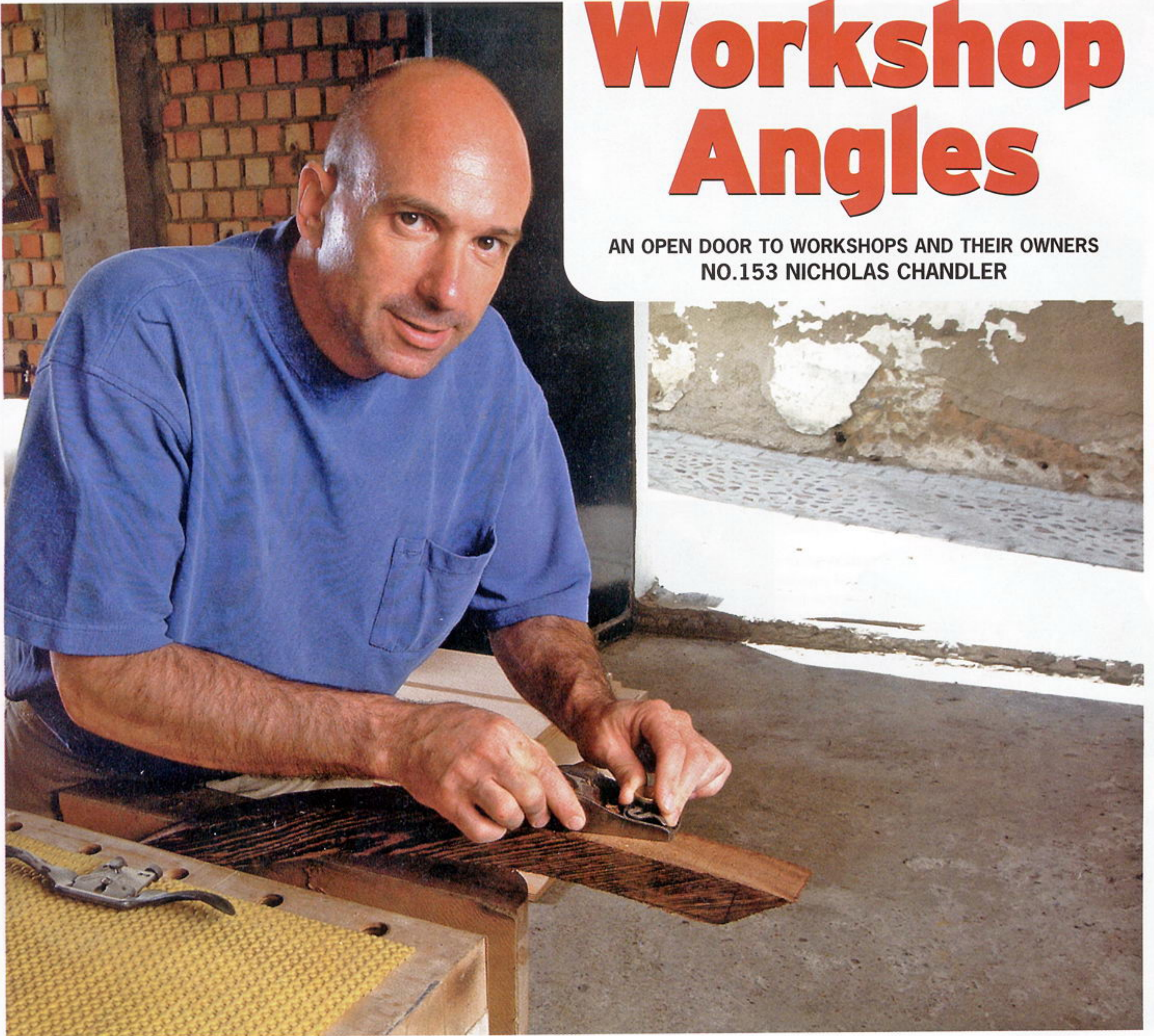


Workshop Angles

AN OPEN DOOR TO WORKSHOPS AND THEIR OWNERS
NO.153 NICHOLAS CHANDLER



Nicholas Chandler, fine furniture maker and teacher extraordinaire, is living the life most of us can only dream of. Regular readers will remember him from David Savage's workshops, where he was David's senior

