Looking to take your skills to the next level? Just turn the page...

The person who coined the saying, “The more things change, the more they stay the same,” just might have been a woodworker. Admittedly, new tools and materials have made certain operations faster, safer, and easier, but if a woodworker from the 1900s could visit your workshop, he’d have a tougher time with the K-cup coffeemaker than the table saw. That’s because the basic tenets and tools of woodworking are almost timeless.

If you’ve doubted the possibility of crossing paths with time-travelling woodworkers, think again. Thanks to books, these experts can still share their advice on every aspect of woodworking, from outfitting your shop, to applying the final coat of finish.

To compile a short stack of must-have titles, we asked the staff to share their favorites, and then divided the list into categories. Whether you’re looking for gift ideas or buying books for yourself, you’re sure to find a few valuable additions to any library.

In addition to current titles, we’ve included a few classics that are worth the hunt. If you don’t mind a few dog-eared pages, you’ll discover that great information can be had for pennies on the dollar.

For ordering information, check out the Buyer’s Guide on p. 64 or go to woodcraftmagazine.com and click on onlineEXTRAS.
Just starting out

One of the biggest challenges with woodworking is making sense of the plethora of tools and techniques you need to start and finish your first project. The books shown here can start you off on the right foot.

Just bought a lathe? Treat yourself to a copy of *Getting Started in Woodturning* (and while you’re at it, join the American Association of Woodturners). Written by turners for turners, the book offers expert advice on safety, tools, and techniques, plus a few projects.

For new woodworkers, we recommend *Woodworking 101*. Written in textbook format, this book covers the basics of setting up a shop, selecting and using a basic assortment of hand and power tools, jigs, and a few projects designed to help you build your skills.

All of us dream of perfect hand-cut dovetails. Until then, *Classic Joints with Power Tools* can help you get projects out the door. This easy-to-follow guide will help you understand and successfully complete all types of joinery.

Worth the Hunt:

*Woodworking: The Right Technique*, Bob Moran (1996). This gem starts with a wink that’s explained further down on the cover: “Three Practical Ways to Do Every Job—and how to choose the one that’s right for you.” Bob introduces the main woodworking processes from dimensioning stock, to cutting dovetails, and then offers a variety of ways to get the job done using traditional hand tools, modern machinery, and an assortment of slick jigs.
Go-to reference books

The good news is that you don't need a lot of shelf space to house a comprehensive collection of basic woodworking knowledge. Get started with *Understanding Wood*. In this comprehensive bible, professor Bruce Hoadley delves into the nature of wood and how its structure affects strength, workability, and other characteristics. He then shines a light on fundamentals like drying, machining, bending, joining, sanding, gluing, often accompanied by stunning macro photographs that zoom you in to the meat of the matter.

Finishing comes last, but in terms of frustration, it often ranks at the top of the list. In *Understanding Wood Finishing*, professional finisher Bob Flexner demystifies the art by explaining the "hows" and "whys." After busting many long-standing myths, Bob offers instructions on selecting and applying a wide variety of finishes.

Sharpening is another topic that can vex woodworkers. Ron Hock's *The Perfect Edge* cuts through the mysteries so that you can improve your edges and enjoy the pleasure and efficiency that comes from a really sharp tool.

Know your woods. Don't know the difference between sapele and sassafras? Don't worry. In his pocket-sized book, *The Real Wood Bible*, Nick Gibbs packs a ton of useful information about the woods you might find at the mill or lumberyard. We really like the large photos (including face, edge, and end grain).
**Workshop building blocks**

The secrets to safe and efficient woodworking are a workspace that’s tailored to suit the woodworking you do, and machines that run like tops. Woodworkers quickly discover that this concept is a journey rather than a destination. These books can help you find answers along the way.

