

# Woodworking

## CRAFTS

HAND, POWER & GREEN WOODWORKING • TURNING • RESTORATION • DIY

# Take the twist out of timber

*with winding sticks*



**FEATURE**  
Berea College,  
Kentucky

### PROJECTS

Shop drawers rebuild  
Push-along racing cars  
Laminated plant stand

### TECHNIQUES

All about waxes  
Sharpening turning tools

LEATHER TOOL ROLL • HALL TABLE • BIRCH BARK MATCHBOX • CORONET HERALD TEST



# Berea College Kentucky



This month we look at a unique educational establishment in the States, with a very inclusive ethos and located in an area of natural beauty

**B**erea College is a liberal arts work college situated in the city of Berea in the US state of Kentucky. It is located in Madison County, 35 miles south of Lexington – itself an important place in the history of America, the Appalachian mountains lying to the east.

## Student promise

What caught my eye was the college's statement that no student will pay a tuition fee – the only one in America to make that promise. Although it is a Christian-based college, it is open to everyone regardless of race or creed. Consequently it is able to teach and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Set in a beautiful part of the States and with such a welcoming approach to learning, it seems like a student's dream placement. In Berea's own words: 'The best education money can't buy.'

## The college

Courses cover a wide range – languages, physical education, maths, computer science, economics and much more, but my major interest was the woodcraft workshop. I asked woodcraft supervisor Andy D Glenn to tell me more. 'Berea College is a special place. It's definitely what caught my attention when considering this position. Berea is a wonderful small town and a great place for our family to be.'

'I think what drew me to the job, which I started August 2017, was a little bit of everything – the principles of the college, the town and surrounding natural environment, the history of the woodcraft program, and ability to work alongside the college student crew all drew me to the opening.'

Andy continued: 'It's a challenge unlike others I've encountered when it comes to woodworking and this really

excites me. My challenge – can we be successful? Can we make beautiful, functional work? Can we provide meaningful experiential learning?'

## Woodcraft training

'Training the students is an area where I spend a lot of time. I want to get them to the point where a student leader can take a group of less experienced crew members through the process of making our pieces.' *So how does the production in the workshop benefit the College?* 'In a lot of ways. It's all about the work – making beautiful wooden pieces that the college then sells and the revenue goes back towards supporting the educational mission. But there are other aspects at play as well. Providing design opportunities for the students. Taking the time to train them in new and different skills. The goal here is not an assembly line, but having students

## PROFILE – Andy D Glenn

*Can you tell us about yourself Andy? How did you get into woodworking in the first place?*

I had woodworkers in my family and that exposed me to making. One grandfather was the town milkman, and he had a basement shop where he built small furniture pieces and gifts for the family. My other grandfather was a farmer with a wood and metal fabrication shop. He could build anything, and did so, to keep his farm operational. I gained my initial experiences through time spent with them. Then, through high school, I would spend time in my neighbour's shop and he taught me the safe use of many of the machines and how to complete a project.

I went to the North Bennet Street School in Boston, MA from '06-'08, completing the Cabinetry & Furniture Programme. For the following five years I worked in small custom furniture and repair shops, along with teaching woodworking workshops at NBSS. I followed that with experiences at a shipyard and a custom cabinetry shop, while building furniture on the side. And I continued to teach.

In the future I will continue to travel and teach, though on a limited basis.



Andy demonstrating the spindle gouge to the shop student wood turner Azariah Mawoka

with the skills to take a project from the rough board all the way through to completion.'

### Typical working day

*What is your own working day like in the woodcraft workshop?*

'My days vary greatly. My goal is to train our student crew to the point of relative self-sufficiency. I'll always be working alongside them and with them on our offerings – we're co-workers here at Berea College. I have much of the information and experience, and I need to transfer as much of that as I can to them. That takes time, patience, and a willingness to work slowly in the short term with the belief that the students will gain experience and speed up in the long run.

'There is another full-time woodworker in the shop – Chester Mullins. He works with the students as well and he typically takes a small crew through a large project (such as making all the furniture for a dormitory on campus, or creating architectural details for a newly constructed building). He also makes custom furniture and does great work on the lathe. He's been here five years and his background was with the army, fabricating wooden parts for airplanes.

'Chester supervises five to seven students, depending on the special project running through the shop. I work with 18-20 students and we make the production items we carry in our catalogue and stock in an inventory area.

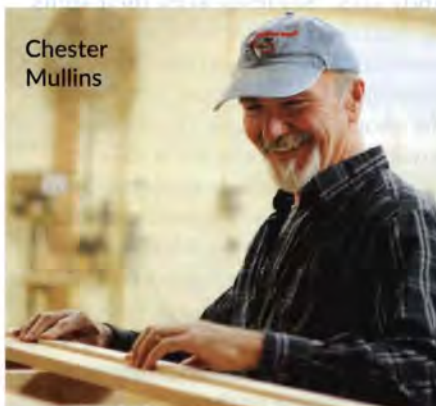
'We have plenty of administrative work – ordering for the shop,

budgeting and credit card reconciliation, etc. We have collegiate duties as labour supervisors, which include writing evaluations for each student and meeting with them to discuss their performance.

### Methods

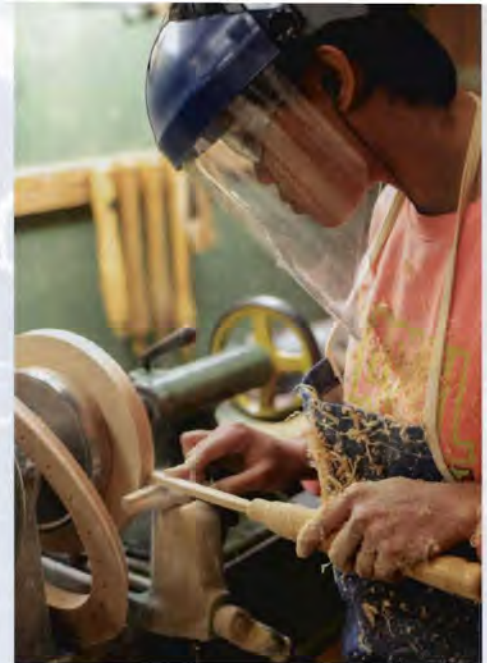
'A majority of our work is produced by machines and has been for the past 35 years. There is a significant amount of handwork that was once a part of the programme and we are working towards adding handwork into our designs going forward. Out of our current catalogue, I'd refer to our lathe work as the most "handwork" thing we do. Students turn our wooden baskets and the details in the turning show the hand of the maker. Other students are turning rolling pins and candlesticks. Again, the slight variations show the skill and design eye of the turner.

'We use chisels to trim and adjust tenons. We'll make modifications to pieces with a plane, or use hand tools for a repair. But the production items were designed for machine efficiency. ➤





The typical shop meeting includes updates on our current production, upcoming projects, and demonstrations around techniques



I'm planning on adding the hand details into upcoming pieces/designs. We're currently redesigning our Harmony Bench and Stool to a design with more regional aesthetic, and that incorporates handwork.

### A typical student group

Andy says 'Berea's mission determines our student groups. Most of our students come from the Appalachian region here in the States. We have international students as well – men and women of course. This past year we had a few more men than women working within our crew. Freshmen are selected for their labour position, upperclassmen can apply for open positions. I'll have 15 upperclassmen for this fall, and will need to select five freshman students to fill the open positions.'

'It's an awesome aspect of our shop that, because Berea College draws in the diversity of the region and our student crew reflects that diversity. Berea College is designed to provide education for students of low financial means. It's a common trait across most of the students here.'

### The student working day

Andy says: 'Students work their shifts around their class schedules. Most students have classes or work running from 8am-5pm each day, so at times the shop has a couple of students working, other times we'll have 14 or so. We have one hour (4pm-5pm) on Tuesday afternoons when all the students are here. We fill that time with training, safety, and other relevant information. We also have Tuesday evening hours (6pm-8pm) when we'll cover a topic as a group – furniture design, training in the spray room, how

to mill lumber, how to use chisels and planes, sharpening, etc.

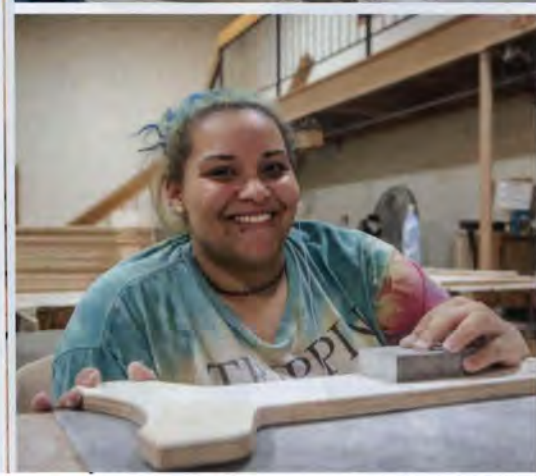
'Students normally work within small crews of three to five to complete a small run of an item'. He continues 'We have a basket crew making continually – milling, turning, assembling, and weaving. Some students work more around the machines, because they like selecting and milling lumber. Others would prefer to do quieter detail work, such as assembly and sanding. I try to keep students engaged with tasks that they enjoy. We have so much work that it's possible to do it this way'.

'As the year progressed last year, our students' skill set grew to the point that many of them could handle much of what we do from start to finish. But it takes time to get to that point. Students typically work 10 hours a week and need time to become comfortable in the shop. Most of the students do not have a "hand skills" background. Their high schools did not have woodworking programmes. Some students will major in a related field, such as Technology & Design (they'll receive shop experiences within that programme), but most others haven't worked with wood before joining our shop crew.'

### Functional wood shop

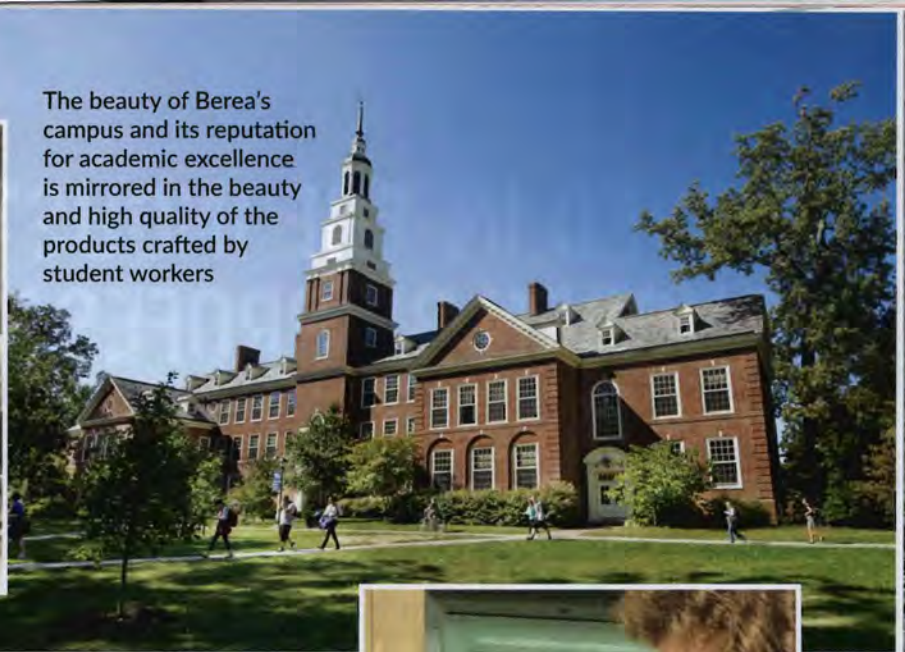
Andy put me straight on a critical point. "We are not a course, but a functional wood shop within a college. We're mostly making our production items, custom work, and speciality items for the college. We work within the labour programme here at BC – separate from the educational programmes but of equal value.

'Freshman students must work for a full school year. Upperclassmen change work positions each semester, if they'd





The beauty of Berea's campus and its reputation for academic excellence is mirrored in the beauty and high quality of the products crafted by student workers



Growing from a model of self-sufficiency to furnish College buildings, Berea's Woodcraft later began making items for retail sales, such as fine colonial-styled items in the 1930s

like, though many stay in one position during their time at Berea. So it's possible to have a constant turnover, and we constantly need to train up a new crew. One of my objectives is to provide a quality, enjoyable experience within the shop in order to retain students. Students are trained on whatever job is coming through the shop and they join midstream, joining a crew and contributing as they can.'

### Student remarks

Andy observes: 'Students are an integral part of our programme. In fact, I see my role as supporting them in the production of our items, and not the other way around. There are two full-time staff and 25-27 students. They're doing a majority of the woodworking. I lean on them to do good work and to hold each other to a high standard of work. I think they realise their work is needed and appreciated here. Of everything we do, it seems that students are naturally drawn to the lathe'. Shaina Melton, a 2012 education major, says: *'Working in the shop has taught me patience, concentration, responsibility, dedication, and the importance of teamwork. I'm extremely grateful for getting to have such amazing experiences here and I hope I get to have many more.'*

DeAndrae Lightfoot, a 2021 Heath & Human Performance major says: *'Working in woodcraft has been one of the best experiences I've had in my five years of working. If you enjoy solving problems, working with your hands, and working in a peaceful environment, then this may be the job for you.'*

### Products for sale

The Crafts Program at BC includes: woodcraft, broomcraft, weaving, ceramics, and jewellery. Most products are both functional and beautiful. The weaving is completed on traditional looms. The broom-making is done in a low technology way, with much of work done by hand.

'The woodcraft programme has gone through different variations and forms throughout it's history. We produced furniture from Wallace Nutting's collection at one point (1930s-40s), making more early American and colonial-style pieces. During those times the woodcraft programme consisted of six to eight full-time woodworkers/furniture makers and 40 students.

'The products are made of Appalachian hardwoods: cherry, walnut, maple and oak. Some of it comes from the College's forest and Berea community, otherwise it is purchased from a regional distributor. Outside of custom commissions, much of the production items are small in scale that they are easy to ship or transport in a vehicle. There are a healthy amount of online sales: bereacrafts.com. A good portion is sold through the college-owned crafts gallery, the Log House, and at the BC



college visitor centre. Woodcraft's production items include wooden baskets, games, kitchen items, and small furniture.'

I'd like to thank Andy D.Glenn for being so helpful and forthcoming about the work that goes on in the woodcraft workshop at Berea College. Maybe there's something we could draw from that back here in the UK? ■

If you are interested in an international placement or simply want to find out more about this unique institution visit: [www.berea.edu](http://www.berea.edu)



Most items are produced in small runs - like these single and double handled cutting boards - so that students can experience all the skills necessary to produce our items