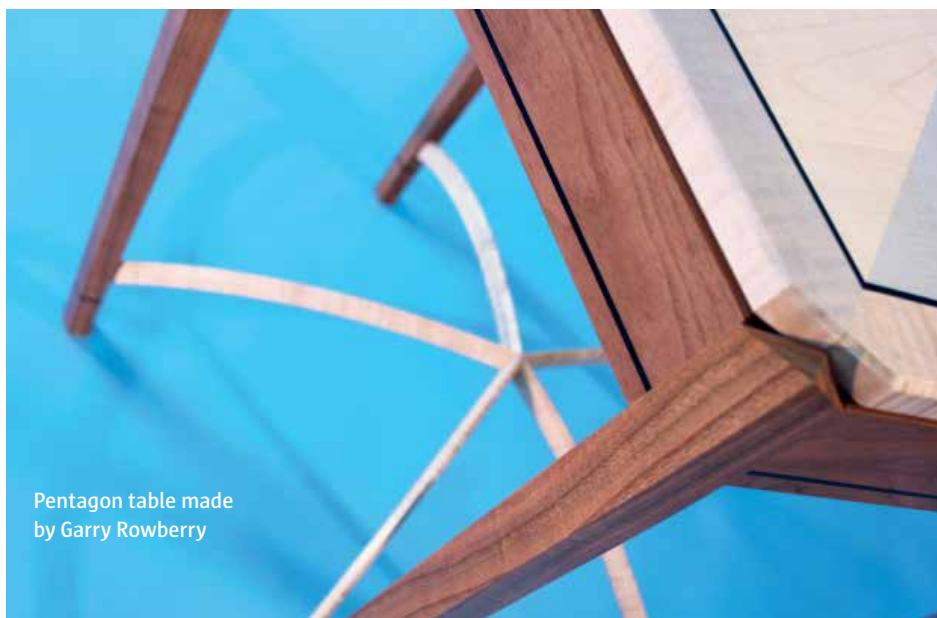




Furniture School class with, far right, Sarah Sefton, Sean Feeney and Peter Sefton

# SCHOOL & TOOLS

Peter Sefton's students play a big role in deciding which tools should be in the Wood Workers Workshop range. **Andrea Hargreaves** reports



Pentagon table made by Garry Rowberry

**P**eter Sefton should be feeling very pleased with himself. In the past few months he has acquired Wood Workers Workshop on the retirement of Roger Phebey and got a joint website up and running, enjoyed encouraging sales for his new ranges of American tools at both the Harrogate show and at his own open day, and secured the services of renowned designer-maker Sean Feeney as Maker in Residence at his furniture school.

The story started 10 years ago when Peter spotted a derelict 3-acre 17th-century farmstead at the foot of the Malvern Hills coming up for auction. He just knew that the barns and redundant farm buildings would make perfect teaching workshops. It took a further two years of planning and development to create the spacious purpose-built teaching workshops that today are home to the school in Upton-upon-Severn.

In the meantime he had set up his own furniture workshops in nearby Malvern and was teaching part-time at a local college where he was asked to develop its City & Guilds and BTEC woodworking and furniture-making courses while undertaking his own teaching qualifications. But much as he enjoyed teaching new students each year, he became increasingly frustrated with ever-changing curriculum demands and decided it was time to set up his own bespoke teaching workshop.

“From the outset I decided to concentrate on teaching the skills you need to make top-quality bespoke furniture whilst also understanding the constraints of running your own business or how to be a productive employee. I’m in the workshop all day, every day, to provide one-to-one hands-on practical tuition; I concentrate on you and don’t have the demands of a production workshop distracting me at the same time as teaching you. On the professional long course we have an esteemed list of guest lecturers including James Ryan of the Barnsley Workshop, Mary Greensted, author and authority on the Arts and Crafts movement as well as chairperson of the Gloucestershire Guild of Makers, and Quentin Smith, President of the Marquetry Society.

