

PACKIN' WOOD

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Michael as Davy Crockett and brother Harvey

Halloween, 1955, Brooklyn, New York. Earlier in the month, the Brooklyn Dodgers faced the New York Yankees in the World Series. In the prior five Series they were paired (1941-53), the Bums lost each one to the Yanks, Leo Durocher and every loyal Brooklynite proclaiming their battle cry, "Wait 'til next year!" The Dodgers had never won a World Series, the Yanks already owned 16 crowns. I was wearing my satin blue Dodger jacket every day, "Dodgers" in white lettering, with the script "s" curling under the team name with a big swoosh. My brother Harvey, almost eight years older, was a diehard Yankee fan. He had Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford, Hank Bauer, Billy Martin, Don Larsen, and Phil Rizzuto. I had Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, Pee Wee Reese, Duke Snider, Gil Hodges, Johnny Podres, Don Newcombe, and a 19-year-old rookie, Sandy Koufax. The series was tied at three games apiece. Podres, winner of Game 3, held a 2-0 lead going into the bottom of the 6th inning at Yankee Stadium, the House that Ruth Built. With runners on first and second, Yogi Berra sliced a line drive down the left-field line. Sandy Amoros, just put into left field for defensive purposes by manager Walter Alston, made a spectacular running catch, threw it back to the infield, and got Gil McDougald off first base for the double play. With the next batter making out, the Dodgers held the lead. Getting out of a jam in the eighth, Podres retired the Yankees in order in the ninth, and my Bums finally won their first World Series!



Arguably the greatest accomplishment in sports, the news would make the headlines the next day, on my sixth birthday.



Harvey's in the upper left, hand raised. I see an opened birthday gift of Permaplast modeling clay. In elementary school art, anything I would attempt to create with clay would ultimately and helplessly devolve into an ashtray. Sigh. (Dad would tell us, "In kindergarten I flunked clay.") I had yet to find my medium.

So October 1955 would begin with the Dodgers as World Champs, I turn 6, and month's end had me wielding my earliest recollection of an object I made of wood, my Davy Crockett rifle, at a Halloween party. Starring 6'6" Fess Parker, Disney's "Davy Crockett" became television's first miniseries and was all the rage that year, along with the requisite coonskin cap. His rifle even had a name and a record by the same name, "Old Betsy." So

there I was, dressed as Davy Crockett holding my version of Old Betsy, while Harvey, the Yankee fan, was dressed...as a girl! **That** made life perfect. (Where is that photo? Hmm, wait, maybe it was my 5-year-old friend Barry who was dressed as a girl. Well, life was *still* perfect!) Now lest you think I was some Davy-come-lately, a cowboy poseur, rest assured the record will show that during the *previous* Halloween, 1954, I had already developed my cowboy bona fides:



1954 Michael & Harvey on Halloween
Harvey, as French artist, is beside me. I think you may see an emerging theme: Despite our age difference, Harv and I were (and still are) close. It was the era of cowboy TV shows: The Cisco Kid, Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autrey, and Roy Rogers. Somewhere between this 10/31/54 photo and 8/11/56, the day we moved out of Brooklyn, we made what I could swear were called “oilcloth guns,” most likely in ’56. They were somewhat like my Old Betsy rifle, only with the “barrel” cut short, to make it a handgun. Atop this shortened barrel, I recall, was a thick rubber band, attached to the front. We’d “load” the rubber band with a piece of linoleum, pull the rubber band back, maybe attach it temporarily to the top of the handle, and then let it fly!

We left Brooklyn to move “to the country,” all of perhaps 30 miles east, to Lindenhurst. We were veritable frontiersmen, staking out new territory in what proved to be the *manifest destiny* that was Long Island suburbia of the 1950’s, starting with Levittown after World War II and moving to points eastward primarily over the next couple decades. Everything was new! We lived in a front-to-rear split-level home, had a back yard, and I had my *own* bedroom! The building boom was alive and well on the Island between the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. We were the first family to move into the

subdivision of about a hundred homes, with many under construction when we moved in. “Borrowing” scraps of wood from various homesites – aah, the smell of fresh sawn wood! – was a temptation that could not be resisted.

Rather than make a lemonade stand, I decided to make a shoeshine box with my wood. Joel, my next-door neighbor friend, liked what he saw, and asked me to make one for him, suggesting we could “go into business together.” So, I constructed a second shoeshine box, and off we went to open business in front of a local luncheonette. I was about eight years old and Joel was a year older, so, we had to play “by Joel’s rules” whenever we played sports and games. I soon discovered this apparently applied to business, too, as Joel, “because I’m older,” snatched the very first customer who came along. Despite his transgression, we’ve remained friends since 1956, I think, in part, because, to this day, I remain younger.

With our source of lumber still abounding, we got into making motor-less go carts, “hot rods” we called them, taking wheels off of discarded baby carriages, and tying a rope to the front axle’s right and left sides to steer our soap box derby wannabes. In 1960, when I was 10, and Chubby Checker’s “The Twist” was topping the record charts, we adopted Frisky, a mutt, and I decided to make a doghouse for him, complete with a shingle roof, and my largest wood project to-date then (August, 1960):



About this time or a bit earlier, I used my brother’s BB gun to “go hunting” in the fields across the street for my first and last time. After shooting what may’ve been a bluejay, I had a dream, a la Hitchcock’s “The Birds,” of birds attacking me. Not long thereafter, I

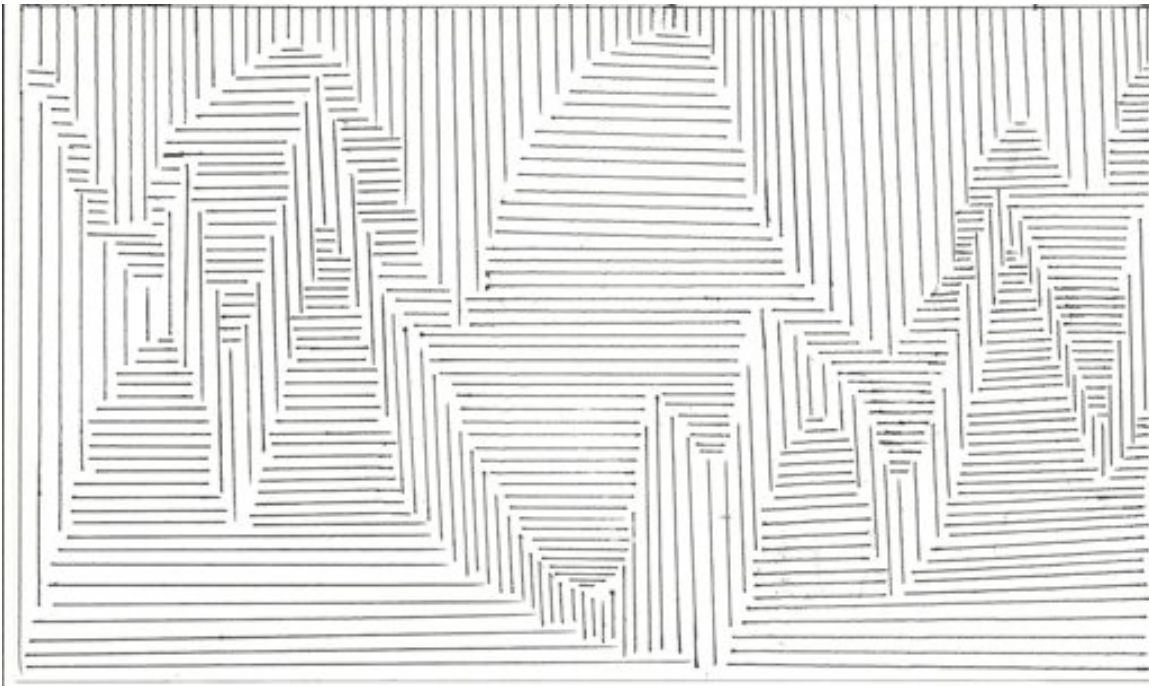
was in those same fields and saw some men with rifles. I ducked down in the bushes. They came closer and closer. “What are you doing there?” they asked. I don’t recall my reply, but they said I should’ve made my presence known, because, just seeing the top of my hair, they thought I may’ve been some animal. No more hunting for me.

While I had imagined, between 1st and 3rd grades (1955-58), becoming an animator (the Disney TV show effect), between 4th and 6th grades (1958-61), I had my heart set on becoming an astronomer, likely reinforced by NASA’s emergence after the Russians sent the Sputnik up in 1957, the selection of the “Right Stuff” Mercury 7 astronauts, and President John F. Kennedy setting his sights in 1960 on having the US send a man to the moon by decade’s end. But Frisky’s doghouse, built in the summer of ’60, planted the seeds of architecture. And so, throughout junior and senior high school (1961-67), I increasingly desired to become an architect. In 9th grade (1963-64), during which JFK was assassinated, I wrote a paper on Frank Lloyd Wright and designed and built a scale model of a high school comprised of concentric circles with the center circle as the auditorium, and the emanating rings serving as classrooms and hallways. This was the earliest recollection I have of my fascination with curves in construction.

On Saturday, 11/12/66, an all-day conference at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn was held for high school students interested in architecture. Part of the day was a competition to design a “discotheque.” Mine, of course, had curved walls. This was my senior year of high school (1966-67), during which my Art teacher exempted me from any of the usual assignments, and, instead, had me design and build a model of a home. Like the school designed in 9th grade, this home had curved walls, with two staircases emanating from curved walls on the left and right of the living room, semi-spiraling up to a second floor master bedroom. That scale model, on a plank of wood about 2’ by 3’, was eventually left across the street, in an as-yet undeveloped field, but I was gratified to see a father, with daughter in tow, pick it up and place in on a wheelbarrow as they headed home.

