

# THE WINDSOR CHAIRMAKER

Newsletter of The Windsor Workshop

May 2007



**Welcome** to a distinctly international newsletter with articles from America, Wales and England - Windsors get everywhere! The show season is now virtually over, which allows me to concentrate fully on courses during the ever popular autumn/winter/spring period. The new workshop (just over a year old now) is being well used as a result of steadily increasing bookings. The new tools (travisher and spoke-shave - see last newsletter) have been very well received over the summer. If you are thinking about taking a course do give me a call if you'd like more details, or even better drop in during a course (if you live locally) to see for yourself what it's all about. If you are already a chairmaker, there are two new courses now on offer, with a third to be announced shortly - hopefully something for everyone! Wishing you all the best for the coming months.

*James Mord*

## WINTERTHUR Visit to Winterthur Museum – The Finest Collection of Windsors in the World?



In June I visited the Winterthur Museum just outside Wilmington, Delaware in order to see their collection of Windsors and to meet Nancy Goyne Evans (author of *American Windsor Chairs* and

other books). I also travelled to nearby Philadelphia to meet Charles Santore (*The Windsor Style in America Vols 1 and 2*).

The museum was once the home of Henry Francis du Pont, great grandson of the founder of the eponymous chemical company. He began collecting American antiques around 1900 (an almost unheard of activity at that time) and inherited the house in 1927. He proceeded to triple the size to 175 rooms, which he filled with his growing collection. He bought complete house contents, including panelling, fireplaces, floors, textiles, ceramics, art and furniture, and his skill was to create complete rooms to show off his diverse collection.



*Winterthur Museum*



*A Wall of Chairs*

The house is so large and full of antiques (and the elevators only hold 4 or 6 people) that visitors are only allowed to view the collection with a guide in a small group, and most people only see 2 floors out of a possible 8!

I was very fortunate to be shown around the Windsor collection by Nancy Goyne Evans, who used to be a curator at the museum, and knows each chair intimately. Each chair has a story. All are painted and the variety is breathtaking.



*Nancy Goyne Evans with JM*

Also of great interest was the Dominy workshop. This is a workshop that was built in 1740 and stayed in the same family on Long Island for 200 years before being demolished. Fortunately all the tools, benches, lathes, patterns, and account books were preserved, and the building was carefully surveyed before demolition. The museum bought the contents and recreated it in



*Charles Hummel & JM in Dominy Workshop*

one of their galleries. Most of the work was undertaken by Charles F Hummel - his book (*With Hammer in Hand*) describes the workshop in fabulous detail. The museum has also collected a great range of furniture, including some chairs, that were made in the workshop.

If you visit the eastern States I urge you to take some time to visit Winterthur. ([www.winterthur.org](http://www.winterthur.org)) The house is set in 1000 acres, and the gardens around the house are also magnificent. The scale is so large that when I visited West Dean a month later it seemed, by comparison, more like a cottage than a country house. Needless to say that impression was quickly dispelled as my brain readjusted to a more 'normal' scale.

In Philadelphia I visited Charles Santore who kindly showed me his magnificent collection of Windsors. He has approximately 80 fabulous examples, and he described how he began collecting in the 60's when prices were quite reasonable. He now claims not to be able to afford to buy old chairs, as fine examples sell for \$250,000 and an exceptional chair \$500,000! They are bought by movie stars and investment bankers to add class to their houses, and much of the value lies in the quality of the paint finish. If it is old, textured (cracked!) and largely intact then the chair is likely to be valuable, but if it has been stripped then the price is a fraction of the painted version! Oh for the same appreciation of English Windsor chairs!



*Charles Santore with some of his favourite Windsors*

[www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk](http://www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk)

*"dedicated to Windsor chairmaking"*

## Going Solo! - experiences of a former student



After five years of design training, and thirty five years designing upholstery for mass production (Parker Knoll), I found myself redundant; and with no desire to design for Eastern European or Chinese manufacturers, I decided to 'down-size' from industrial South Wales, and head west to the beautiful Pembrokeshire National Park.

