



# SAPFM Chronicles

SAPFM—REACHING THE INTERNATIONAL WOODWORKER

JOHN BORLEY, *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

*Veenendaal credits fellow woodworkers for much of his education.*

For most kids, toys are the big attraction. But Herman Veenendaal says, “Since I was very, very young, say about seven years old—and I can’t explain it—I had a really strong interest in Georgian architecture. When I discovered furniture from the same period, which we call Queen Anne or Federal, it just triggered something.” That something turned into a lifelong hobby and passion for building period furniture.

Veenendaal is one of SAPFM’s international members. He lives in St.

**“Since I was very, very young, say about seven years old, and I can’t explain it, I had a really strong interest in Georgian architecture.”**

Marys, Ontario, about a two-hour drive west of Toronto. Now retired after a career as a meteorologist doing both general and aviation weather, he’s able to spend more time in the shop.

He works out of a two-story building on his property, a building modeled after a Massachusetts saltbox house. It’s 20-by-25 feet, with the work area on the first floor and lumber storage above. He has some machines but works mostly with hand tools.

Veenendaal is largely self-taught. He says the only courses he’s taken are a couple of one-day sessions on dovetails and

spindle-turning. “I started making reproductions of early Ontario pine furniture. A friend’s father who collected the stuff and also made reproductions... taught me a few things, and my own father taught me a few things. And I did an awful lot of reading. Read and practice. I’ve always said books are great, but a book isn’t worth the paper it’s written on unless you put what you’ve learned into practice.”

Veenendaal credits fellow woodworkers for much of his education. “I’ve taken a lot of trips to New England and talked to cabinet makers and chair makers. I’d say I’m going to be in the neighborhood, and I’d be invited to drop in. I found that Americans are quite generous once they know you want to learn something.

They’re quite generous in sharing information with you.” He figures he’s made dozens of such visits over a 20-year period.



His favorite piece? Probably his reproduction of a Connecticut highboy. “I’d never done a fan carving or cabriole leg before I built that piece. I did a pine mockup of the leg, and I thought ‘Yeah, I like that,’ and off I went. That’s how I teach myself.”

He also says SAPFM is a valuable resource, through its publications and the







## SAPFM—REACHING THE INTERNATIONAL WOODWORKER

videos that you can find in the Facebook section of the website. “It’s like the trips I made to the States. You learn from the best. You always have something to aspire to.”

Veenendaal says he rarely works from a plan, most often just making a rough sketch. But he has made a lot of pieces based on scaling up from photographs. He spends “a lot of time poring over photographs and measuring them to the nearest 64th of an inch and calculating what the dimension should be.”

Now that he’s retired, Veenendaal has more time for some other interests as well. He helps out at the St. Marys Museum several times a year, putting on



a period costume and demonstrating woodworking with hand tools. He also has a small blacksmith shop, where he likes to “tinker.”

He’s also pursuing a lifelong interest in wildlife photography. “People always say, ‘that must take a lot of patience.’ Yeah, but it takes a lot of patience to do a highboy, too. The two go hand-in-hand.” (Check out his blog at <http://www.veenendaal-period-furniture.blogspot.ca/> for pictures of both

his furniture and his wildlife photos.)

Veenendaal also makes it clear, right at the start of that blog, that for him, woodworking “remains a hobby and not a business.” He says this is “strictly my personal point of view,” but doing this for money “takes the joy out of it. It becomes a job and not a passion. I’d just as soon not do it for other people unless it’s a gift or something.

“People have asked me to build them pieces, and I politely decline because I just prefer to keep the joy in it.” —JB



### SAPFM’s International Members

It may be called American period furniture, but interest in this style goes well beyond the U.S. border. SAPFM has about two dozen international members. Most are in Canada, but we also have members from as far away as Australia, the UK, Austria, and South Korea. All separated by great distances but brought together by a common appreciation for the work of great craftsmen from another era.

It shouldn’t be surprising that there’s interest in other countries. As the video “It’s An American Tradition” notes (on the SAPFM website), American period furniture “traces its roots to European craft traditions that migrated across the Atlantic to be reinterpreted in the American colonies.” So, in a sense, that migration continues.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY AND WITH PERMISSION OF HERMAN VEENENDAAL

