

New Jersey Blacksmiths Newsletter

Blacksmithing Workshops and Classes:

Peters Valley Craft Education Center
19 Kuhn Rd., Layton, NJ 07851 (973)948-5200
pv@warwick.net www.pvcrafts.org

Academy of Traditional Arts
Carroll County Farm Museum
500 South Center St. Westminster, MD 21157
(410)848-7775 (410)876-2667

Touchstone Center for Crafts
R.D.#1, Box 60, Farmington, PA 15437
(724)329-1370 Fax: (724)329-1371

John C Campbell Folk School
One Folk School Rd.
Brasstown, NC 28902
1-800-365-5724 www.folkschool.com

Brookfield Craft Center
286 Whisconier Road
P. O. Box 122
Brookfield, CT 06804-0122
203.775.4526

Dick Gambino is involved in a project forming an artisan work community in Rahway, NJ. Interested Metal workers with a juried portfolio can contact him through his web site
<http://www.gambinometal.com> about this opportunity.

BLACKSMITH TOOLS FOR SALE!

John Chobrda

Has a large selection of tools for sale.
Anvils – Forges - Leg Vices—Blowers
Tongs – Hammers
Will also repair and/or resurface Anvils
Call John for prices and availability
Evening 609-610-3501

Business Members

We would like to thank those who joined with our new Business Membership category
Please show them our support

Marshall Bienstock
663 Casino Dr., Howell, NJ 07731
(732) 938-6577, (732) 780-0871
John Chobrda, Pine Barrens Forge
231 Morrison Ave., Hightstown, NJ 08520
609-443-3106 JChob@earthlink.net
Eric Cuper Artist Blacksmith
109 Lehman Lane, Neshanic Station, NJ 08853
908 642-6420 ericuper@msn.com
Bruce Hay, Jr.
50 Pine St., Lincroft, NJ 07738
Jayesh Shah Architectural Iron Design
950 S. 2nd St., Plainfield, NJ 07063
jay@archirondesign.com

Open Forges

We are looking for members who are interested in opening their forges up to members as a open forge. This does not have to be a weekly forge as is Marshall's the others can meet once or twice a month. Please contact, Larry Brown, Editor.

[We want to encourage all to join us at](#)

Monday Night Open Forge in N.J.

Marshall Bienstock is hosting an open forge in his shop at 7 pm almost every Monday night (Please call ahead on holidays to make sure , (732)780-0871)

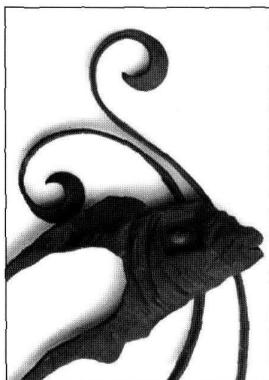
Open Forge in Long Island

Sunday from 10:00 am to 6pm.
Starting the 1st Sunday in November until the end of April. Please call ahead to confirm and get directions.
Ron Grabowski, 110 Burlington Blvd. Smithtown, NY
(631) 265-1564
Ronsforge@aol.com

If any members have a forge at home and work in the evenings or weekends and want to open it up to help a few local guys, let me know, Larry Brown, editor, as we get requests from members who have a hard time traveling to some of the open forge locations.

Some Thoughts About Design

by Mark Aspery, Springville, California



Having taught blacksmithing both privately and for regional organizations for a number of years, I am drawn to the conclusion that we, as blacksmiths, are very good at teaching the actual blacksmith skills, but we are weak in teaching both the elements and principles of good design. It is a fact that well designed but badly made will outsell well made but badly designed.

In an effort to start some productive dialogue on the subject, I am writing this article. It is my hope that other smiths will be motivated to refute or agree with my observations, in part or in whole, offering explanations and examples to support their arguments, in a written format to be published in the various affiliate magazines or newsletters. In this way I think that we can all move forward with the subject. It is not intended to polarize opinions or people, but to provoke thought.

