



# BAY AREA WOODWORKERS ASSOCIATION

Bay Area Woodworkers Association was formed early in 1982 by a small core group of dedicated people who felt the need to strengthen the woodworking community by holding regular meetings, establishing an informal forum for the exchange of knowledge and ideas, sponsoring shows and meeting others in woodworking and related fields. Since then, this non-profit organization has grown to many members. Monthly meetings are held to see the work of others, learn new techniques and discuss all manner of things related to woodworking. Meetings occur on the third thursday of each month at 7:30pm and are generally held either in San Francisco or the East Bay. Meetings usually have a specific topic such as router techniques, finishing, turning, the business aspects of woodworking or other subject areas of interest to the membership. Meetings often focus on a distinguished guest speaker who will give a presentation in their area of expertise. Most meetings are held in members' shops or in the place of business of a guest presenter. Members also receive a monthly newsletter and other benefits such as discounts on tools and supplies.

BAY AREA WOODWORKERS ASSOCIATION BYLAWS

1. The name of the organization shall be Bay Area Woodworkers Association. (the Association)
2. Membership shall be open to anyone in the San Francisco Bay Area who is pursuing woodworking as an artisan or designer or both or who is interested in the field, be they professional or amateur.
3. The Association will promote professional woodworking in both technical and aesthetic directions.
4. The Association will explore commercial discounts and benefits for the members.
5. The Association will regularly offer public shows, a newsletter, educational programs, technical demonstrations, "spotlight" talks, seminars and lectures on topics of interest to the members.
6. The Association shall be administered by a Chair and Co-Chair, who shall act as alternate. The minutes of the meetings and correspondence shall be the responsibility of a Secretary and alternate Co-Secretary. The finances shall be kept by the Treasurer and Co-Treasurer. The newsletter shall be prepared by an Editor and an Assistant. The term of office shall be for six months in order to share fairly the work of running the Association. The positions shall be filled by nominations and a majority vote by the members in good standing, those who have paid their dues.
7. The Association shall organize various committees such as a steering or executive committee, a show committee and other ad-hoc committees as may seem necessary. The responsibilities of the committees shall be clearly stated.
8. The Association shall set the limits of financial responsibility for its officers and committees. Expenditures over \$75. require approval by a quorum of four Executive committee members. Expenditures over \$200. require a majority vote of the members attending a meeting and a prior announcement of the issue in the newsletter.
9. The Association shall also organize, if it is necessary, an arbitration committee that will offer to mediate business disputes between the members or between the members and their customers.
10. Decisions in the Association shall be by a majority vote of the members present except for questions of membership dues, removal of officers, expulsion of members and changes in the bylaws which shall require a 2/3 vote of the members responding. "Responding" votes require that advance notice shall be given at least one meeting in advance at which discussion can take place after all members are notified of the proposal.
11. Dues shall be paid on a schedule determined by the finance committee. Any dues paid by an expelled member shall be refunded on a pro-rata basis.
12. To encourage the participation of all the members, each meeting shall have a time for suggestions for the agenda of the meetings, the admission and welcoming of new members and the setting of the location of the next meeting. There shall also be a treasurer's report.

## REFLECTIONS ABOUT SAM MALOOF

Getting into a critical argument with Sam Maloof about his work seems like a sad, silly, and futile business. It also may be ungrateful. I was privileged to spend a half day in 1974 at his home and shop. I also enjoyed his two day chairmaking seminar five years ago at Anderson Ranch Art Center. Maloof has always been willing to share what he knows about woodworking with anyone who might be interested.

But much to my own surprise I did offer at the May BAWA meeting what I am told was the most critical statement addressed to Maloof. I stated, "It seems to me that the work that you have shown us tonight (in the slide show) is similar to what was in the Renwick Gallery's Woodenworks exhibit in the early '70's and that most of your creative energy since then has gone into the development of your house."

As those of you who were at the meeting know, Maloof shot me an angry look and said, "That's your opinion!" In addition, more than a few woodworking friends looked annoyed at the tone of my question. Since criticizing Maloof is a little like questioning a demi-god it is important to follow-up with a brief explanation.

Woodenworks in 1972 opened the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C. The show featured the work of Sam Maloof, George Nakashima, Wharton Esherick, Art Carpenter, and Wendell Castle. Maloof had ten pieces in the show, all introduced in the 1960's except for the steer-horn chair from 1959 and the turned-leg chair of 1950.

