humphus.*