A new piece in development at Nick's workshops



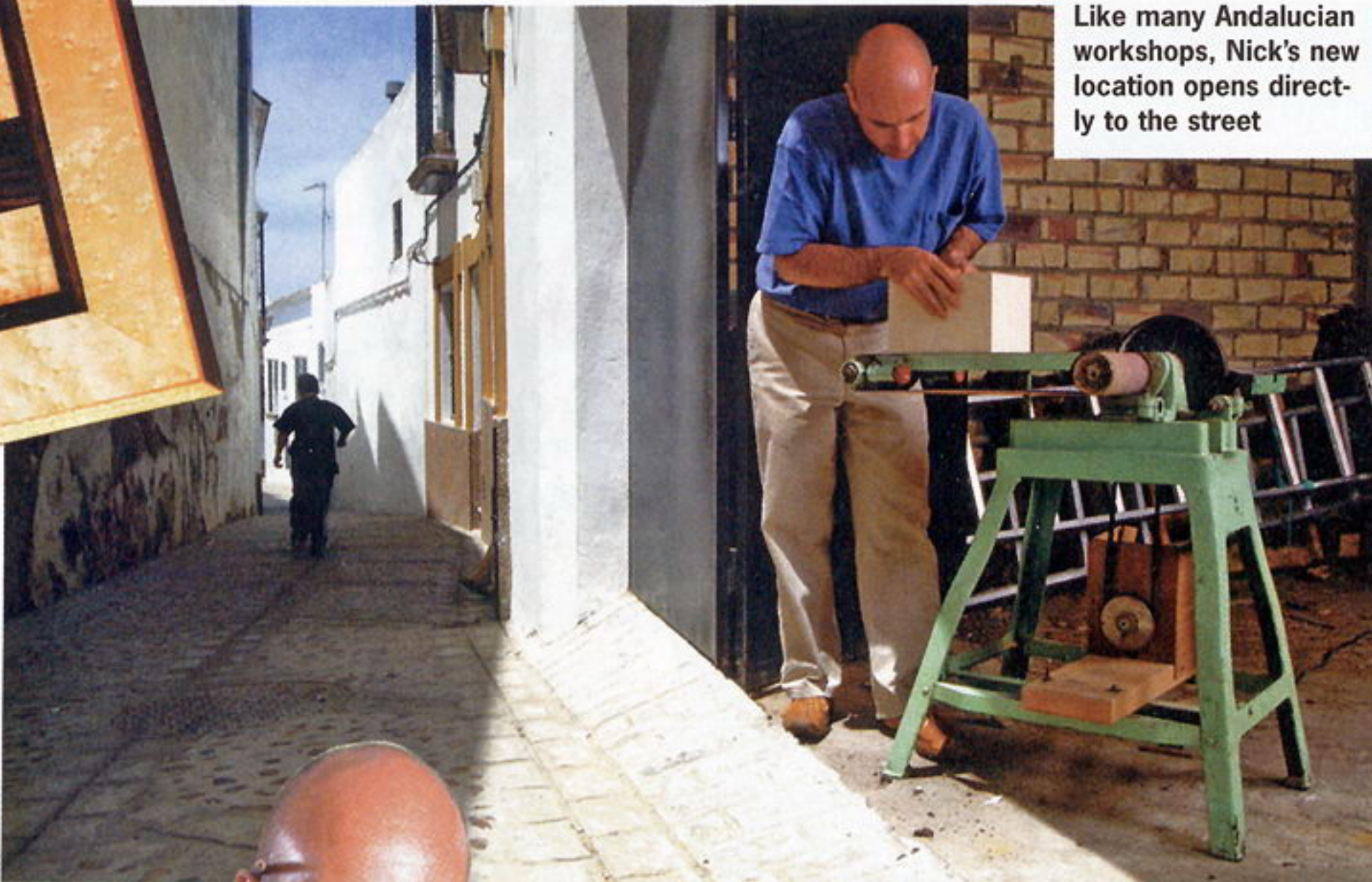
cabinetmaker and teacher for a number of years. But now he's swapped the dull and drizzly drive to work through wet Devon lanes for a leisurely stroll in the bright Spanish sun down through the narrow white-washed alleys of Carmona to his new workshops in this "achingly beautiful" Andalusian hilltown just outside of Seville.