A review of the catalog of Woodenworks indicates that he has been doing essentially the same work for the last 15 to 20 years. The furniture that he presented in the slide show is all there. Judging by the dates in the catalog his most prolific design period would appear to be when he was in his late 40's and early 50's. Maloof is now 71.

On the other hand I don't think that Maloof's work is static. As he said, "...on the pieces that I've done in the past, I make very subtle changes... I don't change completely, but I see things I think have to be improved." Rick Mastelli in Fine Woodworking in 1980 also mentions the remarkable consistency of Maloof's work and the continual and discriminating growth.

Maloof is a hard-working success. No doubt about it. He seems to be in the shop religiously every day, six days a week. His is a phenomenal productivity. He works quickly and for increasingly higher prices. He sold a settee to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for \$12,000. He indicated that he literally has a million dollars worth of business lined up. We should all so be in demand.

This present success follows early years of financial difficulty when Maloof decided to leave graphic arts and search for the vocation that would allow him the expression that he needed. Eventually, as the Woodenworks catalog states, "by the late 1950's his classically simple pieces were known to museums, architects and interior designers, and private customers."

While the details of line and form on his furniture have been evolving, we were shown no evidence that Maloof has taken a costly month or season to develop a new piece, at least not for a long time. When he pauses with his production he builds a new door, gallery railing or guest house. The slide show gave the impression that it is the 7,000 square foot house with 26 foot tower, 40 foot bedroom, and dozens of rugs, baskets and bowls that has been the recipient of the creative part of Maloof's recent life.

Cont'd

## MALOOF REFLECTIONS CONTINUED

As I have had a chance to think about Maloof's lecture I have come to realize that what put an edge on my question was that every time we were shown a slide of a chair or settee we heard about the institution that had bought it. That repetition would not have been so annoying if Maloof had not been so critical at the beginning of his presentation of the efforts of others to create new pieces, to move woodworking and furniture design in new directions, and to take risks.

Maloof said that he agreed with a friend of his who said that 85% of what was in the American Crafts Museum had no business being there. He thought that Garry Bennett's furniture might be acceptable to him. He also remarked that he had no tolerance for painted furniture or unusual shapes.

If he is always this intolerant what does he advocate? More quarter-rounded edges? Does he always denigrate the work of others? What is he doing as a trustee of the American Crafts Council? Is he on the ACC Board only because his position is so self-serving? He did brag that he made \$100,000 worth of sales by having a rocker in the opening show of the Crafts Museum. Yet he despised most of that show.

It can't be denied that Maloof can, better than most, hand rasp a mean, well-defined curve, but he made clear that he turns out his adaptation of traditional/Scandinavian chairs because that is what sells and that is what museums want from him. As he said, "I must be doing something right." Maybe yes. Maybe no.

Bearing in mind that I like the curves in Maloof's rocker and I wish him well as he fills all his orders, I think from my perspective in the 1980's Maloof's furniture in a design sense is "safe". And as always the creative edge in the craft and art world is never defined by what is safe. The forefront is defined by what is new, daring, and, perhaps in the longer run, may well be a failure.

Sadly Maloof is intolerant of those who attempt to take chances with design. He need not be so rigid. He could be both comfortable with his own evolving work and generous with his encouragement of the efforts of others. Encouragement is certainly something that we all could use at times.

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John Grew-Sheridan is a San Francisco furniture maker, past co-chair of BAWA, and a Board member of the Baulines Craftsmans Guild.

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A copy of these comments was sent to Sam Maloof for his response.

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MESSAGE LEFT BY SAM MALOOF ON PETER GOOD'S ANSWERING MACHINE, JUNE 7, 1987

"Peter, this is Sam Maloof calling. I just returned from Washington, D.C. and I got a letter from Grew-Sheridan Studio, and that's how I realized who the fellow was who asked the question of me. He wrote an article and wanted me to answer to whatever I wanted, and I'm not going to. I just got home to this really horrible letter and I wrote one [back] just saying that I couldn't answer his letter; that I didn't think it would do a bit of good. In fact, I said, 'I'm sorry that you feel the way you do and I do not think anything I might say would change your view'. But I'm misquoted all through his letter. Where he says, 'If he is always this intolerant what does he advocate? More quarter-rounded edges? Does he always denigrate the work of others? What is he doing as a trustee of the American Crafts Council? Is he on the ACC Board only because his position is so selfserving?'. That has nothing to do with the talk that I gave and I think that it is very close to libel. You can print the letter if you want. I'm not going to answer it, but I would like to have you call me back, and I might say that I've received letters from people on your board that disagree with him completely, and I could even send those letters, but I won't. But I would like to have you call me back it it. I'm not going to give him the satisfaction of putting words in my mouth that aren't right. Would you do that tomorrow, or even this evening? Thanks a lot."

THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE WAS LEFT ON JOHN GRUW-SHERIDAN'S ANSWERING MACHINE  
ON JUNE 8, 1987:

"John, this is Sam Maloof calling. I've just returned from Washington and I found your reflections in the mail.

I'm not going to answer to it, except I'm going to say that I'm sorry you feel the way you do and I just don't think anything I might say would change your view, but I take exception to some of the paragraphs. You've put a lot of words in my mouth that I did not say.

I read from the Crafts International about what the writer felt about the furniture that was shown at ACC and also in the end you say "What is he doing as a trustee of the American Crafts Council." That has nothing to do with my lecture at all and, also, do I degenerate (sic) the work of others. That has nothing to do with my lecture. And I am only on the Board because the position is self-serving. That has nothing to do with my lecture.

I think you are very wrong on that and if this is printed (meaning the essay) you're going to hear from me.

I think you're a very angry young man and I think I'll let the people who have written to me from your group, I'll take their letters because I've received a lot of letters from people. But it will be interesting what your reflections bring, but I'm not going to answer your letter. It isn't worthy of it. But I've spoken to thousands of young people. I've helped a lot of people. I've set up scholarships out of monies that I have for young people. And I do think you are way off base.

I've worked too long to ..."

END OF MESSAGE

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To The Editor:

6-11-87 -1-

Bay Area Woodworkers Newsletter  
Box 421195  
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If you attended the May 21st BAWA meeting at which Sam Maloof spoke, if you weren't stirred by his presentation, you would have been by the discussion that followed. About half way through the question and answer period following the presentation, John Grew-Sheridan somewhat curtly accused Maloof of stagnation in his growth as a furniture designer or innovator. The audience's squirming at that point was nearly audible. Welcome to San Francisco.

Grew-Sheridan  
He cited the similarity in Maloof's present work with that which was shown during an exhibit in the early 1970's at the Renwick Gallery, wherever that is. I apologize for not knowing more about that kind of thing. Unfortunately, Maloof's composure broke and he was not able to adequately respond to John's criticism. We never got to know exactly where he was coming from and I feel both men are to blame for that.

The question I wish to address is not so much the content of John's criticism or Sam's response, but rather its' place in a forum such as it was. Ultimately, the more interesting discussion will revolve around the issue of design and artistic growth, but for now let's just deal with the controversy because it seems that's what has everybody spinning.

If not for John's slight indiscretion you can be sure the May 21st meeting would only be a memory. Instead we've been confronted with an issue that challenges us to examine a pre-eminent furnituremaker's work to a far greater degree than we ever would have otherwise. To this end I am thankful for John's attempt, albeit clumsy, to express an opinion which has caused me to deepen my perception of Sam Maloof. I find it puzzling that Sam has since reacted quite strongly and negatively to this issue. I suspect that the VIP treatment he has grown accustomed to (and deservedly so) has numbed him. His bitter reaction does not jive with his usual self-confidence and self-assuredness. I feel he could teach us a great deal more if he tackled criticisms head on. Rather, his response was a terse "I disagree".

Although Sam's lecture and slide presentation proved to be informative and refreshing, I felt it was not nearly as compelling as his recently published book. To his credit, Sam Maloof is a woodworker/artisan first and lecturer second. His dedication to his craft and his productivity are legendary. The style and grace of his furniture, most notably his chairs is sublime, but as a voice for the woodworking movement I'm afraid he may fall short. Sam was clearly harsh in his criticism of experimental forms of contemporary woodworking during the course of his talk and should have been better prepared to defend those ideas.

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continued

Hopefully, John Grew-Sheridan will take the time to express his view more fully. His vital role in BAWA since I've been a member and his stature as a furniture designer and maker certainly entitles him to some space on these pages. Let the struggle unfold!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Blake Gilmore", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Blake Gilmore



Every person living in the free world is entitled to his or her opinion, including John Grew-Sheridan. But the time and place where opinions are forwarded is a lesson most forget all too quickly. I don't think John Grew-Sheridan will be forgetting this incident for some time.