For a few years I had wanted to attend Syracuse University’s School of Architecture, as it was the only school in the country that had a combined Architecture-Liberal Arts program, getting a B.A. degree after 5 years and a B.Arch. after 6 years. I interviewed with the dean of the school on the 17th floor of the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan. I recall his attempt to de-romanticize architecture, telling how, as an architect in the near future, I might be in a large firm and relegated to work out the plumbing design of a basement in a high-rise apartment building. He sagely noted that an architect blends three components: artist, engineer, and businessman. At that time, as my high school senior year progressed, my drawings, previously attempts to depict reality, became surrealistic. I began writing poetry, reading philosophy, questioning meaningfulness and meaninglessness in life.

So, it was not altogether surprising that after six years of wanting to be an architect, and getting into the school I so much wanted to attend, that I would decide to forego it altogether. The “final straw” occurred after only about one month into my freshman year. I had but one architecture class, Introductory Design. One day, the in-class assignment was to make a drawing using only vertical and horizontal lines using a straight edge. My design was, you should forgive the expression, along the following lines:



The instructor began walking around the classroom, between tables, looking at each student's design silently. When he came to mine, he stopped. "What is this!?" he demanded. "A drawing using just vertical and horizontal lines," I offered. "But there are curves!" he insisted. "I see curves here, and here," tracing over the what was simply the white spaces between the vertical and horizontal lines, the points where they almost, but do not, touch, giving the illusion of curves. "But, sir, if you look carefully, there are only vertical and horizontal lines." Oblivious to what I thought was obvious, indeed what I thought was a clever irony in using straight to convey curved lines, he announced, "You didn't follow the instructions." That was it. The next day, I walked into the Dean's office, and noted I wished to withdraw from the School of Architecture. At first he thought I was kidding, as they had used a very thorough process of screening the 22 admitted students from around the world. It was not the one Design class assignment. No, it was a year-in-the-making, and the realization that while I was indeed interested in the artist component of the architect, I had no interest in the engineer and businessman parts. I retained my liberal arts classes, ultimately majored in Psychology and minored in Creative Writing. After graduating from Syracuse, I decided, second to having a PhD program in Psychology, the graduate school I was seeking had to have sunshine and good weather. Off to New Mexico I went in 1972, having never previously been west of Pennsylvania.

I was smitten by the sunny blue skies, vast panoramas, and the high desert terrain. Graduate school was intense, and after getting my Masters degree (1974), I worked for a year as a psychometrist administering and interpreting psychological tests given to adult and juvenile offenders at the Second Judicial District Court Clinic. Returning to graduate school to resume my doctoral degree, a fellow grad student and I rented a house near the university...which needed furniture. Ever the Lincoln Log devotee in childhood, I decided to build furniture using 6" diameter logs, or "peeler cores."



Peeler cores

I designed a couch with corduroy upholstery, a kitchen table (a burnished spool top, from the utility company, with three log legs and massive sliced tree trunks for chairs), a double-size bed, and a stereo bookcase in 1975. Definitely Man Cave. I finished my PhD in 1978, and a few months later, purchased my first home, moving my Contemporary Neanderthal furniture with me. The next year, I decided to spruce up - though “pine up” is more appropriate – the yard, and went about the task of designing, building, and digging in place log landscaping. I recall purchasing a 15” Makita circular saw, and having someone build a jig, allowing me to split the peeler cores in half. The wrought iron railing on the porch was removed, replacing it with a wall of peeler cores. I’d use



Mom visiting the Altez home May 1979 Log landscaping completed November 1979



plumber's strapping to adhere the split logs together, inserting tar paper to keep the soil inside the raised flower beds rather than seep out between each log. The strapped-together split log segments, each about 8 to 10 feet in length, would be buried about 4 inches into the ground, with sweeping curves, of course, around bushes and plants. Later, I would add one kidney-shaped curve around a tree and a flower planter, about 4 foot high, 2 feet wide, and over 50 feet long, dividing the property line with a neighbor. ("Good flower planters make good neighbors.")

It would not dawn on me until 33 years later, in April of 2012 (after living in Corrales 21 years), and after completing my first three dowel tables, that I had, in fact, made a dowel creation a third of a century earlier! I recalled that, during my log landscaping months, I had also made a dowel gate to the left side of the house. I wondered if it was still there. I drove about 15 miles to the old house, saw that only the front porch retained the log work I had made, the log landscaping now replaced with railroad ties. I knocked on the door. A large, burly man answered the door, and I told him I was a former owner of the house. "Oh, you're the psychologist" who had the house remodeled to have an office and waiting room replace a bedroom and the remaining part of the garage. "Yes, and I've been making some dowel tables lately, and recalled I made a dowel gate here back in 1979, and wondered if I could take a look to see if might still be here." He gladly accommodated my wishes. I slowly walked to the left side of the house. Yessss, there it was, 33 years later, still standing! The homeowner, who works in construction, but not realizing the gate was that old, complimented me on the longevity of the gate. Over two decades since having lived there, I compliment the series of owners who cared for it.



Altez home April 2012



Dowel gate 2012, 33 years later

The Altez Street home proved a good place to live. In spring 1980, I finished the last of my log landscaping projects: a flower bed around a tree and the 50' flower planter. That summer, after a half dozen years of playing Scrabble with fellow grad student, now psychologist, Dr. Dan Matthews, we started New Mexico's first official Scrabble Club. Later that year, I saw my first private practice clients, while working fulltime serving students at the University of New Mexico's Student Health Center's Mental Health Services, which I suggested to my colleagues we rename "UNM Mental Health Spa." My

energies and interests were put into the outset of my professional career as a psychologist and as an aspiring expert Scrabble player, making the rounds at tournaments around the country. I would also attend crafts fairs, gravitating to the woodworkers, and would ask them if they thought they could make an inlaid wood Scrabble board. Repeatedly I would hear, “No, that’s out of my league.” Until.

Until I attended the 1988 New Mexico Arts and Crafts Fair. A young barefooted artisan in his twenties, Shane Myers, who went by the artist name of “Shane Shane” and would sign his work “Shane²,” had a booth with exquisite woodwork, including inlaid cutting boards. I asked him if he could make a Scrabble board and expected the same reply as so many others had given me before. Instead he offered, “I don’t know, but I’d like to try.” I was stunned and delighted! I met with him at his basement shop in his home, he showed me various hardwoods we could use for the 125 tile squares, and I left my plastic rotating Scrabble board with him. He also would construct a wood carrying case. I later met with him while it was still in-progress, at which point he asked what I would like on the perimeter of the board. We chatted, and he said, “How ‘bout you trust me? It’ll be nice.” Agreed. But, as I really wanted to have it to bring to the upcoming weeklong National Scrabble Championship in Reno, Nevada, and as he needed just a few more days to complete it, he offered to ship it to Reno as soon as it was done. I would have no idea what “nice” meant until midweek. I get a notice it arrived for pickup. My jaw dropped:



Custom Scrabble board by Shane (Shane²) Myers 1988

Shane’s artwork was beyond my expectation, and seemed to possess some magical properties. After the day’s official tournament games were played, nightly after-hours

social get-togethers were the rule, when players would “play for fun,” so people gathered around my new board, and we had a team of three or four players on one side playing a similar sized team on the other. Mind you, these were some of the best players on the planet. When the board’s inaugural game was done, the total score was in excess of 1000 points, meaning each team averaged over 500 points in that game! (For comparison, I recall in my early pre-tourney days of Scrabble, Dad and I thumbtacked up one score sheet when our total score surpassed 700, I think 720, for a 360 average each.)

I would meet my wife Pamina briefly near the end of that Championship event, before I went up to Portland, Oregon to visit my brother. While in Oregon, there was the opportunity to visit Pamina and play in the Seattle Scrabble tournament, bringing Shane’s board with me. Pamina and I played in separate divisions at the tournament, never getting to play one another, so when the tournament concluded, she asked if she and I might play. On that wooden masterpiece, and using wooden tiles, our inaugural game was played, and on her last move, she used all seven of her letters, forming the word COINAGES, for about 70 points and won with a score of about 465-435. Our relationship was a match made in Scrabble. Over 13 months we had 13 dates, in Seattle, Albuquerque, or at tournaments in between. On the lucky 13th date, I brought some Scrabble tiles with me. Remember how Scrabble tiles used to be made of Vermont maple? Well, it would be disingenuous of me (i.e., a bald-faced lie) to say I was “packin’ wood” as I headed up to Seattle because, truth be told, the 14 tiles I carried with me were made of a synthetic resin. Nevertheless, on 9/4/89, I used these tiles in what would prove to be the best play I ever made in Scrabble:



9/4/89 Proposing to Pamina in Seattle



Pamina and Mike ham it up in Albuquerque

Pamina left The Land of Moisture and Greenery and moved to The Land of Enchantment at the outset of 1990. In 1991 we concurrently had our Corrales home built while planning our wedding. The closest this would-be-architect came to designing the home was simply adding an office, waiting room, and half bath to the preexisting plan, designing a floor-to-ceiling built-in bookcase for the den, a floor-to-ceiling built-in desk and bookcase for my office, and a built-in magazine rack for the master bathroom.