Nick left David to move to America, with the promise of a new life teaching fine furnituremaking in a new college on the West Coast. But unforeseeable problems unfortunately forced him to abandon the New World for the old again and "I headed for Seville to learn a new language and lick my wounds". But you can't keep a good man down for long, and soon Nick was making fine furniture again from a sketchbook packed with ideas old and new.

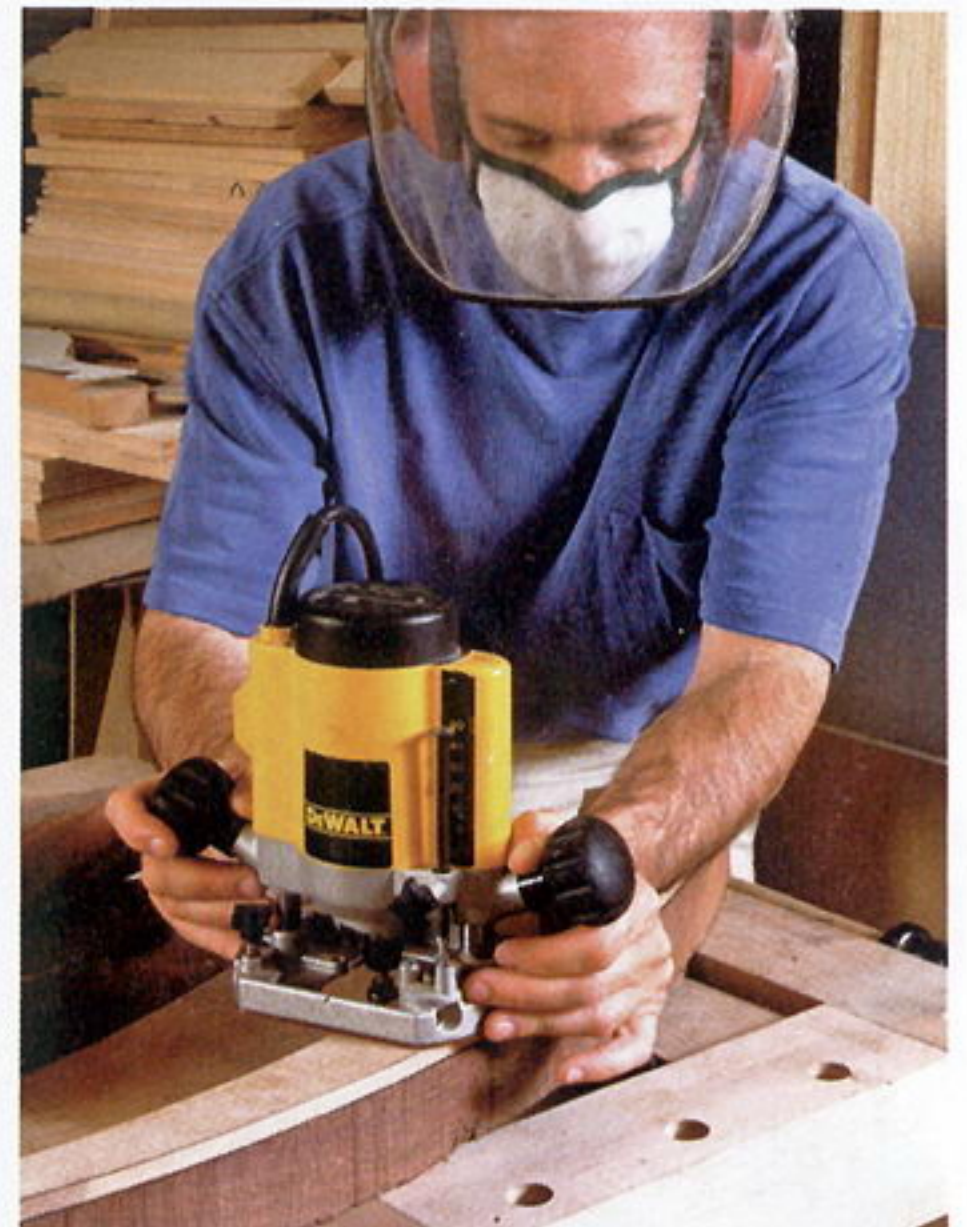
Though the move has its undoubted

attractions it hasn't been without a few hiccups, not least of which was having to leave his first (shared) Carmona workshops just a couple of days before this interview. But now he's settling into new basement premises (below a garage run by an ex-pat), and desperate to get back to work on a variety of exhibition pieces. "At present, it's not so much a workshop, more a large black hole with a bench in it, but it's shady and cool, which is very important when you're working in summer temperatures often in excess of 40°C."

The plan is to turn this promising 'black hole' into well-equipped professional workshops where Nick can continue to ply his craft and also teach students (up to three at any one time) the finer points of furnituremaking. "Whether they're absolute beginners or looking to learn advanced techniques,



Like many Andalucian workshops, Nick's new location opens directly to the street



Come siesta time all work stops, especially anything done with load machinery and power tools



Though he designs a lot of furniture, and is currently hoping to develop some for Spanish mass production, Nick also makes a wide range of boxes and mirrors

