

Introduction to Woodworking Series: Course 4

Characteristics and Safe Uses of Major Woodworking Equipment

By: Mike Cunningham

On Saturday, May 2, 2009 I joined 10 other members of the San Joaquin Fine Woodworkers' Association at Ideal Saw Works in downtown Fresno. We were all in attendance at the woodworking tool safety class. The members joining me included President David Dunlap, Newsletter Editor Richard Pierce, Glen Grey, Dave Summers, Bill Lynam, John Wetzel, Dick Powell, George Zerlang and a new member, Ed Wheeler. Our instructor was Louis Volpp filling in for Howard Atamian who had to attend a funeral.



Louis Volpp

Louis is an excellent instructor, very thorough, methodical and analytical. One might think that he was a college professor or something in a previous life, ha ha. Louis covered the four most used power tools in the average hobbyist's shop, the Table Saw (Cabinet and Contractor's); the Band Saw; The Jointer and the Drill Press.

Louis set the tone of the class by saying, "**All tools are dangerous to work around – the most dangerous tool is**

the one you are currently using". He revisited that theme many times and gave excellent examples of what happens if you don't maintain a healthy respect for the power tool you are using. His emphasis was in tuning the various tools and the making of jigs to assist you in successfully moving the project along. The main source of reference for the class was a book from Tauton Press, 1992, entitled

Mastering Woodworking Machines by Mark Duginske.



Ideal Saw Works Classroom

Louis emphasized correct setup and tuning of your tool at initial purchase and then periodically check the setup and re-tune if necessary. He spent the majority of his time on the Table Saw as it has the reputation of being the tool that causes the most injuries in the shop. Kickback prevention was a theme emphasized over and over. The use of jigs was highlighted to augment safely using these machines.

During his coverage of the Band Saw and preventing kickback, I had an **ah hah** moment as just the previous day, I was slicing veneer on the band saw and put the thin veneer to be cut between the blade and guard and caused a kickback that broke the table



Louis Volpp's Tenoning Jig

insert and twisted the carbide blade severely and kinked it all in about a 100th of a second. Read \$150 to fix the problem, but, at least, my body is intact. I wish I had taken the class first; I could have prevented a near disaster by working more safely.



Attentive Class Members

The class finished with coverage of the Jointer and the Drill Press. The approach was the same, safety, safety and more safety. The emphasis again was on initial tuning of the tool and the use of jigs to enhance the safety aspect of your project.

The class was an informative and enjoyable way to spend a Saturday morning. Louis even made cinnamon rolls and coffee for the attendees, it doesn't get better than

that. Louis will also provide a complete handout for the class on the website in the near future for those who were unable to attend. Do yourself a favor, sign up for these classes. You will be glad you did, I know I am.