At our wedding, one of our gifts was a beautiful set of wooden boxes containing pairs of chopsticks, made of ebony, bocote, osage orange, and cocobolo, one of my favorite Scrabble words. Serendipitously, the craftsman who made these lovely items was the same person who made the Scrabble board on which Pamina and I played our first game of Scrabble in Seattle.



Chopsticks by Shane Myers, 1991

Corrales (2011 pop. 8,500) is a wonderful semi-rural village wedged between Albuquerque (pop. 553,000) and Rio Rancho (pop. 89,000), with adobe and stucco homes, cottonwood trees, coyotes, quail, roadrunners, the Rio Grande, and a view of the majestic Sandia Mountains. Some Correlanos, as we are called, live near the bosque, along the river, where the cottonwoods are older and huge. Others, like Pamina and me, opted for the western side of the village, just beyond the acequia, sloping gradually uphill to the west, abutting Rio Rancho, with the unobstructed view of the mountains, but fewer trees. Another wedding gift to us was a cottonwood sapling.

Pamina and I were no spring chickens when we married, and we were, um, beyond spring when we got pregnant, which we so desired. I recall the day she told me, in the fall of 1993. I was at work at Los Lunas Hospital and Training School at the time, and after she

called me with the news, I was so happy, my cheeks were like solid rocks, frozen into a perpetual state of smiling. I was going to be a father!



2/95 Melina at 9 months 7/96 at 26 months-wallet pic 8/05 Denver splash Six Flags

In 2004, when Melina turned 10, she had outgrown her play equipment, which included a manufactured redwood treeless tree house, with a sandbox beneath it, connected to monkey bars and swings. She had wanted a tree house for some time, and the cottonwood wedding present, now 13 years old, was almost of sufficient size to accommodate one.

I figured a simple 4' x 8' plank of plywood and a picket fence-like surrounding might be sufficient. No, she really wanted a house upon it, one in which she could stand up...and a pitched roof. "And a pitched roof?" "Pleeease?" It had been a quarter century since I had undertaken the log landscaping project (and 44 years since building Frisky's doghouse), had long ago sold that 15" Makita circular saw, and now replaced it with a Craftsman 5". I began the project in early October, 2004, my brother Harvey having come out to surprise visit me for my birthday, and to visit my mother, who had moved out to New Mexico five months earlier after her lung cancer had begun to worsen. Harvey assisted me in positioning the plywood after making and remaking the needed circular cuts to have it fit around the cottonwood tree trunk. It was a wonderful visit. A few days later, the night of the 8th, Melina and I had seen the Albuquerque Hot Air Balloon Festival's "Balloon Glow," and watched fireworks magically light up the sky with repeating cascades of rainbow colors. The next day would be Mom's last. She, like Dad, taught me to be playful, but with her passing, mourning set in. And then uncharacteristic bad weather, so it was not until after the holidays that I would pick up hammer and saw and drill and screwdriver again. And it was good therapy. As winter heads toward spring, and the days get longer and warmer, life appears to energize, as though the sun, now closer, draws something out of us and our surroundings: Buds on trees soon bursting into leaves, newborn goats bleating near Old Church Road, and the acequia filled once again with rushing waters from the Rio Grande for local farmlands.



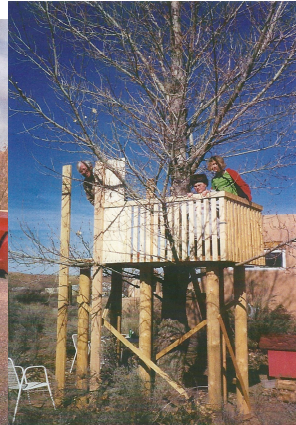
11/25/04 Peeler cores to secure the tree house



2005 Ladder-making in Mike's "shop"



Ladder put in place



Fencing and 14' 2"x6"



4/2/05 Dutch door



4/2/05 The gang I



4/2/05 The gang II



4/2/05 The gang III, no windows yet



4/8/05 Windows



4/8/05 View out of completed tree house



Letter to Melina

The best part is the giving and seeing the joy. I had never made windows before, but I did that Friday (4/8/05), one fixed looking west, two which could be opened and latched shut, facing north and south. Six months in the making, albeit with the majority of time devoted during the latter two months. It was time to celebrate. I felt compelled to bring the folding cloth “soccer chair” into the tree house, look out east through the budding cottonwood leaves, breathe in the spring air, view the magnificent Sandia Mountains, and write a letter to Melina. Later I picked Melina up from school, drove home, and it was time for her to climb up into her completed tree house.



4/8/05 Melina climbs up Dad's letter to Melina Reading Dad's tree house story
In this first photo, I enjoy the sense of distance, me literally standing back, taking in the view of Melina on her “maiden voyage” of her just-completed tree house, climbing up the ladder, with the anticipation of what awaits. We would shortly thereafter celebrate the



Melina's tree house model, self included 3/23/13 Looking good 8 years later

occasion of the tree house's completion by taking Lightning, her 2-year-old part German shepherd (and we like to think part coyote) out with us to the Flying Star restaurant which has a dog-friendly patio. The next day, more friends came by to enjoy her first "home away from home." But I should add, while I was in the midst of this project, Melina surprised me with something she created, too. I was amazed at the accuracy of the proportions she used in crafting a cardboard model of her tree house, including the circular cut for the cottonwood tree, windows, doorway, ladder, and even some bolts. Her model was very helpful to me as construction continued, especially as I was determining whether to build the roof atop the tree house or in the garage and transport it – the garage won out. The last photo on the previous page is the tree house as it appeared eight years later (2013), while Melina was off to college. She and her friends still get use out of it when here at home. And I'll occasionally take that folding cloth soccer chair up to the tree house, open the Dutch door, look at the Sandia Mountains, and do some reading, writing, or just relaxing. And, 38 years after leaving the Syracuse University School of Architecture, I could finally claim to have designed and built a home.

In that letter to Melina, I offered some words of advice I would do well to apply more consistently to myself:

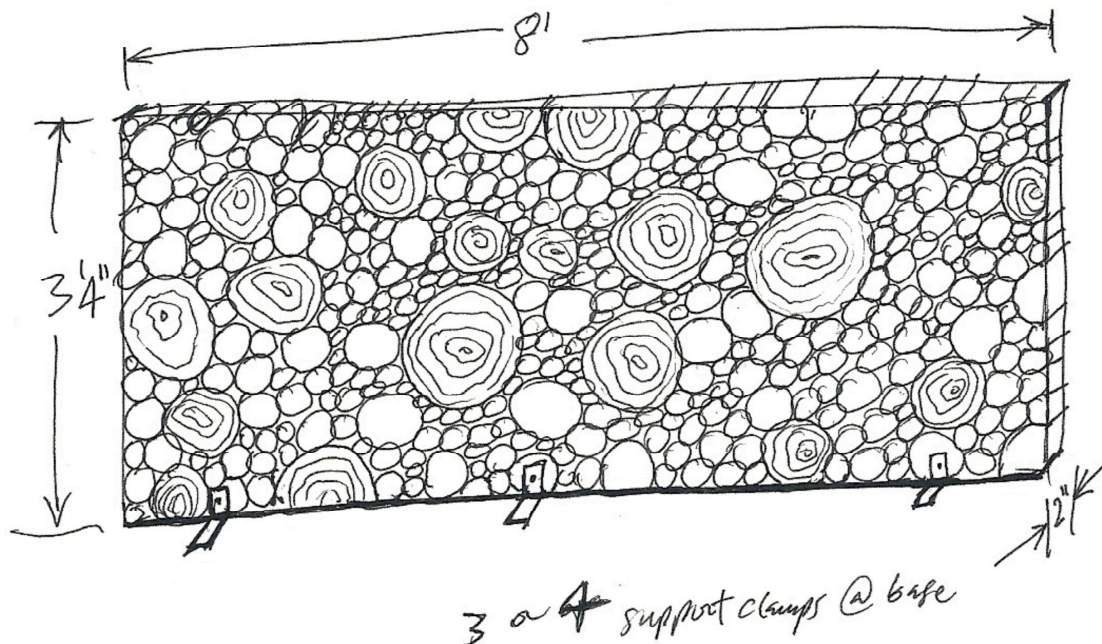
When I began this project, I had no idea that it would have a pitched & shingled roof, a Dutch door, and windows, let alone windows which open & shut. I had no idea it'd be tall enough to stand in. Yes, I had some reservation at times about my knowledge & skill to do some things. But I was patient, did some research (like asking people at Lowe's, a company I should buy stock in), and have thoroughly enjoyed each & every step of the way. I hope that in your projects & undertakings, you will have patience with yourself, be willing to learn more, and enjoy the process of discovery & the evolution of your efforts.

A week after the tree house was done, Melina needed to make the biggest decision, and likely one of the longest term commitments, of her life: which school to attend for the next seven years (2005-12), grades 6-12. She chose Bosque School, a wonderful small school near the Rio Grande, which seemed to have a warm supportive faculty and staff committed to community service, environmental preservation, social justice, and academic rigor. Over those next seven years, I would finally forgo being a "Road Warrior." For over 30 years, in addition to part-time private practice work, I served as psychologist and consultant to many schools in New Mexico, having traveled about half a million miles over those years. In 2009-10, I made a commitment to expand my practice, and by the end of 2010, I would have but only a few days committed to remaining on the road out the outset of 2011.

