

Discover Greene & Greene

By Sam Yerardi

Looking back, I'm not really sure how I was bit by the bug. I've been in woodworking for many years, read countless articles, and along the way have seen the work of the Greene brothers. I think it was the fact that almost all of the pictures of their work I had seen previously were in black and white. Some of you out there will remember that the early issues of *Fine Woodworking*, etc. were in black and white. I suppose it was when I first saw a color picture of the interior of the Gamble house in Pasadena, Calif. that my interest in their work exploded. I was further drawn in when I learned that they were originally from my home state, Ohio. I make custom furniture and cabinetry, and I incorporate the Greene & Greene style into my work. There are a handful of craftsmen around the country that also incorporate the Greene brothers style into their work.

The Greene brothers, typically referred to as Greene & Greene, were architects that developed what I consider to be the epitome style of the Arts & Crafts movement at the turn of the century. They revealed to me, at least when I learned about them, that the house itself can be designed and built with the same styling and craftsmanship as a piece of furniture. The Greene brothers utilized the impeccable craftsmanship of another pair of brothers, the Halls. The four men together, for a very brief period of time, created a mammoth repertoire of work that included not only architecture and furniture, but textiles, metalwork, stonework, etc. that exemplified their style as well.

Earlier this year, for the first time ever, a traveling exhibit of their work was assembled and displayed at select galleries around the country. I had never been to Washington, DC, and I guess I had assumed that it would many years before I would ever go, seeing that whenever a vacation came up we always head to the ocean somewhere. When I saw that there would be a Greene & Greene exhibit at the Renwick Gallery (part of the Smithsonian) I immediately made plans to go there. In short, my wife and I went there and it turned out to be one of the most memorable vacations we have ever had. I really enjoyed seeing everything in Washington. Standing inside the Lincoln Memorial and gazing out towards the Washington Monument was one of the most peaceful moments of my life.

After we had left Washington we stopped at Falling Water in Pennsylvania. Falling Water, Frank Lloyd Wright's ultimate masterpiece, was as memorable. I guess if I had to make a choice between Falling Water and seeing the Greene brothers work up close, I would have to say that the Greene brothers work had a greater effect on me. While I love Wright's work, to me, it has a cold ambience about it that is absent from the Greene & Greene work. The Greene brothers work makes you want to touch it, to feel it. It has an organic quality that to me that Wright came close to but never achieved. At the Renwick, we were not allowed to touch anything of course, but I have to tell you something I did (by accident I swear) that I feel guilty about but nevertheless, will treasure. I was standing in front of one of the chairs and my wife walked up and I was telling her about the details, etc. and I reached out and touched one corner of the top rail in the chair. I quickly pulled my hand back, as I realized I might be asked to leave if the guard saw me touch something. And then it dawned on me. I actually had my hand on a piece of Greene and Greene work. Sort of what I would expect an art student to feel if he/she touched the *Mona Lisa*. I spent several hours there making drawings of details, etc. A once in a lifetime opportunity.

To demonstrate my obsession with Greene & Greene, I will describe what I did in the last hours of our visit to the gallery in Washington. We had already been there, saw the exhibit, and on the way out I bought a few books. There were a couple books that were very expensive (at least to me) and I passed them up. As I left the gallery, it kept gnawing at me that I would love to have those books because at least one them had good close-up photos of the items in the exhibit. We were driving out of Washington, and had made it about 10 blocks or so east of the gallery when a parking spot opened up. As anyone knows that has ever driven in Washington, DC, that just doesn't happen. It was fate. I pulled over, told my wife I'll be back in a minute, and walked/ran the ten blocks back to the Renwick and bought the books. What is funny is the Renwick is right across the street from the White House. I walked past the White House, an icon symbol of the free world, the history, the heritage, but my mind was on Greene & Greene...