

A Bounty of Tools in an Outstanding Collector's Book

by John Wells

Antique Woodworking Tools: Their Craftsmanship from the Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century by David R. Russell, and photography by James Austin (Cambridge, England: John Adamson, 2010) hardcover with dust jacket; 10¼" x 13¾" ISBN 978-1-898565-05-5, 528 pages. Illustrated in full color. £90.

David Russell's *Antique Woodworking Tools: Their Craftsmanship from the Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century*, is an amazing book. Its pages contain 935 illustrations showing 1,556 tools, 575 illustrations of marks on tools, an appendix listing and showing 269 plane iron marks, and an extensive index. Each item is fully described and the provenance is provided when available. The research is

stunning—in many cases presenting newly discovered or recently translated material.

David Russell's book is a vehicle for sharing his fabulous collection with the world. His unerring eye has sought out the most interesting tools available over the past forty years resulting in one of the world's greatest collections of antique

woodworking tools. A close examination immediately reveals that the tools in the collection were selected by an individual who was extremely knowledgeable in the fields he chose to collect; the collection also shows a deep commitment and emotional attachment to the intrinsic beauty of tools. The early-seventeenth-century German handled auger (item number 1388 on page 457) is one of the most beautiful tools I have ever seen.

Antique Woodworking Tools begins with the earliest tools known from those predating written history to those of the Roman era. It moves on to explore beautiful anvils, axes, and saws. It adds a delightful excursion into the fascinating world of measuring and marking devices. Then it embarks on the major theme, wooden and metallic

planes, of the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries, made in central Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Of particular interest to me were the decorated, hand-made, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century continental wooden planes (found on pages 96 through 133). I was also fascinated by the central European metallic planes made of wrought-iron plates, beginning with a very rare German smoothing plane (on page 272) made in the 1570s, which has sides decorated by acid etching. It is similar to the two planes made in Nuremberg that are in the Dresden Collection. The next several pages contain beautiful central European metallic miter and chariot planes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made of iron plates joined by brazing or dovetailing. These planes were often decorated with fanciful scallops and cusps cut into the top edges of their sides or into the edges of the upturned front palm rest. The very significant contribution to the development of ornamental lathes and tools made by John Jacob Holtzapffel during the late part of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries is celebrated on pages 362 through 371.

David Russell began his collection with a Norris smooth plane that he greatly coveted as a young woodworker. So it isn't surprising that his book devotes more than fifty pages to the absolutely marvelous infill planes made by Norris. The book concludes with a generous treatment of boring tools including an extensive selection of very attractive plated and framed braces, followed by beautifully decorated screwdrivers.

David Russell's book, *Antique Woodworking Tools*, will delight all tool collectors and woodworkers as well as everyone having any interest in how things were made in the past and the tools that made it all possible. This book belongs in every serious collector's library.

EAlA member John Wells was the recent winner of the association's J.D. Hatch award for his contributions to the scholarship of tool history. He is a frequent contributor to The Chronicle. Antique Woodworking is available from the publisher and from Astragal Press, David Stanley Auctions, and Jim Bode. EAlA members receive a discount on books purchased from Astragal Press.