In summer of 2011, a wonderful leather swivel office chair I had for nearly 15 years reached a point where it was beyond repair. Then, my 28-year-old armchairs and love seat used by my clients and myself were cracking, cat-scratched upholstery had me patting down the frayed edges before sessions, and repairs proved insufficient. As Rafiki says to Simba in *Lion King*, "It is time." It was time for me to replace my furniture. Mind you, this is coming from someone who still has a winter jacket purchased in 1964 at age 15, who ascribed to the tenets of Stoic philosopher Epictetus ("Wealth consists not in

having great possessions, but in having few wants”), transcendentalist Thoreau (“Perhaps we should never procure a new suit, however ragged or dirty the old, until we have so conducted, so enterprised or sailed in some way, that we feel like new men in the old, and that to retain it would be like keeping new wine in old bottles....It is preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else, that prevents us from living freely and nobly”), and folk icon Bob Dylan (“When you got nothin’, ya got nothin’ to lose”).

But it was time for my office’s renaissance, and perhaps a bit of my own. I liked my previous Hjellegjerde Fjords® Mustang recliner swivel office chair so much, I thought I would replace it with a similar one – on rollers – with three more, with stationery wood bases for the client area. And then I realized: Once I remove the loveseat, all the computer wires would be exposed. I’ll need a have some sort of wall partition, and, so, on the day I placed my order for the recliners (10/27/11), I took pen to hand:

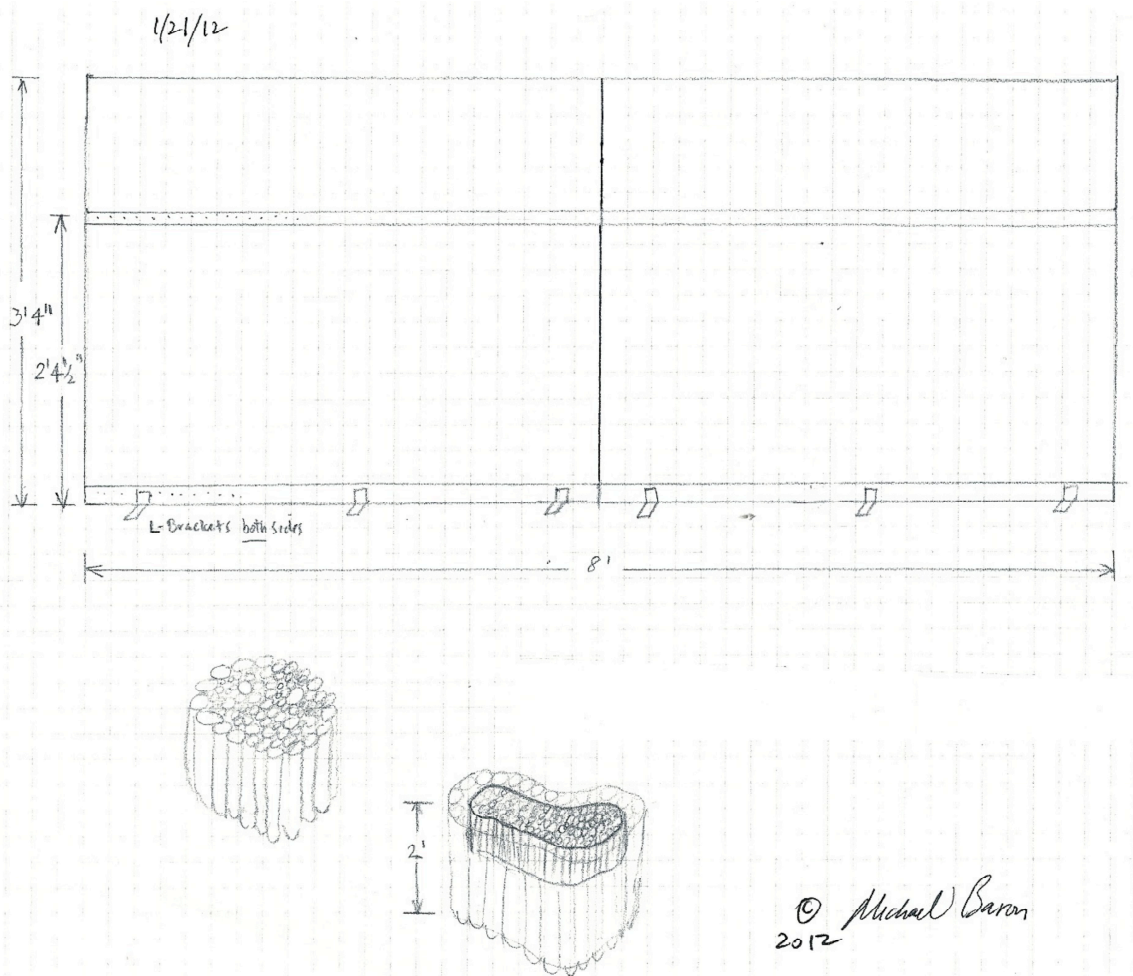


Partition Wall for Office

Michael Baron
10/27/11

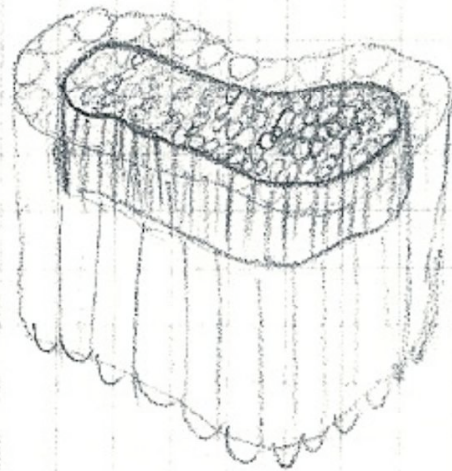
A wall of tree slices! Over 25 square feet of nature, hundreds of pieces, adhered together with some polyurethane-sounding-polysyllabic-better-not-eat-it substance. But I didn’t have the tools to make such items. I finally connected with a cabinetmaker who was willing to put together such a wall per my design, but for a fee I was not prepared to undertake. Melina, for whom I had made her tree house over six years earlier, advised: “Dad, you should build your own!” I took a deep breath. She was right. But how?

The recliners are, of course, grown in Norway and, after initial seeding, take about three winter months to grow to full form. They were harvested, packaged, shipped, and arrived in January, 2012. Inspired by Melina, I ventured to Lowe's to look at woods, feeling like I was on a safari, searching for some rare breed of nature, something that would "reach out to me" without biting off my head. Up and down the aisles I went. I then headed over to that other bastion of home improvement, Home Depot. And then, without my head getting bitten off, something reached out to me: DOWELS! 1 3/8" DOWELS! Instead of tree slices on their sides, I'll have these mini-trees, these dowels, aligned vertically, side-by-side! The curvilinearity of my school (1963) and home (1966) designs in junior and senior high school, my Intro Design assignment in college (1967), and the use of peeler cores for my Man Cave furniture (1975) and log landscaping (1979) all came together at that moment, in the otherwise innocent sight of a dowel. I saw it's potential immediately.



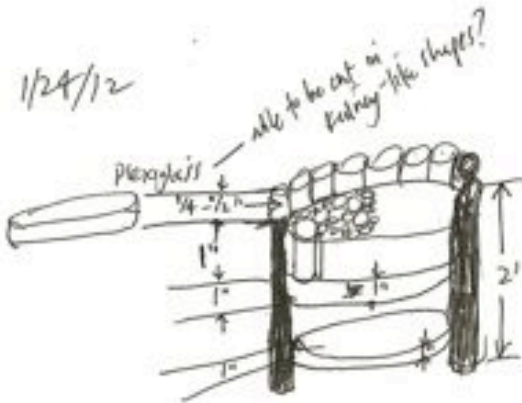
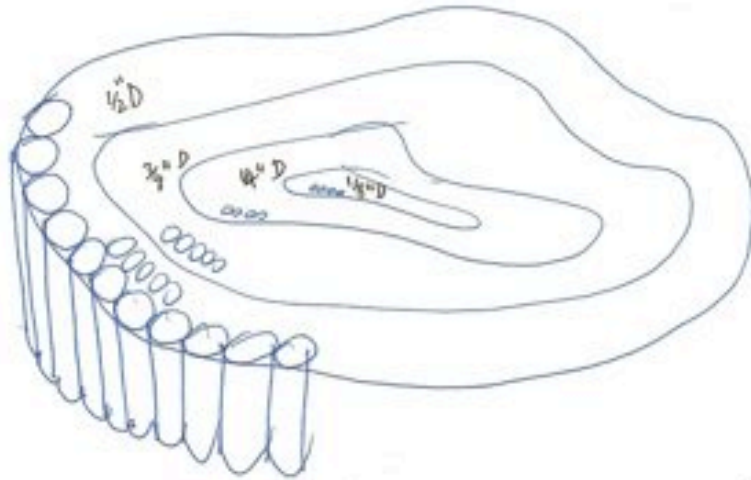
So, while the New York Times was reporting this day that police in Iran were closing down toyshops selling Barbie dolls, as part of a crackdown on "manifestations of Western culture," I was attempting to manifest a new form of art here in the West, with no plans as yet to have Barbie dolls adorn them. I was excited at the prospect of making functional art, and while eager to begin building the wall partition, my mind was racing in many directions over the prospect of a dowel table, and so much more.