Inspired by the chairs in Michael Harding-Hill's wonderful shop in Chipping Norton, and the robust charm and

simplicity of the Welsh stick chairs in St Fagans Museum of Welsh Life, I decided to set up a workshop and do my own thing!

Armed with a comprehensive DIY toolkit, a lathe, band saw, pillar drill, and 'O' level woodwork I made my first stick chair, copied from an original Welsh antique.....I was hooked!

Although I had some knowledge, and a few skills I needed some expert guidance, and a search of the internet produced James Mursell and The Windsor Workshop

After two inspirational courses with James, and the acquisition of a few more tools, I now quietly make full size and children's chairs and stools from my small workshop in the beautiful Gwaun Valley (A stone's throw from John Brown's old workshop).

I exhibit with the Pembrokeshire Craftsmen's Circle, mainly in St David's where the odd sale and commission keeps me motivated and chirpy.

Fortunately I do not have to earn a living from my chair making.....it's too exhausting! The joy is the quality of life, in rural surrounds, crafting the simplest of products in a time honoured tradition, far from the maddening crowd.

John Collingridge

October 2007



## New Introductory Course - English Wheelback

As an alternative to the bow-back chair, newcomers to chair making can now make this English classic. Although the design has been devalued by endless copying for use in pubs, the course chair aims to get back to the original attractive design of this compact chair. No previous experience required.



**Next course: 10 - 14 March 2008**

## New Advanced Course - Low-back

Each year I try to put on one course that pushes the limits of what is possible in five days, and produces an extra special chair. This year I am offering a low-back chair in ash with an elm seat. This course would be particularly suitable for those that have already taken two courses. Please contact me if you are interested.



**Course dates: 7 - 11 April 2008**

### Course Dates

#### 2007

29 Oct - 2	Nov	Bow-back / Child's high-chair
12 - 16	Nov	Sack-back / Continuous-arm
26 - 30	Nov	Bow Back
10 - 14	Dec	Bow Back

#### 2008

14 - 18	Jan	Bow Back
21 - 25	Jan	Sack-back / Continuous-arm
4 - 8	Feb	Bow Back
25 - 29	Feb	Sack-back / Continuous-arm
10 - 14	Mar	Wheel Back (see above)
7 - 11	Apr	Low back (see above)
21 - 25	Apr	West Dean Bow Back
5 - 9	May	Bow Back
19 - 23	May	Sack-back / Continuous-arm
9 - 13	Jun	Fan Back Side Chair
23 - 27	Jun	Bow Back

**Prices: Bow-back/Wheel-back £395**

**Sack-back/Continuous-arm £425; Low-back £495**

*Deposit of £150 on booking, balance at start of course  
(There will be a price increase from 1/1/2008)*

## Classic Hand Tools Competition

At the end of last year I ran a competition with Classic Hand Tools on their website offering a free course to the first person drawn from those correctly answering the questions correctly. Matt Hancock, the winner, took his course in July making a bow back chair. Other high quality courses continue to be offered on the site, so do have a look, and enter for the chance of a **free** course.

For further details go to:

[www.classichandtools.com](http://www.classichandtools.com)



*Competition winner with his chair*

## Visit to Sam Maloof's House in Los Angeles

As anyone that has been on a course at The Windsor Workshop knows, Sam Maloof is one of my woodworking heroes! In August I dragged my family along to see his house and its wonderful furniture including his iconic rocking chairs. If you find yourself in LA do not miss this wonderful opportunity. Opening times are limited, but you will find a great welcome, and inspiring furniture!



[www.malooffoundation.org](http://www.malooffoundation.org)

### **James Mursell**

The Windsor Workshop, Churchfield Farm, West Chiltington, Pulborough, West Sussex. RH20 2JW

T: 01798 815 925

E: [james@thewindsorworkshop.co.uk](mailto:james@thewindsorworkshop.co.uk)

W: [www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk](http://www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk)