

## The Maker movement

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Over my lifetime, I've frequently found myself overtaken by events. As an early folkie, I tended not to listen to 'new' music, much preferring The Weavers or Tom Paxton over the emerging folk-rock. And as a result, I missed much of the cultural revolution with which my generation is so frequently identified. At least, musically speaking.

Similarly, as tastes in food have evolved, I've failed utterly to embrace new themes and flavors, steadfastly hewing to the Irish Catholic meat and potatoes line long after friends, family and most restaurants had updated their palates. To this day, my oldest daughter – a fantastic and adventurous cook – will make a separate side dish 'Dad style' when contributing to pot luck. (By the way – not by my demand; she is just that generous.)

I supported a certain political party long after I should have made a change, realizing only belatedly that they had moved away from my principles into a realm I can neither support nor even encourage. Beyond questionable, well into the pit of anti-democratic hatefulness. You can take from that what you will, by the way.

So, the message here is that I tend to be slow to embrace societal change. Or if not slow, at least uneven. I listened to the Beatles but not the Stones, realizing belatedly than I'd been humming Jumpin' Jack Flash all along without realizing it. I loved Mexican and Chinese food but never ventured into Thai. MLK was my hero but I failed to realize that my own political affiliation worked counter to the foundational ideals we shared.

So, what does all this have to do with the 'Maker' movement? Just as in other areas of my life, I've been slow to embrace, or even recognize the makers for what they represent – new life, new vigor, new ways and attitudes toward the crafts I hold dear.

Having started carving first as a child and learning what I could as I could over the years from available resources, my own craft – working in wood – had been framed fairly narrowly. Growing up and as a young adult, most of what I learned came from books. (Which by the way, I continue to collect and through which I find a great wealth of knowledge.) There was no Internet, at least as a cultural construct and I never had the money to take a formal apprenticeship or attend far away conferences. Yes, I could find what I needed to build my skills but I had to work at it – building houses for charity under mentorship of retired carpenters, watching Norm Abram and others on television building their versions of classic furniture, trying my hand when money for materials and time away from being a Dad allowed. I built my first set of kitchen cabinets on the floor of our garage, with just a circular saw and hand tools.

It was a slow way to learn and an even slower way to evolve. I love my books but the economics of paper publishing dictates that what I find in the bookstore tends to reinforce orthodoxy rather than proposing new ways. Face it - in the world of hand craft, few rebels found publishers. At the same time, the consumer economy has dictated a mass-produced feel to most of the items we find gracing (I use the term carelessly here) our homes. The economy of machined-produced furniture has driven most hand craft workers into factories.

But another movement, very much akin to environmentalism, farm-to-table and an emerging egalitarianism in the 'trades,' and driven largely by the innate curiosity of the human animal, has shied away from cheap-and-easy in favor of 'we (I) can do better.' There is something fundamentally satisfying about a 'thing' – whether a poem, a vegetable garden or a modernist highboy – produced by one's own mind and hands. I make boxes and kitchen cabinets and Christmas ornaments. Mary makes rather than buys Covid masks and lives to work in her garden. And when our daughter asked for a set of stacking tables, I went out to my shop rather than the furniture store.

Alone in my shop, it would have been easy to keep making the same sorts of things using the same methods. I love the work and I'm good at it. But in the Maker movement, I've found new friends and colleagues and yes, the inspiration to step out of my competent-but-staid approach to things. In the new world we inhabit, ideas travel at the speed of record-type-post, so new ideas tend to reach more of us and more quickly. And the emerging community of craftspeople is all about new ideas.

I'll write more about the Makers as time goes on; meanwhile, for me it's all about personal growth. And while the pandemic keeps me mostly at home, the Internet allows my quarantine to be about learning rather than confinement.