Tapping the knowledge of dozens of top-shelf woodworkers, Scott Landis’s *The Workbench Book*, and Jim Tolpin’s *The Toolbox Book* are filled with inspirational photos and drawings that you can use to enhance your workbench and tool storage needs. John White’s *Care and Repair of Shop Machines* completes the workshop triumvirate. The author’s straightforward advice for repairing and setting machinery will help you make the most of every machine in your shop.

Of all the machines in a workshop, we think two deserve their own books, not just because they possess the greatest potential, but when used incorrectly, are most likely to bite back. Bill Hylton and Fred Matlack’s *Woodworking with the Router* comes close to being the Router Bible. This tome provides an excellent overview of routers and bits while also explaining how to build and use jigs for router tables and handheld routing. Similarly, Paul Anthony’s *Complete Illustrated Guide to Tablesaws* gives entry-level and experienced woodworkers the information they need to safely use this workshop workhorse and accomplish more with their saws. Both books have excellent photos and great illustrations.

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**Two for turners.** Turners often develop needs and interests that are different than other woodworkers. Richard Raffan’s *Complete Illustrated Guide to Turning* offers one of the best overviews of the craft, as taught by a skilled artisan. As turners explore new ways to get a grip on different projects, they’ll appreciate Doc Green’s *Fixtures and Chucks*. This book explains how to get the most from commercial chucks, centers and faceplates and how to make your own.
Magazines offer a buffet of interesting topics, but they lack the pages to explore specific interests in greater detail. This selection of books provides everything a woodworker needs to tackle challenging projects, like Windsor chairs, or a houseful of well-designed furniture.

Few woodworking areas are as challenging as chairmaking, even for accomplished woodworkers. If you are interested in making a seat, Drew Langsner’s *The Chairmaker’s Workshop* offers to-scale plans for 11 different chairs and 5 must-have chairmaking fixtures.

In *American Country Furniture*, David T. Smith shares 50 furniture designs, accompanied by Nick Engler’s friendly step text, cut lists, and detailed exploded drawings. Although it does not provide step text and photos, Thomas Moser’s *Measured Shop Drawings* offers detailed illustrations of 50+ pieces. Even if you can’t build them yet, the drawings offer valuable insights on design and construction, providing useful reference for other projects.

Hylton’s *Illustrated Cabinetmaking* fits neatly between Smith and Moser. By providing excellent exploded views and thorough presentations of 100 classic designs, this book can be used not only as a project book, but also as a complete encyclopedia of traditional furniture design and construction.

*Sawdust starters.* David Wakefield’s *Animated Animal Toys* and David Heim’s *Woodturning Patterns* are books for folks who want to start making sawdust. As the titles suggest, the books focus on completely different topics, but both provide full-sized patterns and instruction that ensure success.
Fun and inspiration

Not all woodworking happens in the shop. These books offer some practical advice, but they’re more about process and personalities than product. Putting a few of these titles alongside your favorite reading chair or nightstand might provide you with inspiration for your next masterpiece.

Grouping George Nakashima’s *The Soul of a Tree* and Jim Krenov’s *Worker in Wood* with Nick Offerman’s *Good Clean Fun* might seem sacrilegious, but we like how the trio’s perspectives encompass the diverse spirit of woodworking. The older books combine photos of exceptional work with serious reflections on the nature of craftsmanship. Nick is equally passionate about wood and woodworking, but he’s more willing to admit that he’s enjoying himself—a good example for all of us to follow.

For an entertaining read (and proof that woodworkers lead interesting lives), treat yourself to Nancy Hiller’s *Making Things Work: Tales from a Cabinetmaker’s Life*, and George Frank’s *Adventures in Wood Finishing*. These two biographical books are beautifully written and offer similarly lively accounts of the adventures that come from making a living as a woodworker. As you spend time with Nancy and George, we think you’ll enjoy the stories that come with the sawdust.

**Worth the Hunt:**

Kiyosi Seike’s book employs photos and just enough text to reveal some of the secrets of Japanese joinery. These joints can be applied to projects, but until then, this picture book deserves a place on your coffee table.
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