

Furniture makers in fellowship

Andrea Hargreaves finds out what prompts amateur furniture makers to drive around the countryside seeking out their fellow woodworkers

The Southern Fellowship of Woodworkers is, so far as I can ascertain, only one of two such groups of predominantly amateur furniture makers in the country. Its membership includes Surrey, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Sussex and Berkshire. The other federation operates in Kent.

So what entices makers out of their cosy workshops and garages to travel miles to meet their fellows on a regular basis? I was invited to tea and some wickedly buttery biscuits in the well-appointed garage-with-a-room-on-top workshop of Colin Waters, the chairman of the Southern Fellowship of Woodworkers where I met its founder member Peter Guyett, secretary Roger Hardwick, and four other stalwarts of this 51-strong membership.

Sitting on an assortment of chairs in Colin's double garage which serves as timber and materials store as well as home to his and his son's collection of mountain, road and racing bicycles, I began to see the attraction of belonging to a fellowship of like-minded people: it's the opportunity to poke around other makers' workshops, ask questions about their work practices, why they choose particular machines, how they cut their joints, how they finish their work; it's the chance to discover that you



NEIL HISCOCK

are not the only one with particular problems and, moreover, to find out that several of your fellows have

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COLIN WATERS

Cabinet by Colin Waters



ANDREA HARGREAVES

Front, left to right, Colin Waters, Bill Griffiths and Steve Isherwood; back, left to right, Peter Guyett, Thad Carter, Roger Hardwick and Steven Probert

About the SFW

To find out more about the SFW go to www.sfwoodworkers.co.uk or email Colin Waters at colinandlesley@sky.com, or Roger Hardwick at rogerhardwick@btinternet.com

Chair by Neil Hiscox



Kent group

Colin Searle, a Member of the Institute of Carpenters, told me that the Kent Woodworkers Club generally meets on the last weekend of the month when there are demonstrations of most forms of woodworking excluding turning. The last two meetings for example had featured French polishing and marquetry. For more than two years Colin has run a hand skills class which is very popular. He also runs the Roy Sutton routing courses.

“The club is for cabinetmakers, carpenters and joiners,” he said. The Kent Woodworkers Club meets at Apple Craft Centre, Macknade, Faversham. Call Colin on 01732 773145 for details.

Colin's workshop



Members listen and comment...

Colin Waters largely made his workshop himself, getting steel beams put in to support the upstairs room over the double garage. Light pours in from all four sides, it is fully insulated and kept warm in winter by a single oil heater. There's an air compressor under the stairs with a line which feeds upstairs, and extraction courtesy of the Axminster ADE2200 in the floor space and five blast gates connected to the compressor.

He made a router table to a Norm Adams design and has a Scheppach 260mm planer/thicknesser and tablesaw, a Hammer N4400 bandsaw and a VicMarc lathe.

Lying on the tablesaw's surface were a book about chairs and how to make them, plus drawings, to enable him to

copy and adapt from a Mark Ripley design run in F&C.

When I asked the group if they preferred to make from their own designs or to be inspired by the work of others I received a mixed response.

Colin said he usually worked from his own designs but in this instance had not made chairs before so was glad to have some guidance. Others were split between working from their own designs and preferring to copy others' work.

He was making the chairs as a wedding present for his son, from a mix of English white and ripple ash with brown oak splines, and members bombarded him with questions about his own technique and comparisons with their own work.



... as Colin Waters talks about the templates...



... for these chairs...



... that he made to a Mark Ripley design

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA HARGREAVES



Chair by Peter Guyett

PETER GUYETT

Workshop ingenuity



Colin incorporated a trapdoor into his workshop design to enable pieces that were too big to be carried down the stairs, like this dining table, to be lowered...



... to the garage below



Detail from the underside of the table



The table safe and sound

PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLIN WATERS

< their own solutions; it's the opportunity to look at what others are making and how they are doing it. In short, it's about not feeling that all work has to be in isolation.

The SFW began in 1992 in response to a magazine's attempt to set up a countrywide fellowship.

What evolved was a programme that encompasses monthly visits to places like professional workshops and timber yards during the summer and monthly meetings at the Mytchett Centre in Surrey during the winter, when woodworking experts give well-attended talks.

Recent visits have included trips to see the workshops of Mark Ripley, Hugo Eglestone, Richard Linford and the Barnsley Workshop while talks have been given by makers with an interesting tale to tell, like Luke Griffiths, 22, who won a Medallion of Excellence at the recent WorldSkills international competition, works at Cimitree and teaches at Chichester College.

Peter explained that members address the winter meetings about aspects of woodworking and pieces they have made, Colin adding: "We all take woodworking very seriously."

Professional members number among them F&C contributor David Barron, and

most of the amateurs are retired.

Peter said: "I don't think there is any other significant group other than the Kent group. The Kent group is about teaching whereas ours is about exchanging views on how members do things, learning from pro makers by visits and talks.

"We have had most of the major makers and designers over the 17 years."

At its peak the fellowship had 65 members, numbering among them even some female makers – currently it is an all-male membership – and they would like to attract new members. "It would be nice to

have some lady members," said Colin.

Peter said: "We're going to try to do a couple of shows a year to recruit people, and we're getting a better website."

Membership is £10 a year and four newsletters go out a year, some to members as far-flung as the Orkneys and Devon who moved away but like to remain in contact.

With the tea drunk we eagerly moved upstairs to the real business of the morning, to inspect Colin's workshop and what he was making.

That's fellowship for you. **F&C**