

# Tage Frid in Atlanta

by Jack Warner

*Courtesy of United Press International.*

To watch master woodworker Tage Frid conduct a seminar is to see his books come alive. He looks just the same, and he works exactly as he does in the books. He makes the same hair-raising passes on the table saw, wields his Danish bow saw with the same continental elan.

Working in cramped and unfamiliar quarters with more than forty people — including former President Jimmy Carter — crowded around him, he spent a good deal of time hunting for the tool he had put down five minutes ago. As Frid worked, demonstrating every kind of joint and making them all look easy, he talked. Carter was instrumental in bringing Frid to Atlanta for the Friday night lecture and two-day seminar at the end of February in Highland Hardware's little basement auditorium.

After overcoming initial nervousness over meeting the former president, Frid's ever-present banter touched often on the well-known woodworker from Plains.

When Carter pointed out that Frid was using a measurement of mortise depth made before he had planed the piece, the master rechecked the measurement and grinned at the former president. "You're right," he said. "No wonder they made you president."

Carter is a dedicated and very accomplished woodworker. He certainly got his money's worth from the seminar — at a rough guess, I'd say that no less than 60% of the questions asked of Frid came from Carter, and he would not let go of the subject until he clearly understood the answer.

It was in a way a very strange weekend. An unheated little room, with one section of high bleachers plus some makeshift benches and folding chairs, was jammed. In the middle of all this was one of the world's great woodworkers, and among the several dozen people in his audience was a man who had held the world's most important job.

It was remarkable to see how smoothly Jimmy Carter fit into all this. Anyone who didn't recognize him would have assumed he was just another enthusiastic woodworker who, from the cut of his clothes, might not have had as much trouble scratching up the seminar fee as the rest of us. He sat in the third row of the bleachers, operating the projector during the hour or so each day Frid spent lecturing on slides, and during breaks chatted about woodworking with others.

One Secret Service agent was inside the lecture room at all times; several more stood in the hallway outside and there were others here and there, watchful but as unobtrusive as possible. There is nothing to set these people apart but their earpieces; seeing them for the first time, I thought they looked like members of a club for athletes with hearing problems.

Frid told us a lot of wonderful stories, but the best of all came from his years of apprenticeship in Copenhagen. The master of the shop where he apprenticed was a stern one — it is hard to imagine anything else — and was in the habit of charging his journeymen and apprentices alike a dollar every time they made a cut on their workbench.

One of the journeymen, Janssen, had gotten enough of cabinetmaking and joined the army. On his last day, he went to collect his pay and mentioned to the master that he had put another cut on his bench.

"All right, Janssen," said the master. "Thank you for telling me," and deducted a dollar from his packet. Janssen left and a little while later the master came out to inspect the workroom.

He found Janssen's bench cut in half.

Frid is a great believer in the Makita plunge router, and used it to make hidden-spline miter joints, which he feels are stronger than secret dovetails and much easier to cut. However, as will often happen with this machine, the bit slipped down, ruined the workpiece and cut a considerable gouge in the bench.

Any of you using the Makita have likely had the same problem. I have heard of it happening with other brands of router, too, but it is most common in routers with half-inch chucks and a quarter-inch collet in place.

John McGee, the eminent woodworker of Carrollton, Georgia, showed me how to deal with this problem in the Makita. Both the chuck and the collet have three slits in their tops, two short ones and one long. If you are careful to keep the long slits lined up together, the bit will rarely slip.

