





DANIEL ROSE

FOUR corners

EDITED BY JOANNA WANE

Fully Furnished

For master woodworker John Shaw,
the beauty is in the details.

John Shaw makes a confession: once while house-sitting, he would wander through the rooms, opening cupboards, lifting lids on boxes and pulling out drawers.

He had no interest in the contents of the cabinetry, but in how each and every drawer, door, lid, latch and dovetail had been lovingly crafted. For this was no ordinary household, furnished from local chain stores. It was the Californian home of Jim Krenov – one of the world’s most celebrated fine furniture craftsmen.

In the mid-1980s, Krenov spent a week in Wellington with other notable masters of woodwork to teach, mentor and “stimulate interest in the art of fine woodworking” in New Zealand.

Shaw, who’d been inspired by Krenov’s books on his craft, travelled up from Nelson, along with four other woodwork enthusiasts, and says “just meeting the man was a thing of dreams”. So when Krenov presented him with one of his own hand-crafted timber planes (a tool he often described as “the cabinetmaker’s violin”) and invited him to come and study in America, he remembers feeling like “the chosen one”.

Accepting the offer, Shaw joined Krenov’s woodworking programme at The College of the Redwoods in Fort Bragg. “Being taught like that made me what I am today. I would watch him closely; saw him doing things – techniques he’d spent years perfecting – and then try them myself.”

It was during his year there that Shaw and his wife Fini were asked to house-sit, giving him the opportunity to examine all the intricate details of Krenov’s furniture. 🐼



A trio of music stands hand-crafted for three siblings.

At the time, Shaw says, Krenov had been worried nothing would come of his time in New Zealand; that there would be a sense of the circus having left town once he returned to California. So Shaw took up the mantle, founding The Centre for Fine Woodworking in Nelson. "I guess I made that responsibility my own, in eventually becoming a teacher myself."

Nestled into a hillside overlooking Tasman Bay, the school's programme ranges from cabinet making for beginners to a fulltime furniture-makers course (www.cfw.co.nz). Shaw juggles teaching with creating commissions; he recently completed a set of music stands for three saxophone-playing siblings – one in Wellington, one in Arkansas and one in Wales.

Krenov, whose work is exhibited in museums in Japan, Norway, Sweden and America, died in 2009 at the age of 88. Surprisingly, Shaw does not own a single piece created by the master craftsman, nor does he have a photograph of them together. "As a student, I never felt right about asking to buy his pieces – though I later heard other students had no qualms about it, and Jim was only too pleased to let his creations go."

Shaw believes there's plenty of potential for New Zealand to develop an identity for designing and making fine furniture.

"All it takes is about 15 years of teaching to create a generation of fine furniture makers," he says. "Among fine craftspeople, there tends to be an openness; a generosity in being mentors and teaching others. It's unfortunate that there has to be a monetary value put on it."

VICTORIA CLARK

Masha Yakovenko in *Love Story*.



New York Story

Florian Habicht's new "pick-a-path" film.

So, this guy has his palm read by a psychic, who tells him to stay behind the camera rather than in front of it (he's a filmmaker, but hadn't told her that); then he meets a beautiful Russian girl on a subway and gives her a piece of cake.

And that's how Florian Habicht – deliberately flouting the psychic's advice – came to star as the romantic lead in his new film *Love Story*, shot while he was on a Harriet Friedlander artist residency in New York.

"I had this initial idea of a man meeting a woman holding a piece of cake in the subway," says Habicht, now back in Auckland. "But I had no idea what would happen next."

Running out of time to develop a script, he decided to go out with his camera and ask people in the street to come up with a plot. The footage he ended up with was so good Habicht used it to create what he describes as a part-documentary "pick-a-path" film. His father – legendary sixties photographer Frank Habicht – makes a cameo appearance giving his son advice via Skype. And he really did find his co-star, Masha Yakovenko, on the subway.

Love Story is one of some 140 features and shorts in the New Zealand International Film Festival, screening throughout July and August in Auckland, Wellington, Dunedin and Christchurch (www.nzff.co.nz).

Other gems include *Autumn Gold*, a peculiarly uplifting documentary following five athletes (the oldest is 100) competing at the 2009 World Masters Athletics Championships in Finland; an adaptation of Haruki Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood*; and *Fire of Babylon*, a social commentary on what was once the unstoppable force of the West Indies cricket team ("It's like slaves whipping the asses of their masters," is one colourful comment after a 5-0 test series "blackwash" of England).

Love Story will be the fifth film Habicht has shown at the festival and he hopes Yakovenko will come out to New Zealand for the premiere. The psychic, who became one of the film's main characters, will have to wait a little longer to rate Habicht's talent on-screen. "When it opens in New York, she'll be there."

JOANNA WANE

