

A chapter of the American Association of Woodturners

October 1995
Number 31

The Woodturners of St. Louis Newsletter is published monthly and mailed to the Chapter Members and to other selected woodturners.

President:

Gary L. Johnson
12220 Latham
Bridgeton, MO 63044
314-739-4791

Vice President:

David C. Wahl
10041 Conway Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63124
314-993-4843

Secretary/Treasurer

Virginia H. Toone
736 Linwood Blvd.
Kirkwood, MO 63122
314-984-0502

Meetings are held on the fourth Sunday of each month at Woodcraft Supply 12511 Olive St. Rd. (Dierberg Heritage Center)

1PM to 4PM

Bring a guest or a friend!

Joy of Turning Symposium September 16 and 17 Our first annual symposium was a great success. Ninety-six (96) people attended the demonstrations and 67 attended the dinner and slide show on Saturday night. The preliminary financial statement of the symposium shows a profit of \$1,443.00 after we returned the \$500.00 grant to AAW. A special thanks to Ken and Mariam Schaefer for their hard work on the symposium and thanks to all who helped.

Joy of Turning 1996 Our symposium went so well that we have started planning for our second annual symposium to be held on September 14 and 15, 1996. Reserve the dates. You won't want to miss it. It will be held at the Holiday Inn Southwest in Viking Conference Center. Watch for more information in the future.

Tee Shirts Our red club tee shirts look great. If you signed up for a tee shirt and haven't picked it up yet, Dean Hooks will have them available at the October meeting and the price is \$25.00. If you've not yet ordered a tee shirt and would like to have one, contact Dean Hooks at 314-741-0923. We have some extra red shirts available now and we will be placing an order for some additional shirts in alternate colors.

Art Show The Columbia Art League Wood Concepts Exhibition runs October 1 through November 9 in Columbia, Missouri. Gary Johnson and Binh Pho have turnings in the show. Binh won first place in the turning and sculpture category. Congratulations Binh.

Next Meeting October 22, 1995 Our October 22 meeting will be held at the Woodcraft Store from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. We will take nominations for officers for next year with elections to be held at the November meeting. The program will be turning Christmas ornaments. Dave Skinner and Gary Johnson will demonstrate. Be sure and bring your turned ornaments or anything else you want for our Show 'N Tell session.

Miscellaneous Clay Foster donated a hollow vessel he turned at our symposium and suggested that we use it to start a bring-back raffle. We will raffle it off at the October meeting and whoever wins it has to bring something else back to be raffled off at the next meeting. It should be a fun event.

The Oppie Brush Company has sent us two sample shop brushes for evaluation and possible group discount purchase. These are very high quality brushes and will be used to help clean up at the meetings so you can see how they work.

The October Crafts Report has an interesting article on how woodworkers sell their crafts. This is an excellent publication covering all areas of crafts as business.

Hope to see you all on October 22, 1995.

The Challenge of Marketing Artistic and Functional Wood

by Loretta Radeschi

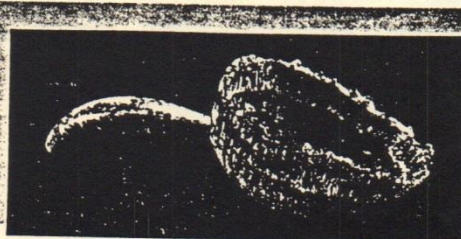
"Operate free of anger and bitterness, sarcasm and rancor. Educate with tolerance, patience, affection and wit, as you would your child who you hope grows up to love, appreciate and value you and your labors."

This is how spoon maker Norm Sartorius of Parkersburg, W.V., suggests woodworkers approach the challenge of selling to the general public. Any maker who spent two days at a craft show answering the same questions dozens of times while making few sales knows the value of Sartorius' words. The public's naiveté about professional woodworking and the concept of artistic pieces is the main selling challenge woodworkers encounter.

Perhaps because of its universal appeal and use, wood craft generates some of the most ingenuous comments from consumers. They imply that it must be easy to make such pieces. They joke that they or their cousin "made something like that in



Photos by Norm Sartorius



Woodworkers should inform consumers about the woods used and the reasons why they were chosen for use, says Norm Sartorius. Some of his spoons, bowls and handles are shown here.

attempt to earn very much money," Sartorius says. "They have no understanding of the overhead in most craftspeople's businesses.

Their jaws drop when you tell them the booth they're standing in costs about \$1,000."

Turned wood is gaining acceptance as an art form, but it has a long way to go.

If you're selling work priced into the thousands of dollars, answering mundane questions while waiting for the few collectors who can make the difference between a mediocre show and a good one can wear your patience thin.

"I've been explaining what spalted wood is for the last 15 years, and it doesn't seem like

I've made any headway," says Michael Mode of New Haven, Vt. "When you're educating the public, it takes a long time for them to see turned vessels as more than salad bowls."

"People at craft shows look at a vase or bowl and think it's just wood," says turner Edrich Florence of Bethel Park, Pa. "They don't realize the difficulty in finding the right piece of burl or the thought that goes into designing a piece and the number of hours spent making a vessel."

