

## TOP 10 Unavoidable Truths of Woodworking

We are only human, and tend to seek the path of least resistance, finding the quick or easy way out. This tendency almost always leads to trouble.

### #1. Don't Rush

Do not confuse working quickly with rushing. After years of practice, the best craftsmen appear to work very fast, but they do not rush. You rush when you focus on getting the job done in less time. It's an impulse we all fight. Pros have deadlines and hourly rates to meet. And hobbyists, because of work and family, have limited shop time. Rushing causes more injuries than any other bad habit. It also results in more mistakes. When you are focused on the completion time, you are less attentive to the work and the process.

### #2. Learn to sharpen

Sharpening is a skill that too few take time to master. Most tools will not work well if dull, and some won't work at all. This forces woodworkers to resort to methods that are frequently clumsier and more awkward. Knowing how to sharpen is a gateway skill: It opens the door to faster, easier techniques that will yield better results. Sharpening and honing are part of the measured rhythm of fine work and so are connected to Rule #1.

### #3. You get what you pay for

Most of us have limits on our woodworking budgets that cause us to think twice about paying the long dollar for equipment or materials. However, quality in new or used machines and hand tools always has been and always will be an expensive option. When trying to cut corners by buying the lowest-end brand or lower-quality materials, you can set yourself up for disappointment. Learn what constitutes the best quality that you can afford, and don't get fooled by fancy sales campaigns.

#### #4. Finishing is half the battle

When you're finished with the woodworking, you're only halfway done. While we all love to work wood, most of us dread finishing. We enjoy being precise and finicky when making a project, but most of us hate the sanding and the cleanup required for a perfect finish. However, when we skimp, we usually get poor results. Glue spills show up suddenly when finish is applied. Or we find sanding scratches or flaws in surfaces that are supposed to be perfect. The undeniable truth is that the finishing is as important as the woodworking, and it frequently takes almost as long.

#### #5. Practice makes perfect

When we decide to undertake a new project, we can't wait to jump right in and get to work. However, woodworking is a bundle of skills that are polished by practice. That's why your parents and teachers told you, ad nauseam, "Practice makes perfect." The truth is that the quality of your projects is better if you are not learning the skills on the job. It is wise to try unfamiliar skills on some scrap first.

#### #6. Dry-fit before glue-up

This is one of the first things to go wrong when we are rushing. It also can be the result of over-confidence. Other times we simply forget. Whatever the excuse, dry fitting saves a lot of grief. Joints that are too tight can lock up when glue hits them, and freeze before coming together completely. Basically, you don't want to be scrambling around or discovering any nasty surprises after the glue has been spread and the clock is ticking fast.

#### #7. Glue won't rescue poor joinery

When it comes to securing two or more pieces of wood to each other and having the joint look good and hold up over the long haul, nothing replaces proper fitting. There is no glue so strong or so gap filling that it makes up for sloppy joinery. Because we are human, things will go wrong. While there are tricks for correcting mistakes, these never should be thought of as a way to get around good workmanship. When a joint isn't right, sometimes there is no sound and seamless way to fix it short of doing it over again.

## #8. Your lathe can't do everything

It's an unavoidable truth that our craft involves a wide range of skills, techniques and tools. While we all wish it were different, there is no universal wonder tool that will do everything perfectly and effortlessly. In an effort to do it all with one machine, woodworkers often end up working in ways that are cumbersome and time-consuming. They can end up wasting precious shop time building elaborate jigs instead of making a one-time investment in a new tool or technique. Once you have created your trial piece, and know you will do more of something similar, that is the time to experiment creating a jig or investigating new tooling if it will make the job go more smoothly or safely in the future. Many woodturning tools can be created or modified at home to do the job properly.

## #9. Use both hand tools and power tools

Woodworkers tend to come in two extremes. The first are those who will (or can) only use machines. And then there are others who will insist on doing everything by hand. I say you can't do it all by machine, but working only by hand wastes time. Sanding is a prime example. Sanding while the lathe is spinning is great, but final sanding should usually be done by hand. The reality is that an efficient, effective woodworker knows how to use both machines and hand tools.

## #10. Keep your shop clean

Think of your shop as a tool. Keep it tuned up and well maintained. We all get so involved in our work that our bench top and every other flat surface quickly become cluttered. A messy shop is dangerous for you, your tools and your projects. It is also very inefficient. Cleaning up as you work is a habit you can develop. I am hardly a paragon of tidiness when I work, but every time I reach for a tool, I look at the bench and see if there is anything I can put away. It is a lot easier than forcing myself to stop and do a general cleaning.