Let me first offer my own qualifications on the subject. Absolutely none! This exercise is a seat-of-the-pants dialog containing information that I can glean from various books.

That stated, let me list a few of the books I am citing: *Composition in Art*, by Henry Rankin Poore, ISBN 0-0486-23358-8.

The Nature of Design, by Peg Faimon & John Weigand, ISBN 1-58180-478-4.

A History of the Modern Movement - Art, Architecture, Design #3, by Kurt Rowland, ISBN 0-442-27175-1.

I am supplying photographs taken from some of the coffee-table blacksmith books, and they will be credited with the photographs.

As a professional smith whose style is commonly called traditional, I used to see the growth of the catalog component part manufacturers as a problem. I now see it as an advantage. I cannot compete with companies that use those parts if I stay within the same style of work. I am pushed to be original in my design and offer something that the client cannot get anywhere else.

If Madame Curie had not discovered radiation, there is a strong chance that someone else would have, but if Monet had not painted his water lily paintings, no one would have. I am told that you cannot design by numbers; there is no step-by-step protocol that will lead you to a good design. That may well be the case.

My own thoughts are that there are considerations that should be given conscious thought before you move on to something else. That said, I might as well lay my head on the chopping block and commit those to paper.

Proportions

The Golden Mean, Golden Section, Divine Proportion, etc., all refer to a ratio of length to height. As far back as pre-Roman times, the ratio of 1:1.618 was found to have ideal proportions. Those are roughly the proportions of a 3" x 5" photograph.

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate the human response to the aesthetic of the Golden Mean rectangle. Fechner, 1876, and Lalo, 1908, studies found that about 35% of people found the proportions to be most pleasing, the next closest being 20% regarding a rectangle very similar in proportions to the Golden Mean (*Geometry of Design*, by K. Elam).

Try it yourself. Draw a line on a piece of paper and then divide the line in two so that you think that the two sides are proportional aesthetically.

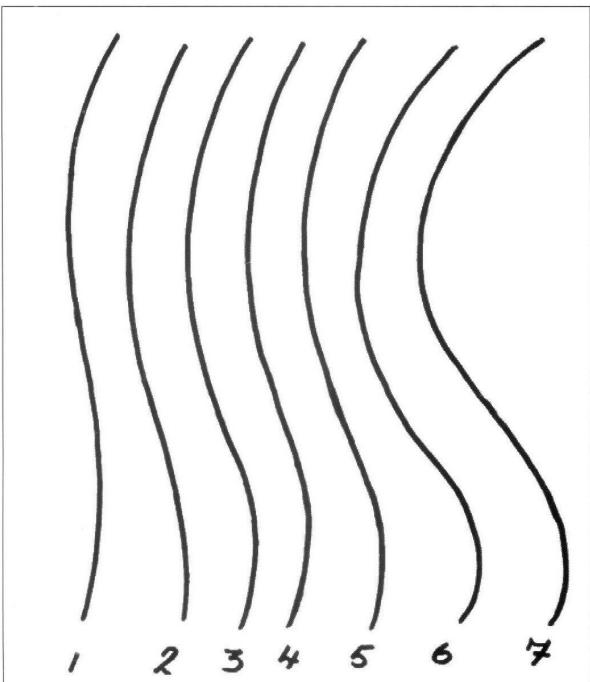
What does that mean to the blacksmith? In real terms, if the design for your gate, panel, sculpture, etc. does not fit in a rectangle of Golden Mean proportions, then you are departing from conventional wisdom. Does this mean that everything we build should fit into these dimensions? Absolutely not! But, it is worthy of consideration before you move on.

Line - Organic / Geometric

Strength of line, horizontal vs. vertical, curvilinear are some of the catchwords. William Hogarth gave a series of seven curves in his "Analysis of Beauty," circa 1753. He identified line #4 as being the most aesthetic, the profile of the human back (illustration on next page). These lines can be seen in many master paintings and sculptures. For me as a blacksmith it means that when I make a leaf, flower or flowing sculpture with curves, they had better have "S" shapes and not single curves.