1/21/12 Enlarged detail

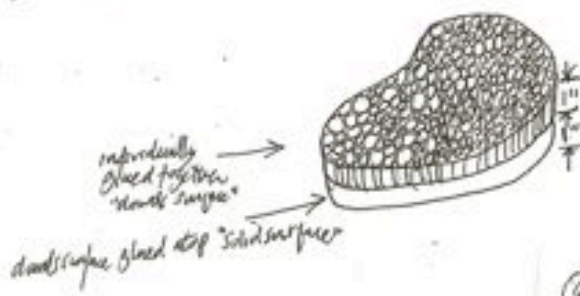
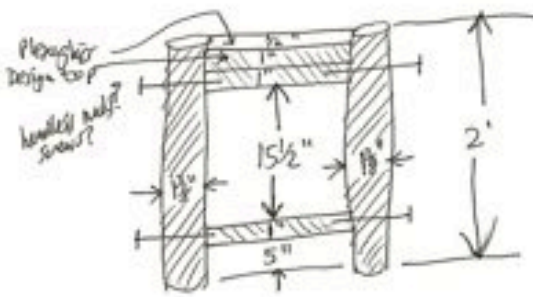


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2012

1/23/12



DO WELL DOWELS



could use dowels
to depict faces
scenes, lettered
messages, anything!

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The initial design two days earlier required me to look “at the guts” of how I would piece things together. My excitement over how I might further use dowels is obvious in my exclamatory statement: “Could use dowels to depict faces, scenes, lettered messages, anything!” When I use an exclamation point *and* underlining, I’m pretty jazzed. But, I would have to defer the first dowel table until I completed The Great Wall of Dowel. A week after I sketched the wall design, I commenced on my first wall project. It was an exhilarating sunny Saturday (1/28/12), the air was crisp, and I began by sandpapering and stain-sealing 70 dowels, each 1 3/8” diameter and 40” long. That height would be ideal

for enclosing the “conversation pit” of my office and providing the right amount of visual concealment of the computer table area of my office. This is what I was concealing:



Partition wall before and after (2/6/12), 95” x 40” x 1 3/4” using 1 3/8” diameter pine

In between the Before and After were the days of delight in seeing the two dimensions of the page become the three dimensions of reality. Without attempting to be overdramatic or maudlin, as the January sun bore down, and I put sandpaper to dowel, there really was a state of bliss.



1/28/12 Getting started: sanding dowels for the wall partition on a gloriously sunny Saturday afternoon.



1/28/12 Applying stain-sealer



1/29/12 Dowels are numbered and marked. Numbers allow for preferred sequencing and hash marks note the front. This allows for preferred positioning of the wood's character.



My first clamp. While the intent was for an 8-foot wall partition, not being the sharpest knife in the drawer, it took me a while to realize there was no way such a wall could be constructed outside of my office and carried through the narrow sharp turns en route to my office. Two 4-foot pieces it had to be.



1/29/12 The first screw



1/29/12 Much of the first of two pieces is completed



2/4/12 Back of wall partition, two parts braced together. But how to have the wall stand upright? Place on a 1" x 4" and L-bracket to the office wall? It would be too wobbly at the other end.



2/4/12 "Rick, I could use your help. Can you stop by?"

I knew Rick Thaler as a woodworker in the early 1980's. In 1984, Rick created one corner and two end tables for my first home-based private practice office, the very furniture I was now planning to replace. Pamina and I were looking to have some large cabinets made to help get some greater storage space. I had Rick in mind as a possible cabinetmaker, but also wanted to pick his brain on how to stabilize the wall partition I would soon be completing. Rick came over, heard my needs for cabinetry, and informed

me he hadn't made cabinets for years. I knew he had been involved in the woodworker tool business some time ago. He later updated me on the arc of his professional path, the last couple decades serving in an executive capacity with a major construction company that he later purchased and oversees with about 80 woodworker employees. He gave me the name of a cabinetmaker who worked for him. Born in New York, I still think of the phrase "greater metropolitan Albuquerque area" as an oxymoron, but it does now exceed 900,000. So, of course the cabinetmaker he recommended is someone I met about 35 years ago. He then mentions a former employee as well. Of course I just happened to have a photo lying on a table of that former employee's son and my daughter who played as a doubles team at the National School Scrabble Championship. So in this extended community of nearly a million people, the zeitgeist was right for more like two-degrees-of-separation as, right at that moment, I get a call from a close friend I've known nearly four decades, who happens to have been a former coworker of Rick's wife. Before I ever met Rick, I hired his wife to enter my dissertation data onto computer punch cards. I still think of Albuquerque as the world's largest town. But I digress.

I had solved the problem of how to steady my wall partition the day before Rick arrived, but I had a new problem: Why can't my drill get this screw into my computer table? It's made of hard beech wood, but still. My junior by some years, I kiddingly tell Rick, "Come on, you're a young Turk. Get in there, under the table, and see what you can do." I wouldn't learn about Rick's career update until later, so I knew something was strange when he grabbed the drill, and offered, "I haven't handled one of these in years." He fiddles a bit with the drill, makes some adjustments, and proceeds to screw in that pesky resistant screw. He then tells me the only thing needed was an adjustment on the torque setting. "Torque setting?" I ask. He educates me. I tell him, "I've had that drill 10, maybe 15 years, never knew about or touched the 'torque setting.'" So thanks." Rick, in his wonderfully understated way, tells this psychologist, in his own therapy office:

"Torque is cheap."



2/5/12 The simplest and best solution 2/5/12 First dowel creation for office done!

I was pleased with the dowel wall partition, and began to imagine how it would compliment the three dowel tables I had yet to make. Unlike the rectangular lines of the wall partition, with 70 straight dowels all standing at vertical attention, my tables would afford me the opportunity to engage in curvilinear play and horizontal art. I knew the set of tables, especially the large corner table, would be a major undertaking, but I was eager to start. “The Bean,” the smallest, would be Table #1.



2/7/12 Laying the groundwork for The Bean



c.1964 meets 2012 Circle template

By no means a hoarder, how shall I say this? I get good use out of what possessions I have. Epictetus and Thoreau would be proud, not only of that winter coat from 1964, but of a circle template from about the same year, when Ed Sullivan was introducing the Beatles to America, and I was designing a round school building in 9th grade. That template would allow me to draw 1 3/8” circles onto manilla folders, which I would then cut out. I now had a pile of paper poker chips with which I could configure whatever shape I wished for my future tables. With my recliners in place, I could place these circles upon the floor, and play with the shape I desired, assisted by juxtaposing them near the recliner and wall partition “just so,” until I was satisfied with the shape. Once attaining the desired shape, I would tape the circles together and number them. The Bean was comprised of 52 circles, or 52 future dowels.



2/12/12 Stencil for The Bean tabletop



2/12/12 Now, to use the stencil

I placed the taped-together paper poker chips upon a piece of poster board, and, using an Exacto blade, carefully cut out the form contained within the “dowel” perimeter.



2/12/12 Outline onto tabletop 2/12/12 My first jigsaw Lightning meets dowels

My stencil allowed me to make the sweeping bean shape onto what would become the tabletop base and the tablebottom support. Then, I eagerly opened the box to my first jigsaw, set up in the garage with Lightning, our then nearly 10-year-old dog, and enjoyed seeing the first curve take shape “in real life,” about three weeks after I had made those drawings of the wall and the first table.



2/14/12 Not quite true to form yet

2/14/12 Looking, loosely, inside

“Go with your first instinct.” My first idea for securing the dowels was rather labor intense, so I considered other possibilities, including plumber’s strapping. It worked well in ’79 for log landscaping, why not in ’12 for dowel furniture? Was not to be. As well, I felt the 24” height had to be reduced to 20”. As it turned to late February, I was off to Portland to visit my brother Harvey to celebrate his 70th birthday.



2/14/12 Peekaboo, I C thru U

2/15/12 Cut height, scratch strapping

Having foregone Plan B plumber's strapping, and other considered options, I returned to Plan A to see me through. While it's not the equivalent of the Miracle Staircase at The Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe <http://www.lorettochapel.com/staircase.html>, and it may not have the heft of a "trade secret," I remain open to ideas as to how one might most efficiently and "invisibly" configure round objects (dowels) into curved shapes (table perimeter). With Plan A in place, the pace picked up. Completing the tablebase, the other joy of approaching the tabletop awaited. My palette consisted of seven species of wood (birch, cherry, mahogany, maple, oak, poplar, and walnut) in six different diameters (from 1/4" to 1"), effectively providing me 42 "paints" from which to select. For Table #1, I decided to go with "dowel delight," a not entirely random placement of all 42 "paints" to reflect the rainbow diversity of woods at my disposal. Each of the over 2,000 pieces were glued to a base. The process added a "Where's Waldo" step. Just to make sure all my pieces were in place. I would turn the tabletop upside down, and see how many pieces fell out. "Plink! Plink! Plink!" Okay, so no one's perfect. So, gathering up those fallen pieces, I now had the task of playing "Where's Waldo?" and finding where each fallen piece had fallen from!



3/10/12 The Bean is getting truer to form
I had already acquired a glass top, cut to the template shape I provided the glasscutters. This was a little tricky, because I needed to leave a little wiggle room lest the glass be too snug and defy the ability to insert or remove it, if needed. So the moment of completion awaited, initially threading a piece of cord beneath the glass for easier removal. Like the completion of the wall partition, the final creation would be placed in the office:



3/13/12 The Bean has landed

3/13/12 Wall partition has company

Well I find this curious. Today (4/14/13), over a year after finishing The Bean, I now see that I opted to configure the table in the *opposite* direction from the original plan!