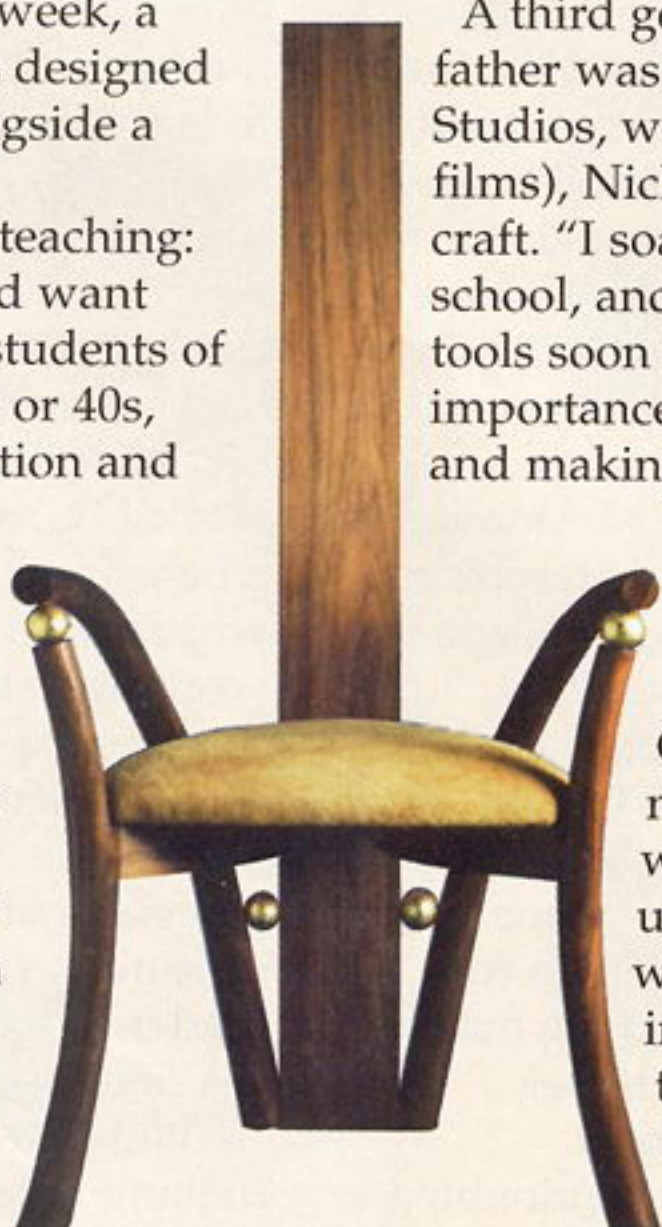


Andalucian imagery is strong in much of Nick's recent work, with the above mirror based on arches in Cordoba's Mezquita

they'll be able to come for a week, a month, a year... with courses designed to suit individual needs alongside a professional maker."

Nick is passionate about teaching: "I'm good at it" he says, "and want others to succeed too! Most students of fine furniture are in their 30s or 40s, looking for a change in direction and career, and my courses give sound training for this."

And of course there's the added attraction of the lifestyle: "We'll work from 9am until 2pm, then take