

Setting Up Shop Transcription.

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Greetings! Hello, welcome to Splinters. I'm Gary Rogowski, and I run the Northwest Woodworking Studio. A place for woodworkers and ideas. I like ideas. It gives me something to think about.

Well, I'm about to launch a class called Setting Up Shop, and the idea of this came to me when I had closed my studio in town, in Portland, and moved out to a place up in the hills above the Columbia River. And this opportunity came to me when I was working in my little shop. I came from a 10,000 square foot shop to 600. I'm not very good with math.

And in this shop, I said, well, you know, this is my fifth shop that I'm setting up. And it is true. Each one you set up, you think, "This is it. This will be the last one, so we got to make it right." But I had started in a basement shop, little tiny thing, maybe 125 square feet and steady, 56 degrees all year round and 54% humidity, stable environment. And that's where I taught myself woodworking.

That was a good spot because I didn't know what I was doing, and there was no one to teach me and no programs out west. I say that being self-taught means that I've developed my own best and worst habits, but that's how it goes. It's what I had. I didn't want to go work at a cabinet shop and learn how to build kitchen cabinets. I wanted to build furniture. So I spent that time down in the basement, and then we moved. Jane and I moved out to a place my dad helped me buy, and it had a 600 square foot space that the previous owner had repaired diesel trucks in. So it was big enough for a diesel truck to drive into. And he had made this wonderful choice, being facetious, he had cut all the rafter ties out so that his trucks could go in there and he could flip open the lid on them. Oh my goodness.

I looked at that and I went, "How is this roof standing up?" I had to replace all those things. Well, that's how it goes. It's always an adventure as you move to a new space and discover its strengths and limitations. That shop was above ground, but it had a giant, I don't know, 12-foot wide door that was too heavy, even in my 30s for me to lift and go in and out of four or five times a day or 10 times a day.

So I cut a pass door through that and had a wood stove to stay warm and laid plywood down, anything down on that concrete floor because boy, I learned at that shop, I hated to walk on concrete. That was tough. That was really tough. And so, every shop since then, wood floor. The last studio I was in, the big barn I was in, had giant floor beams and two and a half inch thick planks on top of those beams, and then somebody poured concrete on top of those planks.

So I took that concrete out. Two-thirds of the floor I took out that concrete, and I'm so happy I did. I'm so happy I did. It gave it a nice feel. It was easier on your body, standing there throughout the day. And as we know, bench tools are magnetic with concrete, so they leap to their death to dull an edge. So I didn't have that to worry about with a wood floor. I loved that floor.

It wasn't flat. It was a challenge. I tried to flatten it, and that was not going to happen with the tools I had available. I used it as it was, and it was a great space. But now I moved out here in this little 600 square foot shop, which was basically the parlor to this guy's fifth-wheel trailer. Got rid of the trailer and got a little bit more floor space. It's raised up. It's got a crawl space underneath, so it's a wood floor and decent height, you know 10-foot ceilings, and that's kind of nice. Put in good lights, that was important, put in really good lighting, and then filled it with stuff. Just absolutely filled it with stuff. I'm just now starting to unbury myself with all the things I've got in there.

It's funny how you get into a space and you develop a pattern of moving through it, and I finally realized, "You know, my chop saw is in the wrong spot." As soon as I turned it, it opened the shop up for me. This coming January, I've got a video series called Setting Up Shop. And in it, I go through the issues that we face when setting up a shop.

That idea of flow, the idea of what to do with all your stuff. I mean, we have one full class on storage, plywood racks, lumber racks, tool racks, clamp racks. They're super important. You woodworkers out there, you have a lot of stuff, and we need a place to put it and a place to be able to find it. So there are 12 lectures in this series.

Class will run on Saturdays, two hours. We start at 11:00 a.m. Pacific Time, so in the afternoon for folks back east. And at 9:00 a.m. Pacific Time, I have office hours. So there's a one-hour period so students can come in and ask me questions and we can talk about stuff and pick my brain. It needs picking sometimes. But it's always an opportunity for students to get more information or some clarification, and I'm happy to provide that for students.

