



Q: *What is craft?*

A: Craft can mean many different things to many different people. We take it to mean something like: the making of objects that are both useful and beautiful through the dedicated transformation of materials offered to us by the natural environment.

Q: *What is the Craft Program?*

A: The “Craft Program” is simply a label we use to communicate a dream we have of working with other people to develop cottage industries, educational workshops, and hopefully someday a school (or schools!) dedicated to promoting craft as meaningful and viable way of life.

The Craft Program embraces the model of cottage industries as an ideal scale and form of production for individuals, families, communities and cooperatives in this rapidly changing and evolving world. The workshops of these cottage industries are either in the place where one lives or a short ways away, addressing the rising cost of transportation. The useful and beautiful objects made in these workshops can be very sophisticated in their design, manufacture and functionality but use as their primary materials those which are common and abundant locally. For example, the making of a violin involves much skill and precision but can be made with all locally available woods or the manufacture of useful clothing that is very complex in its durability and design but uses wool or other locally grown fibers as their primary material.

The emphasis on using locally available materials responds to rekindled interest in businesses that are sensitive of their environmental impact and long-term viability (even thinking seven generations ahead!). In the main stream, these principles are known as “green” or “sustainable” businesses.



Q: What need does the craft program fulfill?

A: The need of an emerging group of people interested in alternatives to the conventional economy to have productive, meaningful, and economically rewarding work. Natural building is adequately meeting the need of such people for shelter. Organic gardening is adequately meeting the need for nourishment (with the notable exception of many basic staples, notably grain). The craft program seeks to fulfill the need for such people to train themselves in making the useful objects of daily life out of locally available materials. This need is two-fold: it includes the need and delight of making useful objects for one's self as well as the need to engage in an activity where one is making useful things for others and thereby able to sell or trade for other things that are necessary for life. In other words, the craft program aims to address the big question of how to have a fun, successful, and sustainable livelihood that supports a rural homestead and other creative ways of living.

Q: What step in its evolution is the Craft Program in?

A: Well, there are craft programs all around the world that take many different shapes and forms so this idea is nothing new nor unique.

Max was, for example, a student of ceramics and then metalsmithing at an adult education school in southern Argentina (EMETA) which is a great inspiration to us. Most courses were 6-7 months long, met once a week and were focused on teaching settlers of the area skills that would allow them to use local materials to create useful things and often times encourage the creation of businesses around these skills. Classes taught included ceramics, basket-weaving, metalsmithing, carpentry, food processing and preservation, cheese making, baking for a bakery, and many others.

The most interesting example we have found of a craft school already functioning in the US right now is the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina (www.folkschool.org). We believe that there should be many more of these schools around the United States, and that they would be important centers for hopeful change during a time of great revolution in modern American culture and society.

Since we live in Oregon, We are interested in seeing one of these craft programs evolve on the Pacific West Coast. There are certainly many craftspeople who have turned their own work spaces into schools for their specific crafts. This is a great asset. And there are "Art and Craft Schools" on the West Coast already established in places like Oakland, Mendocino and Portland although we believe that their emphasis is quite different – having a very modernist interpretation of what art and craft is.

So this particular instance of a craft program is looking for collaborators.... People who have already thought of this idea; people interested in collaborating; people with land, tools, or expertise that are willing to share them; teachers; students and many more.

So the first step in evolving these ideas into the reality of a craft school is to begin with an “itinerant” or travelling craft school. This essentially means that the school coordinates classes and apprenticeships not in one location but in the workshops of already established craftspeople who are making a living doing what they do best. In this way, the school can develop with time and from the ground up – developing experience, contacts, an excellent teaching team, trust and familiarity in the community – all things essential for the establishment of a truly vibrant craft school.

So if you identify with these motives, already have similar ideas under way, or are interested in collaborating or participating – please contact us.



“A Vision!” or “Towards a Pattern Language for a Craft School”

The craft school looks like a small village. It has a “village center” with indoor and outdoor communal gathering spaces, a library, an office, a showroom/store and a kitchen and dining area. The village center is noticeably punctuated by decorative and medicinal plants. Food producing gardens extend from the kitchen and dining facility and are a noticeable part of the overall ecology. While there is a centrally located tool depot and “shop” for tools used in the general maintenance and landscaping of the school/village... the main productive spaces or workshops are located in a second-tier or ring around the village center.

Workshops are organized around the crafts that they produce, ie. a ceramics workshop is designed around the activities for making ceramics, including covered clay and firewood storage, an indoor production space with lots of shelving, counters, a sink, a solar-lit throwing station, and kilns adjacent. In the spirit of cottage industries, the workshop looks and feels very much like a house, replete with flower beds outside and a tea-station inside. In fact, it is likely that there is loft within the workshop where an artisan or apprentice dedicating herself to that craft lays to rest his weary head.

This alludes to an important aspect of the functioning of the school. While the business of the school mainly happens through workshops during the summer months and during other major holidays throughout the year when participants can come for the 4 to 14-day workshops necessary for really engaging with a craft, the real life of the school is sustained by the artisans and apprentices who work in and maintain the workshops year-round, thereby instilling these spaces with that special magic associated with creation. Their work is displayed and sold in the central store which is visited by participants and visitors alike. This business is supplemented by mail ordered purchases and an annual or bi-annual craft sale.

In small clusters, on the periphery of the village, are cottages that provide personal and family space for the staff of the school.