the traditional siesta before continuing from 4 till 8, after which we might adjourn to a local bar in the town square for tapas and a few beers in the land of *la noche larga* (the long night)!"



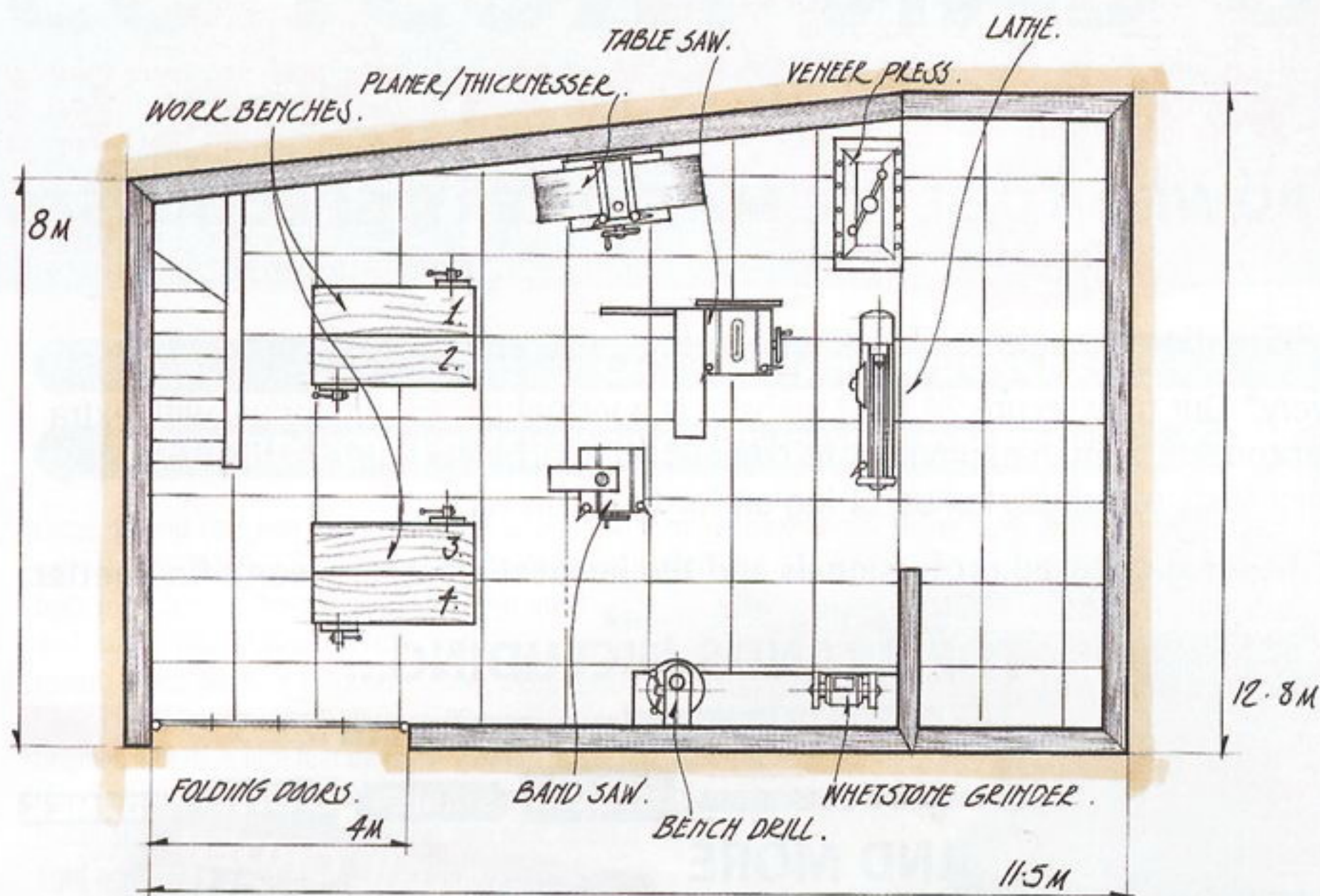
A third generation woodworker (his father was a set builder at Pinewood Studios, working on the James Bond films), Nick was attracted early to the craft. "I soaked up knowledge at school, and using my Grandfather's tools soon made me realise the importance of tool quality. Designing and making my first piece of furniture was such a thrill and I soon discovered that this was what I wanted to do in life."