So we do that for an hour, take a break, and then start class at 11. It's a two-hour class, and there's going to be 12 of them. So 24 hours of class. Divided into four chapters. The first chapter is entitled "Shop Flow." I think the concept of flow is a really important one. I'll tell you what I really think is critical is you sit down in that space, whether it's got stuff in it or not, better if it's empty, and just imagine it.

Imagine how it would feel to walk through there and what would be right to have. Where do you put your bench? And where's the light coming from? And is there a window? Are you going to take advantage of that window? Then we do another lecture on clamps and benches and vices, all the holding tools we need at a bench. And then, as I mentioned, we do racks for all the many things we need to store.

Our second chapter is called concepts. So one of the important concepts is understanding our material, wood. And I'm a solid wood guy. I don't do a lot of veneer work. So there's an understanding that needs to occur for best results. And that is a two hours is just the start of that conversation because there's an enormous amount to learn about wood. But it's very important to understand shrinkage and strength, how we deal with the forces that our furniture comes under, compression, tension, racking, furniture mover.

Next, we talk about sharpening. That two-hour class is really invaluable, I think, for people using hand tools. And that's me. I use my hand tools all the time. Power went out for seven hours last week, and I said, "Well, I could go and clean up this cutting board. I got my spokeshave and scraper and hand sand it. It worked great. No light. I had a little dim light through the winter windows, but I can still go back to work. I know there are people out there who say, "As soon as I pick up a hand tool, I'm losing money." All I can say and reply to that is, "You're missing out because as soon as I pick up a hand tool, I feel better." There's nothing restorative about hanging onto a router all day long, but hand-cutting some dovetail joints, there's a sense of satisfaction. There really is. It's a very different thing than flipping on your table saw. Don't get me wrong, I use machines and we talk about that in chapter three.

Let me get back to concepts. Wood movement, sharpening, and then flat, straight and square. So those are the three concepts that I want to talk about. I have a carpenter working with me on this new shop, and I said, "Okay, we got a high spot there. Let's get rid of it." He didn't really know how to do it. He took everything away, not the high spot, everything. And so understanding that concept about flat and straight, true, is really important.

So, chapter three is hand tools and machines. Start out with hand tools, measuring and marking tools and cutting tools, so all of our marking gauges and marking knives and saws and chisels and things. Our next lecture is on shaping and smoothing tools, rasps and files, scrapers. That's a critical, important little chunk of steel. And then we talk about the most important machine in the shop.

You know what it is. You're saying table saw. Nope. Shaper Origin? Nope. It's the bandsaw. It's the most important machine in the shop. If you're a furniture maker, it's what you need. To rough out lumber, to resaw lumber, to cut joints, to cut shapes. It can do more easily and safer than any other machine in the shop. All right, it can't drill a hole. Yeah, I get that. But it is a, it's so valuable to me. Years ago, in my basement shop, I was out looking for tools. I had bought a radial arm saw. I said, "Okay, now I'm a woodworker. I got a power tool. I got a radial arm saw." And so all I could do was cut half lap joints and cross cut dados.

It was terrifying to try and rip anything on that machine. But I could do crosscuts all day long, and that's how my design work went. But then I got a bandsaw and things really opened up. Things really opened up. And I was lucky. I got a great bandsaw. And that machine really changed my life, changed how I approached the work, changed how I treated the lumber.

A lot of people do all their ripping on the table saw, which is fine. It works. It generates a lot of dust and heat and debris flying at your hand or face. And I do all my ripping on the bandsaw. I do my cleanup cut on the table saw, but all my ripping's done on the bandsaw. If the piece wants to move, there's no danger of it kicking back on me. I had a piece one time, I show it to my students. It was a piece of mahogany. It was like a two by three, and I was resawing it because I needed a thinner part and it was about three foot long. It looked straight. There was no knot in it, no grain run out. It looked just fine. And I made a rip cut, and before I got to the end of it, the whole piece had bowed towards itself, you know, around the blade, and then it blew apart before I finished the cut. It just blew itself apart the last couple of inches. Like, whoa, I am glad I wasn't on the table saw doing this rip cut. Things can happen. Bandsaw is a much safer tool for that kind of job.

