



# WOOD FORUM

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association

Volume 39, Issue 3

March/April 2019

## *A Busy Week*

Near the end of this month we have a special event. In concert with 180 Studios, the SCWA is hosting a three day Lie-Nielsen Handtool Event.

The event begins on Thursday, March 28, when we will have our regular membership meeting at the 180 Studio site. This 6pm meeting is open to members and their guests only.

The Handtool Event will continue the following two days, when it will be open to the general public.

### **Membership Meeting:**

Thursday, March 28, 2019, 7pm

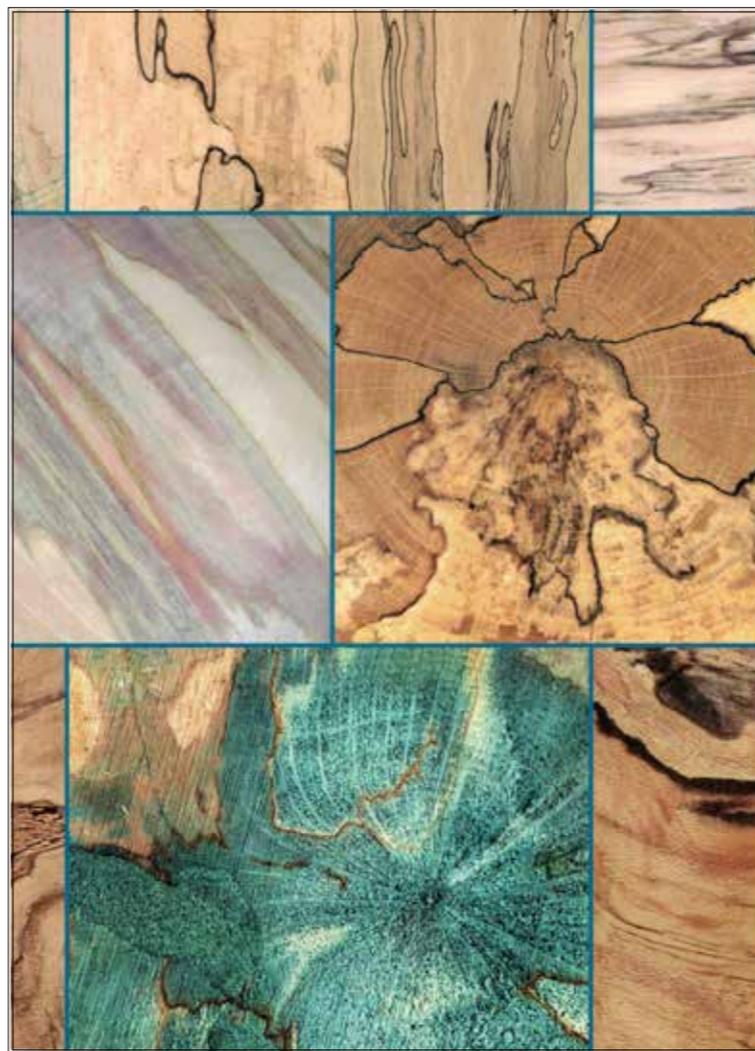
**Public Event:** March 29-30, 2019

Friday 10am-6pm &

Saturday 10am-5pm

### **Venue:**

180 Studios in Santa Rosa



At our regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, April 2 we will hear from Dr. Seri Robinson, aka “Doctor Spalting.” Seri is a professor in the Mycology Lab at Oregon State, and author of the excellent book *Spalted Wood*. Seri also has a website

[www.northernspalting.com](http://www.northernspalting.com)

where you can purchase the many fungi and pigments useful in a woodshop.

