



BY FRED AGNIR

CUE MAKER'S CORNER

Sheldon Lebow

Technologically Speaking

The world owes much to the Information Age and the subsequent technological periods. They have given the common man access to information at blinding speeds and increased our knowledge base more than it was thought possible compared to previous conventional outlets. For cue makers, the Information Age has provided an additional means to learn their craft, expand their craft, and push their craft at a faster rate. That is, the Information Age has been crucial in providing us with talented cue makers like Sheldon Lebow.

A native Oregonian, Sheldon Lebow was born in Klamath Falls and currently makes his cues in Springfield in the Eugene area. His parents started the Sprout City Sprouts, a company specializing in alfalfa sprouts. Lebow's personality and demeanor is very much the casual West Coaster. He is a former skateboarder and is a life-long cyclist. Today he devotes much of his time as a member of a local mountain biking club and maintains their website.

During his high school years, Sheldon took shop courses that included wood-working and metal-working. After high school, he held a number of odd jobs, including a stint in construction. He also worked as a carpenter for ten years, providing a background for his future cue-making.

"I started playing pool fairly late," stated Lebow. "I started playing in bars and pretty much immersed myself into it." He joined a league, which really hooked him into the game, and his first year in the Valley National 8-Ball Association (VNEA), his team won the city championships. Sheldon also has won a state 9-ball championship. More importantly, Sheldon met his future wife, Lora, through playing pool, as she frequented most of the places that he played. They now have been married for 13 years and have a 3-year-old son, Adam.

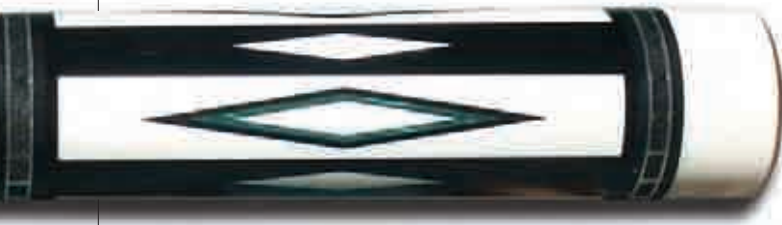


Jumping In Mid-Stream

"I started doing tip repairs to help people out, plus make a little extra money," reported Lebow. "I've always been good with my hands, and it was just another way to be involved in the industry." He also made a makeshift lathe for tip and ferrule repairs using a half-inch drill motor strapped to a board. "It wasn't really pretty, but [the repaired cues] ended up better than having a broken ferrule," he joked.

He made his first cue, a cue nearly 70 inches long, for a very tall local player. He started with a house cue and used a wood screw for the joint. "It worked, it was straight, but it was definitely a little crude," he added.

A friend had bought cue-making equipment from a cue maker who had only been making cues for a year. "This cue maker started making cues, and then a year later he decided to go to Costa Rica," Sheldon shared. His friend stored the turnkey business at Sheldon's home since he didn't have the room for everything himself. This included a precision lathe, a Porper cue lathe, a CNC machine, cue parts, and exotic woods.



"I knew my friend was going to sell the stuff, so I bought the Porper lathe from him," said Sheldon. "I started making Sneaky Petes with it." Lebow eventually bought all of the equipment and supplies and took on the challenge of cue-making full bore.

"I'm self-taught, but I sort of got into it mid-stream," continued Lebow. A few partially assembled cues were included among the supplies. "I deconstructed those cues to figure out how they were made. I also ran the programs on the CNC to see what they were making." He has since added a table saw shaft machine, as well as various fixtures tailored to specific building processes.

"Every cue I've built has been a custom order," said Lebow. "I've never built a cue on spec." This is testament to his skill and quality, as he has never had time or reason to build cues that weren't ordered. He was able to produce cues immediately because of the equipment and supplies. Consequently, he has been a full-time cue maker since he started. Being his own boss and finding success immediately, Sheldon has had the fortune of spending his time as he wants, whether mountain biking in Canada or simply staying home more with his son.

Riding the Information Super Highway

"I never even looked at a computer until [two thousand] ninety-nine, when I started using the CNC," stated Sheldon. "Today I build computers and help people with their computers." Soon after he first started working with his CNC, Sheldon acquired his first personal computer and joined Internet newsgroup forums specific to pool and billiards. After introducing himself to the forum members as a new cue maker, several of the newsgroup members decided to order cues from him and give the rest of the group full reviews. High praises from this group early in his career helped to put Sheldon Lebow Cues on the national and global map.

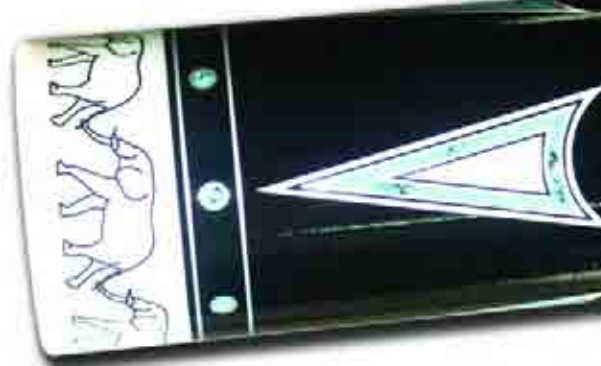
"The Internet has certainly helped a lot. It got me some orders and some exposure," he explained. Through the Internet, he has met other new cue makers who have shared the same road and have been instrumental in his continued learning. For example, he attributes much of his knowledge of woods through the help of Washington cue maker and Internet newsgroup member Clark Smith.

Sheldon often discusses cue-making with Dave Jones, another cue maker from Washington. Sheldon consider Jones to be an exceptional machinist with a specialty in making V-groove points. With Sheldon's expertise using the CNC, their cue-making friendship has mutual benefits. Apart from Jones, Lebow has little interaction with other cue makers.



Truly Custom for the Customer

"My philosophy is to make what the customer wants, in a true custom fashion," commented Lebow. "If the customer wants a certain joint, certain taper, I'll try to make that happen. I have my favorite specifications, but that might not matter to the customer." This philosophy is very different compared to many other cue makers who have developed certain construction techniques, favored tapers, joints, and other parameters and who might not be willing to waiver from those particular parameters.



“Flexibility is critical. I like to be able to claim that,” Sheldon said. He can do V-groove cues and butterfly splices, but he tends to make points with the CNC machine. “I like using the CNC, I enjoy it, it’s challenging, and the options available to the CNC are amazing.” Sheldon tries to push the envelope of CNC work, rather than do simple cookie cutter designs. He admires the work of Jerry McWorter and Thomas Wayne, both giants in the field of CNC-designed cue-making.

“I enjoy the sheer challenge of making new and interesting designs,” said Sheldon. “It’s my toughest challenge to come up with designs. I’m not an extremely creative person. I’m more a technical person, so it’s difficult for me to imagine and create things on my own. I can do it, but it is more challenging for me.”

With his four-axis CNC, Sheldon has been able to make designs that are nearly impossible without one. He has just com-

pleted a cue that he has engraved elephants all around an ivory butt cap. Each elephant is holding the tail of the one in front of it. Sheldon is a fan of ebony and ivory, as well as cocobolo and quilted maple. He also enjoys using ivory, gold, and turquoise in the veneers of some of his cues.

With the advent of the Internet, would-be cue makers have a wealth of knowledge at their disposal. They can readily research methods, find new adhesives and finishes, and contact other cue makers at the touch of a few keystrokes. They can also market themselves in a global fashion, reaching millions of pool players daily. So, without the Internet and today’s technology, pool players across the U.S. might never have known of cue makers such as Oregon’s Sheldon Lebow. ♦

