



Books & Doors

I know lots of good photographers. Where are they when I need them? Newspaper friend Bart Everett of Los Angeles suggested close-ups of the library book shelves at my Lake Forest home. Shipmate George Keeton of Texas wanted details about the fretwork on several doors. These photos were the best I could do with my dinky digital camera. The first thing to be said about books is that they are heavy, and no book shelf of mine was going to sag. So I special-ordered birch plywood with full-inch thickness as opposed to

the mundane three-quarter-inch stuff. Of course, when you are working with plywood, you must hide the ugly edges. In my workshop, still in the garage then, I routed coves on thin birch strips to create shelf molding. Vertical supports need hiding, too. I could have routed the battens as well, but I'm no fool. Birch chair railings — designed to be installed horizontally on dining room walls, so pushed-back chairs don't do damage — were readily available at lumber stores. Turn them vertically and they become neat battens. A rule of fine carpentry is that once you have built something, you are only half done. There is the whole business of sanding, filling, staining, varnishing and polishing. It took me five months of spare-time work to build and finish two large floor-to-ceiling bookcases in my library. No doubt they add thousands of dollars to the value of my home, but I'm not much interested in that. They serve me well, don't sag, and compliment my Sligh leather-topped desk and Henredon and Drexel library furniture. The fretwork on the door at left and other doors in my house was done in a relatively short period of time. It's just molding, glue and paint, but well worth the effort. Plain hollow doors, ubiquitous in tract houses like mine, are, well, plain. A little fretwork gives them an elegance they don't really deserve.





... and Ceilings

A friend in nearby Laguna Niguel, Eleanor Finney, had an interesting thought about woodworking by senior citizens. “I’m glad you did your woodworking while you were younger,” she wrote. “My brother-in-law always wanted to do fine woodworking when he retired. Unfortunately, he waited too long and had a stroke, which made fine work impossible.” I am not incapacitated yet, but I keep my feet firmly on the ground at age 74. I never get high up. Last year I decided I just couldn’t live with an open-rafter workshop ceiling that allowed dust to fall through the wood shingles. But I didn’t even think about doing it myself. I hired Toshio Namba, a 50-year-old master carpenter, to install ceiling insulation and oak paneling. He used hand-tools from the old Japanese school — saws that cut on the pull stroke instead of the push stroke, wood-block planes with sword-quality laminated blades, and sharpening stones mined from the earth rather than manufactured in a factory.



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