

Shop Practice #8

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Being efficient and caring for your tools

This once again starts in the shop while making something. The item is a name plate for a traction engine made by forming letters and then soldering them onto a backing plate.

What came to mind as I held these little bits of metal to file the shapes, was that this was one of the things my great grandfather did for a living as an engraver in gold rush San Francisco. Not only that but I was using the same hand vice he had used and his initials JP, for Jules Pages, are right there as proof.

I think it's pretty cool to have that link in my history and for a tool to survive 150 years still in use is worth thinking about. I have other tools from my maternal grandfather and from my father but this is the oldest. I have some of Jules gravers and the block of lignumvitae that he worked against, but this vice is so perfect for its intended use it's everything a contemporary one could hope to be.

The point I am getting around to is that one of the hallmarks of craftsmanship is a respect for not only the work accomplished but also the means employed to accomplish it. We have all seen tool sets with a place for everything and also tools sprawled all over the bed of a pickup truck. When comparing the workers which would you prefer to hire. Yeah there is a price difference but I would still rather have quality work.

One of the things I take note of is shop organization. A lot of people think it takes too much time to organize but the time spent is always recovered in the efficiency of getting something done. The shop in which every surface is covered requires clearing before a task is undertaken and tossing it into the corners just makes more effort. Of course you can carry this to absurdity. I am always amused by the expression, "the shop was so clean you could eat off the floor" what's that about, what is that a measure of?

So a craftsman keeps his tools in good order and uses them for their intended purpose. Heritage tools are respected for their contribution to others' work before your ownership, and simply because they are the

means to realize your designs and dreams. I often verbally thank the previous owner of a tool as I use it for having kept it in good condition and for passing it on to me to use. Whether I thank them or not they are still in my thoughts.

I recently built a custom tool box to hold the tools I find I use all the time while assembling a model project. All the small size wrenches and drivers are there with a small square and scale. A flashlight and scratch awl a scalpel and needle nose pliers. But you get the idea. I can move the set from one location in the shop to another and if I need more room on the bench top I can move the drawer set without having to sweep all the tools into a pile. As more tools become used for this work they get added or deleted from the group.

And all are kept in an order that protects them and keeps them ready. No job is complete until the tools have been returned to their storage.

