

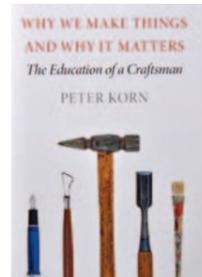
Make or Not?

Author Doug Stowe reviews a new book on the life of furniture-maker Peter Korn



Flute Peter Korn's Fluted Coffee Table in walnut and maple is 38in long

PHOTO: JIM DUGAN



Craftsmanship Peter Korn (right) founded and runs the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Rockport, Maine (below), and has written about his life as a furniture-maker



BOOK JACKET: MARK LEFANOR



things and certainly would touch deeply upon why such things matter to us as individuals and as a society.

Compelling

On the other hand, as an autobiographical text, Korn's telling of his own "education of a craftsman" is an easy and compelling read. I am of his generation (actually a couple years ahead on the aging curve) and like Korn and so many woodworkers of our generation, was driven toward a life in the crafts by the discovery that the prospect of corporate employment left me hoping for much more. Korn describes his own journey honestly, as he

work shop and his hands will work to the benefit of his brain, and he will become a philosopher while thinking himself only a craftsman." There is indeed a sense of humility that can emerge when one faces the travails and challenges of attempting to craft useful and beautiful work that masks wisdom. In fact you, the reader will need to work a bit to extract the wisdom from a thorough reading of this book, but will learn that Korn has earned his philosopher's chops. His story conveys both the humility of a craftsman and the wisdom of the philosopher he has become.

faced the earliest days of his growth as a craftsman, through his loss of relationships, through two rounds of life-threatening Hodgkin's disease, and through the founding of the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship, a place at which many hundreds of students have been enabled to come face to face with learning through their hands and the discovery of what craftsmanship offers and entails.

Anyone who lived through those times and engaged in similar struggles as a craftsman will become engaged in Korn's story as told in this manuscript. It rings solidly of truth.

Jean Jacques Rousseau had said "put a young man in a

Just as no one could tell you how to play the tuba, and just as Korn can't describe in words, how to win at his favorite game of Croquet, and just as John Ruskin said, "Let the youth once learn to take a straight shaving off a plank, or draw a fine curve without faltering, or lay a brick level in its mortar, and he has learned a multitude of other matters which no lips of man could ever teach him", (Time and Tide 1883) there are many things of great importance that



Stand Peter Korn's walnut Dictionary Stand made in 1981

cannot be successfully conveyed in words alone.

Getting back to the title of this book, Korn in this text has offered his own life as an example that I hope will inspire others. The heart of the matter of "why we make" is described by Korn as follows: "Within my lifetime it was commonplace to picture thought as a completely ethereal phenomenon. Now science tells us that every new idea or piece of information reorganizes neural pathways within our brains. This makes the transmission of information from one person to another a physiological process, comparable to the spread of a virus. Like all living creatures, we cannot shut off sensory intake, and we are acutely receptive to data from our own species. We are so finely tuned to nuances of expression, carriage, speech and dress that it can take only a glance to accurately place another person within a highly complex sociocultural context. Thus, when you and I interact, your words and actions cannot help but leave a physical imprint on my mind, which in turn may affect my thoughts and actions

in ways that are likely to impact still other people's neurons in the future. Ideas and beliefs are contagious."

If ideas and beliefs are contagious when spread as words alone, how much more so are they when spread in physical form? Can it be that by making things we are actually seeking means through which we might actually touch one another as when someone sitting at Korn's most recent finely crafted table runs his or her hands across its surface, crafted to a radiant state and in the moment may be transformed in the contagion Korn describes?

It is my hope that more and more people young and old will discover the wonderful processes and rewards of making useful and beautiful things. I thank Peter Korn for his many contributions (including this book) leading us to the decision that we must make if we are to realize the full depth and breadth of our own humanity.

Details Why We Make and Why it Matters: The Education of a Craftsman, by Peter Korn, David R. Godine, Publisher 2013.

Men's Sheds Association



Association Peter Gallagher of UKMSA at Men in Sheds at Milton Keynes, one of 60+ communal workshops in the UK

A new association has been formed to represent the growing number of communal workshops that are sprouting up around the country. A recent segment on BBC Breakfast reported that there are now at least 60 Men's Sheds in Britain, with 200 in Ireland. Referred to as Sheds, and sometimes as Men in Sheds, the aim is to provide facilities and companionship. To harness this growth, share failures and successes and to pass on group benefits, a handful of pioneers have formed the UK Men's Sheds Association (UKMSA).

Age UK have been instrumental in setting up Sheds, and reader Terry Regan, who has worked for the Macclesfield workshop in Cheshire, told us about the project. "It is for men only over the age of 50, who are socially isolated either from retirement, redundancy or bereavement, and have lost contact with friends, family or colleagues, and for who boredom and the risk of depression is a real problem. We provide a stress- and pressure-free environment where the men can do what they like, within reason."

The Milton Keynes Shed, which we visited recently, is housed in an Age UK industrial premises, and though the charity has been helpful and supportive, the ambition is for each workshop to fend for itself. This means raising funds to pay rent etc., through membership fees, donations and money-making ventures and projects. The UKMSA is hoping to be able to offer practical advice and group discounts to member Sheds, for instance a special price for a subscription to British Woodworking, and we have offered the association space in our regular e-newsletter Bulletins to promote the concept and pass on news and ideas to Sheds around the country and the world.

Details To learn more about Men's Sheds visit ukmsa.org.uk or menssheds.org.uk.