### **Membership Meeting:**

Tuesday, April 2, 2019, 7pm

### **Venue:**

180 Studios in Santa Rosa

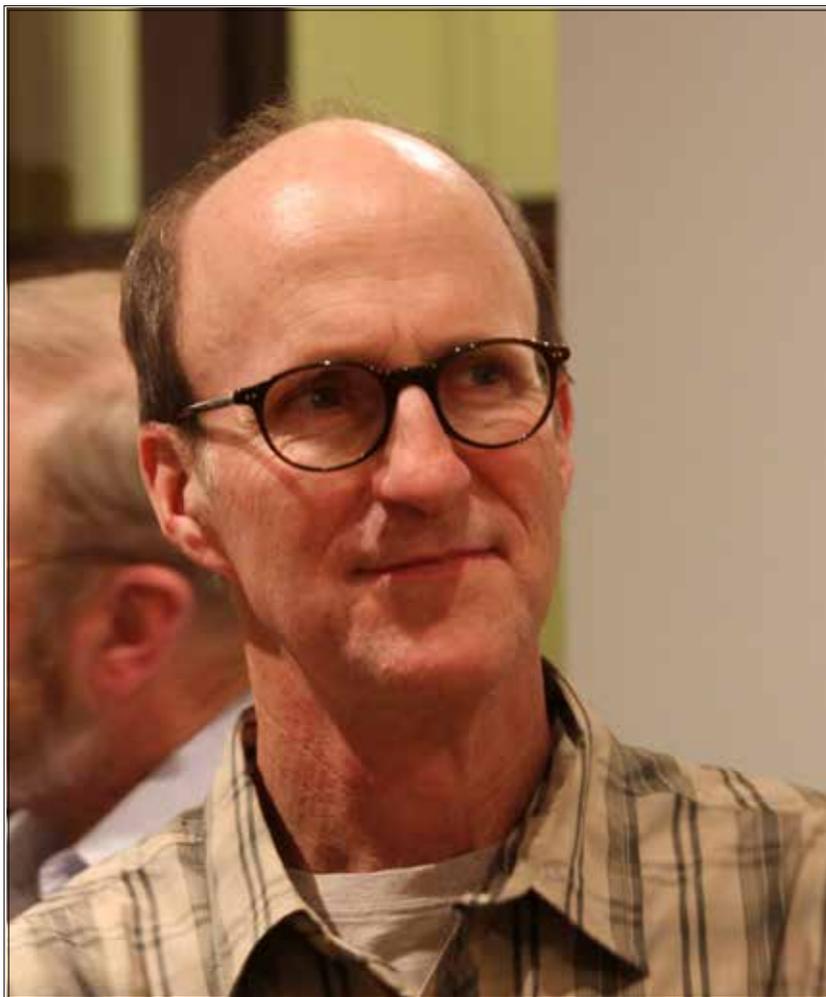


# Boatbuilding the Old Way

by Joe Scannell

Chairman Thomas Vogel opened the meeting by commenting on the unusually large number in attendance, and welcomed the many new members and guests. Treasurer Judi Garland said there had been “a flood” of new members this month. By my count there were at least seven present this evening.

Guild Chair Mark Tindley briefly described the function of the Guild, and its primary function, which is to “jury” the pieces submitted for entry into the annual *Artistry in Wood* show. He then announced the election of a new Guild member, Don Jereb. So now Don has yet another responsibility on top of being Show Chair. Congratulations, Don.



Our new Guild member, Don Jereb

Mike Center announced that **180 Studios** has a special currently being offered: a card entitling the bearer to seven consecutive days free admission to the entire suite of workshops, to try them out and hopefully decide to become a member.

Mike also announced that **180 Studios** is looking for a person with woodworking skills who can put in four hours in the evening to help less skilled members with their projects. They will be compensated by a free membership with access to the entire facility and all shops.

Program Chair Chuck Root gave a rundown on the upcoming events on the calendar, then introduced the evening’s speaker, Bob Darr, the executive director and instructor of the Arques School of Traditional Boatbuilding in Sausalito, a position he has occupied since 1996.

Bob began by introducing some of our guests for the evening, the Price family. Their teen-aged son Henry became interested in the Arques School, and now the entire family are students of the school. He went on to say he would be speaking about *Freda*, a 32’ gaff sloop he believes is the oldest sailboat on West Coast. It was built in 1885 on a spit of land connecting Tiburon to Belvedere. When Bob was a boy he sailed with his father on the *Gracie S.*, a San Francisco pilot schooner of similar vintage. As a teenager he fell in love with *Freda*, named for a daughter of the original owner, a local bartender by the name of Harry Cookson. Living on an old boat made him aware of the need of a vessel such as *Freda* for repairs and restoration.

*Freda* represents the epitome of the aesthetic development of the American sloop. A sloop has only one mast, which differentiates it from other common sail boats like ketches, yawls and schooners which have multiple masts. This is the boat most often depicted in the paintings of Monet, Manet, Renoir, and several



Robert Darr

others of the Impressionist period. These painters were also sailors. They were painting American sloops, which had been brought from America and adapted for racing on the Seine. The American sloop has very beautiful, sculptural lines the French found attractive.