What's the Function?

"Many people don't know what the objects are or don't comprehend the extent of them," adds Mode. "They'll look at one of my lidded vessels and expect it to have a function. They can't understand why it costs \$2,000. Some people have to know what they're going to do with an item. They're not thinking of it as art."

Like all craftspeople, woodworkers are challenged to appeal to a broad market without undermining their artistic integrity. Edrich makes turned vessels, holiday ornaments and bottle stoppers. His ornaments and stoppers sell quickly, most likely because people see their obvious use.

"People like to have functional items. It gives them an excuse to buy," according to turner Bruce Bernson of Santa Barbara, Calif. "When we sell a piece of wood as an art form, we're ask-

ing the potential buyer to have a higher state of consciousness. When you ask someone to take a step beyond their basic needs with a purchasing dollar, it takes a more sophisticated approach."

As far as Sartorius is concerned, decorative pieces *do* have function. "We use all manner of decorative objects all over our homes, and that's accepted as the use," he says. "In other cultures spoons are used in ceremonial, ritualistic or decorative ways that have nothing to do with food. I like to make spoons as I please."

Educating Galleries

Gallery staffs also have to be educated about turned wood. David Elliot of Sherman, Conn., provides galleries with a video about his wall sculptures and vessels, an artist's statement and information on how his new work is made. Since many of Elliot's pieces are bleached, making them look like stone, customers often ask if the sculpture is actually made of wood.

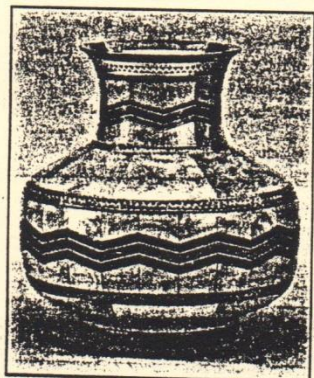
Woodworkers who work with exotic woods often hear that question. If a wood-

As far as spoon maker Norm Sartorius is concerned, decorative pieces do have function.

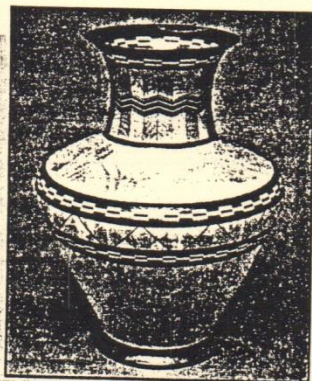
eventh grade," and that "anyone can do that." Such remarks can exasperate the most patient woodworker.

The Naïve Consumer

"Many people think this is a hobby; therefore, they believe the woodworker should not



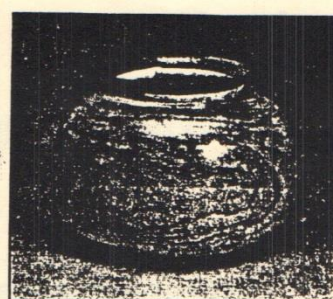
Photos by George Radeschi



Naïve consumers often do not appreciate wood turned vessels as works of art. Educating consumers is a key to success, craftspeople say. Work shown here is by George Radeschi.



Photos by ENF Woodworks



Uninformed consumers do not consider the thought process that goes into designing each piece, or the number of hours spent creating a vessel, says wood turner Edrich Florence of ENF Woodworks. Some ENF pieces are shown here.

object isn't brown, people wonder if it's wood at all or if the piece has been painted. Fairgoers often ask Bruce Bernson whether the color of the wood used in his platters or vessels is natural, or whether he dyes his work to make it so beautiful.

Education Across the Board

Some woodworkers think that charging admission to a show is a good way to qualify customers. "At a high-end show where admission is charged, the audience is likely to be more sophisticated and less likely to be puzzled by the prices you're asking."

But the need to educate the public is not limited to artistic pieces. Judy and Lew Tolliver of Knot Just Toys in Mason, Wis., make wooden vehicles ranging from hand-held toys to reproduction logging and construction equipment which sell for several thousand dollars. "People say our products are made from kits," says Judy Tolliver. "In fact, they'll insist, telling me they've seen them for sale, even after I tell them our products are handmade and original designs."

Getting a potential customer to handle a piece is what helps the couple sell their toys and reproductions. "The tactile interaction with wood clinches the sale," says Judy Tolliver.

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Like it or not, educating the public probably will continue to be a marketing challenge for woodworkers and other craft makers. Videos about and photographs of process displayed in a craft fair booth are excellent teaching tools. So are brochures. Ultimately, though, the best educator is a patient, tolerant craftsman.

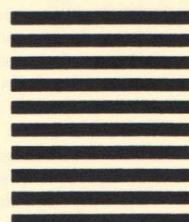
"Just educating people about the materials you've used and why you've chosen them can help the public appreciate all woodwork," Sartorius says.

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LORETTA RADESCHI is a Doylestown, Pa.-based freelance writer.



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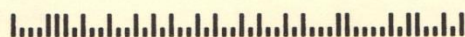
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