



So What's News? (continued-2)

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, AND OBSERVATIONS

In the meantime, John Borley, my Canadian friend who has been responsible for writing all the “Chronicles” articles since the newsletter began (and who taught me more than I ever wanted to know about Robertson screws), had the following to say about interesting words in woodworking. I invite you to add to John’s list.

John Borley
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When I took up woodworking as a hobby, I figured I had a pretty good handle on the terminology. Knew a hawk from a handsaw, as Shakespeare put it. But I quickly discovered that cabinetmaking in general, and period furniture in particular, have entirely different lexicons.

Take, for example, the word *architrave*. I came across it while working on the article on Cartouche winner Ronnie Young. Check out the back cover of the 2014 *Journal*. There, Young describes how he made the applied fretwork on the architrave of a double chest. The word means a lintel or beam that rests on the capitals of the columns, and it comes from Classical architecture. Who knew? (OK, he knew; I didn’t.)

At the same time, I’m building a replica of a piece in Toronto’s Royal Ontario Museum. It’s an 18th-Century chest of drawers from Quebec, with what the museum calls a *reverse-arbalète* front. *Arbalète* is French for crossbow, and you understand that right away when you look at the shape of the curves. It’s a term I’d never heard. You could also just call it a *breakfront* chest.

With those examples in mind, I thought it would be fun to look at some of the more unusual or unique terms that we use in furnituremaking. So...

Where would you find a fleam? (Hint: in a handsaw.) Where would you

use a travisher, and what would you do with a froe? Why does that chair cushion have a welt? And rubberized horsehair? Seriously? What do you do with a macaroni chisel? What does *chatoyance* mean? (My late wife once said one of my cherry tables looked “blotchy.” I said, “No, that’s chatoyance. You pay extra for that!”) What’s a whale’s tail? Where would you find a gadroon? Do you know your arris from your astragal? (Look it up; I had to!)

There are some words that we share with other arts, crafts, and professions. For example, we use a *banjo* on a lathe. Some of us also use a *fiddle*. SAPFM member Frank Rhodes of Maryland introduced me to that word. It’s a jig used to hold pieces of wood between lathe-like centers for carving, doing reeds, etc. Rhodes says check out R.A.Salaman’s *Dictionary of Woodworking Tools* for more details. (Add a musical saw to the banjo and fiddle and you’ve got the makings of a pretty good bluegrass band.)

There are also times when we use different words for the same thing. What I always called a *drawer rail* or *divider* is a *drawer blade* to many period furniture makers. Do you say *rabbet* or *rebate*? Spell it *mortise* or *mortice*? We all know what a *frog* is on a plane, but do you say *chipbreaker* or *cap iron*?

A tool found in many shops is the ever-unpopular *dammit tool*. That’s the one that mashes your fingers or gouges your work, so you fling it across the shop while shouting...you know. (This is not unique to woodworking.)

And now that I think of it, I wonder how many SAPFM members would know what a *Robertson screw* is? Answer: a superior fastener invented in Canada that, according to Bob Van Dyke, Canadians like to talk about. And talk about. And talk about. (Beats me why he would say that!) You may know it as a

square drive.

This article barely scratches the surface on the subject. If you have some cabinetmaking words that are unique, unusual, or obscure, send them to me at woodworker@rogers.com, and we’ll see about sharing them with our readers in future editions.

Heading back to my shop now. I’m having trouble getting one troublesome joint to close, so I’ll probably reach for my *fine adjuster*.

You would probably call it a *hammer*.

References:

1. Wikipedia.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cartouche>
2. Ancient Egypt website.
<http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/pharaoh/explore/cartob1.html>
3. Wikipedia.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cartography>



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