*Pleasure Boats, Argenteuil, c.1872-3* by Claude Monet

The Arques School of Traditional Boatbuilding was established with an endowment by the estate of Don Arques, who laid out the groundwork for the school prior to his death in 1993. The nonprofit corporation thus created sought out a suitable director for the school-to-be, and the search led them in 1996 to Bob Darr's doorstep in Tomales Bay.

In 1885, when *Freda* was built, the sporting scene was different than today. Boxing was popular, baseball was just gaining ground, and yachting was a fashionable pastime in some circles. In 1886 the Corinthian Yacht Club was founded in Tiburon, and Bob referred to *Freda* as the club's flagship. As such, he felt the restoration was especially important in maintaining that history. The actual work took, intermittently, nearly twenty years. Some work would be done, then more funds would be raised, and so on. He estimates the total cost was around \$400,000.

With the establishment of the school, in the late 1990s an attempt at restoration of the *Freda* was begun by Darr and apprentices. Boats of this era were commonly double-planked, meaning the frames were covered with planking inside as well as outside. This was done for strength, but it also makes it much more difficult to examine the health of those frames. In the case of the *Freda*, planking was removed from the outside in places, to get a look inside. What they found was horrific.

In a vessel this old, the first step is to determine whether it is even possible to restore it. But before going any further, they had to ensure that the whole vessel did not collapse. Bob compares a boat to a triangle (the deck and two sides of the hull). They had already noted the sponginess of the deck, so that had to be addressed first. When the deck repairs were completed, the hull could be incrementally exposed

for repairs. The decay was heartbreaking, and ultimately meant replacement of beams, frames, nearly everything they saw.

It is imperative in this kind of a restoration to hold on to the original shape. To this end, they replaced each member one at a time, fitting the new piece into the old neighbors before moving on to the next. Bob frequently mentioned using black locust for many of the parts. Black locust has very good decay resistance properties, and grows locally, if you know where



to find it. He was told much of the original wood in *Freda* was rock elm, which is a mid-western tree. This turned out to be untrue; most of the wood was locally grown fir and several kinds of oak.

Bob was in his 20s when he acquired his initial supply of black locust in the town of Nicasio in 1975, a fallen tree. There was a lot of locust growing around the Druids Hall then, and Bob asked if he could cut some, but was turned down. He continued to ask over the years, but the answer was always the same. Finally, the man who had held sway over the trees for forty years was dying, and he realized the trees were damaging the roof of the Druids Hall and relented. Of course, as black locust is fast-growing tree, they were now much bigger and better, so they were harvested and promoted to a seafaring life.

In the process of restoration, Bob could identify some previous repairs, and could also see the original work, some of it average and some exemplary. Harry Cookson was not known to be a master ship builder, but someone on the job obviously was, possibly working alongside other less skilled craftsmen. As an example, he cited the sharply raked, wide, shallow, elliptical transom, which he said could only have been produced by a master.



Because the vessel was in such poor condition, and the deck was collapsing, in the shop they built a mock-up of the deck and cabin with the correct camber, so they could build the pieces to fit and then install them on *Freda*. They rebuilt the entire cabin, a 1,000 lb. structure whose solidity is crucial to countering the twisting forces of a ship under sail.

Following the deck and transom restoration, the sloop was returned to the water. Then the tides shifted. Seven years later, the foundation that owned her went broke, there was much squabbling, and in the final indignity, *Freda* sank. Luckily, this happened at Lowrie's marina in San Rafael, where the water is so shallow the deck didn't even get wet.



Photos by Scott Wall



After renewed fund-raising, work began again. The next phase of the work involved replacing the frames, beams, etc. To accomplish this, the rejuvenated deck was supported from above so that the hull could be worked on (photo above). The frames were made from the black locust, the trees chosen for their shape to match the curves of each frame, which were all different. They used Douglas fir (from the Camp Meeker area) for the keel and knees, and pepperwood, which interestingly is the same tree as our local bay laurel, much loved by the powderpost beetle. But when grown in other areas (he specifically mentioned Cazadero) the tree is resistant to insect infestation.



