

The Apprentice

WOODWORKER, SHIPBUILDER, COWBOY, PIRATE, BOY

JOHN BORLEY, *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

Our youngest SAPFM member takes on the challenging dovetail

“The truncated dovetail is where the dovetail is cut at a compound angle,” explains Pere Howlett, but I’m not really

January at the Williamsburg Symposium Working Wood in the 18th Century. He discussed a small dovetailed box he made. Wasn’t that a bit intimidating? “It wasn’t as nerve-racking as the first time” he says. The first time? That was last year, when he presented a small table he made to display his G.I. Joe.

Corky says “I laid out the first set (of dovetails) and he cut them. They were a little sloppy.” But Pere learns quickly. Corky says by the fourth set “He just laid them out by himself and cut them and put it together and he had the box. Not only that but it was square. I wish my first set of dovetails had looked that good.” He adds “I’m very proud of him.”

Corky remembers the first time his son showed an interest in woodworking. He says Pere was about two years old when he showed up with a hand-wrought nail and a small hammer. “He beat on that thing for about half an hour, and drove it into a piece of oak. I asked him what he was doing. He said ‘I’m making a ramp for my car, Dad.’ Then he turned it over and dropped a Matchbox car on it and it ran down the board,

which was sitting up on the nail.”

Now when he wants to build something,

Pere says “Sometimes I just ask for information. Sometimes if it’s a little harder, I watch him and then eventually try to do it.”

Corky says “I make him do a measured drawing. I’ll help but you do it. I show him something, then leave him alone, keep half an eye on him so he doesn’t cut himself. He doesn’t do a lot of power tools. I don’t like him to. I fig-

ure you learn more from using the hand tools.” They don’t have a workshop at home, so they use the dining room table.

Pere is also helping out at the Colonial Seaport in Deltaville, Virginia. The foundation is converting a modern, but neglected ketch into a working replica of an 18th century rake-masted coastal trading sloop. This is the type of vessel Blackbeard sailed after he lost the Queen Anne’s Revenge. There are locations on the ship where traditionally, carvings would be placed. The Seaport’s blog notes “Our youngest shipbuilder, Pere,



*Pere and Corky (dad) Howlett
Williamsburg, Virginia*

paying attention. I’m still trying to get my head around the fact that the woodworker who is telling me this is just 10 years old.

That’s right. SAPFM member Pere Howlett is in Grade Five, likes to dress up as a pirate, and understands compound dovetails.

“The truncated dovetail is where the dovetail is cut at a compound angle”

Maybe it’s not really a surprise, since he’s surrounded by woodworking. His family lives in Williamsburg, Virginia, near Colonial Williamsburg. His father, Corky Howlett, works there as a journeyman joiner. He and his fellow craftspeople build everything from boxes to houses, using 18th-Century tools and techniques.

Pere actually made a presentation in



Pere made a presentation to a large audience at the SAPFM Annual Meeting, this past January, in Williamsburg—a second presentation of this kind—featuring a box he made, dovetails and all.

will be taking these two carvings on (one to port and one to starboard) and we can’t wait to have them on board!”

Yes, this ten-year-old is also a carver. He learned from watching carvers at Williamsburg. Corky says “He just took



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to it, and he's pretty good." He's started working on two crescent moons with faces for the ship.

So what's next? In the short term, Pere wants to build a naval gun carriage

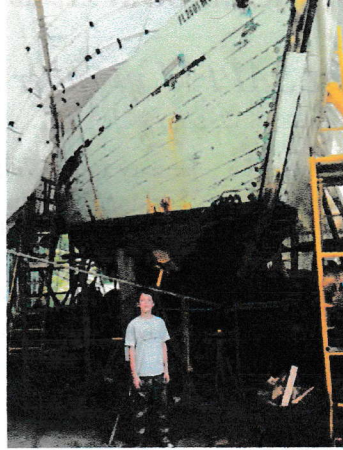
for his miniature cannon. (Corky makes these for a hobby, casting the bronze barrels himself.) He says "It should fit in the box I made this year."

He also wants to make a sea chest with canted sides and those truncated dovetails. To some of

us, that might seem a bit like getting your driver's license on Monday and

"Some days he's a pirate, some days he's a cop, some days he's a cowboy."

Pere Howlett has a few years to go before he has to make any career decisions. Meanwhile, we can all look forward to watching him grow as a woodworker. Even if he decides to become a pirate. —JB



As for the long-term, Pere says woodworking is "most likely a hobby."

deciding you want to drive a race car on Tuesday.

Corky says "The trick is the layout. Once you know the trick to that they're no harder to cut than traditional dovetails."

Maybe so, but it's a safe bet there aren't many ten-year-olds who can do them. Corky says "Probably not." He adds "That's the advantage of being ten. That stuff doesn't intimidate him."

As for the long-term, Pere says woodworking is "Most likely a hobby." He wants to join the Army. His dad says



PHOTOS AUTHORIZED BY CORKY HOWLETT