

THE SUSSEX WOODCRAFT SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 2025

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Chairman's message

Another interesting newsletter this month and for those who couldn't make the meetings recently you will see that we've had some good topics. Bob Packer has managed to find some interesting outside speakers lately and between these, our members have stepped forward to entertain us. Please feel free to approach Bob or myself if you would like to give a talk. I would also like to put out another request. The newsletter is all about the SWS. Katrina has been doing a great job of taking notes at the meetings and writing them up for our quarterly newsletters, but we would love some more articles to put in. So. If you've done some work and would like to send us a picture and a small piece explaining about it, that would be great. (email address above) We are also happy to add any events including dates you come across that other members might be interested in. For example Bentley or West's Wood Fair. Or if you are taking part in any shows that members might like to come to see and say hello.

[Portrait of an SWS member](#)



Colin Irvine Sisk

How long have you been working with wood?

I started woodworking at school in the 1960's – a London grammar, with a well-equipped woodwork shop, about 15 double sided benches. It feels like a nightmare now to imagine 30 teenage boys wielding hammers, chisels, and saws etc. Surprisingly, the woodwork teacher wasn't prematurely grey! Other than hand tools the only equipment was a simple solid lathe and a large water-bath grindstone; I've never found anything since that gives such a clean and easy bevel on a tool. A hot animal glue pot simmered away constantly giving the room its own special aroma.

I've looked around for something I made at that time, and I hit upon my oilstone box which I made in about 1965 from the old teak bench tops that were being stripped from the school chemistry lab (to be replaced with Formica topped benches, which I doubt provided the length of service of the original teak ones). Saturated with oil from 50 years of honing it is not going to rot anytime soon!



Why work with wood?

Because that was what was readily available. In truth I'm interested in most things craft based (pottery being a prime example – but also gilding, plasterwork,

metalwork). Stone carving is my unfulfilled ambition.

In fact, leaving school to move into tertiary education it was a close call between teacher training to become a woodwork teacher and, what I finally choose, a tech college course leading to a professional surveyor qualification. Having eschewed a career in wood, I nevertheless kept alive a strong interest in it.

What do I enjoy?

I enjoy the challenge to myself – proving I can do it. I often muse along the lines of “if someone else can do that, so can I.” Then I stand in front of some Grinling Gibbons carving in Petworth House and realise what a delusionary fool I am. I also enjoy the process – making things the lazy way, lots of jigs and tricks – anything to avoid hard work.

I definitely get more pleasure in the designing and making than in the finished product.

How long each month?

I'm in my workshop on average every other day, usually for no more than half a day.

Best item

Hard choice. I'm tempted to say my violin (although still unfinished) should take the top spot. But because I can't play it it's a slightly abstract notion that it could be best.

I would have to settle on my Macintosh table as favourite. I love the Deco simple geometry, I really liked the way the design came together, and as much as I like the thrill of well figured timber, burrs etc, there is something about the simple, light, slightly figured surfaces that appeals.

At the smaller end, amongst my boxes a recurring favourite is the handed pair



of Deco boxes. It's about the only thing I ever make on repeat.

Workshop

All through my professional life I continued to do as much woodworking as possible. I've had a workshop of sorts in every house I've lived in. The smallest was a tiny attic room in Paris, but that still had enough space to produce a Directoire style console table, and it was the place of the start on my violin.



My current workshop is smallish and awkwardly shaped, but it has room for a proper bench (made back in 1970)., my Myford ML8 lathe, which does everything I need in terms of turning. A table saw completes the big equipment (I had to abandon my bandsaw when we last moved, not enough space). Essential power tools are a plunging router, a jigsaw and of course a battery drill and driver. Also, a small wet grindstone, essential for a clean bevel on tools.

Two south facing windows sound like a good idea, but in fact in bright sunshine the contrast between light and shadow makes work difficult at times. The layout is as good as I can achieve in the small space, but the table saw is on castors as it has to be carefully positioned for any long or wide cuts.



Deciding on projects

Most of my projects are decided upon as a personal need or desire, or as a request from someone. I have made some furniture on commission, and I do quite a lot of fascinating odds and ends of restoration work (you may remember the tale of the re-tailing of the greyhound) for an acquaintance who is in the antiques business.

Favourite wood

Probably easier to name the less preferred timbers, Zebrano is beautiful to look at but cross grained, pithy and splits easily. Padouk and Afrormosia work well enough but are quite an irritant. In the end I fall back to oak, it works well and predictably, has a nice aroma, and finishes cleanly.



Sources of wood and veneer

I scavenge where I can. I've picked up a lot of veneer from contacts at craft fairs, some paid for, some for nothing. I have bought veneer, but not for a while. Some solid timber I have sourced from Wenban Smith in Worthing.

