

# Home Workshops

## HOME WORKSHOPS CAN BE MORE THAN A HOBBY



*Hendrik bench*

Professional woodworker and instructor Hendrik Varju applies a wax finish to one of his projects. Varju has taught small-shop woodworking to people from across Canada, the US, England and Holland.

Every home has the potential to be more than just a place to keep warm and dry. Outfit a corner of your basement or garage as a home workshop, and it can also be a place to develop the skills to earn a living on your own terms. This is a dream that more than a few people bury, but not Canadian women Charlene Weisel and Betsy Barlow. They took the plunge and haven't looked back.

Five years ago neither of these women knew one end of a screwdriver from the other. Today they're earning a

living building beautiful things out of wood, and it all began when their own personal needs met a very special guru.

"We were both looking to buy jewelry boxes for our teenage daughters," remembers Charlene. "Everything in stores looked so boring and predictable. That's when we wondered about making boxes ourselves. Trouble was, we didn't know the slightest thing about woodworking."

Eventually, Charlene and Betsy found Hendrik Varju. He runs a small, country woodworking shop and training studio in Erin, Ontario ([www.passionforwood.com](http://www.passionforwood.com); 519-853-2027). In September 2003, Charlene and Betsy spent a week of ten-hour days learning the basics of woodworking from the ground up – what the tools are called, how to turn them on, how to keep them running sweetly. "Hendrik's magic is his patience", says Charlene. "We were two middle aged women who knew nothing, and yet he never made us feel foolish or inadequate."

Fast-forward four years, and these two spunky ladies now have their own successful woodworking business: Out of the Wood ([www.outofthewood.biz](http://www.outofthewood.biz); 416-928-2845). It's astonishing how far they've come so quickly. Betsy and

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Charlene sell most of their creations at top craft shows and love the experience. Their daughters have some pretty nice jewelry boxes, too.

Betsy and Charlene wear many hats in their work. "We're designers, builders and marketers. But ultimately it all comes down to the beauty of wood. We simply try to show that off."

Right now cheese boards are one of their most popular items. "Cheese has become the new gourmet delicacy," says Charlene. "We use English oak, walnut, maple, cherry and a highly figured wood called mappa to make our boards."

Success stories like these make me both happy and sad. I'm thrilled whenever I see people putting their creative talents in gear. What a breath of fresh air to see individuals choosing to move beyond the ordinary, right in their own homes. But I'm also sad when I think of how many people were blessed with the talents of a builder, yet can't find a situation to develop their potential properly. And while part of the problem is a shortage of willing and personable gurus, there are solutions. Look hard enough and you'll find them.

One way Hendrik extends his guru influence is through writing. He's put together a book ("Starting and Running a Woodworking Business"), he offers an email/phone consultation service, he writes magazine articles, and, of course, he makes things in his home workshop, just like some pretty important people that most of us know.

Walt Disney's animation empire got off the ground with movies made in a home workshop. Steve Jobs launched

the personal computer revolution from his parent's garage in 1976. Eighty years earlier, Henry Ford developed the concept of the affordable automobile working from a backyard coal shed. Readers Digest, Hewlett Packard, Buddy Holly, Amazon.com -- they all relied on home workshop space to get started. And besides making the world what it is today, you've got to believe that the folks behind these ventures had a great time in their workshop. Maybe you're next?

Steve Maxwell is technical editor of Canadian Home Workshop magazine. Send homebuilding and renovation questions to [www.stevemaxwell.ca](http://www.stevemaxwell.ca). Sorry, but letter volume may prevent individual response.

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