



On Your Day Off...

BY ROBERT KEITH LEAVITT

Your hobby may track sawdust on the rugs and get paint in your hair. But it's worth it

THE Judge and his wife were showing off their house, and we had come to the cellar. Here, all but crowding out the heater, was the Judge's workshop, with its well-worn benches, its racks of tools, its battery of machines, its hoard of choice woods and its shelves of oddments in jars and boxes.

A half-finished ship model stood in a corner. On the machinist's lathe gleamed a newly-turned part for a fishing reel. Other projects lay all about. "Watch out for that gun," said the Judge, "I just refinished the stock and it's still sticky."

Among the guests was a chatty lady. "My!" she said. "It must be grand to have a husband so handy with tools. Think of all you must save on odd jobs around the house..."

I caught Mrs. Judge's eye, and there was in it a great light of laughter — silent, but hearty and wise — that showed what she was thinking.

For it might as well be told, especially



on the eve of Hobby Week: the products of home craftsmanship are many and varied, but they rarely include odd jobs, and they almost never add up to anything utilitarian by money-saving standards. Nevertheless, the end result of hobby crafts is practical beyond all dollar measurement.

To make this clear, let me start by admitting — for myself and unnumbered thousands of other home-workshop addicts — all the bad things you might say about our hobby. And this goes for all of us, male

and female, expert or dub. It holds good, no matter which of the skilled trades we assault: cabinetmaking or weaving, gunsmithing or photography, flytying or pewter-whacking, boatbuilding or block printing...

Home craftsmanship is untidy, destructive of skin and furniture, productive of flat feet. It is extravagant of time and rough on social obligations. But it gives you a Something you can get in no other way.

The home craftsman tracks sawdust into the rugs, grinds paint into the guest towels, spills chemicals on the butterfly table and leaves upon the freshly painted kitchen walls the mark of the Black Hand.

While he will not spare time or money for ordinary dissipation, he is utterly unable to resist the heady intoxication of buying tools he might some time need.

ON WEEK ends when other people are out of doors getting ozone in their lungs and roses in their cheeks, he (or she) is indoors breathing dust and paint fumes and cultivating curvature of the spine. Let others beautify themselves in sun and wind; he would rather shred his epidermis with accidental nicks and cuts to create his own idea of beauty in the things he makes. Long after decent people are healthily asleep, you will see him beneath the midnight Mazda, bent over his work, his hair full of metal chips and his head full of wonder at the way materials can take shape and finished form — for him.

No matter how skilled he becomes, he never gets over his pleased astonishment at this miracle: that something should come into being beneath his hands where nothing was before. He has toiled for endless hours on each of many separate parts. Any one of them alone is prosaic, lifeless, scarcely interesting. But now at last all these various pieces have come together (almost of themselves, it seems) to become what he had planned. They are no longer separate Parts, but a Whole that has individuality and meaning.

He realizes with fresh surprise each time that it was he, and no one else, who gave this Thing form and purpose. He, alone, is responsible. No wonder that the Thing

(whatever it may be) seems to him the most perfect and desirable of its kind in the world.

It may be a pup in any other eyes but his. It may look like something Junior did in third-grade Self Expression. Or it may be a masterpiece of which a professional could well be proud. *That doesn't matter.* The point is that he made it. It is his to love like a frail



child or to gloat over like the prize of a great contest. He puts it in his home or his office where he can secretly admire it while pretending to do something else.

No matter if he could have bought the same thing for infinitely less money than his time is worth. As a distinguished surgeon once said, "If I were to put a price upon that sideboard at the rate I charge my patients, it would be one of the most expensive pieces of furniture in the world. But I wouldn't sell it for ten times even *that* amount."

You see, the hobby craftsman acquires a special scale of values. Many other things he gathers on the way: a sound respect for honest construction, a pride in thorough workmanship... but it is this scale of values which is most valuable of all.

By some standards it is a warped scale. On it, Keeping Up With the Joneses rates below zero. So do most other store-bought pleasures. The more things you make for yourself, the less you covet anything you cannot make. Money cannot buy the things you want most to have, but only the tools and materials to make them.

A reprehensible scale? Maybe. Who are we craftsmen to say? All we know is the simple truth that ours is one scale by which it is easy to reach that goal — so far off by most standards — Contentment.

Sidelines

RARE. In World War II, buck privates were more exclusive than you think. According to Lt. Col. Randolph Leigh, in "Armed Forces Digest," there were only 484,741 in the ETO. Corporals, however, were a dime a dozen — numbering 638,381.

MISSING JEWEL. A sense of humor can sometimes be a liability, as attested by this tale from Cincinnati. A young lady entered a local night club and felt her cultured-pearl earring give way. She grabbed for it but it bounced into a gentleman's coffee cup. Her boy friend said wouldn't it be fun to wait and see how surprised the man would be when he finished his coffee and found a pearl in it. She giggled and said it would.

But then complications set in. The man decided his coffee was cold and ordered another cup. As the waiter whisked the cold coffee away, the alarmed young lady grasped at his arm and whispered: "There's a pearl in that cup!" He just laughed and scurried to the kitchen.

The couple then took their case to the headwaiter, who, rather skeptically, allowed them to go out to the dishwashing department. After a half hour, they finally turned up the missing jewel. But if you know anything about women, you've probably guessed the pay-off: During the melee, the lady lost the *other* earring, and they never did find that one.

BARBER. We understand there is a man named John McIlroy whose pro-



A job for Mr. McIlroy

profession almost defies terminology. You might call him a "mustache eradicator," because for the past 30 years he has been hired to go about New York City and erase mustaches on advertising boards. He estimates that he's made 36,000 such operations. He can handle beards too, but they don't come up so often. For some reason, the average signboard artist sticks pretty much to mustaches, and that's okay with Mr. McIlroy because beards are bigger and take more time to clean off.

This Week Magazine

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