

Who They Are

Jim Creasman

The March Contest Winner DIY Shop Aids and Tools



The March 2022 contest was titled DIY Shop Aids and Tools. Jim Creasman was selected as the top entry with his outstanding Moxon style bench vise. Recently, Phil Soper discussed the vise creation and woodworking with Jim.

Jim said the idea of the Moxon vise started long ago with an early workbench. It was a crude old-fashioned folding table. It really was no more than a place to set tools. The plan was hatched to build a work bench.

The bench he built from hickory from the Creasman backyard that was downed during Hurricane Fran (1996). The hickory makes a rock-solid top according to Jim. Having a solid work bench



got Jim to thinking about how he could cut dovetails on the bench. The bench has a pair of mounted vises, but neither were at a suitable height. Jim says, “You want a higher height for dovetails.” He decided to build a Moxon; “settled” was his word.



When Jim, “settles”, his woodworking turns out to be user and art. Jim says, “I like when you have a tool that is nice, looks good, and is functional.” Jim pointed out that he makes things for his wife who is very supportive of his woodworking habit.

Jim describes the vice with considerable pride and enthusiasm. “With dovetails you need to crank the vise with one hand and hold the piece in the other”. So, Jim designed and created a chain drive for the clamping system. The vice materials came from pecan trees harvested from hurricanes that came through Holly Springs about a decade ago. If you look, the vice has walnut accents. “The vise is heavy enough to stay in place, and you can hammer on it.” says Jim.



Jim is happy with the chain drive clamp. For him it was a matter of finding the right parts. The screw came from a left-over wagon vise and has left-hand threads. That allows the vise to respond with a righty-tighty, lefty-loosey clamping motion. He had a local machine shop turn down the ends to mount to sprockets and knobs for the drive systems.

The first use of the Moxon was to cut the dovetails for my workbench drawers. There are 18 drawers, or 36 sets of half-blind dovetails and 36 sets of through dovetails. “This is where I taught myself to cut dovetails. The first few were a bit rough, but I was doing pretty good by the time I got to the end.” Jim noted.

Phil asked Jim how long he has been a woodworker. Turns out Jim can't remember when he wasn't a woodworker. Turns out that his father and woodworking mentor was an old school carpenter and house builder. When he built a house, he started with the foundation and finished with the cabinets. Jim grew up in Western North Carolina with wood working all around. About 15 years ago Jim got serious with hand tools. His thought was that "Power tools are good for production, fast and efficient. I encourage, after my long time in woodworking, to use and invest in hand tools for hobbyists." Jim encourages woodworkers to visit Williamsburg where you'll see craftsman working on 4-5 workbenches all using hand tools and creating heirloom pieces. For Jim, investing in hand tools is investing in yourself. With hand tools, "...you learn how to be part of the tool. You bring the tool to the wood. That is better than bringing the wood to the tool as a production woodworker does." Of course, for Jim, the lathe is the power tool where you are always bringing the tool to the wood. Just less leg work.



Turns out Jim's father was a patient man, "He took time to answer my questions. He turned me loose to use the tools. I'm sure I broke a few. There was one time, he was mad at me. I had taken the hammer out of his toolbox and didn't put it back. He went to the work site and was hammerless. I did not make that mistake again."

When asked about how he came to NC Woodworking.net (and Jim currently serves on the NCWoodworker.net Board as Development Director), he says he setup an account in 2010. He'd been surfing the web for answers to questions and came across the forum. What really got him active was seeing Dan doing a demo on veneers at a Klingspor event (thanks Coleman). And, then Charlie gave him a forum business card. Jim says that card was turned to be the key to making posts, asking questions, and getting involved. "It is great to find people that have the same interests.", says Jim.



ground.

Phil wanted to know about the shop. Jim has a basement shop of about 700 ft². He appreciates that is odd shape as that gives more wall space. He has a basement alcove under the house's porch where he stores upwards of 2000 board-feet of lumber. He has one table saw for breaking down sheet goods, one band saw (with a second one on the way) a wood lathe, a metal lathe, a sharpening, jointer, lunchbox planer and 2 drill presses. Jim's finds that, "You fit into the space you have, and I do like what I have." He also has an assembly table that is about 2 feet off the

He describes his approach to woodworking as continually learning skills. Building is a good way to practice skills. "You try, you build, and you learn." He gets an idea, and if his wife is the inspiration, she wants to see a sketch. Jim doesn't do CAD so he produces detailed hand drawings and 3-dimensional sketches. "I force myself to detail the build. That forces me to think through, "How am I going to do this?" He also is wanting to ask himself, "How would a

master craftsman have done this in the 18th century? How can I focus my best to replicate what they did?”

Jim’s pay-me job title is Enterprise Modernization Architect. He says that means is help the company modernize existing processes mostly by moving the processes to the cloud. And, he still relishes the opportunity to write code. For him woodworking is like writing code, it’s a mental puzzle to be solved this. Only with woodworking, there is the added problem, “How can I do this without leaving marks?”

Phil asked Jim about advice for new woodworkers. His first advice is to invest in good tools and in yourself. Take time to learn how to properly use and maintain the tools. As with any task the best tool you have is always the one between your ears. Also, Jim says, “You have to start square. You have to stay square. It is the only way to achieve correct fits.” Jim expounds on this by stating that to build square you have to start with a flat level surface. His bench has $\frac{3}{4}$ ” leveling screws at each corner. Of course, building a bench out of hickory means it is not moving across the floor. Jim mention that he has read some of David Pye’s writing on workmanship.



What’s next from the Creasman shop? Turns out he is mentoring his son on a king bed. It is a big platform with drawers, doors, and headboard. He’s also promised his wife a barrister’s bookcase but not with the scissor door hardware. For Jim it will be a self-aligning tape system. We will all be waiting for the build photos for that project.

For more information on Jim’s Moxon vise:

<https://www.ncwoodworker.net/forums/index.php?resources/moxon-vise-plans.507/>

David Pye’s Workmanship: <https://www.amazon.com/Nature-Art-Workmanship-David-Pye/dp/0713689315>



