

News and Views from  
**WoodCentral.com**  
by Ellis Walentine

*The topic of copying versus imitation is one that never seems to go away. There's a story going around about a friend of a local furniture maker who was traveling somewhere off the beaten track and came across a piece of furniture looking exactly like one of his friend's designs. When he met the maker of this obvious copy, he confronted him, and the maker replied, "Yes, I make all of his pieces."*

*To get our messageboard visitors' perspective on this issue, I recently asked them "where is the line between copying and merely being influenced?"*

"If I make it for myself, I think it's okay. But, if I profit from someone's design by making it commercially, I think I've crossed the line. There's also an age angle; if the original designer has died, it's probably okay to copy a piece for commercial purposes."

"When you've incorporated several styles along with some original features, you're influenced. When you have all of one style, you're copying. I don't see a problem with either, if you're not passing it off as original work."

"If you directly copy an original work, the creator of that work may see it as a problem, in which case it's dueling lawyers at ten paces."

"I work in research. A staffer says, 'if you copy one, it is plagiarism. To copy many is research.' I think this applies. If I look at many works and get ideas for my own, that is influence."

"Imitation is the greatest form of flattery. So, I would let the imitator know how flattered I was, then I'd sue his butt off. If the imitator is making a profit from these pieces, then at the very least it is immoral. I think most people would change their design some if confronted."

"My opinion is that by adding some of your own design elements to a piece, it may be okay. A complete copy for profit is completely unethical. A copy should be advertised as a 'so and so' replica, with the original designer's permission if it is for profit."

"Copying is when all of the features of a previously crafted piece are copied. Influence is when most or all of the features of a piece are changed to suit the application, wood type, skill level or personal taste."

"If I draw out details and dimensions, I own the copyright to that design and the pieces that I build. If somebody comes by, looks at it and builds a replica from memory, that's influence. If they measure my piece and write it down as a design, that's stealing. Publishing and/or selling the design would be against the law."

"My father, a pioneer in radio, said you could protect your invention by fully documenting your idea, dating it and having it witnessed by three persons. Mail it by registered mail to yourself. The unopened, registered document will prove the idea was first yours."

"Emulation becomes plagiarism when money changes hands."

"All furniture designers are influenced by the work of others. The influence may be subtle or obvious, but it will never be a direct copy, because copying shows no creativity or imagination. Copying the whole and selling it for profit while the originator is alive is, in my opinion, criminal."

"Legality changes with the times and tides. The ideal of morality is a constant. Copying another's protected work is Wrong unless some consideration is given."

"I was always upset when I returned to a craft fair the following year and found many copies of my best selling piece. To me, doing it for profit is wrong, even if giving credit."

"Someone once said, 'I make traditional furniture and tools, so I copy everything.' I like traditional designs, so I eliminate the tiresome design process and just rip off the past."

"To me, it is a copy if the design is the same. Since there is 'nothing new under the sun,' everything we do as woodworkers is probably influenced by several someones."

"Reproduction designs have clearly passed into the public domain. Close reproductions are needed to keep good design from being swamped by manufacturers who think Queen Anne means putting a foot on a coffee table. My pet peeve is institutions, supposedly educational, who think they own the design when all they own is a piece of 200-year old furniture."

"My work and designs appear in magazines, with details drawn and explained. By my own hand, I provide the ammunition. Inquiries for reproductions for personal use seem fine to me. There again, I've chased after people using my copyrighted images for their gain and caused them to desist from what they were doing."

"Passing someone's designs off as one's own is one of the lowest things someone can do. General ideas will always propagate into the domain if they are good. A woodworker's willingness to share methods and ideas is not free license to copy without permission."

"In my field (puzzle making) copying is clear and distinct since puzzles are based on defined mechanical principles. Original puzzle designs are published, as well as patent filings, and permission from the inventor can usually be had for the asking. Selling illegal copies still happens."

"I maintain that any plans made available in a book or magazine are there intentionally for the reader to use, however he sees fit."

"A design for a piece of furniture can be protected by copyright or by patent. If I design something and do not get protection for it, anyone can legally copy it. Only if I get a patent, it has not expired, and I can prove someone else's design infringes my patent, can I stop that person from making their design."

"My one wish is that someone would want to copy something that I have made. Some of us aren't in the big leagues. We copy all the time, to get ideas for a project. Usually, there isn't any threat to the original."

"I'm pleased if someone wishes to copy what I've designed and built. But, it is something else when they sit beside my original and compete for the dollar."