“We also visit designers/makers in their own craft workshops, larger production workshops, museums, timber and veneer suppliers to give students all-round experience of the whole furniture-making industry from selecting and buying timber to finishing and delivering items to exhibitions and – most importantly – customers!”

The school also runs short courses all year round in woodworking and furniture making. “I meet many home-based woodworkers who have bought some great tools and just want to enjoy their own weekend woodworking, rather than be frustrated by lack of experience or understanding of fundamental elements of furniture construction and timber movement.”

## Tool connection

For almost 20 years Peter has been advising students on choosing tools and equipment. “I used to feel for students who had spent their



Garry Rowberry demonstrates the Router Boss at Harrogate show



This pear-handled saw is made for Peter Sefton by Thomas Flinn



Sean Feeney teaching in the design studio



Square-end fishtail dovetail chisel made for Peter Sefton by Ashley Iles

hard-earned cash on tools that they either didn't need, didn't understand, or worst of all just weren't fit for purpose. Two years ago the professional long-course students at our school were asked to do a magazine review of some of the best dovetail saws around the world and we were pleasantly surprised that our home-grown Sheffield-made saws came out top in the tests; simply, they cut the best dovetails without fuss."

So the school started supplying tools including Clifton, Veritas and Quangsheng planes that Peter was confident would stand the test of time. "We didn't want to be a faceless internet-based tool shop that would 'stack 'em high and sell 'em cheap'. I wanted to know that if I supplied a student with a tool, it would have to do what was promised over the long term."

As and when students found they got on well with other products, the range has been expanded, rebranding last year with the acquisition of Wood Workers Workshop from retiring owner Roger Phebey, who had for 15 years been importing Incra, Woodpecker, Easy Wood Tools and more recently Router Boss from America.

Now the school plans to develop short training courses for customers to get the best out of the tools they have invested in.

## Tool guru Garry

Wood Workers Workshop is now run on a day-to-day basis by Garry Rowberry, who

undertook a short course at the school two years ago and this year graduated from the full-time nine-month professional course. As Technical Director he is the first point of contact for sales and technical support. "Garry is a woodworker, first and foremost; he's not just here to take orders but more importantly to advise customers on what tools may suit their requirements and find technical solutions to their individual woodworking needs. We are the largest stockist of Incra and Easy Wood Tools in the UK but are still small enough to cater for individual needs. We are always looking to stock new products and are happy to hear from woodworkers who have seen great products in the US but have yet to see them arrive in the UK."

Peter's own tool designs, available exclusively through Wood Workers Workshop, include a pear-handled dovetail saw based on the Pax 1776 saw by Thomas Flinn, a Joseph Marples cutting gauge and an Ashley Iles dovetail chisel.

## Sean Feeney

Sean Feeney holds seven Guild Mark awards for bespoke furniture design and making, has been lecturing on design for the past few years and, like Peter, gives practical demonstrations and constant advice.

The school comprises a design studio with computers, drawing and whiteboards, a machine shop and a naturally lit hand-tool

workshop with seven student benches alongside Peter and Sean's.

The final term's optional classroom work now turns to the creation of business plans taught by Sarah Sefton, who joined Peter as the school's Student Manager after a successful career in project management and accountancy.

Later in the term, students prepare for the Summer Open Day and showcase the work they have produced over the professional long course, along with their own portfolio of work including drawings and photos. To see how the students are developing their skills, you can follow two of this year's long-course student blogs at [kjungwoodwork.tumblr.com](http://kjungwoodwork.tumblr.com) and [cabinetmakingadventures.com](http://cabinetmakingadventures.com).

[www.peterseftonfurnitureschool.com](http://www.peterseftonfurnitureschool.com)  
[www.woodworkersworkshop.co.uk](http://www.woodworkersworkshop.co.uk)



Hand-tool day at Wood Workers Workshop