So that's the most important machine, but then there are others, chop saw and table saw, drills, routers, sanders, and we talk about those in the next lecture. The final two lectures, our last chapter called Strategies for Building. I think you need a bench and then you don't work on it. I know that sounds odd, but I like to have my bench for my tools, for my plans, for all sorts of things that accumulate there, but I'm building my piece in a staging area.

And even in my little 600 square foot shop, I create staging areas because I made these little sawhorses, 18 inches tall, and I can connect them together with two by fours, and I show folks how to do that, and slap a piece of plywood on it, true it, put my winding sticks on, and true it so that it's dead flat and not twisted. I have four of these little sawhorses. I can go four by eight, and I've done it. I've done big pieces. The big sideboard I did for Fine Woodworking I did on that.

Yeah, it makes assembly so much easier if you're 18 inches off the ground, or I've got other sawhorses that are 30 inches off the ground. These things really help. So we talk about building those. And then finally, we talk about project flow again and workstations and jigs, those things that help us make certain cuts. And once you build that jig, you can set it aside and know you've got it because they're a time saver. So that's basically what we're going to talk about.

It's fascinating to hear people's approach. I don't know. I was online or something, and someone had a different approach for some technique, and I thought, "Well, that's cool." There's always something to learn. You know, everyone's got their own way of, you name it, sharpening, flattening the board, finishing, which is why I say there are only two rules of woodworking.

Number one rule is wood moves.

You can pay attention to it or not, but wood moves, and there you go. And the other one is the other woodworkers don't know what they're talking about. Every woodworker's got their own set of personal rules. Okay, that's the way you sharpen. That's not the way I sharpen. You don't know what you're talking. It's a set of rules that actually works pretty well. And my approach, always in class, is to give people options and let them choose.

Because woodworkers, I know, I know you folks. You are independent thinkers. You want to do things your own way. Don't tell me, don't tell me the answer. I'm going to figure it out for myself. And that kind of independence is one I hope to engender. I hope to teach my students so that they can move away from me and go off on their own. There are some things I hope they truly remember. And to me, that's always about quality.

How to do things in the best possible way, not perfect, but how to do things in the best way that I can with the experience I have, with the tools that I have, and with the shop that I have. And setting up your shop in a fashion that allows you to flow through it and your work to flow through it successfully is really critical, I think. So we're going to get started with that come this January 11th.

Go to my website, <https://northwestwoodworking.com> to get more information and to sign up. We are working with Highland Woodworking on our educational series. I hope you drop in at their new website, <https://Highlandwoodworking.com> Great folks to work with. Just a treasure trove of information on their website too. So please check them out. And check out my website for information on the online mastery program.

We're in our sixth version of it now, and it's been going great. It's quite revealing what teaching from a distance can do for us. It's really been fun. It's really been fun. So I thank you for your time. Thank you for listening. Pay attention to our future podcast. We just did a Q&A. One of my former mastery students, Ashley Piper, helped me out, and that was fun. We're going to do that again, Ashley and I, and answer some more questions.

So if you have any, please send them in. Happy to address them. Send them into the studio, my address studio@northwestwoodworking.com or to Highland Woodworking. There's a spot on their website for questions. I know we've got some coming up on some finishing questions. There's a question on breadboard ends and a question about my reading list that I give to my mastery students. So I might do a little bit on that.

Oh, and contrast. Contrasting woods in a design and how we use that. What woods go together? What do not. So much fun stuff to discuss. So I hope you'll check out the Q&A. That should be in a couple of weeks. Thanks very much for listening. This has been Gary Rogowski for the Northwest Woodworking Studio. If you like what you hear, sign up. Sign up for a class. You can also support me on <https://ko-fi.com>. Ko-fi.com

Take care out there. The solstice is coming. Be of good cheer. Things are going to change. All right, take care of yourselves. Adios.