In defence of Sam Maloof, I hold him in the highest esteem as a woodworker, craftsman and human being. He is a modest, hardworking man who has taken 40 years to hone his skills and enjoys sharing them with whomever is interested. I find him a fascinating and humble man who is a joy to be around. Besides, he is one of the fortunate few who have achieved a level of success envied by thousands. I build what sells and I have my own style of design. Sam Maloof should be extended the same courtesy.

As for the incident at the May BAWA meeting, I have no desire to take sides on the issues of design, contributions to the industry or any other aspect of what goes on outside of my own business and shop. We need to leave creativity to those who possess it and let them go about their business.

What troubles me is the feelings that John Grew-Sheridan has toward Sam Maloof. The friendly atmosphere of a BAWA general meeting is neither the time nor place to debate, disrespectfully, design or status or contribution or whatever point John wished to make. He obviously has some animosity toward Sam Maloof or he would not have challenged him in an open forum. Because of the casual atmosphere of our meetings, not to mention that Sam donated him time, I was, as a member, embarrassed by the comments of John Grew-Sheridan.

Let John Grew-Sheridan have his say but let's ask him to take it to an organized forum in the future. And let's not, in the future, show disrespect to our invited guests lest we want to get a reputation for being a group of arrogant, egotistical pompous woodworkers.

(signed) Steven Madden

## Of Chairs, Art, and Common sense

(Being an editorial, by a (co)editor.)

Warning! this piece is entirely opinion. It is meant, and offered, only as such.

The month before last, while listening to Sam Maloof, and finding that he had no cures for the stubbornness of rock maple that I didn't also, a question came out of the audience which took Sam to task for "doing nothing new". The questioner, it seemed, was upset that Sam had not produced a revolutionary new chair. Sam's response (paraphrased) was "Why should I? God hasn't produced any newly shaped people."

I find myself agreeing with Sam on two counts: First, he is now doing what he wants, selling all he builds, at his price, and has more customers than he needs. (I should only do half so well!) Second, according to archaeological record, there hasn't been a significant change in human form (though there has been a change in size) in about 1.8 million years.

I think the questioner is confused about the relationship between Sam and art. Sam, as I see it, did not set out to be an artist. Sam set out to build furniture. The title of artist was something bestowed on him later, by others, based on his works, not a title he took on and then set out to prove. Of course, Sam now accepts the title of artist. He'd be foolish not to. The title allows him to increase both his customer base and his prices. One doesn't survive as a woodworker for as long as Sam has without a strong streak of practicality. Nonetheless, at the bottom, I see Sam as still just a woodworker.

Most of the renown artists of history can be shown, on a little examination, to have behaved similarly. Da Vinci is an obvious example: he was basically a craftsman/mechanic (study the sketchbooks) who did things a little more carefully and thoughtfully than his contemporaries. Rembrandt is another. Van Gogh is, in fact, the only obvious counterexample I can think of, prior to 1900, and it is clear that he was deranged. The trade of being an "artist", from a zero-experience start, is a product of the twentieth century.

### Just For Argument

First, let's consider a definition for a chair. A chair is meant for a human being to sit in or upon. Further, unless it is the designer's intent that the sitter's stay be brief, the chair should be comfortable for the seated person. Anything beyond this begins to get into specialized uses for chairs, or differences in means of construction. In its most general form, then, a chair doesn't have to have anything to do with art or esthetics. Chairs deal in physical comfort. Garish coloring and absurd shapes will not make a chair less a chair providing the result is comfortable to sit in. Conversely, a device which may resemble a chair, however closely, that is difficult, impossible, or injurious for a human to sit on is NOT a chair. It may very well be art, and as such be highly marketable, but that doesn't make it a chair.

Defining art is a great deal more difficult than defining chairs. Most of the difficulty stems from the fact that modern marketing types have really trashed the traditional meaning of the word art. Now art can be damn near anything. For a working definition, let's try "art is the use or working of material objects to state, clarify, or enhance a concept, an aesthetic purpose, or the condition of mankind". That's a weak definition - it leaves out music and some other things, but it ought to serve. Webster defines art as "skill in performance acquired by experience, study or observation", which is perfect for my argument, but I fear many people would take it to be an obsolete definition. It does however illustrate one portion of my argument quite well, and that is that if Andy Warhol was an artist, he was primarily an artist at marketing. This is not to deny Warhol, or anyone like him, the title of artist, rather it is to demonstrate the breadth of the field, and the difficulty in establishing an adequate definition. David Ellsworth, as a further example, is apparently primarily an artist at extracting large amounts of money from fools. Bless him, it's obviously an art.

