



A two-week course at the Centre for Fine Woodworking, Nelson, New Zealand

by Ray Halpin

I recently spent two weeks in New Zealand participating in a course run by Canadian Michael Fortune and Kelly Parker. I've recently felt that designing furniture and jewelry boxes was limited to making linear forms. This was an opportunity to increase my technical knowledge by exploring and experimenting with new forms and woodworking processes. The course was not designed to have a completed piece of work at the end of the course but to use a design process to generate through sketching, full size drawings, model making, mock-ups to develop a prototype.

This was a significant challenge as it was very different to the way I usually work. The emphasis was on "anything but straight" and using steam bending, laminating, hot pipe bending, clamping strategies, vacuum press to make a piece of work.

I chose to design a small box that had no straight surfaces using pipe bending techniques and the band saw to do any cutting. The photo of my piece is attached demonstrates another aspect the course of making specific clamping jig.



Making your own jigs was an important part of the course as I had to make a jig to cut the rebate to insert the bottom of the box.



A large part of Michael Fortune’s approach to the execution of your work is to make your own tools rather than purchase expensive commercial brands that may not do what you want to do. I made two tools during the course, one that cuts veneers accurately and joins veneers perfectly.



The other tool is an inlay tool made from an \$8 scraper.



We were also introduced to the joinery involved when joining curved pieces using a mortise jig developed by Michael. I intend to make this jig soon to enable curved joinery.

Kelly (see AWR 104) also introduced us to ebonizing, and inlaying techniques and provided recipes for tannic acid and iron acetate. You can use the tannic acid recipe to raise the grain in wood when fine sanding (as opposed to water). I can recommend it.

The course covered a huge amount in a short space of time, giving me the preliminary introduction to complex techniques and the ability to design and make future projects. My almost finished prototype made from London Plane timber can be seen below.



The other participants were making chairs, occasional table, a tea box, and side table. We all assisted each other laminating, bending and learned from each other. I can highly recommend the Centre for Fine working and combining it with walks in the Abel Tasman National Park and the Marlborough Sound gave me a new appetite for more walking and woodwork.

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