Piet Mondrian, in his 1915 "Pier and Ocean," moved away from traditional representation and depicted the scene through horizontal and vertical lines. These were the essential lines of the forms that his subjects made. This style continues to influence the arts, crafts and architecture and can be seen in such places as Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. I refer to Mondrian when approaching a geometric style commission. I was unable to secure permission to print Piet Mondrian's painting, but strongly encourage you to go to the Internet and search for that and others of his work.

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I have never spoken with Mr. Lund and therefore do not know what influenced his design, but I enjoy his exploration with vertical and horizontal lines in the gates pictured here (right). (Guiseppe Lund Gates for the Victoria Plaza is shown in *Into the New Iron Age: Modern British Blacksmiths*, by Amina Chatwin, ISBN 0-9525105-0-2)

Mondrian also talked of rhythm - not a new thing in the art world. By repeating or varying the spacing of lines (e.g., a railing) we can give a piece of work rhythm or beat. A series of straight pickets for a railing, each not quite 4" apart, give the railing a monotone rhythm. By changing the spacing (as far as code allows, of course!) the rhythm of the railing can be enriched. Mondrian also filled in the spaces between the lines to further emphasize the rhythm. As a blacksmith I can change the bar size in a series of bars to break up a monotone pace.

Let's take it a bit further. While looking at the numerous figures that follow, think about where your eye is going and whether it is at rest or not.



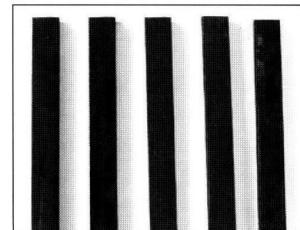
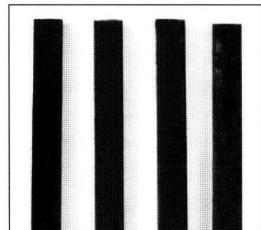
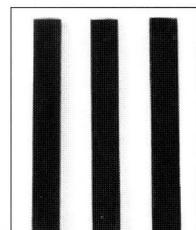
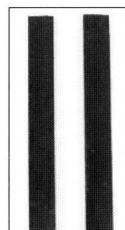
Figure 1. One of something, unless it is a stand-alone art piece, can be a bit boring.

Figure 2. Two of something can irritate the viewer. The human mind likes to divide things in two. With two elements, the eye is forced to go between both pieces. It can only rest in the negative space between the pieces.

Figure 3. By creating three of something, the eye can easily divide the piece, resting on the middle element and then taking in either the left or right hand side before coming back to the middle.