2/7/12



3/13/12

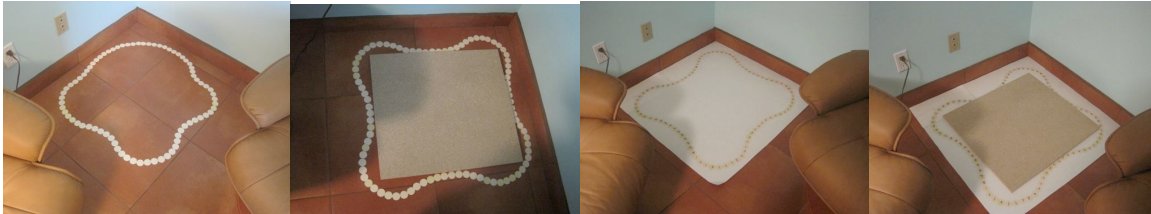
I believe somewhere during the early construction process, I determined that the visually more interesting side would be the concave (curving inward) rather than the convex (curving outward) side, and desired the concave part to face outward (as it does in the 3/13/12 photo). Essentially turning what had been the rear to the front, but with the added factor of choosing the preferred dowels to show toward the (new) front.

Helping this newbie at the outset was Tracy, an incredible employee at the local Home Depot, where I discovered the dowels initially. Now while the wall partition was fairly straightforward in what I would need to do, The Bean was not. I brought in my January 21st and 23rd drawings to Home Depot, and smiling Tracy was quick to assist me. She not only became excited over what I had in mind, she started reeling off the potential supplies which might assist me, e.g., stain-sealer, Plexiglas (before I opted for glass), jigsaw, wood glue, and, of course, dowels. She spent a good hour with me, accompanying me in the cavernous store to each aisle that might have the needed items. So, upon The Bean's completion, the next day I brought it to the store to share with her:



3/14/12 Mike, Tracy, and The Bean

One table down, two to go, but much learning had occurred during The Bean (about 18" x 26") that would assist me on the next two. Of the two remaining, I thought I would opt for the larger (about 32" x 32") corner table rather than the midsize end table (about 26" x 32"). I had in mind the sort of tabletop I desired, one that would be rather complex, an exciting incentive to get me on my way. Again, using my c.1964 Perfect Circle Template, I started by placing my paper poker chips in the area the table would eventually be:



3/17/12 Nah

3/18/12 More better

3/18 Stencil-to-be

Bigger top needed

And so the task of using my stencil to configure the shape upon the tabletop began, but this was my "4Corners" shape, allowing me to be a sort of ice skater with blades cutting through wood rather than sliding on ice, skating in on the concave, out on the convex, in on the concave, etc. The tabletop design would abound with curves, but for now, the task ahead was completing the tablebottom.



3/21 Jigsaw skating

3/24 88 dowels on two tables

3/26/12 Dowel #1's place

If I had been shown the photo below four months earlier, and asked, I do *not* think I would have said, "I can make that." I knew the tabletop would be a major undertaking.



3/28/12 Starburst tablebottom done

3/28/12 In its place awaiting top

Now, no sooner did I complete the Starburst tablebottom, “Table #2,” that I decided to defer the tabletop to another time, and start on Table #3, the midsize table, later to be known as “WoodEye.” I would base the shape of the midsize table in part on the length of The Bean and the width of Starburst. So, paper poker chips in hand I began, borrowing from the Starburst stencil.



3/28/12 WoodEye begins 3/29 Starburst shape... 3/29 ...for future tabletop

With Starburst put on hold, WoodEye proceeds, from paper poker chips on the floor, to its own stencil, from two dimensions to three.



3/30/12 WoodEye outline 3/31 WoodEye stencil 3/31 WoodEye 69 dowels



4/5/12 Melina sittin’ pretty beside WoodEye 4/5 Melina with three new tables

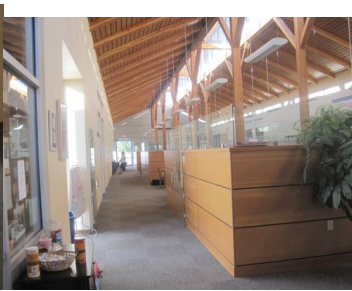
After finishing one wall and three tables (save for two tabletops), I entertained the thought of participating in the June 2012 New Mexico Arts and Crafts Fair. Alas, I learned the deadline was the previous January and one needed at least five pieces for judging. I invoked the same phrase as the pre-1955 Dodger fans used: “Wait ‘til next year!”

And then it occurred to me that, with Melina graduating at the end of May, perhaps I could gift her school with a table dedicated to her graduating Class of 2012. Melina liked the idea, but wisely suggested clearing that with her school. The school was receptive, and I would meet with a school representative to see where one might best be placed. The Schoolhouse Building was selected. Containing classrooms and administrative offices, built in 2009, it is a sleek modern structure, featuring what appears to be a cherry wood paneled peaked ceiling with skylights allowing a wonderful splash of sunshine inside.

The day after visiting my old Altez Street home and saw my 1979 dowel gate, I visited the Bosque School campus, agreed to a site for the table, and took measurements.



4/11/12 Bosque table site



Schoolhouse Building



4/12 Jalapeno-shaped table

A couple of days after commencing this project Melina, who would be the featured artist at the upcoming Art Exhibit at her school, asked me if I would be willing to show my Bosque table with her at her exhibit. Would I?! What an honor! And, borrowing that great phrase used by the host of the “Coffee Talk” routine on the *Saturday Night Live* television show, I felt “a bit ferklemt” by her sweet invitation. A day or two goes by, and while her graduation day was May 25th, ample time, I ask her when the Art Exhibit is. May 3rd. “May 3rd! Like in two-and-half weeks?!” Yep. Into overdrive I went. Melina, too, had much to complete, as well, during this time, and felt a bonding as co-artists during these crunch weeks.



4/20/12



4/20/12



4/21/12



4/22/12



4/23/12



4/24/12



4/25/12



4/26/12



4/30/12 White-on-blue nameplates of 66 seniors surround the perimeter



5/1/12

“In honor of the Bosque School Class of 2012
and the incredible faculty & staff”



5/3/12 Melina's Art Exhibit

It was so sweet to be with Melina at her exhibit, and to have pulled a nearly all-nighter with her the night of May 1st, as she had to have all her work submitted the day before the Exhibit. I'm of mixed mind about art-on-a-deadline. Part of me believes we should follow our muse to create only when inspired to do so. On the other hand, if we did not have that hourglass called Life, would we be nearly as creative? As I put finger to keyboard at this moment, I wonder to what extent my flourish of “packin’ wood”

creations this past year or so has been mediated by the awareness that my own hourglass, as well as those for the vast majority of people over age 45, has fewer grains of sand at the top now than at any point in my past, and fewer than at the bottom. I am struck by the concept of “legacy,” of what we leave to our successors, and yet, at the same time, I focus on the joy of Now, of the tactile experience of sanding and staining dowels on a sunshine-filled winter’s day, of listening to classical music on a quiet Corrales night (as they all are) while running my fingers through a bag of hundreds of one-quarter inch diameter mahogany dowel pieces, and finding a nearly mystical experience in that process. Perhaps in the making of art, that is, that which is art-ificial, we also get closer to the Real, to that which ignites and sustains the Soul. My life has been a tapestry of far greater joys than sadness, and far many more hugs than wounds. In a sense, the practice of therapy and the making of art share a path where both involve expression, communication, and, at its best, understanding – to reach greater joy or to heal wounds, to make greater connections with those around us. The practice of therapy often includes introjections, incorporations from outside influences into one’s personality or being. Art includes the projection outwardly of that which is inside of us.

After Melina graduated from high school, knowing she’d be leaving the nest for college in fall, we took a family road trip within the Four Corner states, to Arizona (Sedona and Grand Canyon), Utah (Monument Valley, Arches National Pak, Moab), Colorado (Mesa Verde National Park), and New Mexico (fossil hunting in the Jemez Mountains). The mixture of sky blue and earth tone colors has always appealed to me, so our trip was a dizzying array of such visual delights. The stark contrast of red earth and blue sky in Sedona was invigorating. If the “spirituality of the land” is to be felt anywhere, Monument Valley would be the place. And the Arches dare you not to look at them.



7/1/12 Sedona, AZ

7/4/12 Monument Valley

7/5/12 Arches National Park

In Moab, UT, near Arches National Park, we discovered Lin Ottinger’s Rock and Fossil Shop. We met Mr. Ottinger, a tall sturdy octogenarian who has a dinosaur named after him: http://dinosaurjim.com/html/iguanodon_ottingeri.html. There I was seduced by turquoise stones of various sizes, and it occurred to me that the blue of turquoise and the brown of wood would organically blend well together, no less than the blue of sky and the brown of earth. Called “cabochons,” or “cabs,” they have flat bottoms that I knew would work well in positioning them beside my dowel pieces. I had in mind attempting one piece for the midsize (future WoodEye) table and 14 pieces for the larger (Starburst) table. The discovery of new materials and new combinations of materials has added to my journey in forging new artistic possibilities.



7/5/12 Melina and Pamina at Lin Ottinger's Rock & Fossil Shop in Moab, UT

Returning from our trip with the stash of turquoise, I looked forward to resuming work on the midsize office table. The previously completed Bosque 2012 table attempted to configure a design somewhat akin to tree rings. I had the tree ring motif originally in mind for the midsize office table, but with the Bosque School graduation and Art Exhibit looming, that design motif would be more fully incorporated in the table for the school. Still, I wanted to use part of that motif in some way. I hoped a similar organic quality might emerge, despite the changes in the pattern. The one piece of turquoise would make its appearance in the “outer ring” closest to, and between, the two chairs.



