



SAPFM Chronicles

THE STUDENT, THE MENTOR, AND THE TEACHER

JOHN BORLEY, *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

“I don’t know exactly how I happened to find my way to that meeting”



Roger Moister, the student (left)
Marion Smith, the mentor (right)
Peach State Chapter members

Roger Moister doesn’t have any woodworking machines. He admits that for a long time he was “scared to death of table saws.” He’s just finishing his first real workshop. And he rates himself as “very much at the bottom of the totem pole” when it comes to skills.

So it may come as a surprise to learn that he’s just finished building a Southern Huntboard, which is no small accomplishment. How did he do it? In a word, mentors—fellow cabinetmakers who have helped him every step of the way.

Moister is a member of the SAPFM Peach State chapter. He lives in downtown Atlanta. He practiced law for 40 years, finally leaving the world of litigation, bankruptcies, and estate disputes for retirement in 2011.

His path to woodworking started two years earlier, when he attended a meeting of the Woodworkers Guild of Georgia. “I don’t know exactly how I happened to find my way” to that meeting, he says, but after a few more of them, he had caught the woodworking bug.

But Moister also realized just how “green” he was. He says “I’d heard the words mortise-and-tenon and dovetail” but didn’t understand the significance of these joints or how to create them. Then he bumped into fellow lawyer and SAPFM member Marion Smith at a Lie-Nielsen event. Smith, also retired now, has been making furniture for 25

years. And that’s when the mentoring began.

Smith says, “Part of the purpose of our chapter is to try to give guidance to people who have an interest in making American furniture.” So the chapter decided to organize a mentoring class. Some of the more experienced members planned to teach others how to make a Federal table. Smith was one of the instructors, Moister one of the students.

It was basically woodworking boot camp. Smith says, “We tried to put as many different skill-sets into it as we could. When all was said and done, these

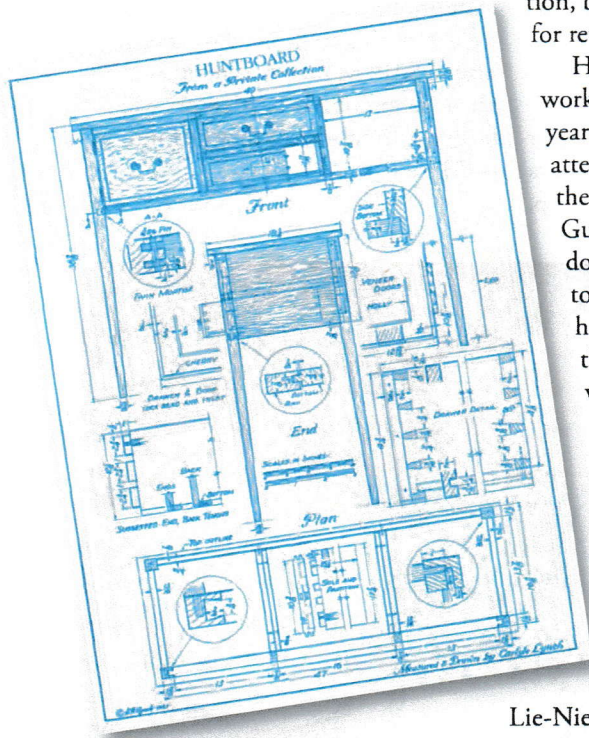


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—Marion Smith

guys had acquired the ability to cut dovetails, to hand-cut twin mortise-and-tenon joints, regular mortise-and-tenon joints, do veneering, do inlaying, make drawers. It was really a lot of fun. Roger was one of the most enthusiastic.”

Then Moister got a chance to take it to the next step. Smith and fellow SAPFM member Chris Schleier designed a course on building a Southern Huntboard. It was held at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC, where Schleier teaches. The project was based on a Carlyle Lynch plan featured in *Fine Woodworking* #39. Again, the mentoring kicked in. Moister says he was





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“more than just a student,” since he was invited to show up early and help break out the stock.

In an article he wrote on the course, Moister says, “My lesson was following the cut sheet, looking at grain orienta-

tion, and thinking of how the final parts would look in the piece, using a dial caliper repeatedly to get most of the boards to 13/16-inch thickness and helping to run the planer and resaw.” Smith adds, “He learned how to be safe with machines, with two people breathing down his neck.”

When the course proved to be a bit ambitious for the allotted time, Smith continued to mentor the students, some by phone and email and, in the case of Moister and one other student, in his shop for several weeks.

Smith says it’s all about passing along skills and hard-earned experience. “They would get a joint that didn’t fit, and I’d get down and say ‘see that little speck down in there, that’s the reason it’s not working.’” I think both of them came out with...an entirely different perspective on precision.” He adds, “I can show him \$2000 worth of mistakes I made on the table saw; he didn’t have to make them. I think (the huntboard) is a fantastic result. But it takes a lot of hands-on help to get there.”

Of course, Moister realized that “you can’t be a woodworker in somebody else’s shop. I needed my own place.” His 8-x-23-foot garage, where a few hand tools shared space with boxes of legal files, wasn’t cutting it. He wanted a proper shop, with wiring and walls, insulation and heat. (He recalls trying to cut dovetails one day in 38-degree weather, while bundled up in “long underwear, two fleeces, and a wool hat.”)

Smith and another SAPFM member, Jim Milam, not only helped him design the shop, they also put some sweat equity into the makeover. They spent two days doing what Moister calls “sort of a barn-raising.” Milam has also continued to advise him on the project, as well as helping Moister decide what tools to buy.

So thanks to others, Roger Moister now has the foundation to become a first-class cabinetmaker. A proper shop.

Comfort with using the woodworking machinery that will soon be delivered. A workbench that he built after taking a course with Chris Schwarz. But most importantly, a solid grounding in skills, and people he can call on when he needs help. “I’m not a solitary person, off in a room somewhere, trying to figure this out on my own. I’ve got others helping, and who are trying to excite people.”

As for Marion Smith, he has several reasons for mentoring others. One is the

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joy of teaching. “Seeing the guys who have participated with us [who have] gone so far so fast and don’t even realize it.” Another is that “I want to pass the craft on, because I’m afraid we’re going to lose all this stuff one day.” His message to SAPFM members in other chapters is to give it a try. “Mentors will get far more from it than they put into it.”

—JB



*The helpful team—
From left to right is Jim Milam,
Roger Moister and Marion Smith*