Hoping that by now that I've stated that art, with regard to chairs, is essentially unnecessary, let's consider ways in which art may interact with chairs. (Admittedly, I've left a gray area here, with regard to methods of chair construction, but I call that craftsmanship, and contend that it is not art.)

First, it has been said earlier, by someone unremembered, that a chair should say "sit here and welcome!" I agree. Perhaps this is where the art starts. An above-average artist then, might be one who could make unlikely structures or surfaces say "sit on me", and a great artist one who could not only do that, but also make the unlikely structure rewarding to sit on. Decoration, similarly, though not necessary for physical comfort, can add to the mental comfort of the seated person, thus increasing the overall comfort value of the chair. A similar argument involving pride of ownership can hold for the appearance of the unoccupied chair. Art, of course, must also be involved in the choice (when there is a choice) of materials from which the chair is made. Only the artist can define, from the amazing spectrum of materials available for the construction of chairs, in what materials their next design is to be executed. Regardless of materials, if the result "sits well" it is a chair. We can safely grant at least these aspects, and probably a lot more about chairs, to art.

So where does new come in? That's the problem. New will not be a necessary part of chairs until humans again evolve a different form. (I will accept some, but not a lot, of quibbling on this point with regard to zero-gravity chairs, but nobody has designed one of them yet.) New is a part of art, or more specifically a part of twentieth-century Marketing-as-art, where something has to be novel in order to sell. Chairs don't have to be novel. They have to be comfortable. (Case in point: Have you checked the recent sales of the shin-and-buttocks chairs that were such a hot item two years ago?) Clearly, chairs can be art. Just as clearly they can be either marketing-as-art or old-definition art.

What we have here is a double standard for judging art. This, I feel, is the key to the problem. Prior to the twentieth century, an artist's work was seldom acquired by museums until well after his death. By this standard, Sam is an overnight success. Nonetheless, it must be noted that during the time that Sam has been building chairs, Andy

Warhol started, blossomed, fulfilled a career, and died! By this standard, Sam is rather small potatoes. Actually, Sam, as an artist, is a hybrid of the two standards. Outwardly, he is of the new standard. Inwardly he is of the old.

The reason I see for the rancor which developed during the question period has to do with Sam's comments on pieces he observed at a recent show. As I heard them, his comments tended to imply that the chairs he saw weren't comfortable, and the other pieces weren't adequately functional. Fine. It was clear to me, that Sam was speaking as a furniture builder who someone else has called an artist. Andy Warhol, on the other hand, might have been ecstatic over the same things Sam didn't like.

The discomfort Sam caused to artists with his, to their ears, disparaging comments stems from the way modern art acquires its value. Before the twentieth century, value accrued to art slowly, over a long period of time, as the result of thousands of individual judgments, any one of which merely shifted the value of the piece a little. There is no time for this procedure today. An artist, or his work, must acquire value quickly in order for the artist to become profitable enough to survive. Now, value accrues to a work of art, or an artist, by mass acclaim. Generally, (though not in Sam's case) this procedure is initiated by the artist, and followed as soon as possible thereafter by a media blitz. It calls for great marketing skills on the part of the artist, and means that endorsements of his work by other artists, confirming that the work is in fact art and meritorious, are of substantial commercial value to the artist. Without such endorsements many wealthy customers would not be able to discern the difference between art and fraud, and sales of art as a consequence would suffer. It is also clear that many artists, for example David Ellsworth, cannot, for commercial reasons, grant such endorsements. Sam's comments then, in a very real way, can be viewed as literally taking food from the mouths of other, younger, artists. Admittedly, these younger artists are, by the old standard, only self-proclaimed artists, but these days that is how you get to be an artist.

It is unfortunate that whoever did so solicited the comments of a furniture maker on the subject of art, but Sam is clearly not to blame. It wasn't Sam who proclaimed himself an artist and therefor competent to judge art. Sam's field of expertise is furniture. It is likewise unfortunate that the art community which proclaimed Sam an artist now cannot understand that their action did not magically change Sam's modes of thought and action into those they feel are appropriate for artists. The whole episode illustrates for me just how difficult normal human communication can be.

