Troubled by current trends—Recently, I set some time aside to visit several woodworking shows and galleries. I wasn't sure what I was looking for but I knew there was a trend that was making me uncomfortable.

Now that I've had a chance to look around and talk to people, I'm beginning to get a handle on what's wrong. I think it's this: Woodworking isn't art and never will be. The painter who's fortunate enough to become a hot item can expect to make a decent living or even get rich, but people won't pay that kind of money for woodwork, no matter who made it. However, woodworkers, who by definition are starving, refuse to believe this. After all, wealthy art patrons are their only hope. Therefore, woodworkers strive vigorously to make their work into art.

This has led to a vicious spiral. Galleries and museums are asking art curators to jury their shows. These people choose works by academic criteria. The result is a collection of works that are funky, brightly colored, shocking and whimsical—anything but subtle. Lack of function is considered avant-garde.

Up and coming woodworkers see this trend and build accordingly. At design schools, like Parsons and Pratt, the professors adjust their own work to suit the trend, and students at these schools are tacitly encouraged to build carbon copies of their teachers' work. So it all looks the same.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not bitter because my own work is being ignored. It's not. In a gallery filled with purple boxes with spikes and orange beads, my rocker is the first thing people ask about (and often the only thing that sells), which is an object lesson in itself. The finer points that make woodworking such a challenge—elegance, warmth, finesse, comfort—are also what make well-crafted furniture a joy to live with over the long term. There is still plenty of room for innovation within these constraints.

—Jeremy Singley, East Middlebury, Vt.

More on Krenov's students—Looking at your article on James Krenov's students' work was a sheer delight. Special attention should be paid to Mr. Radenkov's marquetry cabinet, which is so fine that I'd be tempted to sell my house and car to buy it. I was also impressed by Page Sullivan's cabinet; it's nice to see a woman's work represented.

All the pieces in the article illustrate how well the students have learned Mr. Krenov's basic philosophy of cabinetmaking. However, I wish there had been more pieces shown and more close-ups of some of the cabinets. I also would like to have read a bit about how each student's personal philosophy on cabinetmaking compares with Mr. Krenov's approach. There's got to be someone else out there who feels that a Krenovian-style cabinet would certainly not be hurt by incorporating some well-proportioned and well-placed chip or relief carving, to add to the artistry of the whole piece without detracting from the subtle beauty of a fine-grained wood.

—Dave Kolanek, Wolcott, Conn.

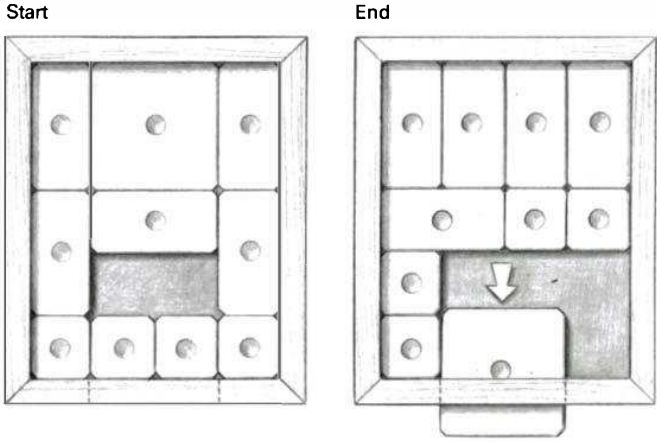
Woodcarver blade interferes with grinder switch—I recently purchased a Bosch right-angle grinder for use with a Ryobi Woodcarver blade. It didn't take long to discover that the design of the switch on the grinder makes the combination dangerous: When the switch is on, cutting debris accumulates under the switch so that it will not turn off. I suspect that this problem could also occur in any other application that created large quantities of debris, such as rust scaling. In addition, because the Bosch switch is similar to the one on my Makita grinder, and presumably to many other small hand grinders, it is likely that most such grinders will have the same problem.

I'm now using the grinder plugged into a portable switch-controlled outlet box, so I don't have to rely on the tool's switch to turn off the power. This solves the problem, but a first-time user could be caught by surprise.

—Bruce Winterbon, Deep River, Ont., Canada

Even more puzzling—The sidebar "A sliding-tile puzzle" by Robert Stirling (*FWW* #91) was most interesting. The very similar plan was published in a 4-H woodworking manual (*Woodworking—Beginner*, Cooperative Extension Service, Purdue Univ., West Lafayette, Ind. Publication 4H 442) several years ago, and I have made many of them for gifts.

With only minor alterations, another much more difficult puzzle can be made, making it a two in one. To make the alternate puzzle, one of the long rectangular tiles is replaced with two small square tiles, and the large square tile is made thinner so that only it will exit the tray through a slot in one end of the frame. More than 50 moves are required to move the large square from the upper center to the bottom center (see the drawing below) where it will slip through the slot. So many moves are involved that when you are successful, you've forgotten how you accomplished it.



The tiles move easier if they are a bit larger than Mr. Stirling's. I make the small squares 2 in., the rectangles 2 in. by 4 in. and the large square 4 in. The large square should be about 7/16 in. thick while the other tiles are all 3/8 in. The slot should be flush with the floor of the tray so the large tile exits easily, but the others are retained. My name for this puzzle is *Le Game*. It is really challenging and is handy for a coffee table or in a waiting room to keep guests occupied.

—O. H. White, Medaryville, Ind.

Bits and braces—As a youth, I had the same question as Noah Birnel (in *FWW* 91, p. 26): How do you fasten an auger bit into the chuck of a bit brace? I grew up thinking the jaws should grasp the bit's squared-and-tapered end. But the bit would often fall out of the brace when I tried to remove it from the work, and I could rarely get the bit straight enough or the chuck tight enough with my young hands.

Then as a young man, I discovered the secret. The squared-and-tapered end of the bit fits neatly into a square socket located deep inside the chuck. The jaws of the chuck grasp the round shank of the bit, keeping it perfectly straight and centered. Although it is possible to pull the bit out of this socket, the jaws prevent it from coming all the way out of the chuck, even in a very tight hole.

This discovery served me well for more than 25 years until I read Richard Starr's reply to Birnel's question. It prompted me to re-examine my old Craftsman brace to see whether or not I was crazy. Sure enough, I learned something new—there are two possible positions for the bit. About 3/8 in. inside the chuck, the face of each jaw has a molded depression shaped to fit the squared-and-tapered end of an auger bit exactly. On my brace, it requires a strong light and close inspection to see these depressions. They allow the bit to be held farther out of the chuck than does the socket deep inside, thus allowing one to drill a slightly deeper hole. But even in this position, the outer ends of the jaws still grip the rounded shank, centering the bit and preventing it from being pulled out of the brace.

I suggest that Birnel examine the chuck of his own brace closely. A