



# Woodworkers Guild



of

Southwestern Michigan – <http://www.woodguild.org> March 2014

## Next Meeting

**March 11, 2014 7:00pm**

**Al Collison's Shop at  
10292 Douglas Ave.**

Take Douglas North to Cooper, it is 2 ½ miles North of Cooper, on the right (East) side. Or you can take 131 to D ave East to Douglas and turn left, (North). Al will have an orange cone and flashing light out to get your attention.

Agenda: The guild's own Jake Blok will be showing us his work in fine furniture and discussing furniture design. You can preview his work at [www.jblokstudios.com](http://www.jblokstudios.com).



Notes from February 11 meeting held at Al Collison's Shop: At last count 27 members and guests were in attendance. The meeting opened up with a good show and tell discussion. Gary Doyle commented how well our web site is going and recognized all the effort Mike Kline is putting in keeping it organized and up to date.

Bruce DeDee was looking for a copy of Woodsmith magazine #19 from 1982.

George Armstrong had information for the Woodturners Symposium in Columbus Ohio during October 3-5. George may be presenting his ornamental turnings and machinery.

Thom Kelly presented a unique hasp he added to the finger joint box he made during the guild box build last year. Art Wurfel found the hasps at Lee Valley.



George Armstrong also present a vase he turned from a maple tree he took down on his property a few years ago. It was rough turned while the wood was still green. The end grain was coated with a sealer and allowed to dry over time. After drying the vase was turned to final shape and finished.



The meeting was then turned over to our feature presenter, Doug Berch, dulcimer maker and musician. Doug and his wife Cynthia drove over from East Lansing area to spend the evening with our guild explaining dulcimer construction and even graced us with a dulcimer performance. He provided a brief biography. Doug grew up in an apartment in New York City. While he did not have any access to tools or people that could pass along crafting skills, the local neighborhood hardware store was a real hardware store like we nostalgically dream about. At the hardware store he was able to get questions answered and gain some skills. Doug's first work bench was his parents kitchen table.

A lot of pieces fell into place to shape his career. At 15 he was playing in a rock-n-roll band. At 18 got connected with an instrument repair shop. There he learned how to use hand tools and how to repair instruments. At an open mic night in a weekend coffee shop he heard his first dulcimer played. At 21 he was a traveling musician as that paid much more than minimum wage and was more desirable than doing instrument repair. During the last eight or so years he had returned to making and repairing dulcimers.



He went on to explain hammered dulcimers are the older style and have been around for over 2000 years. Dulcimers have 4 strings typically, but often are played with 3 strings or with the top string doubled up to play a louder melody. 95% of his dulcimer sales are of the 4 string variety because those are easier for the original owner to sell. Doug builds the dulcimers in a small bedroom shop with only a few power tools in his garage for rough out. The wood he purchase from local suppliers is allowed to dry to two years in his attic. It is then moved to the bedroom shop for a couple of months prior to resaw for construction. The wood's final dimension is less than 1/8" thick and will be from quarter sawn lumber to minimize warping. Doug prefers air dried lumber or lumber from an evaporative kiln for workability. Work begins with book matching the back pieces at 3/16" and planning that down to 1/8". A reinforcing back seam is added. The edges of the reinforcements are beveled to 45° with a custom scraper he ordered from Lee Valley. One of his favorite hand planes is Mijingfang rosewood planes. These are a Chinese style plane. Doug uses one with a high blade angle. While it is hard to push it planes with no tear out. You don't have to go to China to get one. These planes can be purchased at Woodcraft.





The holes that Doug places in his dulcimers are made with a forstner bit. He has learned the bits must be kept very sharp to keep from tearing the thin pieces of wood they are drilling through. He guestimated it takes 30~40 hours to build a dulcimer. The costs start around \$700 and go up depending on wood choice and decoration. He may build anywhere between 12 ~ 20 dulcimers a year plus a few repairs. One of Doug's favorites woods is black walnut. The wood type as well as the instrument maker can influence the sound from bright to warm tones. As beauty is to the eye of the beholder, apparently is sound to the listener. Some people will pass on a great sounding instrument just because someone told them it was made from the wrong type of wood. Doug also had one instrument that he thought sounded less than he would have liked and that it would be difficult to sell. However at a convention a customer proclaimed it the best sounding dulcimer amongst many vendors and all of Doug's other offerings and purchased that dulcimer.

Altering the sound of a finished dulcimer is a skill of its own. Sanding, scraping and adjusting braces can alter the sound. That led a lot of discussion around adhesives. Hyde glue is a one of an instrument makes favorite choices and it gives a strong crisp joint and can be repaired. Titebond tends to creep under the tension of an instrument and its bends. Luthiers Mercantile sells a white glue that works well, does not creep, but has a six month shelf life.

Doug graced us with a dulcimer serenade before moving down to Al's work bench to demonstrate some of the bending equipment. A jig was constructed to bend the side pieces. The wood is dampened with water and sandwiched between a silicone heating blanket that Doug purchased from Benchmark Thermal. The blanket and thermostat will cost around \$200 to purchase. Doug relies on sound and smell to determine how long to apply heat to the wood in the bending jig.



Another bending tool Doug uses is an Ilex bending iron. Its elliptical shape gives it more bending surfaces than a typical heated pipe. The wood side strips are typically resawn, rough sanded, hand planed and scraped to 1/8" thick or less. Distilled water is used during bending to prevent chemical staining from sanding grit and minerals. Wetting the bands has a technique as well. Too much water causing cupping, however more water is needed at the bend locations.



Doug could have discussed more construction techniques but the evening had to draw to a close as it was well past 9:00. It was a wonderful entertaining and informative meeting.



The guild wishes to thank Doug and Cynthia for spending it with our woodguild. You can learn more about Doug Berch, dulcimers and purchase his music at [www.dougberch.com](http://www.dougberch.com)

### **Guild Officers**

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#### ***Directions***

***New Hwy 6 E. off 131 to  
M-37, N. to 28<sup>th</sup> St., Right  
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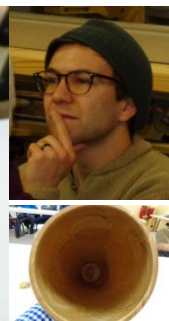
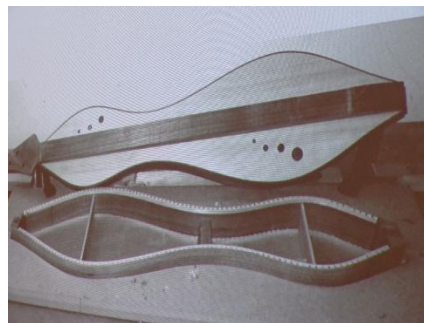
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Bill Crown has purchased some of the aircraft drill bits and stops featured at Dennis Dahl cabinet shop during the February meeting. The drills bits will be available for purchase at the March meeting for around \$6.



Also Mike Kline is taking orders or hats with the guild logo. The hats will cost around \$12 each and are available in black, white, orange, khaki, navy and red.