May meeting:

A Regency Demi-Lune Table

By Colin Irvine

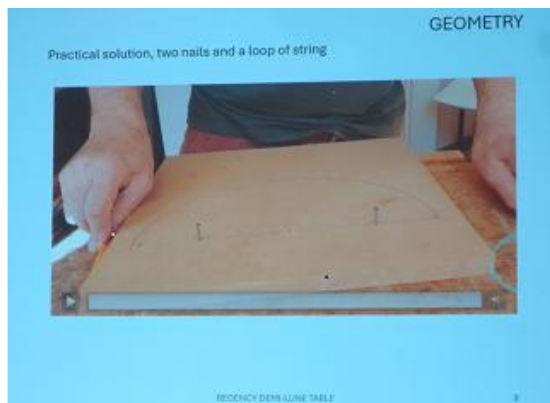
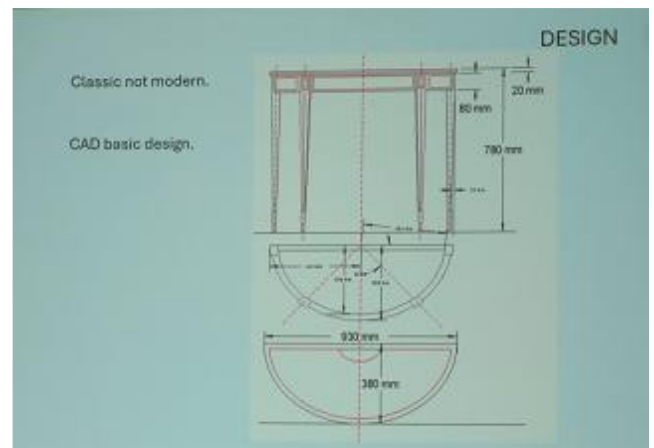
The idea for the demi-lune table came to Colin when he moved house. His new house was built in 1820 and he wanted to have furniture to go with the style of house.

Colin started with a CAD design, which is how all his ideas start.

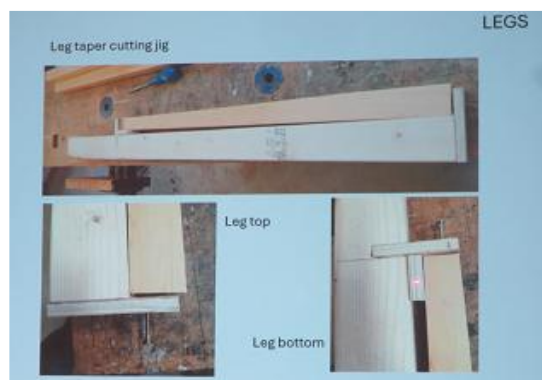
He made a special point of saying that the table is semi-elliptical, NOT semi-circular.

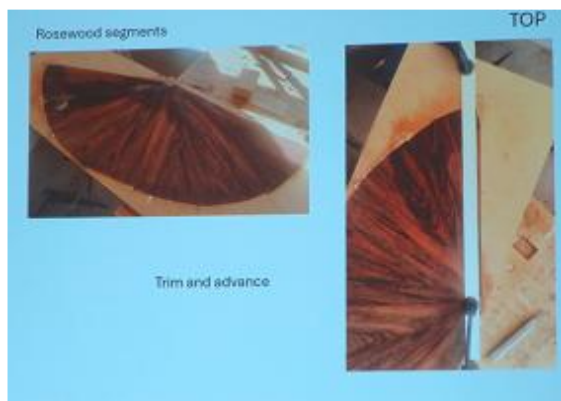
Mahogany was used for the top of the table, with rosewood and boxwood for the 'decorations'. The legs were solid maple.

We know how Colin loves his jigs and gadgets. He showed a fantastic way to draw an accurate ellipse using string and nails.



The following pictures show some of the many processes which happened in order to produce the amazing finished article.





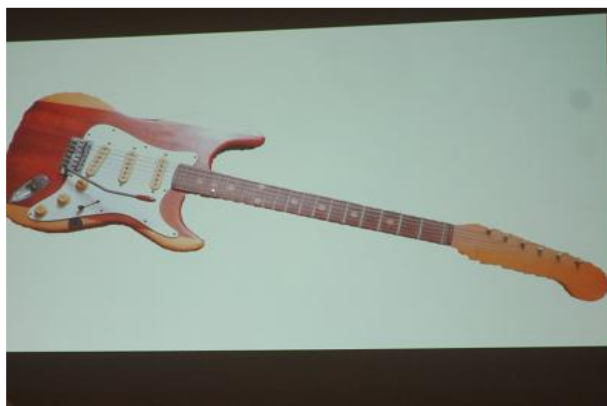
The end result



June meeting:

Making a solid body electric guitar

By Brian Campion



Most of us learnt something new and very interesting about Brian from this talk!!

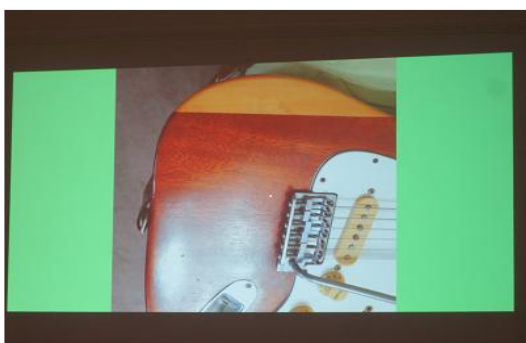
In his younger days, Brian was a member of a band called Rob and the Dominators, playing the electric guitar. The group played at venues like Devil's Dyke and the Newhaven Labour Club. Their music was melodic, similar to the Searchers in style. Who would have thought that Brian was a 'rocker' in his former life!!!

