

Penland Line

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It Grows on Trees

I love wood: the way it smells, feels, and reacts with light. —woodworker Jamie Russell

Of all the materials craftspeople work with, wood is perhaps the least adulterated. It is not extracted, refined, or filtered. You cut down a tree and you've got wood. It starts out as a living organism, and it seems to carry that life into all its incarnations. It is a sensual material, offering color, smell, texture, and pattern even before the woodworker has touched it.

The first woodworking class at Penland, taught in 1942, promised to give students at least enough skill to keep a loom adjusted and repaired—a close tie-in with the school's origins as a weaving institute. Several years later, Penland began to include carving and whittling as part of its array of "folk crafts." Woodcarving (an old photograph shows reliefs and figurines) and making wooden shepherd's pipes were listed in the Penland catalogs until 1962, the year the school's founder Lucy Morgan retired.

She was succeeded by Bill Brown, who reshaped Penland's program in the 1960s. In his first year at Penland, Brown invited a former student and colleague named C.R. "Skip" Johnson to come and teach classes in furniture building. Skip was also one of the first Penland resident artists, and he taught every summer until

1983 (he has continued to teach at Penland occasionally since then). He was joined several years later by Doug Sigler—both were educated at Rochester Institute of Technology—and together they looked after the studio and scheduled the instructors. During this time period, Penland began to attract some of the most important craft artists in the country; Skip and Doug's colleagues at Penland included the legendary furniture makers Tage Frid and Sam Maloof.

The first space they had to teach in was a 16 x 38-foot room under the pot shop (today it's the downstairs clay glaze room). Doug remembers that Skip started with a 10-inch saw, a drill press, and a jointer. In 1967 the clay and wood studios were expanded so the wood shop had about 1800 square feet. In 1985, the program moved

into the 3070-square foot building currently in use.

There were no published course descriptions in the 1960s and 1970s, but Skip reports that the classes at that time were focused almost entirely on furniture making. Since then, the wood program, like all Penland programs, has expanded the scope of what it offers. Today Penland balances furniture classes with those emphasizing sculpture—a number of classes span the two areas.

In the past ten years Penland has offered workshops in upholstery, site-specific sculpture, mixed media sculpture, outdoor seating, bent-willow chairs, green wood techniques, and tool making. Furniture classes have been taught by makers such as Curtis Buchanan, Ashley Ericsson, Wendy Maruyama, Jere Osgood, Peter Pieroban,

