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New Hampshire artisans showcase craft and creativity at annual woodworking competition

By Matt Ingersoll Special to the Union Leader
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Earle Rich /

Guild of NH Woodworkers

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Dozens of artisan woodworkers, ranging from professionals to students and amateur hobbyists, will transform the University of New Hampshire's Durham campus into a showcase of skill and creativity next weekend.

The Guild of New Hampshire Woodworkers' third annual competition returns to UNH's Memorial Union Building on Sunday, Nov. 9, and is open to the public.

"You really don't have to be into woodworking to enjoy this event. It's all about artistry, craftsmanship and the pleasure in watching people show off what they've done," said Elliot Savitzky, president of the Guild of NH Woodworkers and competition chair. "For 90 percent of the entrants, this is the only opportunity to get to show anybody other than their family and friends what they've made."

Participants can submit any piece of their own creation. Entries range from intricate works of art to functional furniture, all of which will be on display during the event.

"A lot of folks will make something specifically for the competition," Savitzky said. "Some may have a shelf or a basement full of stuff that they've made over the years, and they'll take one or two of those pieces and enter them in. ... As long as it hasn't been entered before, it's up for grabs."

New this year, entries are split into three categories: Masters, Emerging Makers and Students. "We wanted to level the playing field," Savitzky said. "Anybody who has a creative mind or is really skilled can enter anything they like. And so, you'll see a wide range of different techniques and styles and artistry. It's really amazing to walk around and see all these pieces."

Judges include two New Hampshire Furniture Masters and a juried member of the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, who evaluate entries in multiple categories over several hours. Prizes are awarded in each category, along with an Overall Best in Show award.

Beyond the competition, the event will feature hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar, a product demonstration by event sponsor Wood Lover's Wax, and presentations by keynote speakers such as Mike Pekovich, artistic director and editor of Fine Woodworking Magazine; and Jeffrey Cooper, a New Hampshire Furniture Master.

Tom McLaughlin of Epic Woodworking, a Canterbury resident and the host of the popular “Shop Night Live” web series on YouTube, will serve as master of ceremonies.

“The theme this year is all about inspiration,” Savitzky said. “Jeffrey, for instance, is interviewing a bunch of his New Hampshire Furniture Master colleagues and asking them where they get their inspiration for the pieces they create.”

Founded in 1990, the Guild of NH Woodworkers has grown from a small handful of amateur and professional woodworkers in the state into a large community of more than 750 members. Education remains central to the guild’s mission, and the competition reflects that commitment.

“We’ve really been making a big push lately to get involved in student education and attracting students to the guild,” Savitzky said. “We happen to be extremely lucky in this region to have such a high density of woodworking masters in the area. Being able to learn from their experiences and resources is very valuable.”

If you go When: Sunday, Nov. 9, 3-8 p.m. Where: Memorial Union Building, University of New Hampshire, 83 Main St., Durham. Cost: \$25 in advance, \$30 at the door. Info: [gnhw.org](https://www.gnhw.org).

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