

Book Review: *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters: The Education of a Craftsman* by Peter Korn, David R. Godine Publisher, 2013, 200 pages

Someone once described Peter Korn as a smart man. After reading his new book, *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters: The Education of a Craftsman*, I consider that an understatement. Twenty years ago, Korn founded the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship (CFC) (*AW*, vol 28, no 5), organized it as a nonprofit school, and strategically placed himself within the institution to ensure its ongoing success and his own employment, doing what he loves. On the surface and taken as isolated events, those actions sound simply like good career moves, but in the context of his new book, they represent the culmination of a life punctuated by serious health issues, supported by a persistent love of craft, and open to continually reinventing himself.

Unlike Korn's first book, *Working With Wood: The Basics of Craftsmanship* (Taunton Press), his new book is not instructional, unless considered existentially; *How to Make a Good Life* could well be its sub-subtitle. The overt theme is that the act of making objects, with conscious investment of self, fulfills the human spirit. Korn parallels that narrative with the inspirational story of how he crafted his own life, giving the book depth.

Korn asks big questions framed in broad contexts: What gives objects meaning? How and why do we create those objects? He also discusses the nature of identity and selfhood and how objects inevitably result from a confluence of factors, deftly placing the discussion into historical context.

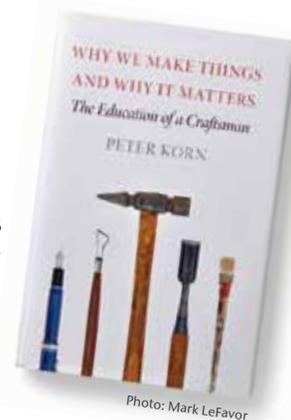
For those involved in creative work—woodturning, furniture making, pottery, glasswork, writing—Korn's initial thesis is not an untold secret. He notes early in the text that students who attend CFC “do not invest time, money, and effort traveling to Maine to cut dovetails with hand tools because they need hardwood benches, which are the introductory-class projects. What lures them is the hope of finding a deeper meaning by learning to make things well with their own hands.” The act of creating is fulfilling and nourishing and makers undergo change in the process: We are the maker *and* the object being made. Creative activity is a vehicle for self-transformation.

Korn is skilled at voicing concepts that many makers and consumers only know intuitively: Objects are the material expression of ideas and values, whether art, craft, or mass-produced. He shines a

spotlight on the designing and making of objects to remind us they are the result of a multitude of decisions on the part of the maker, inevitably influenced by his or her existence in a particular time and place. (And you thought it was just a refrigerator!) Offering these kernels of truth that reside outside of our everyday awareness makes Korn's book a rewarding read.

The ideas in *Why We Make Things* are perceptive and well informed. The tone is erudite, yet accessible to thoughtful readers. Korn had already proven himself as a furniture maker, designer, teacher, writer, and administrator. With this insightful and well-crafted book, he has risked and gained more as an author, and in doing so offers a roadmap toward a fulfilling life. ■

—Joshua Friend



Arrowmont Purchases Historic Campus

Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts is pleased to announce the school's Board of Governors has purchased its historic campus in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, from the Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women. “We are grateful to those who have made it clear that they believe in Arrowmont's future as much as they value its rich history,” says Arrowmont's executive director Bill May. Key donors to purchase the campus are the City of Gatlinburg, Sevier County, the Windgate Charitable

Foundation, and numerous individual donors including the Arrowmont Board and staff. Gifts ranged from \$3.5 million to \$5.

“All levels of giving are important,” May adds. “It's the heartfelt donation of \$5 from a retiree or teenage woodturner that helps convince municipalities like the City of Gatlinburg—which contributed \$3.5 million—or foundations like Windgate—which contributed a matching grant of \$2.25 million—that

their larger contributions are necessary, justified and well spent.”

The American Association of Woodturners was born on the front porch of Arrowmont's dining hall 27 years ago. That shared history has been vital and important to both organizations, and benefits a growing international community of woodturners. For more information about Arrowmont or to view 2014 workshop offerings, visit arrowmont.org. ■