Certainly, twenty years ago Sam's chairs were new in the marketing-as-art sense. Here, I think, the art community serendipitously misjudged Sam. Sam's chairs were not new with the affectatious marketing-as-art newness that causes Detroit to restyle its cars every year whether they need it or not. Sam's chairs would not look any different if Sam had lived two hundred years ago. The newness was merely the result of a new person attacking an old problem. Sam's chairs, while they may be art, are not the type of marketing-as-art that requires constant novelty, and Sam isn't that kind of an artist.

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## AESTHETICS AND TOLERANCE

John Grew-Sheridan

The comments that follow below are the fifth draft of my "Reflections on Sam Maloof" and are, for my woodworking friends, my effort to explain my short question to Maloof at our BAWA meeting in May. A question, I hasten to add, that had a raw edge to the tone of it that I regret. Hopefully, with all the dialogue that we have shared about this, the controversy will soon be put to rest.

To keep the record as straight as possible my "Reflections" were written after my colleague, Blake Gilmore, called me to say that he was sending to our newsletter a letter that would be in a friendly fashion critical of my question. He wanted to be sure that he was quoting me correctly.

I decided that I had to clarify my thoughts, deepen my understanding of our famous guest speaker, and read his book, which Bill Kalton was kind enough to lend me. A copy of the fourth draft of my response was sent as a courtesy to Maloof. He replied in calls to Peter Good and myself that I was putting words in his mouth that he did not say and that I had no business referring to aspects of his career that were not in the lecture. Most surprisingly, Maloof said that if my comments were printed BAWA and I would hear from him. His was an implicit threat of legal action.

Despite this attempt at censorship the BAWA Executive Committee recognized that Sam Maloof is a public figure who lectures widely and is a person whose ideas should be discussed. Our Committee in a split but fair vote decided to devote newsletter space to a review of the differences, if any, between Maloof and myself. Also, anyone with an opinion on Maloof or my perspective is invited to participate in with a letter to the editor. Peter Good began the discussion with a report in the June newsletter on a visit that he had with Sam Maloof.

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Getting into a discussion with Sam Maloof about his work seems like a silly and futile business. It may also be ungrateful. I was privileged to spend a half day in 1974 at his home and shop. I also enjoyed his two day chairmaking seminar five years ago at Anderson Ranch Art Center. Maloof has always been willing to share what he knows about woodworking with anyone.

But much to my own surprise I did offer at the May BAWA meeting what I was told was the most critical statement addressed to Maloof. I stated, "It seems to me that the work that you have shown us tonight (in the slide show) is similar to what was in the Renwick Gallery's Woodenworks exhibit in the early '70's and that most of your creative energy since then has gone into your house."

As those of you who were at the meeting know, Maloof shot me an angry look and said, "That's your opinion!" In addition more than a few woodworking friends looked annoyed at the tone of my question. I now realize that criticizing Maloof is a little like questioning a demi-god and, consequently, it is important to follow-up with an explanation.

First of all as I have had a chance to think about Maloof's lecture I have come to realize that what put an edge on my question was that every time we were shown a slide of a chair or settee we heard about the institution that had bought it or more like it. That repetition would not have been so annoying if Maloof had not been so critical at the beginning of his presentation of the efforts of other furniture makers to create new pieces, to move woodworking and furniture design in new directions, and to take risks.

Maloof said that he didn't like to be negative but that he agreed with a friend of his who said that 85% of what was in the opening show of the American Crafts Museum had no business being there. He thought that Garry Bennett's furniture might be acceptable to him. He also remarked that he had no tolerance for the painted and unusually-shaped furniture being mad today, that such work had been done more successfully in the 1920's.

Unfortunately, Maloof came across at the BAWA meeting as intolerant of other furniture makers and very sensitive to criticism of his own work. Maloof's expressed dislike of contemporary furniture is of importance for a younger generation of woodworkers. His overall importance may be major or minor, however. He clearly did not determine the whole content of the ACM show. But he helps to shape the world in which we try to survive. Maloof is a Fellow of the American Crafts Council and sits on the ACC Board and many juries. What he says and presents affects all of us in the trade.