7/28/12 WoodEye completed

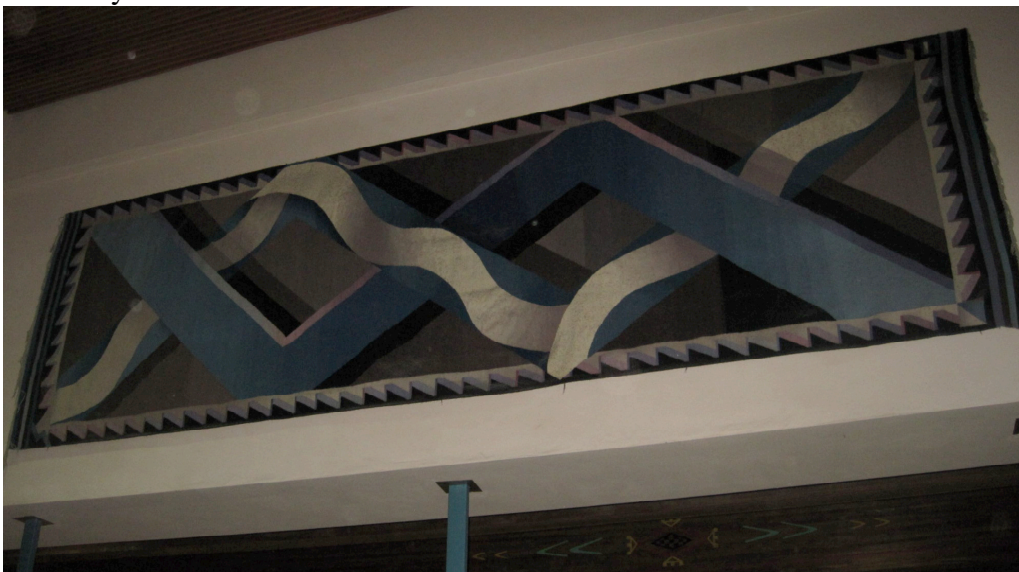
7/28/12 WoodEye between chairs

WoodEye would earn its name over the following weeks after a few of my clients commented on the inner few rings resembling an eye. I had for some time been considering a name for the tabletop's shape. I rejected “PacMan,” and chose “Smile” instead. The concave shape on the right side of the table, facing the chair to the right, would, in combination with the Starburst table further right (out of view in photo above), convey being hugged from both sides. I previously had armchairs in my office. Now I had hugging armtables.

I big rite-of-passage came a few weeks after the completion of WoodEye: Taking Melina to college, with Pamina and me becoming empty-nesters. I made reference earlier to that delightful word used in the *Saturday Night Live's* “Coffee Talk” routine. “Ferklept” hardly begins to describe how I felt after we bade our last goodbyes, and she dashed off

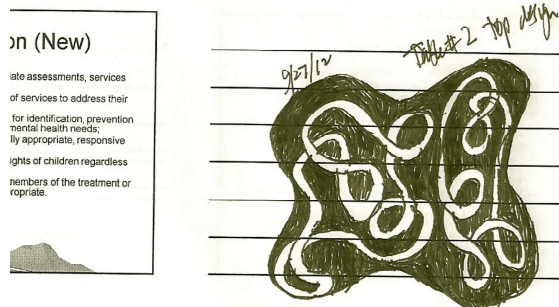
to a dorm meeting, as Pamina and I sat in the car, and I just needed to catch my breath and, um, clear my (human, not wood) eyes a bit. Such bitter sweetness in that moment, despite the years of planning and hoping for the day this would come. Summer was truly turning to fall, and in October, I told Pamina I wanted to complete the Starburst table before Melina returned from college on 12/18/12 for her holiday break.

I had “Starburst” in mind since the prior spring when I built the tablebottom. Clients would sometimes ask what I had in mind for the tabletop, and I would say “swirls of curves.” I wanted to convey a sense of three-dimensionality and weaving of those swirls despite the use of flat pieces of wood. One incredible source of inspiration was a huge tapestry I had seen over the years hanging on the wall above the escalator at the Albuquerque Airport. Here was an excellent example of a flat surface conveying three-dimensionality.



"Runwave," hand-dyed wool tapestry by Nancy Kazikowski at Albuquerque Airport

The artist, through use of shape and color, and shading, was wonderfully able to convey the over-and-under weaving pattern of the wavy white above and beneath the straight blue line patterns. Oh, to make my humble dowels visually sing with just one iota of this masterful aria. At a psychology conference (9/27/12), ever the attentive listener, upon the distributed Power Point presentation, I drew a humble iota of an iota of an aria:



9/27/12 Starburst tabletop design idea

That thumbnail sketch was a first stab of showing the challenge I had: How to convey a weave pattern? So, in October, I began playing with the only two variables I had: dowel diameter (shape) and wood species (color). As I was most smitten by the juxtaposition of the colors of mahogany and birch, I opted to use these two colors, with the dark mahogany serving as background and the light birch as the “swirl” line foreground, and rely on shape, or the diameter of dowel pieces, as the primary variable to convey the weave pattern. I played with various swirl patterns until the weave unfolded. As the gluing of dowel pieces continued, I decided to experiment by keeping dowel diameter constant, and vary the color by using all seven species of wood, which you may notice in the 11/23/12 photo below, on one sweep of 1” pieces, starting with the light birch, progressing darker and darker to walnut, then “returning to light” again with birch. Later, in the near corner of the 11/26/12 photo below, I varied both size and color. By Thanksgiving, I was earnestly on my way but realizing the enormity of what lied ahead. Yet the process was captivating, listening to classical music, and seeing the form emerge.



11/23/12



11/26/12



12/1/12



12/1/12



12/14/12



12/14/12

If I were to meet the goal of having this done by the time Melina returned from college, I knew I had to get in very high gear. It was important to take breaks. Have you ever stared at an object intently and closed your eyes, and, even with eyes closed, you could still see an after-image of that object? Well, during this last surge, I recall a time when, *without* even closing my eyes, I was seeing the after-mage of swirls.



12/14/12



12/16/12



12/17/12



12/17/12 Serpentine shooting star



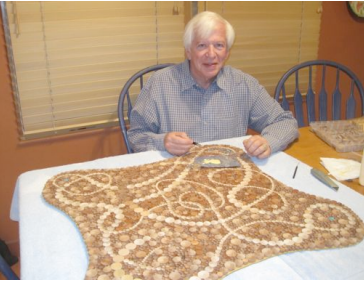
12/17/12 Raising cabs; cutting with my '64 Exacto



12/17/12 Cabochon in each of the Four Corners



12/17/12



12/18/12



12/18/12 The last dowel piece!

Melina's flight was scheduled to arrive at 11 pm. The last of over 5,000 pieces went in at 10 pm! I was ecstatic! As a man, I could not say, "It felt like giving birth," but still.



12/18/12 10 pm Starburst tabletop completed

From summer of 2011, when I began pondering replacing my office furniture - first a desk chair, then all the chairs, then a wall partition, and then three tables - this would be the climax. I took the last two shots of the serpentine shooting star.



12/18/12

12/18/12

And then I gently lifted the Starburst tabletop and carefully carried it into my office, where the tablebottom, completed in March, had waited...hmm, 9 months for this very moment. After delicately getting it snugged into place, I stepped back.



12/18/12 Starburst table completed

This was the second-best thing I had ever made. Off to the airport for best-ever.

After the obligatory stop at the landmark Frontier Restaurant for midnight breakfast burritos, Melina, Pamina, and I came home. Melina put her backpack and duffle bag away, then came into my office. She thought it was cool. *That* was cool. So as the 2012 year came to a close, I could compare the Before and After of my office:



Office furniture Before and After



A week after Starburst was done, and knowing I needed a fifth piece to apply to the New Mexico Arts and Crafts Fair, I decided to enter the realm of signage. I had spelled out “Bosque 2012” upon that table, but my next project would have lettering as the primary focus. And, having officially registered my new business with the State, effective the first of the year, what better time to start signage than now? My visiting mother-in-law and I have a wonderful relationship, and I much enjoy her morning walks with Lightning and me along the acequia and, in wintertime, to a field of dozens of wintering sandhill cranes and snow geese. She became the self-appointed art critic, as I began my sign, until my father-in-law and she concluded their customarily wonderful visit.



9/2012 Judy (83) & Marshall (91) Deutsch
World's youngest 174-year-old couple

As constructive as each of her suggestions were, fool that I am, my inner muse apparently marched to the beat of a different drummer. And she *still* continued to go on delightful walks with Lightning and me. After their departure, the first sign was done (1/7/13):



A client of mine, who much appreciates fine woodcraft and is himself a wood craftsman, had some months previously advised me to consider tung oil “to bring out the richness of the wood.” I stored that gem of advice away, and after the sign was done, seeing the inadequate contrast of back- and foreground, especially for the lower case letters, with a paintbrush I applied tung oil only to the darker background mahogany, and enjoyed seeing the light birch letters “pop out” as a result. On the heels of Starburst’s completion, I had again opted for the mahogany and birch combination, included a singular swirl line of birch, and chose to include two turquoise cabs, these purchased from Mama’s Minerals. Melina would tell me about that shop in prior years, but I had yet to visit it. Like a child in a toyshop, I could have spent hours there looking at all its wonders, and it provided ideas for future creations.

