



Wood Food

Email suggestions for Wood Food to livingwoods@freshwoodpublishing.com

Spoon Loving

Finishing a week running a course at Mike Abbott's woodlands, **Barn Carder** explains why he loves wood food craft



Barn introducing the 'thumb pull' knife grip (above)



One of the Green Wood Guild's day classes in Central London

Being woken up by the orchestral dawn chorus, is a pleasant change from the alarm clock; the fresh air and a roof of living hazel providing a fairytale ceiling with green leaves silhouetted like a natural stained glass window. To be honest at that moment I am ready to go back to the capital, never again! But we are lucky with our London workshop being situated in one of the best city farms (one of 17 in London). We have space for a giant log stack, the joys of veg patches and the odd chicken popping into the workshop. It's fantastic that we can offer such diverse green wood crafts in an urban setting, but we also love that we can drag the city folk out for a week into the woods and give them the full experience of wood culture, it's what permeates all our work. We have been using word-of-mouth to spread the word about our classes, which is always the best way. That said we have just had an article in the Sunday Telegraph after a journalist booked onto the class and asked if he could write about us.

Teaching has always been an important part of my life, and it's a privilege to be able to teach something I passionately support. Each time we teach we are spreading the word about a specific style of woodwork that we produce. It's much more efficient than just posting a photo on Instagram.

When people engage with the process their understanding is much deeper, giving a greater appreciation of the skills and risk involved in this style of sculpture.

Safety and techniques

We start the week with some step-by-step carving with a knife, introducing safe techniques aimed at perfectly efficient shaping of wood. Safety is all in the different ways of holding the tools and effecting the cut. We call these 'grips' for knives, and there are many variations, each with mechanisms that prevent accidents, and increase control and efficiency of cuts. It's like learning the guitar: with a few chords you can go a long way. Most people benefit from learning some techniques rather than just starting with a guitar and making it up. That isn't to say once you've learnt a few rules that you can't bend them, and to stretch the



Will using a gouge for finishing cuts on a bowl

analogy too far, having sharp tools and great materials is like using a quality guitar that has been tuned properly. After a while less focus is needed on the technique and more can be placed on working with the material, and the practical functionality of the object and also the form in terms of aesthetics. I have a great collection of beautiful spoons which provide huge inspiration for me and are great for students to get an idea about different designs.

We teach bowl carving because at the heart of every spoon is a good bowl! A spoon is essentially just a bowl with a handle though the sum seems to add up to more. Carving a large bowl is very useful to focus on the form of just the bowl alone, but it also gives a greater understanding about how the grain changes direction whilst hollowing.

The axe and adze are two of the most ancient woodworking tools, yet they are entirely relevant and efficient tools for an individual to use today, unless you are in a factory, where giant noisy/dusty/dangerous machines may be your better bet.

Axes and adzes encourage a more fluid three-dimensional form, and you can move the wood without the use of clamps so you are able to embrace the form more freely. The axe is used for everything, and on our courses we use the adze mainly for hollowing bowls.

Both adze and axe encourage thinking in three dimensions, which to my mind gives a more beautiful, better-functioning product than



Some of Barn's collection of spoons. The one at the top is made by Jarrod Stonedahl



Three happy spooners in the 'Zone' (above). The freedom of carving with an axe (right). Carving spoons, cooking on an open fire and knitting make for something of a domestic utopia (left). Barn's next course is from 31st August to 5th September. He is looking for a woodland so that he can set up a workshop for woodland courses in 2016/2017



Peter Galbert



Next issue we will be reviewing the new book, *The Chairmaker's Notebook*, by Peter Galbert, and looking at his chairs. He also makes spoons (above), and designs tools and runs courses. Top man!

starting with flat planks and using bandsaws, workbenches and chisels.

Three-dimensional objects behave very differently from two-dimensional ones. A solid three-dimensional object will have many two-dimensional profiles depending on where it is being viewed from. I tend to think of these as like different parts to a song that you can harmonise. The spoon then sings when it is moved and viewed from different angles, but the look of a spoon is just a part of the experience which also includes the vibrant feel of strength in the material, or the sound it makes being hit on the side of a pan or the feel of it in your mouth.

Inspiring place

There is a beautiful sense of togetherness when immersed in this setting created by Mike Abbott. Making your morning cup of tea by splitting firewood from trees cut just a few yards away in a beautiful managed woodland increases the empathy for the material and the surrounding trees. Taking turns to cook for each other, using the spoons we just made as tools to turn onions frying in a pan, the communal cooking really is a magical part of spoons from the woods. It surprises me that people still sign up and come on my course not expecting to be eating with wooden spoons,

but the cooking sharing and eating of food is such a fantastic part of life and I guess it's what spoons are all about. All spoons are in service really, but when we are using a serving spoon we too can be useful! Serving someone food gives a real sense of community, and a big one fills a bowl in one splat. I have a collection of spoons, most made by me, but one of them was made by an American maker Jarrod StoneDahl. He is one of a handful of people who have taken our craft to another level and he has had a great impact on me. I am excited to have Jarrod back at Spoonfest this year (see What's On, p51), when we can sit and chat and explore this new wood culture.

It's hard to express quite how grateful I am to Mike Abbott and the chance he gave me to embrace wood culture. I meet countless people whose lives have been enhanced having experienced some of his wood spirit.

Details Visit thegreenwoodguild.com or barnthespoon.com, or call Barn on 07950 751811.



Abbott celebrates anniversary by 'retiring'

Nearing the end of his time in the woods, Mike Abbott has a new approach

In September 1985 I ignored the doomsayers and set up in business as a full-time green woodworker. With the help of £1000 left to me by my recently-deceased grandmother I was able to enlist Maggie Thatcher's Enterprise Allowance Scheme to establish Living Wood Training. By a combination of running courses, giving demonstrations, writing books and producing chairs and baby-rattles, I have since managed to carve out a fulfilling career.

This September will see the 30th anniversary of my business, during which I have tried to resurrect techniques that seemed extinct, trying to remain open to new ones where they seem appropriate. My love of logic and numbers can be seen in the adoption of the Golden Section into the art of cleaving as well as my recent pioneering of new patterns in seat-weaving.

I had intended to run one final year of woodland courses in 2016 but after nine years as an itinerant bodger, 10 years as a joint owner of Clissett Wood and 11 happy summers at Brookhouse Wood, my love of number sequences has nudged me to leave the woods and move on to the next stage of my career a year earlier than planned. If my health and mental faculties hold up, I am now hoping for 12 years of making chairs and running small-scale courses based in the garden surrounding my timber-framed, wattle-and-daubed workshop at Greenwood Cottage, with a bit of solar energy.

Here comes the sun

Of course, when I started 30 years ago, solar power and cordless drills were still in their infancy but having recently installed solar panels to my south-facing workshop roof, I will be able to replace some of the wood-fired equipment by the power of the sun. Camp-fire kettles and wood-fired steamers might be retired but you can rest assured that the cleaving-brake, the shaving horse, the froe and the drawknife will continue to play a key role in any future courses.

For anyone looking forward to one final woodland course with me, the bad news is that my 2015 programme sold out months ago. Although my courses at Brookhouse Woods are now fully booked, green wood courses are likely to continue there alongside a new glamping operation. For details of my future chairmaking courses visit living-wood.co.uk.



A set of oak stools with 'wavy twill' woven polypropylene seats (above). Mike trampling the daub for wattle-and-daub walls (left), and the workshop at Greenwood Cottage, the basis for his future chairmaking

