

Is the Pen Mightier Than the Sword?

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I subscribe to too many woodworking magazines. It is a habit I resolve to quit every year but haven't licked the practice quite yet. Between the articles and the advertisements, I learn about new tricks and techniques and what new products are coming into the market. But an unplanned benefit, or perhaps a side benefit if you pay close attention, is you can perceive woodworking trends. For example, while I first built something from a live edge slab years ago, you can tell that this aspect of woodworking has become popular based on the large number of recent articles and ads related to slabs. I was ahead of the curve. If you have any doubts, I bring to your attention the "slab milling setup brought to market by Woodpeckers in the past year or so. I can say the same about "epoxy," a material that seems to be the rage for everything from filling cracks, to inlay, to river tables (another hot trend in the woodworking community). Now, many of the woodworking supply houses offer multiple brands of epoxy tuned for multiple applications.

So, another trend I noticed this past year from all the attention the subject gathers in magazines and catalogs is "pens" or specifically pen making. Quite simply, I don't get it. Full disclosure, I do not own a lathe, which in the eyes of some readers makes me a bit of a "girly" woodworker to paraphrase Arnold Schwarzenegger. You can acquire a perfectly serviceable pen at any bank, particularly if you are willing to cut the chain, or a Staples store, or even at a CVS. Why would I want to invest in a lathe, drill press attachments, bushings and collets, mandrels, sleeves, tubes, and wood, resin, or acrylic blanks and a pen press to make gift items that most of us will lose or misplace in a day?

Perhaps I am missing the spirit of woodworking or some pride of accomplishment, or a fervent wish to give away mementoes that impress my friends and relatives.

According to Wikipedia, "the pen is mightier than the sword" is a metonymic adage first penned by English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839. Today the pen is dwarfed by twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, except in the world of woodworking where the pen shines in its own exotic hardwood (or resin).