With the sign, I had my fifth piece needed to apply to the New Mexico Arts and Crafts Fair, and the deadline to apply was three weeks away. But for Mr. TechnoKlutz me, with daughter Melina to return to college in less than two weeks, I had little time remaining to use her capable camera and computer savvy. The deadline was met. The day before she left, she took a hand-held photo of the three of us.



1/19/13 Pamina, Michael, Melina

Forty days and forty nights later, I was delighted to learn I would become a Sexagenarian Fair Newbie for the June arts and crafts fair! With promotional pics needed for that fair’s events, and with the intent to launch an ArtofDowel website, I hired photographer Margot Geist, who had extensive experience with Fair artisans. In advance of her arrival for the photo shoot, I decided to try another sign, much smaller, and with the reverse of foreground and background, birch for background, and mahogany for lettering. It was back to Mama’s Minerals for eight larger turquoise cabs. So, over the course of the first three days of spring, with the days getting longer, the sun moving more northerly in the sky, quail families and the acequia waters returning to Corrales, I fashioned a nameplate.



3/20/13



3/22/13

The next day, photographer Margot was a delight to work with, assisting me in carrying the furniture from my office to the great room for the photo shoot. I admit to some envy of her vast computer navigational skills as she entered and edited photos she had taken. In the Everyone-Knows-Everyone-In-Albuquerque Department, I see a first name only on her computer screen, “Hershel,” and immediately think of a friend and incredible woodworker I’ve known since Nixon was president, who crafted a wood planter commissioned by a mutual friend as a wedding gift to Pamina and me 22 years ago. “Hershel Weiss?” I asked.

“Yes. You know Hershel?”

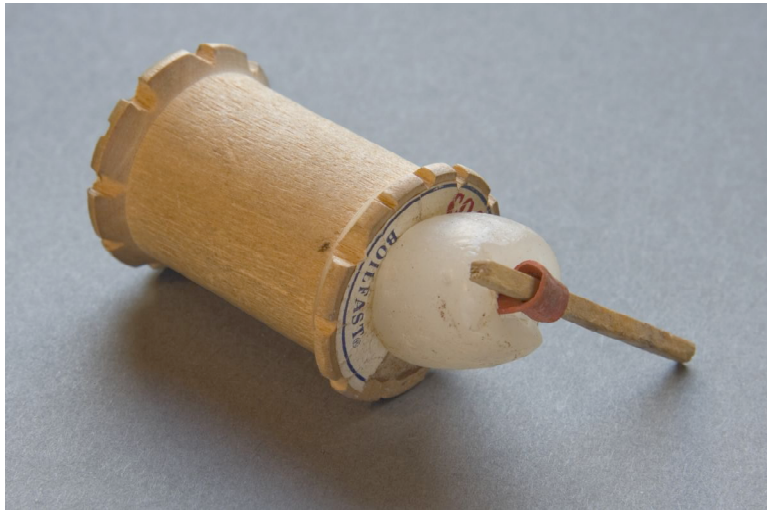
“For 40 years. Ask him if he remembers a friend who ‘assisted’ him out of Times Square on a celebratory New Years Eve in 1974.”

Incredible, the tapestry of connections, the interweaving of past and present. Margot also assisted me in computer-entering the photo she took of Starburst to help me place an order for the first postcard of anything I ever made. In a similar way, Starburst is no less a wooden tapestry, an interweaving of past and present, as one continuous line.



Starburst
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That continuous Starburst line, interweaving past and present, leads me back to the past and the origins of my own playfulness, whimsy, creativity, and expression. I think back to Dad's sweet little wood creation of tanks. Sometime during my elementary school years, Dad would make a tank out of wooden thread spool, notching "tires" on the outer sides, a rubber band placed through the core, adhered at one end, through a bit of wax candle, to a wooden matchstick. I would carefully grasp the matchstick, wind it up, gently place in on a flat surface, and let it go. The tank would take off rather methodically crossing the surface it was placed on. Now here was the magical thing: My recollection was that when the tank ran into an object which would otherwise stop it, the matchstick would then rotate slowly up and over to the other side, and the tank would reverse direction! Around 1974 or '75, I was visiting my parents in Lindenhurst, New York. Fellow graduate student, and now psychologist Dr. John Jacobson, visited us. Dad made a tank for John. Dad passed away in 1977. About 20 years later, while visiting John, I was surprised to learn he still had that tank! And I was so sweetly taken aback when he gifted it to me.



Gabriel "George" Baron's last tank c. 1974

The Starburst swirl weaves further back to the past, to that fall of 1967, as a freshman at Syracuse University, shortly after the Introductory Design assignment, requiring the use of only vertical and horizontal lines, led me to withdraw from the School of Architecture. Immersed in career uncertainty, and still continuing my quest for meaningfulness in life, a journey begun in my senior year of high school, I would seek guidance or escape or more confusion in reading: Rollo May's "Man's Search for Himself," Bertrand Russell's "Why I Am Not a Christian," Teilhard de Chardin's "The Future of Man," T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land," Epictetus's "The Enchiridion," James Joyce's "The Dead" and "Finnegan's Wake," and Dostoevsky's "Notes from Underground" and "The Idiot." In 19th century Russia, the country from whence the Barons emigrated to America before the Russian Revolution, Dostoevsky's protagonist Prince Myshkin is portrayed as innocent and naïve, a good soul, amidst the tide of others' nefarious deeds and intentions. In my freshman dormitory, as others would

be getting inebriated with alcohol, I got intoxicated with pen and ink. Not unlike the convolutions of the brain, this cerebral art and meticulous detail may well have been a harbinger for OCD (Original Creations with Dowels) 45 years later.



1967-8 The Idiot, A Self-Portrait 20" x 30"

Detail from "The Idiot, A Self-Portrait"



Detail from "The Idiot, a Self-Portrait"

And the Starburst tapestry weaves further back, before the high school senior year project's model house with curved walls, before the 9th grade model of a school comprised of concentric circles, about the time I had built the doghouse for Frisky. That summer of 1960, when Dad's company-issued car, a black 1960 Chrysler Imperial, with

long fins, had the height of indulgence, especially for a man who, after World War II, went to night school on the GI Bill for six years and opened up a TV and radio repair shop, when televisions were owned by few: a convertible top *and* an air conditioner. If ever there were two who taught me to be playful and encouraged using one's imagination, it was Dad and Mom. In June, Freedomland, USA, a great amusement park in the shape of our country, larger than Disneyland, opened up in the Bronx. "Mommy, daddy, take my hand. Take me out to Freedomland!" hit the airwaves. And so we went.



1960 Michael, Edith, George at Freedomland

The serpentine Starburst line slithers back further into the past, to connections to play and playfulness and imagination and wood. To Brooklyn. To a toy truck carrying logs, pulling train cars from a makeshift tunnel.



1954 Michael playing with truck carrying logs

The line upon the Starburst table, pulls me back further, four years before the Brooklyn Dodgers would ever win a World Series, when they were, indeed, waiting 'til next year, to another wooden table, a table upon which an infant played.



1951 Michael playing on wooden table

And a half-century after I was born, and thirteen years before that Starburst swirl would be crafted, in Orlando, Florida I would catch a glimpse of what may be called a genetic predisposition.



12/99 Melina, 5, measures furniture at Grandma Edith's 80th birthday

Maybe the Starburst swirl connects not only the present with the past, but with the future as well. Melina's paternal godfather, Rick Mastelli, with whom I've been friends since 7th grade when John F. Kennedy took office, served as an editor of *Fine Woodworking* magazine. In Vermont, providing me email feedback on my woodwork efforts, he plans to visit this summer to play a relatively newfound passion he acquired: golf. He recalled my having been on our high school's golf team. (The only thing geekier at the varsity letter awards ceremony than being on the golf team is being introduced by the coach as "the *brains* of the golf team.") I haven't picked up my woods and irons in years, but when I do, it will be the same set of clubs I used in high school, over 45 years ago, when woods were made of wood. So, when Rick comes out, and we head to my car to set off to golf, I'll be packin' wood.

And that Starburst swirl will indeed connect past, present, *and* future because *that* line on *that* tabletop on *that* table, and its brother tables The Bean, WoodEye, and Bosque 2012, lead to a summer connection at this year's New Mexico Arts and Crafts Fair. A connection between this Sexagenarian Fair Newbie and one very special septuagenarian, who would like to, once again, be with and help me, as he has so many times before. A 134-year-old fraternal pair, who, just this morning, exchanged a few words about an upcoming travel itinerary for a weekend in June:

On Apr 19, 2013, at 12:36 AM, Harvey Baron wrote:

I'm a comin'
Love Ya,

HB

On Apr 19, 2013, at 12:38 AM, Michael Baron wrote:

FANTASTIC!
Love,
Michael

We may load up a vehicle with wood tables and other wood creations. We'll be packin' wood.

Michael Baron
April 19, 2013
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Postscript:

Over 100,000 Americans will have taken a bullet this year (75,000 injuries, 31,000 deaths, two-thirds by suicide), one every 5 minutes. Let us attempt to reduce such tragedies. A portion of Art of Dowel® sales is donated to Americans for Responsible Solutions, started by former Senator Gabrielle and Mark Giffords. For more info: www.americansforresponsiblesolutions.org



“Brothers” tables

“Second Born” on left completed 6/2/13, “First Born” on right completed 5/26/13



6/21/13 Brothers Michael (second born) & Harvey (first born)
at the 52nd Annual New Mexico Arts & Crafts Fair in Albuquerque