The idea for making his guitar came from seeing one which had been made at a woodworking show. Brian looked at it and thought that he could give it a go, making one himself.

The guitar that he made gained a Bronze medal in the musical instrument category at the Alexandra Palace woodworking show.

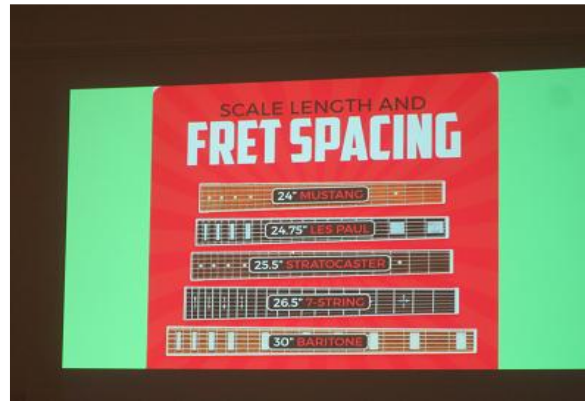
Brian explained how he made the guitar and some of the problems which he encountered along the way.

The guitar body was made of utile with lime for the 'wings'. In Brian's own words – he used two different woods because he didn't have one piece big enough! Some of the other woods he used wererosewood for the neck and maple for the fret dots.



In this photo, you can clearly see the two different woods used on the body of the guitar.

He also imparted some interesting 'guitar' facts, for example – the longer the neck on the guitar, the mellower the sound. The chart below shows the fret spacing on various different types of guitar.



Brian also went on to make a second guitar which also gained a bronze medal. This guitar was made of oak and thus was very heavy.

At the end of the talk, Brian played a piece of music called 'The river' – for two guitars, which he wrote. He played BOTH of the guitars, recording the backing track and then the lead track over the top of it. I think I can speak for the whole group listening to the track – it was SUPERB!!

After the talk, Brian spoke a little more about his days in the band.

Their worst 'gig' was at the White Hall theatre East Grinstead. When they arrived, the MC, who was all dressed up with evening suit and a bow tie, explained that they wanted foxtrots, tangoes etc. The band had never heard of some of these, let alone played them. However, they muddled their way through. In the interval, they played some of their own music and packed the dance floor – much to the organisers' disgust I think!!

July meeting:

Colouring Wood

By Matt Hall from The southdowns woodturners

Matt demonstrated and talked about different ways to colour wood.

Fuming:

Matt started experimenting with fuming because he was obsessed with bog oak. Because this wood is so expensive, he tried fuming wood and this seemed to give a very good bog oak effect. He uses a sealable plastic box (preferably see through, so you can see what is happening inside). Inside the box, is placed the wood and a small dish with about 1cm of ammonia. The wood sits in the box until the required 'darkness' is achieved. Matt generally keeps the wood in there for about 72 hours. He did warn that the ammonia is pretty potent!!!

Ebonising:

Matt makes his own ebonising fluid using wire wool and acetic acid. The wire wool has to be washed to get rid of the oils in it. The wire wool is then dropped into the acetic acid (vinegar) for

about a week, so that the wool rots. You are left then with a potent, quick acting solution to change the colour of wood.

Matt demonstrated the use of the fluid. On oak, which has a lot of tanin in it, the wood darkens straight away. However, on a wood like ash, which has very little tanin, tanin juice can be put on first of all (3 tea bags mixed with good old water – much better in Matt's opinion to any tanin juice which you can buy in the shops!!)

India ink:

India ink can be bought in many hobby shops. The dye penetrates deep into the wood. The benefit of using india ink rather than paint is that the wood retains its texture and grain.

Blow torching:

Matt admitted that this was his favourite way of colouring wood as there were lots of different ways to experiment with it.

The blow torching drives out the water quite aggressively so care needs to be taken as the wood can split or fine detail might disappear.

Blow torching and then using wire wool gives a type of '3-D' effect. The young growth gets burnt away quicker and the old growth doesn't – so the older wood stands proud.

Bleaching:

Matt uses Jarrods 2 part bleach system.

Part A: Sodium carbonate is painted on and left for 15 minutes.

Part B: Hydrogen peroxide is painted on.

Vinegar is then wiped on to neutralise it.



Some of the different techniques which Matt demonstrated.

When talking about the colouring of wood, Matt said that he does it because he is keen to experiment beyond the ordinary turning.

Members' work:

Paul showed this 'gun stock' carving at the July meeting. The gun stock was something which he acquired from Tom Lednor, when Paul went round to help Tom sort out his workshop.

Paul cut the gun stock in half. This is one half. Watch this space for the second carving!