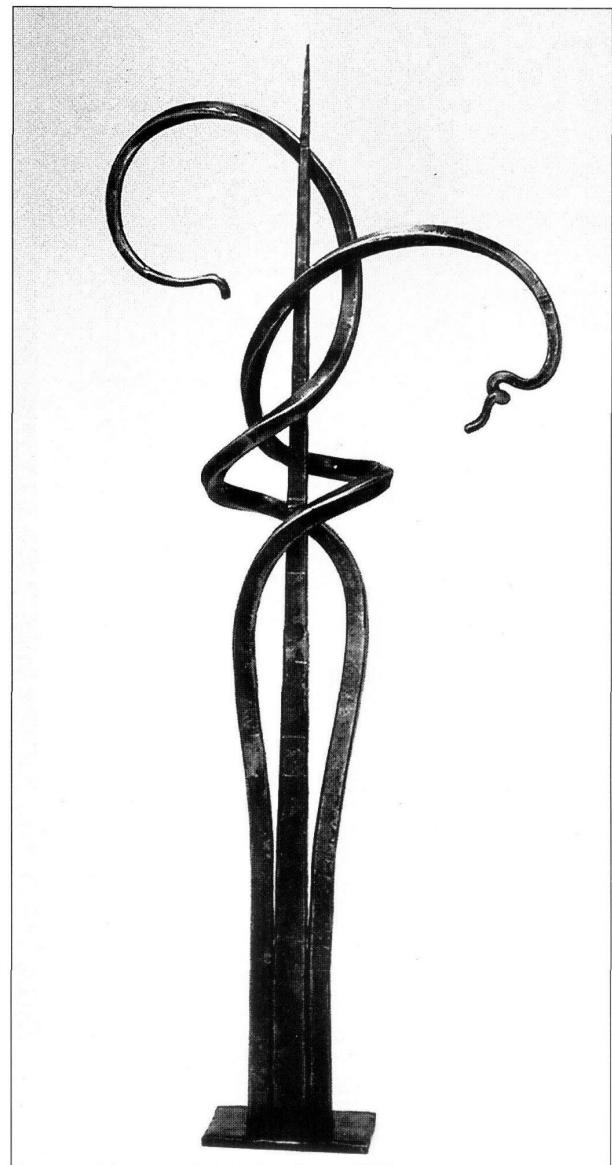
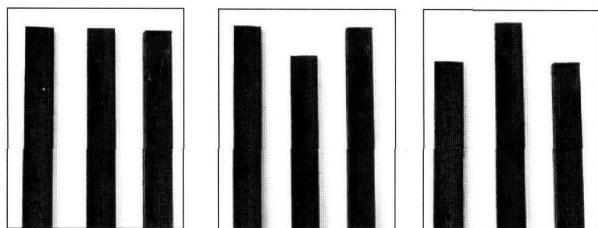
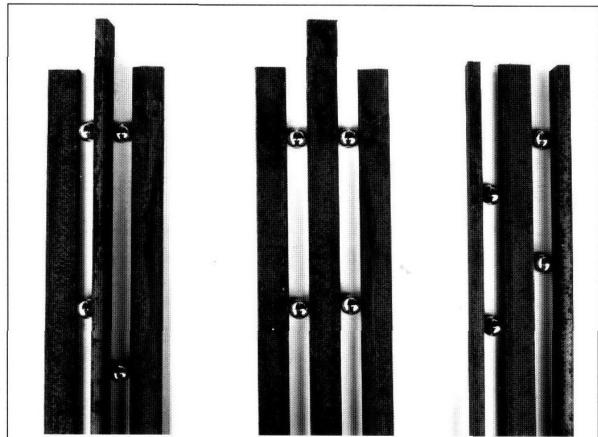
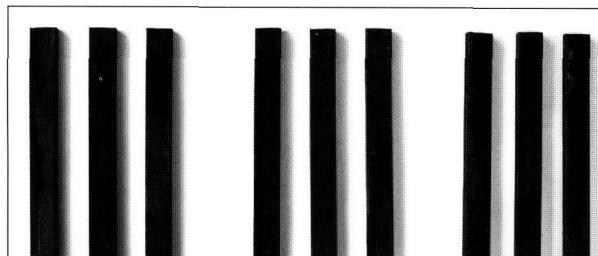
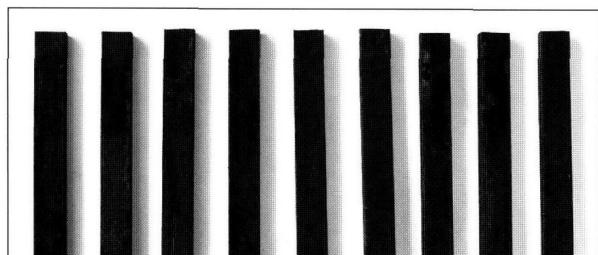
Figure 4. This arrangement is twice as annoying as two, unless you are trying to get the viewer to appreciate the negative space between elements.

Figure 5. Again easy to divide and also restful for the eye to view.



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So it can be seen that odd numbers of elements can produce a pleasing effect when viewed. But on a long railing job, with many pickets, the eye can become confused, as a long railing is not easy to divide. Playing with the arrangement and content of say nine pickets gives me a chance to illustrate the point as seen in the following six figures. Of them all, I think that three is the most powerful number. It is more than the number after two. It is quickly divisible by the eye, especially if the smith has the luxury of adding emphasis on the central piece as Jefferson Mack did in his "Eastern Addition."