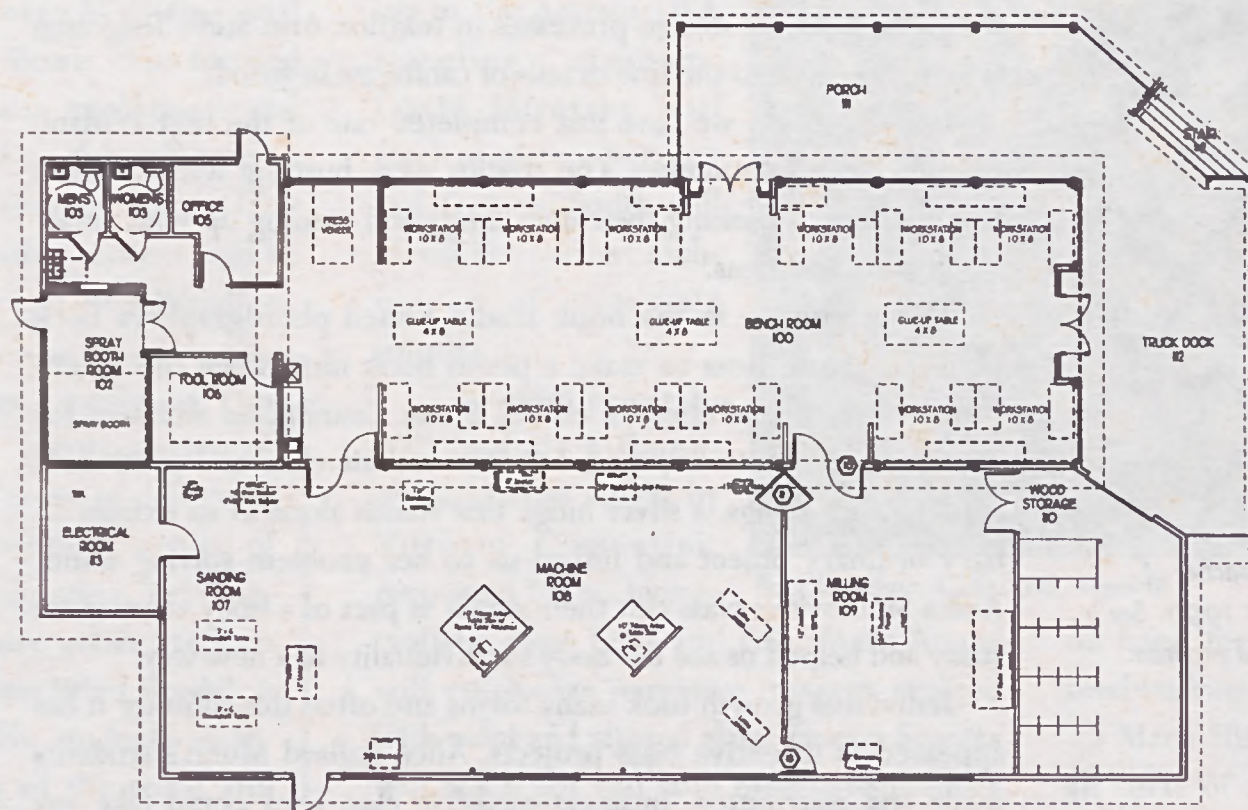


Furniture maker Sam Maloof conducting a critique on the porch of the Lily Loom house in 1974.

Wendell Castle, Gary Knox Bennett, Stephen Proctor, and Michael Puryear. Brent Skidmore and Jenna Goldberg have taught classes on surface design. Craig Nutt's students carved with chisels, Jamie Russell's carved with die grinders, and Howard Werner's carved with chainsaws. Bob Trotman has taught several classes in figurative sculpture. Peter Pittman led a class in sculpture design with an emphasis on drawing and model making. Wayne

Henderson taught guitar building.

All of this activity has taken place in a studio with some serious drawbacks—notably a lack of adequate space. In a shop where students work constantly with sharp



The floor plan of the new wood studio

power and hand tools, space is not just a matter of comfort, it is also a critical safety concern. "Our understanding of what constitutes safe working conditions has evolved over the years," said Penland's program director Dana Moore. "Regulations and practices have changed, and we have been working to address safety concerns in every studio. In wood, this means creating more space around the machines and the benches." In addition to these concerns, Penland's program includes the eight-week Concentrations which give students time to work on larger-scale pieces than would be possible in the two-week summer classes. This potential, however, has been hindered by the crowded conditions of the studio.

With this in mind, Penland put together an advisory committee to talk about the needs of a new home for wood. The members of this committee were woodworkers Kurt Nielsen, Doug Sigler, and Randy Shull, board members Abie Harris and Buck Shuford, and staff members Scott Klein, Jean McLaughlin, Jeff McLarty, Dana Moore, and Chris Winterstein. The studio that resulted from these conversations was designed by Jim Smith, an architect with HagerSmith, PA who has been a frequent Penland student. The new building is 6,396 square feet with an additional 708 square feet of deck which will serve as an outdoor work area. The bench room has a wood

floor, high ceilings, and clerestory windows. The wall separating the bench and machine rooms will be insulated for sound. Ventilation and dust-collection systems will be updated to meet current standards, and

the studio will include a finishing room with an OSHA-approved spray booth. The building will incorporate a number of large wooden beams salvaged from the A.A. Shuford Mills of Hickory, NC. The donation was made by Pope Shuford who is Buck Shuford's brother.

The structure is located just past the iron studio with walkways connecting the two buildings. The close proximity of the wood, iron, and glass studios will create a nice center

of activity at the top of the campus. In addition to enhancing safety and accommodating larger work, the studio will open some new areas of programming. It will be possible to offer classes with more of an emphasis on wood finishes, for example, and next summer will include a class in boat building taught by Karen Wales.

The studio is being funded primarily with money raised as part of the *Preserve Penland* campaign. The money set aside from the campaign will not cover all of the costs of building and equipping the new studio, so fundraising is ongoing—Penland recently received a major grant from the Janirve Foundation for the studio. A special fundraising event will take place in Charlotte, NC on November 5, 2005. Fifty Penland instructors and students have donated an outstanding collection of furniture and sculpture in support of the studio. Doug Sigler spearheaded the solicitation of the work, and the auction will include pieces by Skip Johnson, Jere Osgood, Jon Brooks, Jenna Goldberg, Marvin Jensen, Wendy Maruyama, and Frank Cummings, just to name a few. (See page 12 for details.)

People who work with wood develop a deep love for this beautiful material, and Penland School is proud to be creating a safe and pleasant new studio where artists who love wood can follow it wherever it leads them.

—Robin Dreyer