The question naturally comes up regarding Freda: with so much of her being replaced, isn't she really just a new boat? Bob argues that she is still her old self, but upgraded out of a concern for safety more than anything. After the first phase (the deck replacement) he was shocked to find out that the owners were actually sailing her under the Golden Gate with children on board. He was gravely concerned that the hull in its deteriorated condition could simply split open and sink rapidly, and told them so.

The original boat had an iron keel, but when the time came to replace it a decision was made to pour a 7000 pound lead one instead. However, the original iron keel, and all the drawings and plans they made, have been kept for the future when someone in a younger generation may wish to build an exact replica.

On May 31, 2014, *Freda* was re-launched at the Spaulding Center in Sausalito, where she is now berthed.



The Arques School of Traditional Boatbuilding is also engaged in building new boats, many of traditional designs and some new designs as well. A lot of sailors nowadays are interested in racing, and because these older designs are not as fast, they are less popular among the youth. But Bob Darr persists, using local woods and traditional techniques, because he feels it is important.

He also spoke about a small row boat he builds with young students in the school, using fir from the Camp Meeker area. He harvests the fir using an Alaska mill, working alone with help only from gravity, a come-along, and a mast he rigs on the back of his pickup truck. Back in the shop, the timber is resawn on the bandsaw, and the boat is formed from two wide fir boards (photo, left), one for each side of the hull. Each is tapered across its width, from about 5/8" to about 3/8". The two are joined by inserting one end of each into a cedar stem, then bent by hand around a form. The cedar transom is inserted into the other end. The bottom is marine plywood. He calls this design *Tern*. One thing he likes about this design is that it is easily scaled up for a big person. He makes the oars from fir, light and strong. These are scaled to the user, so one is not restricted to using factory made standard sizes, another advantage.



Interesting footnote: former SCWA secretary Walt Doll took a class from Bob twenty years ago.

Another footnote: Steve Thomas, also a former SCWA secretary, forwarded several YouTube links about boatbuilding. The first features Bob Darr rowing *Doreen* on San Francisco Bay:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8PdUtU4vkw>

Another, about a large-scale restoration:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCg-\\_lYeV8hBnDSay7nmpHUA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCg-_lYeV8hBnDSay7nmpHUA)

And a third, about a smaller project:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C22Crc7XHoi>

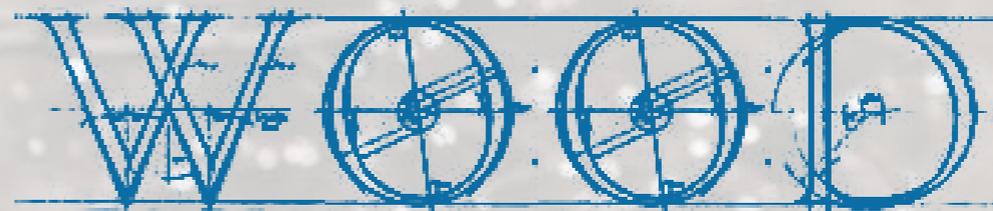




*Peek a Boo Frog Table* by Steve Thomas



*Greene Time* by Bob Roudman





*The Antelopes of Thera by Ray Schultze*



*Fir Street Lounge Chair by Bruce Hart*



*Church of Tree by Michael Palace*

*Photos by Debbie Wilson*

## Officers of the Association

<u>Chairman</u>	Tom Vogel	<u>Secretary</u>	Lars Andersen
<u>Program Chair</u>	Chuck Root	<u>Guild Chair</u>	Mark Tindley
<u>Treasurer</u>	Judith Garland	<u>Show Chair</u>	Don Jereb
<u>Editor</u>	Joe Scannell	<u>Web Master</u>	Rod Fraser

*Wood Forum* is the monthly newsletter of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association. Please feel free to submit articles and photographs for inclusion in the publication. You can send your submissions to the Wood Forum Editor at [SCWAEditor@gmail.com](mailto:SCWAEditor@gmail.com). Advertisements are also accepted with a nominal cost for paid members.

## Membership Application

I would like to join the SCWA to meet other people interested in the craft, the art and the business of fine wood-working. Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$35 for the annual dues. I understand that this fee entitles me to attend monthly meetings and to receive the Wood Forum newsletter by email or via the SCWA's website.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

What can you do to help further the organizational goals of our volunteer-run association? Please tell us how you would like to help:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please send check and completed application to:

Sonoma County Woodworkers Association, PO Box 4176, Santa Rosa, CA 95402