Teacher Training College followed, then a number of years teaching woodwork, before Nick set up his first professional workshop alongside his home in Tiverton. "Throughout my teaching career I'd been building up to this," he says, "carrying on with my own

work in front of the kids, defining my terms, what I believed in, the design process... all important stuff! I started with plenty of commissions in hand, augmenting it with antique restoration, a little carpentry, even helping to restore a castle. I also did a little teaching at Bridgwater College, just to keep fresh."

Even so, financial stability eventually drew Nick to take a fulltime job with David Savage. "I wet my pants when I saw my first job – a rosewood desk and chair – but rose to the challenge and quickly hit it off with David. He sharpened my eye, and I loved the way he thought, and over a period of time my role changed till I was no longer just a hired gun but was heavily involved with teaching his students. It's very satisfying but you need to know how much to teach or show, and when to stand back but leave the door open."

NEW SHOP LAYOUT: Nicholas Chandler



Nick's old shared workshop was less than satisfactory, but full of amusing touches such as pictures of the Virgin Mary in place of guards on machinery, and a hastily scribbled phone number for Jesus on a piece of ply



Like many Andalucian workshops, Nick's new location opens directly to the street



The Bacchanalian Table is one of a series of 'Temple Tables' and has spalted beech legs that resemble marble. The top is a single ash plank



Since his move south, Nick has quickly adapted to Sevillian life. "Andalucia has a great percentage of Spain's 'artisanos', but there aren't many skilled makers here. Clients are very conservative, and it's necessary to network with decor designers and shops for commissions. But, unlike in Britain, where people keep their a designer to themselves, here a client will bring all their friends with them when they come to see me."

At present Nick's priorities are fitting out the new workshop, dividing it up into machine and bench areas and installing new machinery. A MiniMax tablesaw and planer thicknesser are awaiting delivery, along with a Lolar bandsaw (Italian also), while contact with a retiring Sevillian furnituremaker has produced a large three-platen cold veneer press and an ancient lathe. "It should all

be up and running by the time the first of my students turns up in February for a year long course!

"I'm also producing work for the big Valencia Furniture Fair in October and Betty Norbury's August Cheltenham Show. Along with my website (a great way of reaching the wide world) these are essential if I'm to pull in enough work every year. I also have a good agent and plenty of contacts in Spain, Italy and beyond. It's been a hard slog, but ultimately worthwhile.

"Seville has everything I want. I love the heat, and above all the attitude to life: We work to live and not live to work!"

Words and pictures by Pete Martin

You can contact Nick about courses through his website at www.nicholaschandler.com