*Eastern Addition, Jefferson Mack Metals, Inc.
Photo provided by artist*

Flow

How does the eye move around your sculpture or central/focal element in a railing or gate? What stops your eye from leaving the piece?

Note the return on the tips of the orbits in Jefferson's sculpture as per Hogarth's lines of beauty. My eye starts with the mass at the bottom, travels up the piece to the juncture, takes either the left or right orbit, is returned to the juncture to take in the other orbit again returned to the juncture before ascending the spire to take in the sculpture as a whole.

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Unity

After putting all your design ideas down on paper before you build, ask yourself, does the project have unity? Does it all belong on the same job? In the example of a Paul Margetts panel (below), if the borders contained scroll work, would it fit? The elements that Paul has used, while being different from each other, fit in with the larger theme. There is unity.



As seen in "The Contemporary Blacksmith" by Dora Z. Maelch ISBN-13: 978-1-6106-1106
Photo provided by artist Paul Margetts

Taking one or two of the current coffee table books about blacksmithing around to a client at the start of a commission may well lead to the "top of that one, middle of that and a few of those thrown in" response by the client. Hardly unifying.

Balance

If you look at any large building site, you will see a crane at work. Having a heavy weight near the cab, and therefore near the pivotal point, allows the crane to pick up objects at the end of the boom without tipping over.



Abstract fish sculpture by Toby Hickman
Photo by Mark Avery

The crane, while it is in physical balance, also looks balanced visually. If you look at your design, does it have a concentration of work that needs to be brought into balance by having a larger area adjacent that is less saturated in detail? Does your piece have symmetry or is it asymmetrical?

I think that Toby Hickman's abstract fish design (above) is a nice example of balance, texture, curved line, symmetry and movement, and includes a contemporary use of traditional scroll work. Even though it is an abstract piece, these qualities are still important.

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Texture

Let's say that you are in the market for an 8" length of 1/2" square bar. I have two for sale: a length cut from a 20 foot bar as delivered by my steel supplier and a length that I made from some 3/4" x 3/8" bar that had to be forged to size. Which would you buy? The one that had been through the forge, right? Why? Because it has texture. As blacksmiths we might work in metal, but part of what we sell is how the light plays off the piece. Texture creates shade and light.

Positive and negative space

Sometimes what's not there can be more powerful than what is there. Mark Constable made good use of the negative space to depict the image of a woman in his sculpture (right).

Contrast

Do you have contrast in your design? Contrast can be in opposition, for example, a mirror polished section of an otherwise dark piece or a change in metals. It can also be transitional. For example your bar could slowly fade from square to octagonal and on to round.

Expressive properties

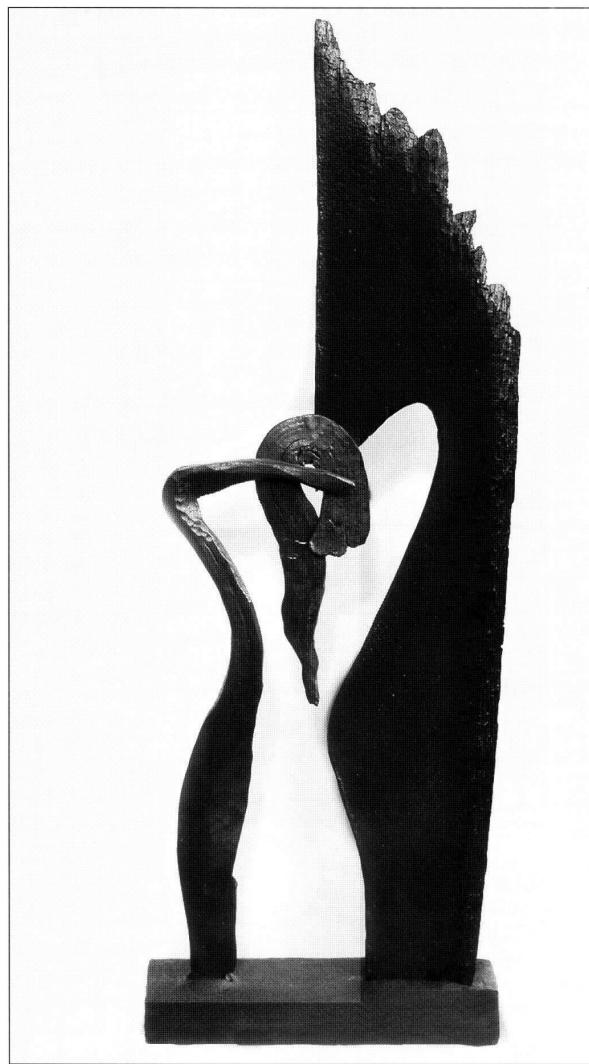
Here we are definitely getting into the art side of blacksmithing. What mood or feelings are you trying to create? Does your piece have a message or symbolism?