Bear in mind that just as Maloof was pointed in his judgments, in his book, Sam Maloof: Woodworker, he recognizes that the rest of us in this field have an inclination, right, and need to look for insights about our craft. His remark was, "Woodworkers see furniture from a professional viewpoint. They are very critical." And no more than he is.

To get back to the point of my original comment, Sam Maloof's national reputation was solidly established by Woodenworks, which opened the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C. The show featured the work of Sam Maloof, George Nakashima, Wharton Esherick, Art Carpenter, and Wendell Castle. Maloof had ten pieces in the show, all introduced in the 1960's except for the steer-horn chair from 1959 and a turned leg chair from 1950.

A review of the catalog of Woodenworks indicates that he has been doing essentially the same work for the last 15 to 20 years. The furniture that he presented to BAWA in the slide show was in the Renwick. Judging by the dates in the catalog his most prolific design period would appear to be when he was in his late '40's and early '50's. Maloof is now 71.



## REFLECTIONS ON SAM MALOOF CONT'D

On the other hand I don't think that Maloof's work is static. The settee develops flamboyance. As he said in the Woodenworks catalog, "...on the pieces that I've done in the past, I make very subtle changes... I don't change completely, but I see things I think have to be improved." Rick Mastelli in Fine Woodworking in 1980 also mentioned the remarkable consistency of Maloof's work and the continual and discriminating growth.

Jonathan Fairbanks, Curator of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in the Introduction to Sam Maloof: Woodworker writes, "Sam maintains a consistent style, which changes slowly over time..." Maloof himself in his book states that "people ask me why I do not go off on a tangent and work in different directions. My answer is that I have not really perfected what I am doing now. I do not think I ever will."

Maloof is a hard-working success. No doubt about it. He seems to be in the shop religiously every day, six days a week. His is a phenomenal productivity. He works quickly and for increasingly higher prices. He sold a settee to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for \$12,000. His rocker in the opening show of the American Crafts Museum produced \$100,000 in business. He appears to have literally a million dollars worth of orders to fill.

This present success follows early years of financial difficulty when Maloof decided to leave graphic arts and use the vocation that would allow him the expression that he needed. Eventually, as the Woodenworks catalog states, "...by the late 1950's his classically simple pieces were known to museums, architects and interior designers, and private customers."

While the details of line and form on his furniture have been evolving, Maloof, when he pauses in his production, enjoys building a new door, gallery railing, or guest house. The slide show gave the impression that it is the 7,000 square foot house with 26 foot tower, 40 foot bedroom, and dozens of rugs, baskets, and bowls that has been the recipient of the creative part of Maloof's recent life. There is nothing wrong with that interest. He takes great pleasure in it. "Working on the home really is another wonderful form of relaxation for me," is how he explains it in his book.

In conclusion it can't be denied that Maloof can, better than most, hand rasp a mean, well-defined curve, but he made clear that he turns out his adaptation of modern chairs because they are what sells and are what museums want from him. As he said, "I must be doing something right." Maybe yes. Maybe no.

Keeping in mind that I like the curves in Maloof's rocker and wish him well as he fills his orders, I think from my perspective in the 1980's Maloof's furniture is in a design sense "safe". And as always the creative edge in the craft and art worlds is never defined by what is safe. The forefront is defined by what is new, daring, and, perhaps in the longer run, may well be a failure.

Sadly, Maloof presented himself as intolerant of those who attempt to take chances with design. He need not be so rigid. He could be both comfortable with his own evolving work and generous with his encouragement of the efforts of others. Perhaps he usually is and it was just a bad evening. But encouragement is certainly something that we all could use at times. As Maloof put it, "... a little recognition gives us motivation and satisfaction."

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John Grew-Sheridan is a San Francisco furniture maker.

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SECOND MESSAGE LEFT BY SAM MALOOF ON PETER GOOD'S ANSWERING MACHINE, JUNE 27, 1987

"Peter, this is Sam Maloof calling. It was nice to have you up the other day and visit with you. I got another letter from Grew-Sheridan and I would prefer if that thing is going to be printed, to have you print the first article that he wrote. He sent me another one that he'd cleaned up some, but I really prefer, if you're going to print it, to print the original. I think it will take care of itself. I think he's getting rather silly and desperate, but what I objected to in the first one was that he said that I used my position as trustee to further my career. That's what I objected to, but you can even print that. I think it will put him in a light where I think he's wrong, but I do want the first one printed, if you'll do that. Call me back, would you? Thank you."