**Participate in future surveys at [www.woodcentral.com](http://www.woodcentral.com)**



INDUSTRIAL  
ROUTER BITS  
SAW BLADES  
ON THE WEB

**FREE:** Sharpening Coupon with every Purchase

[WWW.FARALLONKNIVES.COM](http://WWW.FARALLONKNIVES.COM)

PRECISION GRINDING  
**1-800-4-A-KNIFE**  
(1-800-425-6433)

---

News and Views from

**WoodCentral.com**

**by Ellis Valentine**

The topic of copying versus imitation is one that never seems to go away. There's a story going around about a friend of a local furniture maker who was traveling somewhere off the beaten track and came across a piece of furniture looking exactly like one of his friend's designs. When he met the maker of this obvious copy, he confronted him, and the maker replied, "Yes, I make all of his pieces." To get our messageboard visitors' perspective on this issue, I recently asked them "where is the line between copying and merely being influenced?"

"If I make it for myself, I think it's okay. But, if profit from someone's design by making it commercially, I think I've crossed the line. There's also an age angle; if the original designer has died, it's probably okay to copy a piece for commercial purposes."

"When you've incorporated several styles along with some original features, you're influenced. When you have all of one style, you're copying. I don't see a problem with either, if you're not passing it off as original work."

"If you directly copy an original work, the creator of that work may see it as a problem, in which case it's dueling lawyers at ten paces." "I work in research. A staffer says, 'If you copy one, it is plagiarism. To copy many is research. I think this applies. If I look at many works and get ideas for my own, that is influence.'"

"Imitation is the greatest form of flattery. So, I would let the imitator know how flattered I was, then I'd sue his butt off. If the imitator is making a profit from these pieces, then at the very least it is immoral. I think most people would change their design some if confronted."

"My opinion is that by adding some of your own design elements to a piece, it may be okay. A complete copy for profit is completely unethical. A copy should be advertised as a 'so and so' replica, with the original designer's permission if it is for profit."

\*Copying is when all of the features of a previously crafted piece are copied. Influence is when most or all of the features of a piece are changed to suit the application, wood type, skill level or personal taste."

"If I draw out details and dimensions, I own the copyright to that design and the pieces that I build. If somebody comes by, looks at it and builds a replica from memory, that's influence. If they measure my piece and write it down as a design, that's stealing. Publishing and/or selling the design would be against the law." "My father, a pioneer in radio, said you could protect your invention by fully documenting your idea, dating it and having it witnessed by three persons. Mail it by registered mail to yourself. The unopened, registered document will prove the idea was first yours." \*Emulation becomes plagiarism when money changes hands." \*All furniture designers are influenced by the work of others. The influence may be subtle or obvious, but it will never be a direct copy, because copying shows no creativity or imagination. Copying the whole and selling it for profit while the originator is alive is, in my opinion, criminal."

"Legality changes with the times and tides. The ideal of morality is a constant. Copying another's protected work is Wrong unless some consideration is given."

September-October, 2002

"I was always upset when I returned to a craft fair the following year and found many copies of my best selling piece. To me, doing it for profit is wrong, even if giving credit."

"Someone once said, 'I make traditional furniture and tools, so I copy everything.' I like traditional designs, so I eliminate the tiresome design process and just rip off the past."

"To me, it is a copy if the design is the same. Since there is 'nothing new under the sun,' everything we do as woodworkers is probably influenced by several someones."

"Reproduction designs have clearly passed into the public domain. Close reproductions are needed to keep good design from being swamped by manufacturers who think Queen Anne means putting a foot on a coffee table. My

pet peeve is institutions, supposedly educational, who think they own the design when all they own is a piece of 200-year old furniture."

"My work and designs appear in magazines, with details drawn and explained. By my own hand, I provide the ammunition. Inquiries for reproductions for personal use seem fine to me. There again, I've chased after people using my copyrighted images for their gain and caused them to desist from what they were doing." \*Passing someone's designs off as one's own is one of the lowest things someone can do. General ideas will always propagate into the domain if they are good. A woodworker's willingness to share methods and ideas is not free license to copy without permission." "In my field (puzzle making) copying is clear and distinct since puzzles are based on defined mechanical principles. Original puzzle designs are published, as well as patent filings, and permission from the inventor can usually be had for the asking. Selling illegal copies still happens."

"I maintain that any plans made available in a book or magazine are there intentionally for the reader to use, however he sees fit." "A design for a piece of furniture can be protected by copyright or by patent. If I design something and do not get protection for it, anyone can legally copy it. Only if I get a patent, it has not expired, and I can prove someone else's design infringes my patent, can I stop that person from making their design.\*

"My one wish is that someone would want to copy something that I have made. Some of us aren't in the big leagues. We copy all the time, to get ideas for a project. Usually, there isn't any threat to the original."

"I'm pleased if someone wishes to copy what I've designed and built. But, it is something else when they sit beside my original and compete for the dollar."

Participate in future surveys at [www.woodcentral.com](http://www.woodcentral.com)

INDUSTRIAL ROUTER BITS

SAW BLADES ON THE WEB

**FREE: Sharpening Coupon with every Purchase [WWW.FARALLONKNIVES.COM](http://WWW.FARALLONKNIVES.COM)**

**Woodworker West**

PRECISION GRINDING

**1-800-4-A-KNIFE**

(1-800-425-6433)

Page 9