Questions to ask yourself

- What is the most important shape in your design?
- What shapes or lines repeat or vary to get rhythm?
- What is the first thing you see in your design, that is, the area of interest?
- What sort of balance does your design have? Asymmetrical or symmetrical?
- What elements produce that balance? Can you remove a piece and still keep the balance?
- What elements are working together to create harmony or unity?
- What keeps your eye from leaving the design?
- What textures are present? Have you captured all the light you want in the piece?
- Would you want it in your house or workplace?

In closing, I quote my friend, Adrian Legge, FWCB, "Good technique is important because it supports and frames our art/craft/design like a well mounted picture. I'll just get off my high horse now...."

Reprinted from the May/June 2005, California Blacksmith



Sculpture by Mark Constable Photo by Mark Apery

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Join ABANA or Check out other area chapters!

Northeast Blacksmiths Association

Northeast Blacksmiths holds its meets twice a year at the Ashokan Field Campus in New York State.

The Ashokan campus is located in Olivebridge, N.Y., several miles west of Kingston, N.Y. The meets are held the first weekend in May and in the first weekend in October every year. The main demonstration is in the blacksmith shop and there is a "Hands On" workshop for beginners. A main demonstrator is brought in for each meet, food and bunk-house style lodging are provided as part of the cost of the weekend long meet.

Contact : Tim Neu

to register for hammer-ins
or subscribe to the newsletter;
Tim Neu, Ashokan Field Campus,
447 Beaverkill Rd.
Olivebridge, N.Y. 12461 [914]657-8333
For more information check out the web site; <http://nba.abana-chapter.com>

Join The Pennsylvania Blacksmiths Association!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip code _____

Home / work Phone #

E-mail (optional)

ABANA Member? Yes No

Can you host a PABA meeting? Yes No

Are you willing to demonstrate at a PABA meeting? Yes No

Suggestions for PABA demonstrations

What is your skill level?

Beginner Intermediate Advanced Professional

Send your completed application with \$ 10 (one year dues) to:
Treasurer Gene Degenhardt

271 Stoney Lane
Lancaster, PA 17603

PABA Membership

Application

Membership is from
Jan. 1 — Dec. 31



**New Jersey
Blacksmiths Association
90 William Avenue
Staten Island, New York 10308**



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05/01/06
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Thoughts on Design
Pages; 14—18**

How to Join or Renew your Membership in NJBA:

NJBA Dues are \$20 per year.

Please make your check out to: "NJBA"

Please mail checks to:

NJBA, P.O. Box 761, Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054

Please include payment with the information listed below. You will receive a postcard confirmation of your membership, and will receive a newsletter within a month.

NJBA's "year" runs from June to June. If you join mid-year, the postcard will offer a prorated dues option which will then allow you to extend your membership till the following June. The following information will be listed in a roster available to other members.

Name _____ Home Phone _____
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